

Bodhisattva Bird

Zen Master Wu Bong

In one of the dharma talks during the winter Kyol Che 2012–2013, Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim told a story:

Once I read in the Jataka tales the story of one of the Buddha's previous lives. He was a little bird then, and one day the forest where the bird lived caught on fire. For the bird, in fact, it wasn't such a big problem, because she could just fly away. But looking down on the forest while flying above, she saw all the other animals caught in the fire and struggling to get out. And the

bird couldn't just fly away. She felt so compassionate for the other animals that she decided to help. She flew to the lake—quite far away—took some water into her beak, flew back to the forest and poured it down on the fire. And then she flew again to the lake and brought some more water, and then again, and again. And so she continued until she got completely exhausted. When she couldn't fly anymore, she fell down into the burning forest and died.

Once I read this story, I could never get it out of my head. ♦

The Attendant

How Can I Do Nothing?

Sasha Rymar

The attendant entered the master's room and asked, "Can I do something for you?"

"Mmm . . . I guess, today—nothing," said Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim.

"How can I do nothing?"

"Ah! That is a very good question!" Zen Master Wu Bong replied.

The next day, coming into his room: "Can I do something?"

"Do something!"

The attendant took out his trash and came back. "Something else?"

"Yes, you can do something else," with a big smile.

The attendant picked up a dirty plate from his table, looking around to see if there was anything else that needed to be done. "Maybe something else?"

"Aren't you tired?"

"No, why would I be?"

"You did something and something. You could be tired." Big smile.

Another time he asked "Do you know how to iron?"

"Of course," the attendant replied.

"I washed my robe," he said. "But it's all ruffled, as you can see. Could you iron it for me, please? I can do almost everything for myself. I know how to wash clothes, and I can cook. But I don't know how to iron."

"Have you ever tried?" the attendant laughed.

"Yes, I did. But somehow it doesn't work out for me," said Zen Master Wu Bong apologetically.

Another time: "Hmm . . . What can you do? What can you do?" asked Zen Master Wu Bong. "I guess, there is nothing to do. What do you think?"

"Maybe I can do some dusting? It's been a long time . . ."

"You think so? Is it necessary? Do you see any dust?" asked Zen Master Wu Bong.

And so both of them started to look for dust, but on his table there didn't seem to be any, probably because he would wipe it off with his sleeves.

"Well," he said finally, "for sure there is some dust, but as long as we cannot see it, it's all right. There is nothing to do."

Another time he said, "I'm sorry. It's really difficult for me to think of something that you could do for me. There are really no particular needs."

Together they checked if he had some laundry, or if there was maybe some trash. Finally, he gave the attendant some sweets. "Here! Here is something to do—eat this!"

You Are Making Something

Dorota Drążczyk

In our sangha many of us had a good and long relationship with Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim; many were his friends. We have hundreds of memories of different situations, and gained a lot of wonderful teaching. The stories are fascinating.

I knew Zen Master Wu Bong for a significantly shorter period. Twice I had the honor to be his attendant during Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Falenica (in Warsaw), and so I had the opportunity to experience some moments of his full attention for me. Every one of these encounters contained teaching.

Zen Master Wu Bong was a difficult person to attend to—there was nothing that he needed except for morning tea and the tea for the personal interviews: no fruits, juices or sweets. I haunted him sometimes and tormented him with my questions, asking whether he needed something after all.

Not a thing. I was disappointed. But I risked myself once. With the next tea, I brought a piece of cheesecake. It was eaten! So I brought a piece with the following tea, and the subsequent one. The next day I again entered Zen Master Wu Bong's room with tea and cake. He glanced at me with his penetrating gaze and said, "You are making something!"

I was frightened, because you know what that means as a teaching. "But, Soen Sa Nim, I said nothing . . ." I managed to mutter.

Then he laughed and said, "Easy—you are making cheesecake, Dorota! A lot of tasty cheesecakes!"

With tea I had also a problem. No matter what kind of tea I served in the teapot, it always diminished by only a small amount. I tried all possible sorts but it was always the same. One day before a round of personal interviews, I again brought a full teapot. I put it down and took the previous one. I took a look in it—it was full. In desperation I asked, "Soen Sa Nim, I bring you different types of tea. Which of them do you really like?"

"This one you fetched *just now!*" he said without hesitation. I really took this teaching to heart. ♦