

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

Can you see it?

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

Can you hear it?

If you say you understand this teaching this stick will hit you thirty times.

If you say you don't understand this teaching this stick will also hit you thirty times.

If you say you understand and don't understand then this stick will hit you sixty times.

So what did you understand?

One mouth finishes talking, many ears continue listening. Thank you. ♦

Igor Piniński JDPSN graduated in acting from a famous film school in Łódź, Poland. Right now he is working in his own film studio in Łódź, focusing on educational films. He lives with his wife in the countryside near Łódź.

He has been the abbot of the Łódź Zen Center for last 14 years and is a member of the Polish Zen Kwan Um Sangha Council. He started practicing in Łódź Zen Center in 1995 and has participated in more than 120 Yong Maeng Jong Jin retreats in Łódź led by Kwan



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen—Poland

Um School of Zen teachers. He also participates every year in the Kyol Che in Falenica.

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INKA CEREMONY FOR
Barry Briggs

April 7, 2013 at the Providence Zen Center

DHARMA COMBAT

Question: Yesterday, you told me about your blog, Ox Herding. You said you're going to put it to rest, probably. So I ask you: if you're not herding the ox, where will it go?

Briggs PSN: Please return to your seat.

Q: Thank you very much.

[Questioner turns and crawls back to his seat on hands and knees, mooing, accompanied by laughter from the audience.]

Lerch PSN: You know, you're doing really well, your teaching is—

Briggs PSN: I was.

[Laughter.]

Lerch PSN: Your teaching is very clear and gentle, but I've got to tell you, man, I was hoping for some action.

Briggs PSN: You were?

Lerch PSN: Yeah. So what's the correct action?

Briggs PSN: I love you, Tim. *[Hugs him, and the audience laughs.]*



Photo: Brenton Sheehan

Lerch PSN: I love you, too, Barry.
[Applause.]

Zen Master Bon Hae: Hi, Barry.

Briggs PSN: Hi, Zen Master.

ZMBH: So, what do you think you're doing?

Briggs PSN: I'm just sitting here with you right now.
Why is thinking involved?

ZMBH: Oh, not bad. Good!

DHARMA SPEECH

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

Yes means no and no means yes.

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

No yes and no no.

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

Yes means yes and no means no.

Which of these statements is correct?

KATZ!

Outside, pale sun. Inside, bright faces.

A long time ago in China, Zen Master Un Mun went into town one day with one of his monks. As they walked down the street, Un Mun looked ahead and saw a shop with a sign that read DRAGON'S TREASURE CHEST.

On seeing the sign, Un Mun turned to the monk and asked, "What kind of treasure comes from a dragon's treasure chest?"

The monk couldn't answer, so Un Mun said, "A flattened toad!" The monk still didn't say anything, so Un Mun spoke again: "A fart!" When the monk still didn't

reply, Un Mun tried one more time and said: "Steamed buns!"

We can imagine the two of them walking down the street and coming across a flattened toad on the road; then Un Mun cuts a fart, as people do; and then they pass a bakery display of steamed buns.

We can also imagine the monk's mind. Anyone who has done kong-an interviews can imagine the confusion, embarrassment and resistance in the monk's mind as he walked down the street with his teacher.

Perhaps we can also imagine Un Mun's incredible kindness and generosity as he repeatedly tried to bring the monk to the reality and aliveness of the moment as the two of them walked down the street.

That's our job as human beings: to bring others and, of course, ourselves, into reality, even when reality is a dried toad, or a smell, or a meal. That's what I wanted to talk about today. How do we come into reality in each moment?

Some years ago, I studied aikido, the Japanese martial art. I was a spectacularly poor aikido student, ungainly and awkward and resistant. That's probably why I remained a white belt. But I did have a certain kind of dedication and persisted in trying to learn the forms.

One time, during a weekend workshop, I was partnered with a black-belt practitioner who I had never met. He was an imposing, nearly immovable man who had clearly trained for many years, and I was quite nervous about working with him. I couldn't move him—I was like a stone bouncing off a wall.

In one exercise, I was the attacker and he was the defender. Of course, I was my usual inept self and couldn't really execute the attack properly, and both of us were frustrated after my first few attempts. Then he grabbed my arm and pulled me right up against his chest and whispered in my ear, "Come closer. When you're close to me, I can't hurt you."

This man was almost certainly referring only to the aikido exercise, but of course his words have a resonance that goes beyond the martial arts studio. And I understood them in that larger sense.

I took the words home with me and really tried to examine what they meant in the context of my own life. And the truth is, beyond thinking, I couldn't really bring this teaching alive at

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Photo: Brenton Sheehan

that time.

There might be good reasons for this, of course. This teaching about *coming closer* is deeply counterintuitive, in part because we have genetic heritage that causes us to move away from things we view as unsafe. It's a useful impulse at those moments when we encounter a Siberian tiger.

But most of us don't regularly meet tigers—we only encounter our partners, friends, coworkers and ordinary strangers. And in these situations, *pulling away* doesn't usually produce good outcomes.

In our teaching tradition, of course, we have a wonderful tool for working with our tendency to move away—really it's the only thing we have to offer—which is don't know. And it's through the practice of don't know that we can discover a genuine way to be safe in the world. Don't know brings us closer to whatever the world presents, moment to moment.

Often, we respond to life's demands by saying to ourselves, "I don't know what this is and I don't like it," or we say, "I know what this is, I've been here before, and I don't like it." And we move away.

And so separation appears, and with separation comes a tremendous loss of safety and intimacy. We pull back from the great love that we so much need.

We chant about Great Love in our chants every day: it's the *dae ja in dae ja, dae bi*. Traditionally in Buddhism we say that Great Love is the vow to help all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. That's what we commit to when we begin our practice, and every day, when we chant, we renew the vow to manifest Great Love.

About eighteen months ago, during the height of the Occupy Movement, I saw an online interview with a young economist associated with Occupy Wall Street. During the interview, the economist said:

Economics means: the more for you, the less for me.

But love means: the more for you, the more for me.

When I saw this interview, it hit my mind very strongly. And it caused me to look again at how I live my life and how I relate to other people in this world. And I discovered, once again, that I didn't live, day to day, as if the more love you got, the more love I got; the more contentment you had, the more I had.

And once I began to get a sense of my failure to manifest love, I became really uncomfortable. I couldn't live that way any longer.

So I developed a little exercise. I said to myself: Start saying yes.

Start saying yes to the world. Now, this was not the yes of acquiescence; rather, it was the yes of acceptance. So when someone would ask me to give or do something, I would try to find a way to respond with a yes, even though, to be honest, yes was often not my first response. And sometimes, even when I did say yes, I often didn't feel it inside.

As I worked with this practice, I noticed something. People got really happy when I said yes. Others got what they wanted and that made me happy. Oddly enough, that's how the world works. That's what Un Mun was trying to help his monk understand: that the whole world is right here and present with us if we can just say yes—even to a flattened toad.

So that was an incredible teaching for me, and over time it became almost second-nature to say yes to all kinds of situations—until one day last year when my guiding teacher and dear friend, Tim Lerch JDPSN asked me to consider receiving inka.

And then I said, without hesitation, no.

Of course, I offered Tim a really good reason why I could not accept inka. And Tim, in his own exercise of Great Love, gently set aside my reason. I didn't like that, so I offered another *no* and another reason, which Tim also set aside, and this continued for a bit until I agreed just to sit with his request.

I did sit with this possibility for several days and still couldn't get to yes. Then one day a friend of mine asked, "Why does your teacher want you to receive inka?"

And that simple question cut right through my defenses. In a moment, I realized that inka had nothing to do with me. Tim wasn't asking for me to receive inka. Instead, he was asking for the sangha to receive inka through me. Inka was about you, the sangha, and of course I could say yes to the sangha. I could immediately say yes to the sangha. So I picked up the phone, called Tim, and said yes.

That's our work as human beings: to find ways to say yes to life, as it arises moment to moment. Sometimes a *yes* can present itself as *no*, and that also can be a manifestation of Great Love. But however it manifests, each of us has to find and offer that kind of Great Love. Everything depends upon it.

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

Dionne Warwick sang, "What the world needs now, is love sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of."

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

And the Beatles sang, "All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need. Love is all you need. Love is all you need."

Where can we find the love we need?

KATZ!

Yes. Yes. Yes. ♦

Barry Briggs JDPSN began training in the Kwan Um School of Zen in 1990 and took bodhisattva teacher precepts in 2001. In 2005 he retired from a career as a senior manager in the software and Internet industries. He received inka from Zen Master Soeng Hyang in 2013. He travels widely to lead retreats around the world.