

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Paul Majchrzyk

April 4, 2009, Providence Zen Center

DHARMA COMBAT

QUESTION: Congratulations, Paul, for putting yourself through this moment of public scrutiny. I know that you're going to recall that, last night, in a moment of uncharacteristic muddle, when I took the wrong turn on I-95, you so graciously pointed that out to me, as well as everybody else in the car—which I appreciated—but now that you're going to become a JDPSN, how will you help students avoid straying from the path?

Majchrzyk JDPSN: You already understand.

Q: So I ask you.

MJDPSN: After the ceremony, we're going to go through that door and play volleyball.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

MJDPSN: You're welcome.

Q: I'm not sure that I'm going to play, though.

MJDPSN: Me neither!

Q: Hi Paul, congratulations. It's good to be sitting here with you. So I have a question. Earlier today, Zen Master Bon Haeng was talking about the Buddha's story, and he said that the Buddha tried many things after he left home and sat under the tree for six years. But I also heard that, no, it took six years between when he left home and tried things, so I'm confused, for how long did the Buddha really sit?

MJDPSN: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

MJDPSN: At this moment, what are you doing?

Q: I'm sitting here talking to you.

MJDPSN: That's all you have to try.

Q: How long is that?

MJDPSN: Please count.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: Congratulations Paul. I've been noticing that there are a number of people that have gotten inka from New York over the years. I'm curious as to whether it has anything to do with the height of the buildings in New York.

MJDPSN: Is that a question?

Q: Well, I thought it was.

MJDPSN: You already understand.

Q: Oh, so please teach me.

MJDPSN: The roofs are up, the basements are down.

Q: Oh, thank you for your teaching. ☸



DHARMA SPEECH

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

Do you see this?

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

Do you hear this?

This stick, this sound *[hit]* and your mind—are they the same or different?

KATZ!

Today is Buddha's birthday. Outside the wind is blowing.

Today I'm going to talk about practice, because practice is what we do together in our Zen centers, and our practice experiences and the lessons we take from practice into the world are something we can always share.

A couple of months ago during consulting interviews, someone asked me why I had stuck with Zen practice for so long. Perhaps he had encountered some kind of difficulty with practice, or the excitement of the early days was gone, and practice had become boring and routine. I gave him an "explanation-style" answer that wasn't really on the mark, so I thought about his question afterwards, and for me it comes down to this.

I have stuck with Zen because it is unflinchingly honest, but at the same time accepting, kind, and caring—not in a soft syrupy way, but in a rugged, rough and tumble way. To become clear you have to see what's really there, all the mental junk you've made and accumulated over the years. The honesty will force you to acknowledge the parts of yourself you'd rather keep hidden. The acceptance allows you to look at the less savory parts of your self without being overly self-critical.

In the years since I began giving consulting interviews, I've noticed that more than half of the questions I'm asked are really versions of two basic questions. The first is "My practice is no good. How can I fix it?" The second is "How does practice help this world?" These questions come up over and over again for me, as well.

The first question is concerned with checking and self improvement. Your experience is not what you hoped for, so you think your practice is deficient in some way. It may be that you're not clear, calm, peaceful, concentrated—or your mind is noisy, angry, like a broken record, etc, etc. A variation on this question is "I'm no good" which is a little subtler. "I believe in the practice, but I'm lacking some fundamental quality or ability that prevents me from getting whatever the rest of you are getting from Zen." What's interesting about this syndrome is that people are often toughest on themselves about their areas of strength, so someone who does one thousand prostrations every day will say "I'm not sincere enough."

The second question, "how does practicing help this world?" is about motivation. In formal practice we pay attention during simple activities like bowing, chanting, and sitting in order to become clear, so that we can help all beings. But practice can feel insular and self indulgent, especially when there are so many other ways we could be helping out there. I think many people sense the connection, but we sometimes wonder if the time we devote to formal practice really helps this world.

Several years ago, I was going through another period of dissatisfaction with my own practice. I had finally given up the idea that I would ever see my "true nature," because after fifteen years of reasonably consistent practice I had never seen any entity you could call "true nature," or a "self," even for an instant. Nevertheless, most of my bad habits were still with me, and I continued to develop new bad habits. How could that be? If I'd realized conclusively that there is no self, what did all these defects stick to? Why didn't the realization of "no self" penetrate? That was my big question, and I took it to different teachers for their take on this. Most said something like, "Yeah, it's really humbling isn't it?" When I presented this question with great seriousness to my guiding teacher Zen Master Wu Kwang, he just said "don't lose your sense of humor," and burst out laughing. That was good advice—although I didn't laugh at the time—because a moment of realization about self nature doesn't wipe away the mental and emotional stuff collected over a lifetime. So really, our only choice is to examine what comes up, put each thing in proper perspective, and see if we can make some use of it.

One practice experience that brought this home for me happened about a year after I started sitting Zen, during my first "long" retreat (a ten-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin.) I've never had limber knees, and back then I also had what you might call "ma-

cho sitting syndrome." I wanted to show that I could sit cross-legged with the best "professional retreat sitters," and I chose to stay seated and endure pain rather than stand or use a chair. By the second day, the pain was already bad, and it got worse each day until my knees buckled when I walked. The head dharma teacher finally intervened, and when I got to my sitting spot after walking meditation, there was a chair in place of my cushion. I had no choice, so I sat in the chair—and I swear that was one of the most wonderful feelings I've ever experienced! It was like being enveloped in the clouds of heaven. If someone had asked me what nirvana was then, I would have said "a folding metal chair."

As I sat there enjoying this chair, I also had an insight. "Macho sitting is stupid! I'll never do this to myself again! When legs are hurting, stand up or use a chair. It's so simple!" I was sure I had put this behind me permanently. Well, guess what? The very next retreat I was back to my old ways, and almost twenty years later, my macho sitter is still going strong. But, internally, something has changed. For one thing, the inner dialogue is different. In the old days, I'd tell myself, "I can't let some of these older people sit better than me!" Now it's, "I'll show these young whippersnappers what some decrepit old sinews can do!" But more importantly, I've accepted and made peace with this tendency of mine, and it doesn't dominate my retreat experience as it once did. And since wanting to "be the best" is deeply ingrained in many of us, facing and accepting how this appears in practice has helped me face and accept it in the rest of my life, and to help others see it in themselves.

I had a somewhat similar experience during a solo retreat here at the hermitage at Providence Zen Center. I was assigned gardening for work period, and I love working outdoors, feeling the sun, the breeze, getting dirt on my hands. On the second day I was given a sprinkler to water the lawn, which was basically a 12-inch stake with a nozzle that swiveled between two brackets. The brackets could be set to control the nozzle's range of motion—or that was the idea. But it was not a high-class piece of equipment, so it would frequently get stuck and flood one small area before beginning to revolve again. And when it malfunctioned, I could not approach it to unstick it without getting soaked. I tried many tactics—running up from behind, crawling towards it from different angles, but I always ended up covered in water and mud. This was ruining my beloved gardening, and anger towards this sprinkler began rising up in me until, finally, one afternoon I ripped it from the earth and began cursing it and slamming it on the ground while the hose slowly wrapped around my leg. And then I came to my senses and thought: "Wait a minute. I'm here on retreat to finish the great work of life and death, and instead I've somehow ended up in a death match with a piece of plastic!"

So the point of these stories, what I'm trying to get across here, is that if you practice long enough, everything will come up, everything needs to come up. It's natural to prefer experiences that are relaxing, still, clear, profound, and these will come. But when your conditioning appears—all your opinions, problems, anger, wants, anxieties—instead of being disturbed or pushing them away, try being open to them, and see if they have something to teach. With time, although you may not

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José Ramírez

April 4, 2009, Providence Zen Center

DHARMA COMBAT

Question: Hi, José. A lot of the Zen teaching is bullshit. So, how do you actually figure out what to teach?

Ramírez JDPSN: What do you need?

Q: Don't know.

RJDPSN: That's enough.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: Congratulations, my friend. Getting inka is a very good situation, but Zen Master Seung Sahn says a good situation is a bad situation. Show me the bad situation.

RJDPSN: How can I help you?

[laughter]

Q: That's not bad. Thank you.

Q: First Venezuelan born about to receive inka from the Kwan Um School of Zen. So that actually comes at a great time. It comes at a great time because, in Venezuela, many people are suffering. Political reasons, economic reasons, crime. Many problems. Now that you are going to become a Ji Do Poep Sa Nim, how can you help all of Venezuela?

RJDPSN: *[Chanting]* Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal...

Q: Thank you so much. Gracias. ☸



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get rid of them, you'll see them for what they are, you'll see their insubstantiality, and they'll naturally lose their grip so you're less likely to be pulled around by them.

Finally, getting back to the question about how practice is related to saving all beings, when you are open to whatever appears in meditation, you are living fully in the moment as it is, and accepting yourself as you are. If you can do this with yourself, you can do it with others. Then really, practice is directly related to being helpful, because the only place you can "help this world" is right in front you, just now.

In Zen, the metaphor of a dung heap is sometimes used to describe our mental baggage—we saw it used during dharma combat today. Everybody has one, and if you can see through your heap of dung, you can show other people how to see through theirs. Using this approach, we can genuinely connect with people, be of help, and share this simple, clear way of being that we practice.

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