

Suffering and Taking Away Suffering

Zen Master Dae Kwang

Good morning everybody! I'd like to welcome you to Korea and the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference. Every three years, since 1987, the Kwan Um School of Zen has hosted an international conference. This year our conference memorializes the tenth anniversary of the passing of Zen Master Seung Sahn. The theme of this year's conference is "Great Vow, Life After Life." When Zen Master Seung Sahn first came to the United States, one thing he impressed upon us is the importance of the great vow to save all beings from suffering. One of his great contributions to the Zen teaching style from the time of the Sixth Patriarch is his emphasis on great vow in Zen practice. He said if you look at the history of the Zen teaching style, you notice that sometimes the great vow is almost lost. In fact, one of the most famous Zen books in the United States doesn't even mention bodhisattva action. Because of this, Zen Master Seung Sahn named our international organization the Kwan Um School of Zen. This name was to emphasize what Zen is really about.

Actually, Buddhism is very simple. The Buddha only

taught about one thing: suffering and taking away suffering.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said there are two central questions for every human being. Number one: What are you doing right now? Number two: Why do that? These two questions point to how we live our life, moment to moment, and our great vow. The meaning behind "life after life" is "What are you doing right now?" This is not an abstract, philosophical concept. It's not anything you have to believe. It's something you have to wake up to, moment to moment. That's our human beings' job. That's Buddha's job; that's my job; that's your job. Dae Bong Sunim already said you don't have to worry about being unemployed. We're born into an ocean of suffering. So our vow is without bounds. I want to thank you all again for coming. Zen Master Seung Sahn always ended his talks and letters with, "I hope you only go straight don't know, soon get enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering." Nobody could say it better. Thank you very much.

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You Have to Talk to Our Guests

Zen Master Soeng Hyang

Good morning. This morning we had a wonderful thing happen with the international Kwan Um School of Zen. Even though many of us came here from far away and haven't gotten much sleep, and even though some of us had trouble with finding enough bed padding, the vast majority of us came to practice this morning! So actually our conference began at 6 o'clock this morning. It started with our most essential teachings. We did our prostrations, we sat and we blended our voices with what I consider the strongest chanting I have ever heard.

Many people like to talk about Zen, but most people don't like to actually do it. Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, "99.9 percent will kill you." That 0.1 percent is extremely dangerous. This means we must wake up to each and every moment. So we all have to be careful about learning to be aware of each thing. As Zen Master Dae Kwang said, "Be careful. Watch your step. How may I help you? What are you doing just now?" That is our practice.

When I first met Zen Master Seung Sahn, he was always very busy trying to make the temple clean, clear and inviting. My memory is that he spent hours on the telephone speaking in Korean. So many students wanted to

talk with him! He also spent a lot of time trying to learn English, and planning his next dharma talk. After I had lived at the Zen center for only about two weeks, he had already given me strong teaching. I had been appointed the housemaster, and to me that meant shopping, arranging meals, cleaning the public spaces and so on. I would also make tea and cookies for our guests to eat after the dharma talks. Quite a lot of authentic responsibilities! I thought I was quite the contributor! One night after I had put out the cookies and tea for the guests and gone back to the kitchen to clean up, Dae Soen Sa Nim came out to the kitchen and said, "You have to talk to our guests." Well, I didn't like to talk to guests. I liked to just do the dishes, to stay in the kitchen. So I was reasonable. I said to him, "You have to understand me. I'm shy; I don't like to talk to guests."

Then he took his finger and he pushed it right here [*points to her solar plexus*]: "You don't like to talk to guests, you. What are you?!" Whew! I went out and talked to the guests. Very beautiful lesson. Very difficult lesson.

So how do you find your correct job? There are two more important questions.

One is, "What am I?" Not small I—big I. What am I?

Also, saying “What am I doing just now? What is this?”

My next big lesson with Zen Master Seung Sahn was this. When I first moved into the Zen center I quit working and was just hanging around the temple. I was a registered nurse, but had decided that I didn’t like nursing anymore. In the 1970s, the doctors could be autocratic, and I had been placed in some difficult and painful situations while working in hospitals. As nurses, nobody listened to us. So I decided, “Oh, Soen Sa Nim is the best doctor. I’ll stay home and hang out with Soen Sa Nim and not be a nurse.”

One day Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “You’re a nurse, aren’t you?”

“I don’t like hospitals so much.”

“We need money. You be a nurse.”

So that was good. I went back to nursing, and I helped to pay the rent! I learned to integrate the Zen practice of

paying attention to each moment into my nursing vocation, everything became my teacher. Good, bad or ugly, I learned to enter it all more unconditionally.

Zen is not about whether we live monastically or whether we live a lay life. Every single one of us has to ask, “What am I?” “For what and for whom?” And of course, “How may I help you?” Asking these questions completely helped me be a better nurse than I ever could have been without practice. We cannot spread the dharma. That’s a big mistake. If we have the idea, “Oh, we’re having this conference; we’re going to help spread the dharma,” then we’re mistaken. Each one of us has to find out what we are; what we are in *this* moment. As we learn to do this, we will be able to teach others. Then the conference and the dharma are not separate. Let us all enjoy and listen to each other and have fun.

Thank you very much.

We Have a Fine Refuge

Seol Jeong Sunim

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I’d like to offer a heartfelt welcome to all of you who must have come from a great distance. Some of you had to take time out of a difficult schedule. I’d like to thank all of you for coming and for your contribution. We are



Photo: Lubor Kosut

disciples of Buddha. We are all family. Family are not just people who meet because they happen to be in the same place. They meet each other because they understand each other, they respect each other, and they love each other. Buddhists meet each other also to practice the buddhadharma. We call this conference “The Whole World Is a

Single Flower,” which means the correct eye to be able to discern the correct dharma.

We all have the question, “Why do we live? What achievements do we have to attain in this life?” The goal of all Buddhists—the goal of all beings—is to reach nirvana, to reach ultimate liberation. That is the world of joy, ecstasy and ultimate perfection. Nirvana and this world are not two, so we and the world are not two. When mind is at ease in the Buddhist sense, that means it’s the state of mind completely free from agony, fear and suffering. And in such complete, perfect stillness, we have a fine refuge. That is the refuge of perfect freedom.

It’s a place of no hindrance. It’s a place of eternal bliss. It’s a place where true self can be unfurled forever. It is a place of utter purity and light. And you will find the whole universe a clear and pure place. It’s where there is no object and subject. There is no set order. Everywhere you go, you find truth. And everywhere is authentic. It is the place of truth beyond words.

Maybe Zen masters have taught you the important question, “What am I?” The true meaning of “The Whole World Is a Single Flower” is finding yourself. It is only because people have lost their true self that the world has become a place of conflict, jealousy, struggle and suffering. Finding this true self is the ultimate goal of this conference—The Whole World Is a Single Flow-