

Great Vow Life After Life: Where Do We Go From Here?

Panel from the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference, October 2014, South Korea

“I didn’t bring my wallet.”

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This theme is very serious. And for me it’s quite abstract to talk about. So I just would like to share two very short stories.

I was practicing at the Providence Zen Center during one Kyol Che, my first Kyol Che in the United States, and my first in another country. I was 27 years old. At the end of the retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn visited America from Korea. I was kind of young, and my energy was high because it was at the end of Kyol Che.

It was two months for me of silent practice. I felt the same thing from the others, too. He arrived with some other teachers—Dae Bong Sunim and Dae Jin Sunim—and they gave us a speech, which was very short and in “kimchi English.” I could totally connect, because my English was also kimchi English. He told us, “Human life has no meaning.” Each word just hit my mind. That was true, human life has no meaning. That’s what led me to cut my hair and take this path. Then he said, “This no-meaning is very important, it has a very important meaning. If you attain this meaning, you will understand this no-meaning is the most important thing in a human’s life.”

The second story is something I experienced more re-

cently. You can just imagine, I have been so busy, especially for the last two weeks before this conference began. I had to go to the bank for some business, and immediately I withdrew a million won [*Approximately \$900 in U.S. dollars. —Ed.*] for some conference fees. Because I was so busy, my brain was completely stuck. So I wanted to drink a coffee in a coffee shop near Hwa Gye Sa Temple, and that would give me some chance to relax. I completely

forgot I had one million won in my bag, and I realized that I hadn’t brought my wallet. I ordered a latte and then I realized that I didn’t have a wallet. “I’m sorry, I don’t have a wallet, I didn’t bring my wallet.” Most of the workers in coffee shops, especially big brand coffee shops, would probably refuse to give me the coffee. This was a tiny, local coffee shop owned by one man. He gave me a large latte with a heart drawn in the foam. What is great vow? I saw the great vow from this man. Completely become one with the situation, just help people.

So, the subtitle for this panel is, “Where do we go from here?” Here is my answer; I will stay on this chair until this panel is finished and then I will tell you where I go after the panel is finished. When you completely become one with the situation, your great vow is already there.



Photo: Michael Schutzler