

If you have peace inside yourself, then we can make peace.

Zen Master Ji Kwang

Eighteen years ago, I was writing a book. It was an important book for me, and I wrote it in Korea, where I lived at the time. This project was supported by a Korean university, for which I am thankful. Part of this book was about Zen. Since I lived in Korea, I used the opportunity to visit Zen Master Seung Sahn at Hwa Gye Sa Temple. I went to him at least three times, asking him about certain aspects of my research. I remember one occasion when I told him about an interesting experiment done by Japanese researchers. They were doing EEG readings, and they found out that during Zen meditation, there are regular, calm alpha waves, and even theta waves. It mattered to me, because it scientifically proves that there is something happening in our body and our brain during Zen meditation. Full of excitement, I told this to Dae Soen Sa Nim. He listened, and then he said without hesitation, “Bodhisattva waves necessary!”

So Zen is not a matter of our brain; it’s not a matter of keeping a special mind. It is, rather, a state of being. How are we connecting to this world? This is an important point, and I have another unusual story about that. It’s about Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi. He was practicing strongly for three years. At one point during his practice, a demon appeared. He saw this demon and he wasn’t so afraid, but he thought, “I have to do something.” He already knew many techniques. So he thought, “OK, I’ll try this samadhi technique.” Very strong, only “don’t know.” Deep samadhi appeared. Everything became one. Beautiful alpha and theta waves. When he came out of this samadhi, the demon was still there. Not only that, he was bigger!

Milarepa was shocked. “OK, I’ll try something stron-

ger.” So he did only mantra practice: very strong, powerful mantras. “Om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum . . .” The whole world was only mantra. Everything turned into this sound. When he came out of his strong practice, he saw this demon still there—grown bigger! Now he became a little afraid. He decided, “OK, so then, the most strong and powerful practice is necessary.” So he tried visualization. The whole world—everything—became light: a very powerful meditation. Only very high-class teachers can do it. For a long time, everything became light and pure energy. But when he came out of this visualization meditation, this demon had grown really huge. Then our Milarepa was really lost. Sitting there, he thought, “I don’t know what to do.” There was nothing left but to just look at the demon. After doing so for a long time, he felt a great sorrow. He connected 100 percent with the demon; then he stood up and embraced it. After that, the demon disappeared.

It’s an interesting story. In the end, the bodhisattva mind appeared, right? Only bodhisattva waves! So Zen is not a medicine. It’s how you connect to this world and to our fellow beings. It’s not necessary to fight your demons. How do we use our mistakes? How do we use our karma to help? This is the important point.

During our complicated lives, we will always have problems. But there is no need to fight. So be kind to yourself. Then you can be kind to others. Love yourself. Love your demons. Then, you can love others, and the bodhisattva way is possible. “The great vow, life after life” means waking up each moment. Connect. Love, help, don’t fight. It starts with us. If you have peace inside yourself, then we can make peace. That’s where we go from here.

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Photo: Jim Stanford

From left: Zen Masters Dae Bong, Wu Kwang, Soeng Hyang and Bon Shim.

