

TOGETHER-ACTION IS NOT SOMETHING WE CREATE

Zen Master Wu Kwang

I will also talk a little bit about the theme of this conference, “Together-action saves this world.” I’ll tell a short Zen story as an introduction.

There was a monk, Hae Chung, who was a student of the Sixth Patriarch. When he was a young man, he journeyed for a long way to find the Sixth Patriarch and then he studied with him. After he got transmission, he went to a high mountain, and, according to the story, he practiced there for forty years. He showed great diligence and great sincerity in wanting to ripen his practice spirit. Even though he never came down from the mountain, people heard about him and began to climb the mountain and study with him. Eventually, he became so famous that he was summoned by the emperor who gave Hae Chung the title of National Teacher. When the National Teacher was quite old, the emperor asked him, “After you die, what will you leave?” The National Teacher said, “Build me a seamless monument, a seamless pagoda.” The emperor was perplexed by this and asked, “Please, teacher, what is the monument’s form?” Then the National Teacher sat silent for quite a while before asking the emperor, “Do you understand?” The emperor said, “No, I don’t understand.” The National Teacher said, “I have a disciple name Tan-yuan (Korean Chin Won), summon him, to explain.”

When the National Teacher died, the emperor asked Tan-yuan about this matter of the seamless monument. The National Teacher’s disciple also remained silent for a while before reciting this poem,

*South of Sung, north of T’ang,
In the middle there’s enough gold for a country.
No shadow under the tree, the community ship.
In the crystal palace, nobody understands.”*

Why am I talking about this? Because of this one word, seamless. According to our teaching, our original experience is seamless. That means that name and form is always changing, but one thing remains consistent. Although you can make sandalwood into an incense stick, into a carved elephant, or into a little box, its smell is the same. Also our teaching tells us that we are originally like one big net. That means we are all interconnected, continuously, without any break or separation.

Together is already a pre-existing condition. We are also this wide, interconnected experience. We are all originally pulsating dynamically moment by moment, moment by moment. Together-action is not something we create. Whatever we practice as together-action is just to remind ourselves. In the disciple’s poem, he says, “North of one place, south of some other place, in the middle

enough gold for a country.” That really means, where you are right at this moment, and what you are doing at this moment. Many times during this weekend, I’ve heard people ask each other, “How is your Zen center doing?” And people sometimes say, “Oh practice is very strong at our Zen center,” or “Practice is not so strong in our Zen center,” or “There’s arguing in our Zen center,” or, “There is some kind of problem.” But, “How is your Zen center doing,” does not mean how is your Zen center doing. It means, “How is your practice? What are you doing just now?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn once told me, “One person’s practicing strong, 10,000 people are practicing strong!” In the same sense, the poem says, “In the middle, enough gold to fill a country.” That means each of us is already rich in potential and rich in possibility. The poem continues, “Under the tree, no shadow, the community ship.” Zen Master Seung Sahn once told me, “That kind of phrase, ‘Under the tree, no shadow,’ that’s what you call enlightenment secret words.” But the line in the poem says, “Under the shadowless tree, the community ship,” the community ferryboat. This means that enlightenment and practice is not just a solitary affair, it’s a community affair. We all have to renew our commitment and our vow to make strong action together. We should keep this mind that originally does not understand anything. Then we uphold the value of this world and save all beings. ☸

