

VOLCANO EARTHQUAKE TSUNAMI WAR

Zen Master Dae Kwang

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

BOOM!

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

Our world is always changing—sometimes fast, sometimes slow. When the change is fast, we suffer a lot. Our world changing fast means volcano, earthquake, tsunami, war. Everything is changing very fast. Even if we think it's very solid, it can go away within a second—SNAP! The Soviet Union was once the second-strongest country in the world, and it lasted over seventy years, but it disappeared in less than a month. That's the meaning of "form is emptiness, emptiness is form."

These words are from the Heart Sutra. There are many different explanations of this sutra, but the meaning lives in our guts—it's not just an idea. Even if you do not experience rapid cataclysmic changes like they've had here in Indonesia, you can experience very slow kinds of change. Everyone will experience this when they are seventy or eighty. Look into the mirror, you'll see "form is emptiness, emptiness is form!"

In the United States and Europe, people are always saying to each other, "Life is short, life is short." There's something very interesting about that phrase. Nobody ever asks, "How short?" So... how short is your life?

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

BOOM!

This point means no form, no emptiness.

At this point, there's not even one thing. There is no this and that. There is no form and no emptiness. There is no bad and no good. There is no win and no lose. There is no "I got" and no "I lost." This point is called our original Buddha nature. If you attain this point, your life will become very clear. If you keep this point, your mind and your life can become clear. But that is not the point of Zen. One further step is necessary. What will we do with this original Buddha nature which we all have? How will we use it to help this world?

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]

BOOM!

This point means form is form, emptiness is emptiness.

At this point, if your mind is clear, everything is just as it is, everything is the truth. Our teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn always used to say, at this point, "the sky is blue, the trees are green, the dog is barking, woof, woof, woof." Also, the carpet in this convention hall is red. At this point, everything is the truth. We call it "truth mind" or "enough mind." This point, too, has a job. Perceiving the truth is not enough, our job is to use that mind to help other beings.

So, now you've heard three lines of explanation of Zen Buddhism. Which of those three lines is the best?

KATZ!!

Outside the sun is shining. Inside, bright faces come here to the conference to learn about Zen and how to practice correctly.

These three statements are a little complicated. So, what I am going to do is explain a little about Zen. But before I explain, I would like to thank our sponsor for providing this wonderful place to learn and to share Buddha's teaching. I would also like to thank all of you for coming. This conference is a sharing between dharma friends—it's the result of our good karma.

ANYTHING CAN GO AWAY IN A SECOND

About six years ago, I was leading a retreat in San Francisco. To my surprise, there was an older Chinese man in the retreat. He was very well dressed, his nails were well manicured, and his glasses were quite expensive. During a kong-an interview I asked him, "Where do you come from?"

He said, "I'm from Jakarta. I am a Chinese from Indonesia."

That surprised me because we don't have many Chinese coming to our retreats. So I said, "Why are you here?"

He said, "I have no place to go. I'm in a very unusual situation. I was walking down the street and I saw a sign advertising this Zen retreat. Immediately, when I saw the sign, I came in to sign up for this retreat."

"Why did you come to this retreat?" I asked.

"I am not sure, but I think right now I have nothing."

"What do you mean, you have nothing?" I asked. "You're from Indonesia. Obviously you have the money to fly here. You have very good clothes. Your English is very good. You must be well educated."

He said, "Yes, that's true. I have those things. But I have a very unusual situation. I was here visiting my son, who is attending the University of California here in Berkeley. Yesterday, my wife called and told me that there were some riots in Indonesia. They burnt our business and they also burnt our house. My wife also told me that her passport was kept in the bank and it also was destroyed. So now she cannot even come here. I don't know what to do. So I came to this retreat."

That's a very interesting story. Usually we think we have something. Maybe our body is strong, maybe we are young and healthy. Or maybe our family has a lot of money. Maybe I'm very talented. Maybe I have good job. Maybe I have a good husband or a good wife. Maybe my children are very

smart. Usually we don't understand that all of that can go away in just a second, SNAP!

WE AND THE BUDDHA ARE THE SAME

Many times we think Buddha is different from us. But actually, we and the Buddha are exactly the same. Buddha had a very good situation. His father provided him everything because he was a king. He had everything we desire. But in the end this good situation did not make him happy, it was just outside happiness. The Chinese man from Jakarta, too, had some form of outside happiness. But when Buddha looked closely at our world, he saw that outside happiness did not truly relieve suffering. If you go to any funeral, then you can see it. There's always an underlying feeling that something is very unsatisfactory.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Many people are seeking a way to find the meaning of life. Maybe they practice Buddhism as we are now. Maybe they practice Christianity. Maybe they practice Islam. Everywhere you can find people seeking after the truth. That means, they are not living their lives just for themselves or to indulge their pleasures, they are looking for something. Have you seen that?

Buddha saw four things: an old person, a sick person, a dead person, and a seeker after truth. After that, he could no longer stay in his good situation. He left his good situation to find the answer to why we suffer. Inside, the Buddha had a very big question: WHY? That means, WHY ARE WE HERE?

Are we here for food, to eat? In my country, many people are overweight. They eat as if their whole lives are eating. So, are we here for that? Is that the meaning of human beings?

Are we here for sex? Some people live their whole lives just for the pleasure of sex. Are we here for money? Some people spend their whole lives chasing after money. Do we come here for power? Are we here for fame?

There are people spending their whole lives just trying to please others. Maybe they spend their lives to please their husbands or maybe to please their wives. Maybe, for Chinese, to please their mother and father. Or for Zen students, to please their Zen Master. That's the desire for fame or social acceptance.

THE ANSWER LIES INSIDE

Just like the Buddha, when we truly see these four things, we know these outside things are not the source of true happiness. Buddha had a big question and he did something interesting—he left his good situation to do some practicing. He didn't leave home to find a better life. He didn't leave to get a better job or move to a better place. When I was young, I lived in a city in the middle of the United States. We always thought that if we moved to New York, we would be happy. But when I moved to New York, I found out that New York City was no better than my own town. Many people think that if they can move to Singapore or Hong Kong, then they will be happy. But the Buddha didn't do that.

Also, the Buddha didn't go to the library to read more books about the great question. Sometimes we think we don't understand because we just haven't read the right book yet. Somewhere, at some library, there must be a book that will solve all my problems. It will let me understand what I really need. But Buddha didn't do that. Instead, he went to sit underneath a tree. You may think that's really stupid. Who would go and sit underneath a tree? Why do that?

Buddha knew that the answers to these questions are somewhere inside. Actually, "go and sit underneath a tree" does not mean "go and sit underneath a tree." The way to sit underneath a tree is to start looking inside. We are exactly like the Buddha because, for us, too, the answer lies inside. We all know the Buddha (and Zen, also) always asks the question: what am I? What am I? But it's very interesting, if you ask that question, Zen does not have the answer. It doesn't, but you do, inside. So you and the Buddha are the same. Just look inside.

Zen means finding your true self and helping our world. Very simple! Zen Buddhism is not complicated at all. You may be very stupid or very smart—that doesn't make any difference. Inside, everybody has this original Buddha nature. Inside. So our job is to find that and help this world. Very simple.

ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, had a very interesting life history. He was born in Korea during the Japanese occupation. At that time, many parts of South-east Asia were under the control of the Japanese. Life was difficult for many people, including the Koreans. During this time Zen Master Seung Sahn was always asking himself what he could do to help his country. You, too, may have the same question inside: how can I help my people? We have tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanoes; all sorts of fighting around the world. Inside, you may ask: how can I help? Zen Master Seung Sahn was in the same situation. He asked what he could do to free his country from the Japanese. And then suddenly, the war was over. Then he thought, no more problem—now we are free.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE

But then as soon as the war was over, Korea split into south and north. What everybody thought was going to bring happiness actually brought more conflicts and more suffering. It happened like that in Iraq. The war was supposed to bring peace, but what happened? So inside, Zen Master Seung Sahn had this big question: what can I do? Why is there so much suffering? He went to a temple and took some Western philosophy books with him, because he had an idea: he would read all these books, then he would understand what human beings are all about, and then he could help them.

For months, he read philosophy books. One day, an old monk who took care of the woods around the temple walked by his small hermitage. The monk saw this young man reading a book by Plato, the Greek philosopher, and was very surprised. So the monk asked him, "What are you doing?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "I am reading these philosophy books so that I can understand what human beings are."

The monk suddenly knocked the book out of Zen Master Seung Sahn's hands and said, "That book will not help you understand human beings."

But Zen Master Seung Sahn's mind was very strong. He looked up at the old monk and asked, "Do you understand human beings?" Very clever. It is just like a story in the book by Plato. It was five hundred years before the modern era. A philosopher, Socrates, liked to ask everybody he met: do you understand yourself? One time a person asked him right back: Do you? And Socrates said, "No, I don't. I don't understand my self. But I understand this 'don't know' very well." Very interesting.

So, when Zen Master Seung Sahn asked the old monk, "Do you understand human beings?" the old monk said, "No, I don't, but I understand that the sky is blue and the trees are green."

Then BOOM!

Zen Master Seung Sahn understood this man was not the usual style of monk. So he asked the old monk, "What should I do? What can I do to understand?" The old monk said, "You should do a hundred day solo retreat. Practice very hard and you will understand." So it is just like the Buddha. He left his good situation and looked inside. Zen Master Seung Sahn did a long retreat and looked inside. You, too, can look inside. The outside situation is not so important. What is important is to look inside.

ENLIGHTENMENT

After the one hundred day retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn got enlightenment. That means he understood something. When Buddha got enlightenment, he said, "How wonderful! Human beings already have Buddha nature, but human beings don't understand that. They don't understand that they already have Buddha nature. And because of that, they suffer." Very interesting. I think that is the most interesting thing a religious person has ever said. It's very, very clear. Every human being has a misunderstanding of what they really are. That means they think they are one thing, but actually they are something else. Because of this misunderstanding, human beings suffer. So, it's possible to find out what we really are. That helps alleviate your suffering, and you can use that to help everyone around you.

After the Buddha got enlightenment, he kept sitting underneath the Bodhi tree. He didn't move. At that time, a god was looking down from heaven and saw the Buddha sitting under the tree, and said, "That is incorrect. You can't keep sitting underneath this tree."

The Buddha said, "Nobody is going to understand what I found. Nobody would believe me."

Then the god said, "No, no, some people will believe and listen." Then the Buddha got up and taught for forty five years.

TAKING THE MEDICINE IS NOT THE DOCTOR'S JOB

Sometimes we may wonder, who are those people who would listen to the Buddha's teaching? Actually, there's no need to look for them, because they're here, right now. The only problem is, we have to do something. The Buddha said, "I have 84,000

kinds of medicine to relieve human beings' suffering, but I can't take it for them."

That's our situation. If you keep seeking out doctors, getting tested, and receiving medicine, but you don't take it, who's to blame? If you say no, this medicine doesn't work, I refuse to take it, then what can the doctor do? You have to take the medicine. Taking the medicine is not the doctor's job, that's your job.

Finding your true self is not the Buddha's job, it's your job. Actually, there's no choice, because one way leads to suffering, and the Buddha points to another possible way, a way to get out of suffering. And there's no other way. That's the clarity of the Buddha's teaching. It is not an abstract, philosophical thesis. It's something that you can feel inside your own guts. It is inside your own heart. It is a question we all own: Why do we suffer? What can I possibly do to help?

When Buddha was born, his mother died. Sometimes we even say Buddha had no mother. Actually, the Buddha did have a mother. In Zen, the mother of Buddha is suffering. No suffering, no Buddha. That's true of us, too. Our life is actually not good, not bad, but it does hurt. This hurting is what ultimately makes us practice so that we can help ourselves and help others.

The Buddha lived some two thousand, five hundred years ago. He came as a teacher to relieve suffering. How is the Buddha doing? Any less suffering? Jesus came two thousand years ago to help to relieve suffering. How's Jesus doing? Still a lot of suffering, yes? This means that all of us have a big job. The Buddha said, "When we are born, we are born into an ocean of suffering." That was his situation, and that's our situation. We all share this job.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick slowly three times.]

If you understand these three points, then it's possible to understand your true self and help all human beings.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q: How can we attain inside wisdom?

A: How do we attain inside wisdom? How do we attain inside happiness? How do we attain our true nature? In English, we say somebody gets enlightenment. But actually, nobody ever got enlightenment. What happens is they return to their original nature. The Buddha said that everybody already has it. So there's actually nothing to attain. That's only something to return to, inside.

A monk once came to the Buddha and asked, "Buddha, you have given a lot of teaching. There are thousands and thousands of sutras. I know I'm a little bit stupid, but could you tell me your teaching in one sentence?"

The Buddha said, "No problem." And here's the oneness: *Don't attach to anything.* Very interesting!

The great Chinese Zen Master, Hui Neng, got his big enlightenment when he heard just one sentence from the Diamond Sutra: *When thinking arises in your mind, do not attach to it.* Very simple teaching. But how can we actually do it?



TECHNIQUES

There are many techniques which allow you to experience letting go of your thinking. Some are very simple: in Zen we very often teach people to say a simple phrase to themselves over and over again, keeping their eyes half open and breathing normally. The Buddha got enlightenment just following his breath: in-out-in-out-in-out. There are thousands of meditation techniques. In Buddhism alone, there are many techniques: Theravadin Buddhism has many techniques, Mahayana Buddhism has many techniques, Zen too has many techniques, but sometimes the simplest thing is the best thing.

It is like when you are thirsty—you can drink beer, tea, or coke. You can drink many things, but when you're thirsty, what do you think is the best? Water! Meditation is the same—the simpler techniques are the best.

THE JUST-NOW MIND

The basis of all these techniques is the same. It is what we call “just-now mind.” Just now, you can hear the air conditioning. Just now, you see the faces of your mother's friends.

You hear my voice.

If your mind
is clear,
v e r y
b r i g h t,
a n d
v e r y
p r e s -
e n t,
t h a t
i s
t h e
“j u s t -
n o w
m i n d .”

If you can
keep that,
even for
a little
while, you
can let go
your thinking.

That's important, because it is our like and dislike thinking that causes our suffering.

LET GO OF YOUR LIKE AND DISLIKE

These days, many people are concerned about Israel having the

atomic bomb, or that North Korea and Pakistan have atomic bombs. Also, many people are concerned that Iran might make an atomic bomb. One time, somebody asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “Where do atomic bombs come from?” Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “That's simple. Atomic bombs come from the mind that likes this and doesn't like that.”

Sometimes, people even kill another person because they don't like them. That creates a lot of suffering. What they—and you—should do is let go of the like and dislike mind. If you have a desire, try looking inside, then you can see “I want” mind. It can become very strong and control you. Then you become like a robot, with your “I want” mind the program of the robot.

To relieve suffering, you need to erase the program from the computer so that it can no longer control you. The way to do that is to practice letting go of thinking. Very simple, but you are the only one who can do it. Otherwise, suffering will control you and keep going around and around.

THE WHEEL OF SUFFERING

How long have the people been fighting each other in the Middle-East? More than five thousand years! Who is to blame? Who's winning? Like and dislike mind is what causes them suffer, and just like a wheel it goes around and around and around.

When first invented, the wheel was made out of wood, later it was covered with steel bands. About one hundred years ago we put the rubber tires around the wheel. Nowadays, we have very low profile racing tires on our cars. The style of the wheels is always changing, just like the style of suffering is always changing, but the pain of suffering is always the same. The wheel is still going around. So it is very important to let go. That will help you and help everyone around you.

Enlightenment means just let go of your like and dislike mind and then take care of what's in front of you just now. All of you can do that.

MEDITATION

Meditation is very simple. In fact, the only people who get a result from meditation are the people who do it. People often check their practice and check others' practice. They'll never get anything. So it's very important that you do something. Life and death are always pointing at our need to practice. The Buddha practiced; we have to practice—that's our human situation.

Any other questions?

Q: How do we free ourselves from illusions?

A: Human beings have many misunderstandings about themselves. For one, they think that they are born to satisfy their likes and dislikes, when actually, the Buddha taught that we are here for something else. That something else is love and compassion. Love and compassion for our families, our friends, the ones we work with, and, in the end, everyone. The Buddha taught that anybody who lives in a like and dislike dream is bound to suffer.

LIKE AND DISLIKE DREAM

There are many different like and dislike dreams: there is a mainland-Chinese dream and a Taiwan-Chinese dream, an United States dream and an Iran dream. There's a Singaporean dream and a Malaysian dream. In my country, there is a white people dream and a black people dream. And not only that, there is a husband dream and a wife dream. Sometimes there are children's dreams and adults' dreams. The "I should do this, I should do that" dream. All these dreams are based on like and dislike. The way to wake up from your dream is to let go of it.

THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO PRACTICE

Zen Master Seung Sahn taught that world peace is very simple. If we could let go of our dream, all of us would be at peace. He always taught us to "put it all down." That means let go of all your opinions. Unfortunately, the only way you can do that is to practice. You can't think your way out of the dream. So Buddhism has very good teaching. Unless you do something, it is not going to be very helpful.

It's like I said before about going to a doctor. The doctor gives you some medicine but you don't take it. Maybe it's like Chinese medicine and doesn't taste so good. The bad taste in meditation is that it is really boring. Chinese medicine doesn't taste so good, and meditation, also, doesn't taste so good. But you have to take the medicine before it's possible to get well. If you don't take the medicine you'll get sicker and sicker. You may think you're okay, but you'll get sicker and sicker. So, very important is to take the medicine, whether you like it or not.

Buddha gave us very good medicine, but who actually takes it? Sometimes we think we have to do something special. I have to cut my hair; I have to go to the mountains; I have to leave my family. None of that is true. Actually, anybody can practice at any moment. All you have to do is to let go of your thinking. It doesn't require a special situation. If you think you need a special situation, it's actually part of the illusion. That's why I say Buddha and you are the same, just the situation is different. Try it.

Any other questions?

Q: How is it possible to have a more consistent practice? My practice has not been consistent. When I hear your dharma talk, I would like to try the way you teach. But after this event, I may still follow my former way. Can you give us some tips on how we can have a more consistent practice?

A: The Buddha was a bit unusual because he had a very good situation, but his mind was not lazy. For most human beings, when they have a good situation, even if they are monks and nuns, they stop practice. They think, "Tomorrow I'll start, or maybe next week when I'm not so busy. Or maybe next year when business is better, then I'll do something. Zen Master Seung Sahn always said, a good situation is a bad situation.

You asked what you should do after this event. So you've come to something like this where you become very charged up, but then tomorrow you sleep late and don't practice. Human being's mind is like that. Your mind is also like that. My mind is like that. That means: a good situation is a bad situation.

But Zen Master Seung Sahn also said, a bad situation is a good situation, but nobody thinks that way. Every human

being wants a good situation. Even the Buddha had desires. But inside, some native wisdom told him this was not the true way. You can see that sometimes, too. Usually, when human beings want to do something, they make up a situation for themselves. So the Buddha decided to make a bad situation for himself. He decided to do that—that was his intention. What separates a human being from an animal is intention. We call that vow or direction.

MAKE A BAD SITUATION FOR YOURSELF

I said earlier that suffering is the mother of Buddha. Suffering means a bad situation. This bad situation gives birth to Buddha. Buddha's father represents a good situation. Buddha's father did everything he could to create a good situation for his son. He even dyed his hair so that his son would not see grey hair. But Buddha was able to see through this situation to the suffering ahead. If you look around, if you look close, you, too, can still see many bad situations.

So what did Buddha do? He left home and made a bad situation for himself, but you don't have to be that extreme. A meditation retreat is a kind of bad situation that we create for ourselves. You can even do it at home. You can take a few minutes out of your day to practice. It's something you can do if your intention is clear.

It's kind of like going to the dentist. Nobody would say: okay, let's have some fun, let's go to the dentist. Right? Not so much fun. Also, going to a Zen meditation retreat is not so much fun. It's a kind of bad situation. You can't watch TV. You can't use your cellular phone. You can't drink alcohol. But, it's just like going to the dentist—you know it's not such a good situation, but then down the road you're going to have a beneficial result.

Everybody has that kind of wisdom inside. If I don't go to this bad situation, it will be even worse further down the road. A meditation retreat is like that. Perhaps it's not so much fun now, but further down the road, it will have a big result. In the end, everybody has to look inside and find that intention for themselves.

PRACTICE NOW

We are lazy. We are self-indulgent. We are stupid. Everybody has these sometime in their life. But then something else has to take over. It's just like going to the dentist. Maybe I'll go to the dentist next year. But the more you wait, the more likely it is that something bad will happen. So the best way is to go to the dentist today. That means you should start practicing today. You ask: What do I want for myself, my family, my friends, people I work with? When the Buddha saw people suffering, he did something. You see suffering but you keep silent. You have to do something.

The monk who advised Zen Master Seung Sahn to do a retreat told him, "Three things can happen to you on one hundred day retreat: one, you can die; two, you can go crazy; three, you can get enlightenment." But the two bad things are true of everyday life, no matter what you do. People die and people go crazy all the time. That will happen anyway, even if you don't practice. In the United States, many people go crazy because they cannot handle the pressure of the society.

So a meditation retreat is actually a win-win situation in that you can only win. It's possible to wake up. That helps you and everybody around you. You may end up in the other two situations anyway. So why not practice? Why not now? 