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

Zen means to be free from life and death.

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

The Heart Sutra says: there is neither old age nor death nor attainment, for there is nothing to attain.

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

If there is nothing to attain, what should we be free from? What do we have to attain?

KATZ!

The sky is blue and we are sitting here together. Thank you for coming to the ceremony.

I first came into contact with Buddhism when I was 19 years old. At that time, I had been attending university for just a few weeks. One evening, I ran into a friend of mine on campus. She said she and some other young women whom she knew from her Buddhist circles, also students, were planning on going to a temple that evening. They were planning to eat dinner, and have a pleasant time chatting together. So I thought I'd come along. We went to this temple near Seoul on top of a mountain. After dinner the temple's abbot called us into the dharma room. As soon as the young women were assembled in the dharma room, the venerable abbot said: "It's so wonderful that you young people are interested in Buddhism. Tonight, there is a full moon. And as you know, on nights with a full moon, the effects of practice are twice as strong. So I suggest that tonight

# Inka Ceremony

for  
Namhee Chon  
Berlin Zen Center  
May 3 2008

we do 3000 prostrations together.” The others didn’t dare to contradict him. But first they had to show me how you do these “prostrations.” The abbot also told us that each time we bent down, we should say loudly: “Please take us to the other shore.” By the time dawn came, I had finished all 3000 prostrations. Then I crawled down from the temple’s mountain on all fours and went home. For over a week I couldn’t walk a single step without feeling pain. I could have said after just the twentieth prostration at the latest, “No, I’m not going to continue, this is much too stressful.” But I was adamant and even, if necessary, could have done more—for just one reason, this sentence: “Please take me to the other shore.” I didn’t really know what the other shore meant. But I knew enough to understand that I would meet something unusual, extraordinary, and new there, something for which I had a great longing.

In my youth, and after, I was a very depressed person. I had basically already thought through my life from beginning to end. I believed it was all a repetition of the same thing and that existence had no meaning. So I seriously considered taking my life. Then, something occurred to me that I had never tried out before. In films and literature, erotic love was highly prized. I thought, before I die, I’ll give that a try. A few years later, I learned about yoga and Hindu meditation practices in India. They say that if you want to achieve the absolute, you should practice asceticism and restraint. My husband and I lived together for a long time as brother and sister. All of this was an expression of my desperate search for meaning in life.

I don’t know how I earned all the goodness and beauty in my life. In any case, I met Zen Master Wu Bong and, shortly afterwards, Zen Master Seung Sahn. His “put it all down!” was like a sharp sword to me, cutting through all my fantasies, notions, and desires. Soon thereafter, my husband and I turned our apartment into a Zen Center. Above the Zen Center lived an old woman. Actually, I hardly ever saw her. I only saw her eldest daughter, who visited her from time to time. One day, as I was passing the door to her apartment, I heard a soft whimper, “Let me out of here!” I asked her “What’s wrong? Did someone lock you in? How can I help you?” But she didn’t respond to my questions at all and just kept repeating this one sentence, like a mantra. After a while, she stopped. But the next day, I heard banging and hammering coming from her apartment. It seemed she was hitting her door with a stick. As she did so, she screamed, wailed, and sobbed loudly: “Let me out of here!” I was about to call the police. I thought something terrible must have happened to her. When I saw her daughter hurrying up the stairs, I yelled at her: “How could you have locked your old mother in her apartment?” She looked at me blankly and retorted, “You can’t lock anyone behind this door.” The door had a clasp-lock, the kind that can only be opened from inside. If you want to open the door from the outside, you need a key. So the old woman had locked herself in! A few days later, she was taken to a psychiatrist.

Once during meditation, I realized that during my constant search for the absolute, I wasn’t so different from this old woman. I wanted to get to the other shore; my 3000 prostrations were like this old woman’s cries.

When you look closely, this world is like a huge insane asylum. Everyone creates his or her own prison. We double- and triple-lock ourselves in and cry out for freedom. As soon as we create ideas and concepts of freedom, we become unfree. In the moment when we begin to think about completion, or about enlightenment, we become incomplete and unenlightened. A process of chasing after our own ideas begins. What we have created with our minds becomes so real that we must achieve and realize it. But Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching is very simple. He taught us to put everything down. When we put everything down, everything is as it is: whole and complete. So we don’t even have to rush from one Kyol Che to the next and do thousands of prostrations. We just have to put down our ideas and concepts. Then the prisons disappear, the doors open, and we see clearly. This is the best help we can give to the world. We don’t even have to ask “How can I help you?” This is the greatest contribution we can make to our world.

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

At this point there is freedom from life and death.

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

At this point there is neither freedom, nor life, nor death.

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

Zen Master Ko Bong said, if you go one step forward from this point, you are dead. If you go one step backwards, you are dead. You can’t stay at this point. Nobody can help you. How can you stay alive?

So, how can we stay alive?

KATZ!

Now my talk is over. Thank you for listening. ☸

## DHARMA COMBAT

**Zen Master Soeng Hyang:** Sometimes when people become a teacher, even more karma appears. What can you do with this karma?

**Chon JDPSN:** You already understand.

**Zen Master Soeng Hyang:** Teach me.

**Chon JDPSN:** How may I help you?

**Zen Master Soeng Hyang:** Is that all?

**Chon JDPSN:** Not enough?

**Zen Master Soeng Hyang:** No, not enough.

**Chon JDPSN:** A dog is running after a bone.

**Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS:** *[does a bow and sits with his back toward Chon JDPSN and says nothing]*

**Chon JDPSN:** *[strong]* One more step is necessary!

**Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS:** *[keeps sitting and says nothing]*

**Chon JDPSN:** Next question please!

**Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS:** *[does a bow and leaves]*

**Tara:** I have one question. Mummy, why did you become my mummy?

**Chon JDPSN:** You already understand.

**Tara:** Hum...

**Chon JDPSN:** *[bugs and kisses her daughter]*

Oh, my darling!