

During a discussion with Zen Master Wu Kwang, a bunch of students at our Zen Center said what they wanted from their practice: peace, less anger, clarity. I asked Zen Master Wu Kwang what he was hoping to get. "After this," he said, "a glass of orange juice."

Once a student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "If everything is already one, why do you practice?" Zen Master Seung Sahn smiled and said, "For you."

Zen Master Bon Haeng once told me, "We practice in order to become comfortable with not knowing."

At Chogye International Zen Center in New York, we tell new students, during meditation instruction, that we practice "to experience the clarity of our original mind."

Which answer do you like?

The great question—What am I?—came to me early in my life. Psychiatrists tell me that it is because of early tragedy: a baby brother whose heart stopped beating and a much loved uncle who blew his brains out with a shotgun. "You learned that life was not as simple as it seemed to some," psychiatrists told me.

When I got older, around the time that I graduated from college, I felt paralyzed by the choices that lay ahead of me. Do you try to make money? Do you travel? Do you become a social worker? Do you become an artist? I felt keenly aware that I was going to die. If I am going to die, what is the point of living only for myself and making money? But if everyone else is going to die, what is the point of living for them and trying to help?

A lot of people in my life told me that asking these questions would only make me crazy. They told me to put those questions behind me. They said there were no answers. For some years, I pretended those questions did not exist, but finally they grew like weeds through the concrete and would not leave me alone.

I started reading lots of spiritual books, but what I didn't like was that I could not believe any of the answers. "Why should I believe you?" I always thought. Then, I encountered the Kwan Um School of Zen, where teachers began to tell me things like: "Don't believe any words. Only believe your eyes and ears and nose and tongue and body." If that wasn't enough, they told me, also, that I *had* no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue and no body!

For the first time in my life, instead of being told that I should let go of the great question, Kwan Um teachers told me I must hold onto it day and night. Everything they said, they said not to give me answers, but to take them away. Until then, I had been lost for trying to find a thinking answer. Finally, someone was telling me that "not knowing" was not the curse that I thought it was. Not knowing was my greatest blessing.

"The great way is not difficult," wrote the Third Patriarch, "only put down your ideas and opinions."

"Moment to moment, everything is just like this," said Zen Master Seung Sahn.

Up until now, what I've written explains why I like Kwan Um teaching. But it does not answer this question: What is this "I" that likes Kwan Um teaching? Or, what is it that makes this body bend over 108 times early in the morning and sing silly-sounded out Korean words after dinner? Why is it that this body practices?

Don't know. Yet, on retreat, when the chugpi sounds, this body sits, and when the dinner bell rings, it eats without talking.

Before this body started doing these things, there was always thinking, thinking, thinking. When angry thoughts came, I shouted. When sad thoughts came, I cried. Shouting and crying is, as I've read Zen Master Seung Sahn say, "not good, not bad." But being caught in thinking and crying and shouting because of thinking has often meant that I could not fulfill my correct function.

When a hungry man comes, thinking sometimes says, "I've worked hard for my money, why should I give him something?" When my wife is hurt and angry and she shouts, my thinking sometimes says "I should shout back."

For so long, I thought that, if I could just find a thinking answer to this question "What am I?", I would find the correct way of living. But actually, if I reject all thinking answers and just keep don't know, then the correct way of living appears all by itself. Without thinking, Big I automatically feeds the hungry man when he comes. Without thinking, Big I automatically hugs my wife when she is hurt and angry. Without thinking, correct function is clear.

I am you and you are me and there is no defense or offense and without thinking our feet move to the sound of the universal music, and the name of the song, without it ever needing to be said, is simply "How can I help?"

All of these words are, of course, a great and horrendous mistake.

Already I am a senior dharma teacher. I am a dharma teacher because everything I say or do teaches the world what to do next. I say I am a *senior* dharma teacher because the effects of my teachings are so terribly serious. I have a little girl, and a wife, and friends and family and people who like me and people who dislike me and, through them, my dharma is washing over the planet, just as their dharma teachings wash over the planet through me.

When you think what the difference is between the effects of my teaching when I'm attached to my thinking—shouting at my wife—and the effects of my teaching when I keep don't know—hugging my wife—you can see why I practice. I practice, of course, to stop the suffering of everyone who hears my dharma. I do this even though, before thinking, there is no suffering. I practice to save the world, even though, before thinking, there is no world. I practice, also, because it is my correct direction.

How do I save the world just now? What is my correct direction just now?

Hi Bobby. Hi Richard. Hi anyone else who reads this. Hope you liked my essay. Would you mind too much giving me permission to be a dharma teacher in training? 🌀

