

TRANSMISSION CEREMONY FOR

Zen Master Bon Hae

On April 6, 2013, Judith Roitman received transmission from Zen Master Dae Kwang at Providence Zen Center and became Zen Master Bon Hae.

DHARMA COMBAT

Tim Lerch JDPSN: Hi, Judy.

Zen Master Bon Hae: Hi.

Lerch PSN: Congratulations.

ZMBH: Not yet.

[Laughter and applause.]

Question: So, a long time ago, at the Providence Zen Center, maybe 33 years ago, our wonderful Zen Master Seung Sahn was asked a question by one of his first students, whose name then was Bobby. Many teachers at that time were coming from Asia and they were *all* men. Bobby said, “Dae Soen Sa Nim, can a woman become a Zen master?” So here you are, and if not yet, but maybe soon, and you’re a *woman*—

ZMBH: I am?

[Laughter.]

Q: Well . . . only that?

ZMBH: Finished.

Ken Kessel JDPSN: I’m looking for an ox.

ZMBH: I see one.

[Laughter.]

Kessel PSN: Moooooooooooo!

ZMBH: That’s a cow.

DHARMA SPEECH

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

Sosan Taesa said there is only one thing from the very beginning, infinitely bright and mysterious in nature. It cannot be described or given a name.

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

But fundamentally there is no thing, there is no beginning, there is no name, and there is no one to name it.

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

And yet zero equals zero, one equals one, two equals two, each thing is each thing, each name is each name. Which one do you like?

KATZ!

The sun is shining, the Buddha behind me is gold.

So when I was a kid, people told me I was very smart. And I was very stupid because I believed it when they told me that I was smart. So I thought that I was very smart and I thought that I knew everything. I thought that if I didn’t know something then I could figure it out really quickly and, if necessary, maybe actually go learn it from somebody. But I thought everything was in my mental grasp. And then I met Zen Master Seung Sahn. And he said, “Is this a stick?” And he said, “Is this a watch?” And he held up a glass of water and he said, “What is this?”



Photo: Brenton Sheehan



Photo: Brenton Sheehan

And I realized that *yes* was bullshit. And *no* was bullshit. And *stick* was bullshit, and *watch* was bullshit and *glass of water* was bullshit. I realized that I didn't know anything. That everything that I thought I knew was completely, 100 percent worthless.

So that's the beginning of our practice. That mind. Not trying to grasp, not trying to hold, not trying to describe, not trying to name. That mind. Only the great question, "What is this?" Just that. What is this? Not "it's a stick." What is this? I know many people here have passed that kong-an, but just, what is this? And to continue asking this of everything in our lives. So that's the first step.

We earlier heard a reference to See Hoy Liau, who became Mu Deung Sunim, got inka, got transmission, and become Zen Master Su Bong. Back when he was See Hoy Liau, he was kind of a wild man. He'd write these letters, very challenging letters, to Zen Master Seung Sahn. He'd write these very short letters, and one of them was, "What is the fast road to Zen?" Zen Master Seung Sahn replied, "Not for me."

This means our direction. You have to be very careful

because if you say, "oh, the fast road to Zen is 'not for me,'" then people think "oh, I don't have to practice, it's not for me, it's for somebody else." But no, that's not what it means.

Everyone here understands what it means. It means that my life is not lived for me. Why do you eat every day? Why do you sleep? Why do you get up in the morning? Not for me. So that's our direction, that's our great direction. So, first, substance, then direction.

Su Bong Soen Sa Nim, when he was in his early fifties, he was giving an interview to a twelve-year-old girl in Hong Kong, and suddenly he fell down with a massive heart attack and died instantly. Also, many of us knew Myo Ji Sunim, a wonderful, wonderful nun and Ji Do Poep Sa, infinite energy, a real force in this world. And one day, she said goodbye to some friends who had left her temple, went into the kitchen to make some tea, and fell down with a massive cerebral hemorrhage. She lost consciousness instantly. They kept her alive so her family could come and see her and then she died.

Zen Master Seung Sahn lived for many years with diabetes, a heart condition, kidney failure, and eventually these conditions overcame him and eventually, he, too, died.

Sosan Taesa—*taesa* means "great teacher"—Sosan Taesa was one of the greatest teachers in the Korean tradition. The legend goes that he was giving a dharma talk in the temple, and he looked up at a portrait of himself and said, "That's what I used to look like. I don't look like that now." (This is a free translation.) And he died right then.

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to talk about great Taoist masters up in the mountains of what is now North Korea. They would live in these caves and they would have one drop of dew a day, and that's what they would survive on. He said, "They can live five hundred years." And then he would get this big smile: "But then—dead!" [*Laughter.*]

Can we live in a way so that we really attain that nobody guarantees our life? Can we live in a way that, when something has to be done, we completely embrace and absorb that nobody guarantees our life?

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

Where are you going? Watch your step.

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

Water flows down to the sea, clouds float up to the heavens.

Thank you, everyone, for your practice. ♦