

Questions and Answers

Question: Is there a way to pass on our excitement about Zen and learning life skills from Zen without it sounding preachy? Because, for me, what is important is that we're not trying to convert anybody, not trying to pass on our opinions, but pass on what we've learned from Zen.

Zen Master Soeng Hyang: Somebody has to come to Zen, you don't bring Zen to somebody else. I worked for the same nursing agency for long time, and I did two hundred-day retreats while I was working for this agency. And they were a wonderful group of people—social workers, nurses, doctors, nurse's aids and chaplains. The last time I came back from one of those retreats—they liked me, I worked there a long time—and I looked great because I was thin and my eyes were bright. And maybe ten of them said, "Bobby, you look so great, you'll have to tell us all about it. What were you *doing*?" I said, "I was doing my Zen practice." "I want to hear all about it!" The next day, they forgot. They never asked me again. And they were really high-class, good bodhisattva people, but they have to come to a practice. Even if I walked on water, they would not have asked me for Zen teaching. For me, I read one sentence in a book, and then I was looking all over for a teacher. It has to be that way, I think.

Moderator (Andrzej Stec JDPSN): What that means is we have to look good every day!

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS: I would like to ask her to please ask the question again.

Q: Is there a way to impart what we've learned personally? What I've learned from Zen is an important life skill and I'd like to be able to share or pass this to someone else without sounding preachy because I'm also personally self-conscious when someone tries to be preachy with me and I don't want to seem like that.

HTSN: OK, my answer: What are you doing right now this moment?

Q: I am sitting here listening with my ears and my heart.

HTSN: That's the best speech from the Zen tradition, and we always try to pass it on to anyone else. But many times it doesn't work. Just like Zen Master Soeng Hyang

said. So sometimes maybe preaching is necessary, if that works with someone. Maybe not, but maybe sometimes it works. So we just use it to share these experiences. This is my experience.

Zen Master Ji Kwang: Here comes the demon-story answer. What do you not like? Or whom do you not like? *[The questioner doesn't answer.]* There is someone you don't like, right? There's somebody you maybe really hate, right? Be serious.

Q: Yes.

ZMJK: Go and embrace him. That will be—*exciting*. And that's a good way to pass Zen on to someone.

Q: I have a question for Zen Master Soeng Hyang. I didn't understand your sparrow story and I would like you to elaborate.

ZMSH: Oh, you don't understand the story? Come over here.

[When the man was almost to the edge of the stage Zen Master Soeng Hyang stood up and threw the contents of her water glass at him. The audience burst into laughter and applauded. The questioner was laughing, too.]

Q: I would like to ask Zen Master Soeng Hyang if a cancer patient were going to die, how are you going to tell him where to go?

ZMSH: That's not my job.

Q: If they ask the question, "Where am I going? I am so afraid!"

ZMSH: I did this job for 27 years. Nobody asked me, "Where am I going?" Maybe because I was in America.

Q: But this is Singapore . . .

ZMSH: I already answered you. Nobody asked me.

Q: So I'm asking you.

ZMSH: You're asking me? To the cemetery.

Q: Some people have told me that they've gotten into Zen because they've gotten some great sorrow in their life, some great tragedy happened and they began to practice Zen from that. That wasn't my story, that didn't happen to me. But what you said, about just reading a line in a book and looking for a teacher, I did that, too. But it's not some sorrow. How did you come to Zen? Why did you search for a teacher? Because if you ask me I don't know. I don't

14]



know why I searched for a teacher, but here I am.

ZMSH: Yes, people come for different reasons. That's not important. When you find Zen, what do you do? So don't drop out. Stay with it.

Moderator: So I will ask the other panelists, why did you start practicing Zen? Did it come from big suffering, or was it something else?

ZMJK: I have a short story. Once a person was looking for food at the beach. So he was walking around only trying to find shells and seafood for cooking. It was quite exhausting. But then when he opened one shell, he found a beautiful shining pearl inside. Although he didn't look for pearls, he found a treasure.

HTSN: I had a lot of suffering. But these days it's easy for me to forget. I think that's one of the benefits from Zen practice. Maybe Zen masters are able to forget faster what has already passed. To me, it doesn't sound true that you or we didn't have suffering. We had. Maybe because of the benefit from the practice, I think we are able to forget, and we focus on what's happening in front of me. As some teacher already said, once we see who's actually got that kind of capacity, to forget about something past, the next thing we have to do is great vow. What is this practice for?

ZMDK: From my experience, if a person is ready, the teacher will appear. Actually, at a different level, when somebody really opens up your mind, sometimes it's from a book, but sometimes it's from some incident, but it depends on whether you are ready or not.

I have a story to share. My father is a Buddhist. Actually, he brought me to Buddhism. I was born in a family with a different religious culture. So my father always thinks he is a teacher. We visited many temples together. Nobody can teach him. But he liked Dae Soen Sa Nim, because he said Dae Soen Sa Nim can answer any question. He said he had a question he wanted to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn, so I brought my father to meet him. Then he said, "Zen Master Seung Sahn, I have a question. I have some property I want to sell. What time is good to sell this?"

Then Dae Soen Sa Nim, very fast, replied "Spring, you sell."

But it's true. By spring, somebody bought this property. Then he always hit me and said, "You are Zen master.

I ask you. Shall I buy this stock? You never tell me what to buy. You're no good!" Then, he is always strong and his voice is louder than me and I don't have the energy to talk to him. A few words and I shut up.

Before he died, the first day of the new year, he called me. "I want to die. When am I going to die?" He asked me that. I said, "When you die, that day you die." I just said that to him.

Less than one month before he died, I visited him; I fed him; I brought him food. His whole life is practicing Pure Land Buddhism. He only practiced "Amita Bul, Amita Bul." Then on that day he told me, "I don't believe in Amita Bul anymore. I asked Amita Bul to take me to the Pure Land. He still left me here to suffer. I don't believe. I don't chant Amita Bul anymore." So I asked him, "Uncle,"—after I became a nun, in our tradition we don't address our father as "Father" but rather "Uncle." So I asked him, "Uncle, now your body is suffering. But if you die, does your mind go to the Pure Land or does your body go to the Pure Land?" Suddenly, his mind stopped for a few seconds. Then he said, "OK, let's chant." Then we chanted together, the Great Dharaṇī and Amita Bul.

When he was dying, I was with him. I said, "Are you ready to go? Is your mind detached from all the things you worried about during your lifetime?" Then, with his breathing mask on, he nodded his head. Then peacefully he left; he died.

So what I am saying is, somebody has to be ready. There is always dharma in front of us. Everything is a teacher in front of us. Are we open to that teaching? Are we open enough? Are we ready to see things as they really are? If you can really see things as they are and accept things as they are, actually that is what this vow is beginning. Because at that moment, you and everything already connect. In that connection you can really give whatever they need. It's not about our ideas. This is why we are here. We practice to have that kind of mind. And this mind, it's not just on the cushion, but we have to exercise it in our everyday life with our family, with our workmates, with our friends. And slowly it will affect the community and society and finally the whole country. This is the message Zen Master Seung Sahn always kept saying to us all the time during his life. Thank you. ♦

Photo: Jan Sendzimir

