

There's Got to Be a Horse in There Somewhere!

Zen Master Soeng Hyang

This dharma talk was given in Lumbini, Nepal, during the Whole World Is a Single Flower tour in October 2011.

We talk in our teaching about great faith, great courage, great question. To be born takes a lot of faith—if you have a bodhisattva vow, you're born because you want to help. You're born because you want to develop your practice and also teach other people how to practice, very simply put. Why else be born?

I've been reading a book by an Indian author on this trip, and there's a joke in the book. The joke was very interesting. There was a man that had two children—two sons. One son was always negative. He didn't like anything; he was very hard to please. The other son was always happy, very optimistic, very helpful. It was the time for Diwali [the festival of lights], and he needed to get gifts for his two sons. For his unhappy son, to make him happy, he got a beautiful carpentry set, a magnificent telescope and a brand new bicycle. The son said, "I don't do carpentry; I don't want that carpentry set. This is not the highest class telescope; I don't want this telescope. And I don't like that bicycle." The father was not surprised.

He had also given a present to his happy son, his giving son, his kind son, his anything-goes son. For him, he piled about two tons of horse shit in his bedroom. So, after seeing his first son disappointed with his presents, he went into his second son's bedroom. In the bedroom was his son with a shovel, and he was just throwing the shit all over the room, just digging and digging and digging in this horse shit. The father said, "Son? What are you doing? What are you doing?"

The son said, "Well, all this shit, there's got to be a horse in here somewhere!" That's our faith. There's



Photo: Donald Boudreau

got to be a horse in there somewhere!

When we first sit down to meditate, it's hard to find the horse. We think there's some horse, there's some enlightenment, some kind of gift from this meditation. We quiet our minds. But sometimes it's difficult.

Once while I was doing a solo retreat, I got lost in the woods. It was late afternoon, and it was wintertime, so by 4:30 or 5:00 it was getting dark. It was cold and nobody knew I was out on a walk. There was nobody around. I started to panic. I'm not used to being lost in the woods and it was very scary. The Boy Scout manual says "don't keep going in different directions because

you'll get more disoriented." But I wasn't a Boy Scout, and I started in this direction, this direction, that direction—even though I knew I wasn't supposed to. I was getting more and more lost. I had my mala beads in my hand on this walk and after three minutes, five minutes, seven minutes of getting more and more scared, more and more confused, all of a sudden I looked at my beads. It was like they were strangers! My faith wasn't so strong that day. I said, "Well, nothing else is working. I'll try this. I always just did what Zen Master Seung Sahn told me to do, so I'll try these beads."

So I started doing *shin-myo jang-gu dae-da-ra-ni namo-ra da-na da-ra ya-ya na-mak ar-ya ba-ro-gi-je sae-ba-ra-ya*, and I closed my eyes. And my body just went—and started walking. I still had my eyes closed. We have a saying in the United States, "feet don't fail me now!" My feet were doing clear mind. I kept doing my mantra and my feet were going. No idea! No idea. I was scared

and just wanted to get out of there, so I only followed the feet. And I got to the path! It was not too far away.

As soon as I hit the path, I said, “Boy is *that* a dharma talk! I have to tell people about this!” That wasn’t *me* that found the path, it was *shin-myo jang-gu dae-da-rani*. No idea. Put down the idea. It doesn’t even matter what mantra. *Coca-Cola Coca-Cola Coca-Cola Coca-Cola Coca-Cola* . . . Then, this mind can come to your center, come to your gut. That faith takes time to develop. A lot of shoveling sometimes, a lot of shoveling.

It’s wonderful for each of us that we’re together. Zen Master Seung Sahn gave us a beautiful map, very generous, very wide and open. If he could see this now he’d be so happy. But all the time, it’s up to you. Each one of us. Grab that shovel, shovel that shit. Trust that mantra. Trust it.

Jeff mentioned that we’re traveling in a funny order on this trip. Almost in reverse. At the end of the retreat, we’re at the place of birth. Last time we were at the place of enlightenment—no death. We were also at the place of death. But we went to the enlightenment place also. How do you get enlightenment? How do you do that? That’s exactly the point. What *is* this? What *is* enlightenment? Having a great question. The enlightenment always comes with the question. If you feel confused, maybe you feel like “I don’t understand. What are they doing? I don’t get this. What is my prac-

tice?” Just stop right there: what is my practice? All you have to do is breathe out “don’t know.” Don’t know.

We are very blessed with having had a teacher who emphasized more than anything a great question. That question will take you home. Even though it feels like a pile of shit, or it feels confusing. You have the question, and you look at it; not inside, not outside, just be that question. Then: don’t know. Then: [*imitates the chattering of a nearby monkey*] *Eeeeh eeeeh eeeeh eeeh!* Right? *Eeeeh eeeeh eeeeh eeeh!*

So simple!

Yesterday when we came out to get on the bus, there was a big elephant. In the eastern United States where I live, a small town called Pawtucket, Rhode Island, there was an elephant too. Everybody’s favorite zoo exhibit was this elephant, and her name was Fannie. Fannie the elephant—not such a good name, really. She had been there since about 1952 and they were very proud of this elephant.

She was tethered to a 10-foot chain. Ten feet. This huge, magnificent animal, tethered.

In 1996, an animal rights group in Rhode Island started a campaign to liberate Fannie, to get her off that 10-foot chain. She had been in a building on this chain for forty years. The movement picked up speed. It got stronger and the national animal rights movement started to support the Rhode Island animal rights movement. It got bigger. They were talking about it on the talk shows. Big arguments! “Oh! I went to see Fannie with my grandmother when I was five! She’s *always* been here! Fannie belongs in Pawtucket!” And the other side said, “This is a magnificent animal that deserves to be returned to her own species, to have some space to walk, air to breathe. She’s not an exhibit, she’s an elephant.”

The animal rights people won. They came to get her at two o’clock in the morning to avoid a big fight. They put her on a truck and they took her to a large animal preserve in Texas where there were many other elephants. When Fannie was let off the truck she came to the field and saw the other elephants. Then she did something that she had never done in her whole life. She got on her knees and she trumpeted. When elephants are really happy, they throw up their trunk and they trumpet. People were photographing and videoing, witnessing this. They changed her name and they gave her the name of Tara! I’m driving around listening to this on the radio, crying.



Photo: Scott Dumont

Great faith, great question, and what's the correct relationship, function and situation for this elephant? Ten feet of chain, or being with her own species? Yesterday when I saw this elephant, I was tired and I didn't remember where I was. I got back into the bus and looked at the elephant through the window. All of a sudden this incredible grief came. I felt so much grief. This was as if my mother had just died, my daughter had just died. I was embarrassed a little bit because I was standing on the bus and everybody's laughing. I could have checked myself and said "Oh, you shouldn't feel that way! Come on, get with it! Happy time, we're on the bus!" But I just let myself go into it.

I just breathed into that grief, and then of course I felt more grief. Through the window there was a little baby and the baby's brother and the mother doing something with the drums and the harmonium. There was an old man next to them with a little tambourine. They're in the dirt. The baby wasn't walking yet and it was putting dirt in its mouth and rolling around. The grief was growing and I felt embarrassed and I asked, "Who feels embarrassed? Just go with it. Don't make 'I feel embarrassed.' *What* is this? *What* is this? It's OK to have a cry. Why not? That's how great love and great sadness come together.

That takes courage. That's not easy. You know that. It's not easy to feel that grief, to enter that grief, allow the grief to teach you. Then what do you do? Do you let that elephant keep picking up the rupees and the apples that are offered to it? Maybe, maybe, just an idea, maybe if we just bowed every time we saw that elephant rather than giving it apples and money, the man would get a different elephant. "Nobody cares about this elephant!" I don't know, but somehow we have to find correct relationship to this begging and to this pain and to this sorrow.

How can we help? Sometimes I check. "I'll go home and join a big animal rights group! I'll go home and make sure I send money to that orphanage that we were at yesterday; I'll pledge to that and I'll pledge to this."

But then I say, "Why don't you just go to more retreats? Do more teaching? That's your job. Just try to help people wake up. Then if they wake up maybe they'll give money to the animal rights group." They will—we all will wake up to compassion and generosity. That's our job.

I have been so moved on this trip. I've been on two buses where the group leaders had people come to the front to talk about themselves and their practice on the PA. These often became informal dharma talks. What dharma talks! Someone said, it's only sharing, but it was more than sharing to me. People were giving these great dharma talks. And I'm like, "Wow! We have some great sangha members in this Kwan Um School of Zen." Incredible that we're all able to have that confidence to give some teaching. A lot of places you never get to give teaching because you're a student. But let's give that teaching and help people.

And then there is death. The question of death is what brought me to practice. I was scared to death of death. Since I was little I thought I would jump off a cliff and go into an abyss. That's what I thought death is. You jump off a cliff and then you fall forever. I had that

image. I must have had a difficult death before. I don't know. What is death? Even the Buddha died, ate some rotten meat and died. The fact is, it's all impermanent. We have to hurry up. Hurry up. Try, try try—hurry up!

When we'd go to Korea—Dae Bong Sunim must have heard it a billion times—Zen Master Seung Sahn would say, "*Palli palli! Kapsida!* Hurry up! Let's go!" But it's also that way with our practice. Hurry up, let's go! I very much encourage all of us to continue to find the path. Find the way that can get us to really start, to light that match. I encourage you to do long retreats. Come to Kyol Che. Do long solo retreats. It's not easy, but you must come to Kyol Che. You must take three weeks out of your life and do a solo retreat. Take a hundred days out of your life and do a solo retreat. You can do it. You can do it.

Thank you. ♦



Photo: Allan Matthews