

Tathagata—

Waiting for Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim

Deok Hyeon Sunim

What is it to live as a human being?

This is a question I have striven to forget, yet one that always returns like a chronic disease in the face of someone's death.

When we are alive, the fact that we are alive seems so natural, a reality without a single doubt. And yet all this can come to an abrupt end at any moment.

In particular, the death of a person that has come so close to completeness is all the more unacceptable and absurd, something that seems preposterously unbelievable. More so when that person is someone that you have become one with in all genuineness, one whom you have come to love and respect with all of your heart, from whom there is no distance. Then, the death of that person cannot be easily accepted or consoled. Even though that death is not our own, it shakes the very root of our existence.

And it is only after days and days of deep retrospection, taking to heart the meaning of this painful parting, that it all becomes clear again.

Regardless of you or me, death, like the reverse side of a sheet of paper, has always been one with life. Rather, life is like a fragment of a transient wave rising above the ocean of death.

What wave can be free from its destiny to subside from its rise and return to its origin, the water? The fact that a wave rises reaffirms the truth that it never existed in the first place. When we calmly face up to this truth, then we are able to slowly accept the fact that all deaths are predestined, natural, and nothing to be taken aback about. We are able to let go of our tenacious attachment to life. Our mind becomes free from all things and at last rests.

In fact, life and death are not separate. Life and death are one.

The two sides of a sheet of paper cannot be separated, just as the two poles of a magnet coexist in dependency: no matter how many times it is divided, two new poles appear every time. As such, even if we were to separate the two faces of a sheet of paper, we can never attain a paper missing its reverse side.

When we look deeply right through into the whole,

even though countless waves appear to be billowing in the ocean, in fact nothing has risen. It is merely the movement of the boundless seawater. When we look at the waves, they appear to be rising and falling, but when we look at the entire ocean, it is and has always been only water.

Water by nature has no fixed form and therefore changes indefinitely. Change, moment to moment, gives birth to transient waves, and now in the course of *hetu-pratyaya* (direct cause), merely takes them away. Even though it appears to us that the wave that seemed to have appeared is now disappearing before our eyes, in truth, that disappearance itself is nonexistent. Those that have opened their true eyes, have they not said, “No life. No death”?

Tathagata (one who has thus gone, or one who has thus come), one who has come from tathata (thusness) with *maha-pranidhana*, the resolution to save all sentient beings from the suffering of life and death, and one who returns to tathata by the course of *hetu-pratyaya*, is the Buddha who is beyond all coming and going. When seen through the world of tathata, all sentient beings are no different than the Buddha, with innate Buddha nature, whereby being born is not being born, and dying is not dying. And there is no Buddha apart from sentient beings. As the boundless expanse of water is in itself just water, it is nonsense to search for water apart from the waves.

“Life is correct. Death is correct.”

It is when the eyes that pierce the truth are blinded by ignorance and offenses that life and death become a problem and lead to great suffering. For an enlightened one, all things living and dying are the manifestation of truth, the profound mind of nirvana.

When alive, live to the fullest. And when you die, leave with no regrets or attachments. Live beautifully and leave light-footedly. This is Buddha's great transfiguration and great passing, the endless paramita of the bodhisattva path, and the essence of us living and dying as human beings.

Wu Bong Sunim thus lived and thus departed. The final curtain has come down on one beautiful life.