

Mind Revolution: The Twentieth Anniversary of Su Bong Zen Monastery

Dharma talks given in Hong Kong, November 17–18, 2012

Slow Is Fast

Zen Master Wu Bong

Thank you for your introduction. First of all, congratulations to the Su Bong Monastery family and to everybody here. Thank you for coming. We were asked to talk about Mind Revolution, so I would like to talk about a little bit of my experience. Before I met Zen Master Seung Sahn, actually before I even knew what Buddhism is, I had just finished high school and entered into university in the United States, and it was during the Vietnam War. So, like many young people at that time, I wanted to be useful to the world and do something for everybody. I believed the way to change the world was through the political system, so after I entered the university I began a lot of antiwar activities. Actually what we wanted was a revolution. So, for us, revolution meant change, and of course we believed the change we wanted was to make the world better. So we organized many demonstrations and I did a lot of marching, and we also did a lot of shouting, and made speeches.

At one point we organized the biggest event ever. It was quite a sizable demonstration and many people joined this protest. But while this was going on, something happened. At one point, when we were in this big garden in the center of the city with many, many tens of thousands of people, I looked at my coworkers and friends with whom I had organized this event, and suddenly I felt very deeply relieved. If my friends were in charge of this country, then I wouldn't want to be there! All of a sudden it became clear. We are protesting the government, we are protesting the people because of their desire, anger and ignorance, but my friends and I were not any different. Actually that was not so bad, but then I looked at myself and all of a sudden it became clear: if I were in charge of the country, then I wouldn't want to be there. That one moment of realization was the end of my political activity, because at that moment I turned around and left the demonstration.

After that I have only one question: How can I change myself? So, like many intellectual individuals, I read a lot of books—philosophy books, psychology books and religion books. And I found something called Buddhism, and I also found something called Zen, and all of a sudden—wow, it is possible to do it! And it is not necessary to believe in something mysterious or special. I can do it through my own experience. And not only myself, but anybody can do it in their own life. They just have to do something called practice. So I thought that was wonderful. Then I also wanted to do something called practice.

Of course in Buddhism there are many kinds of practice. In America at that time, the most famous kinds of Buddhism were Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. But somehow I met somebody who practiced Zen. He was not a teacher in any formal sense, but he became my first teacher.

So I started to practice and that was a great revelation because, looking at the world as a young man, I was always thinking, "I am OK. The world is screwed up!" It was revolutionary to me to realize that maybe the world is not so screwed up, and that maybe it was just me! So, this is my little experience of Mind Revolution.

There are two kinds of revolution: fast and slow. (And the slow kind is sometimes called evolution.) As a young person I was most interested in something fast, but I discovered fast is not fast! This is just another kind of desire. When I practiced, I practiced in this style, with very hard training and then giving up, and then again very hard training and then giving up. Eventually it became clear that this is not the best way to do things. This Mind Revolution may be something that happened instantly, but we have to make careful and steady cultivation. So in other words, sometimes slow is fast.

But why do we have to talk about Mind Revolution? If you read the newspaper or watch the news, then you know there are many problems in this world. Who is responsible for fixing these problems, who is going to help this world? Is it God? Is it Buddha? Maybe it's us! Maybe you and I! But we all know the blind cannot lead the blind, so if we

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want to be able to help this world, we have to wake up.

In the welcoming speech, Andrzej Stec JDPSN, the second guiding teacher of Su Bong Zen Monastery, explained this Mind Revolution, this Waking Up. I hope that everybody in your life makes correct practice, and that you save yourself from much suffering, practice steadily and don't do it my way. Then finally this Mind Revolution can become yours. And of course please don't stop there: *one more step* means please help this world, take care of your family, your society, this whole world and all beings. Thank you for your attention.

The Five Desires

Zen Master Dae Bong

We were introduced as “Zen Master Dae Bong is sitting on the right and Zen Master Wu Bong is sitting on the left.” From up here it is true, but from where you are sitting, Zen Master Wu Bong is sitting on the right and Zen Master Dae Bong is sitting on the left! That is a very good example of what we face every day. Everybody is faced with this every moment of our life. From up here, I am on the right and he is on the left; but from down there, he is on the right and I am on the left. So the way we see things depends on our situation. If we are attached to our situation, we won't understand other peoples' situations. Which is correct? I am on the right and he is on the left? Or he is on the right and I am on the left? What do you think? *[Applause.]*

Clapping? Which one is that? This is not just a lecture; this is interactive. Our life is an interaction. Every day, all the time, you are in some situation—with your family, with the people you work with, with the citizens that you live with, with the shopkeepers that you deal with, the people you pass on the street. Everyone has a different perspective according to their situation. Which one is more correct? Even your mouth and your stomach often have a different opinion according to their situation.

Tonight is Saturday night. When I was growing up, on Saturday night you went out. I don't think I ever went to a talk about religious practice on Saturday night. So you people are very interesting. Either you have some big questions in your life or you have nothing to do. But on Saturday night most people are constantly having a fight between their stomach and their mouth. After some time of eating and drinking, the stomach says, “OK, that was good. Stop!” But for most people, their mouth has a very different opinion. Most people's mouths say, “I am having a good time. Let's continue!” Then there is a fight. If the stomach wins, then the mouth is unhappy. If the mouth

wins, then later the stomach is unhappy. So if we live our life that way, there is always suffering.

When humans are born, we have two main concerns: eating and sleeping. And we are not thinking about them either; we just do it. Then when we are not satisfied, we scream. We have no thought of you and me. As we grow, the other desires appear. Buddha said very clearly that humans have five main desires: food, sleep, sex, money, fame. As we grow these five desires all become stronger.

One thing we should consider about fame: fame is not only that I want to be on television or in a magazine; fame means I want attention from others. So everybody has fame karma, even if we don't care about the television, magazines and so on. Still we want attention from others. Probably the last desire to really appear in our life is money. Nowadays that is the number-one desire in the world. Human society now has no direction. Doesn't matter what system we have, everybody wants money.

I was born in 1950, the same year as Zen Master Wu Bong, but in a different part of the world. At that time, many people in the United States had good situations. Europe and Asia both were still recovering from wars. So Asia and Europe were in difficult situations. Zen Master Wu Bong and I were talking the other day. He mentioned that in the 1950s in America, many families had a house, they



Photo: Francis Lau

had cars and anybody could have a job. And most parents assumed that their children will also have those things.

I remember going out on the street where I lived, just outside of Philadelphia. Looking down the street that I lived on, everybody had a house, and each house was different from the other. They weren't just copies of each other. Every family had one or two cars. I remember thinking that we have a very good situation; it is beautiful and comfortable, with no worries about jobs. But I know that inside the houses there were many kinds of suffering: relationship suffering, emotional suffering, mental suffering, self-doubt.

Then a big question appeared in my mind. "Even though we have this social comfort, economic success and security, still there is plenty of suffering. Then suffering is not dependent on the situation. So what is the cause of suffering?"

In my city there were many black people and many white people. In America, black people had been free since 1863, but even 100 years later, they were not equal. They didn't have the same opportunities. There was still lots of prejudice, limitations and hindrances. I also wondered why black people and white people couldn't make a healthy and good relationship. So even though there was a kind of freedom and social success for some, still there

were many kinds of suffering.

If you went to a Christian church they said to believe in God and then afterward you go to heaven. That was a little confusing to me. People talked about heaven as if it were some place like Hawaii that you go to when you die, and it will be wonderful forever. But I remembered reading in the Bible that Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within. To me, that meant that heaven is inside. So how come nobody looks like they are in heaven now?

When I was eleven, I happened to go to an international summer camp in Japan. We got to play baseball and all the usual eleven-year-old things, and we went around the country as well. There were kids from ten different countries. We went to Kamakura. There is an outdoor Buddha there, maybe 20 to 30 meters high. I had never seen Buddha and I had never heard about Buddhism, but for some reason when I saw that statue I felt, "He understands! He understands where suffering comes from and how to take away suffering. Not only did he look like he did it himself, but he knows how to teach me." After that, I didn't want to read about it in books, I wanted to meet a living teacher. It took about 15 years more before I met my teacher.

The first night I met Zen Master Seung Sahn in America, he had already been in the United States for about



five years. He was giving a public talk at a Zen center that his students had started near Yale University. His teaching style was to have one of his students give a talk, and then he answered questions. That night someone asked him, "What is sanity? What is insanity?" I had studied and worked for almost 10 years in the field of psychology, and even though I quit, I was still very interested in what the Zen master was going to say. His English was so-so, and he turned to his student and said, "This man, what say? What say?" He didn't understand the English words *sanity* and *insanity*. His student said, "This man asked, 'What is crazy? What is not crazy?'"

Then Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "If you are very attached to something, you are very crazy. If you are a little attached to something, then you are a little crazy. If you are not attached to anything, that's not crazy."

I thought, "That's better than my 10 years of studying psychology! Then even if you are a big successful businessman, if you are very attached to something, that's crazy. Even politicians, even religious persons, if they are very attached to something, that's crazy." That was very clear, not dependent on our situation or our condition or anything, just dependent on our mind.

But he continued talking. He said, "In this world, everybody is crazy because everybody is attached to 'I,' but this 'I' doesn't exist, it is only made by our thinking. If you don't want to attach to your thinking 'I,' and you want to find your true nature, you must practice Zen." At that moment, I knew, "That's my teacher!"

So, first we have to recognize that we only really understand our own point of view. If we only function from our own point of view, our life will have many ups and downs, nonstop, forever, and we cannot truly help others. If we can understand the other person's point of view, that's better.

But that is the real mind revolution, because the cause of suffering is this idea I have: "I." Unless we see through that, we will never get out of suffering. It doesn't matter whether you get a wonderful government, a successful situation or anything, the root of our suffering comes from the false idea of "I." If you are not sure of that, conduct your own experiment: spend some time every day and investigate "I." Ask yourself "What am I? What am I? Am I this body? This mind? These emotions?"

Someone already said I met Dae Soen Sa Nim when I was young. So that body was young and this body is older, but who met Dae Soen Sa Nim? And who is talking to you now? Look at your own body and ask, is that me? Is my consciousness me? Is my emotion me? What am I? You don't know! If you look into that, you will have a

mind revolution. Then in any situation you can suddenly see things differently.

One time one of our Hong Kong students drove me from Lantau Island back to Causeway Bay. There was a big, long traffic jam. I cannot speak Cantonese and his English is simple. During the ride I asked him how many children he has. He said three. I said, "How old are they?"

"Seventeen, 14 and 4." I was shocked—17? I thought he was 28, but he was really about 40. So I asked, "How's your 17-year-old?"

He said, "Good."

"How's your 14-year-old?"

"No good."

I asked, "Is it a girl?"

"Girl."

I said, "How's the girl's relationship with her mother?"

He said, "bang-bang," pretending to hit his two fists together. Sometimes you don't need a lot of words to communicate. Then I asked, "How's the girl's relationship with you?"

Then he said, "Before, bang-bang. Now, OK."

I asked him what happened, what changed. He said he had been doing meditation about two years, then one day the thought appeared in his mind, "I don't like the relationship I have with my daughter, but I don't know how to change it. I don't know what to do about it." So he told me that time he stopped saying anything to the daughter, because every time he talked, soon it was bang-bang. He said then a very strange thing happened. His daughter suddenly understood his mind! She understood he doesn't want bang-bang with her, but he doesn't know what else to do. Their relationship just stayed at that point for a few months, with not so much talking. Then one day his daughter came home and started to tell him about her experience in school with her friends, with her teachers. Now every day she talks with him about her life and her problems.

So the real Mind Revolution comes from looking back at ourselves. Looking into "I." Don't worry about finding anything. Just by looking into "I," things change. You don't have to believe in Buddhism. It is not Buddhism; it is just a human being having a big question. That's all.

The five desires are important to satisfy, but if that is all your life is, you will never be happy. Look back at yourself. What am I? Don't know. That is the true treasure—so valuable. Then you can change your relationship with the five desires and even use them to help all beings. That is the real Mind Revolution. I think it is what Buddha was trying to teach us. Thank you. ♦