

binds us to suffering?

We certainly all need food to sustain our body and mind. This is neither good nor bad. But humans unfortunately become attached to many things, and thus some follow the wheel of food instead of turning the wheel of dharma. What does following the wheel of food mean? It means: I am hungry—I don't eat. I am not hungry—I eat. If someone is hungry—I keep my food for myself.

We call this attachment not only to food, but also to the idea of an independent being called "I": I want this food; I don't want that food. Food for my health, for my body, and everything for me! The whole universe becomes our stomach. The more we eat, the hungrier we get, hungry not only for food but also for love, appreciation, satisfaction and so on. Here we run wild like a gerbil in a wheel, and there is no stopping, and there is never enough.

How big is the pile of shit we produce in our lifetime? It is indeed our choice whether we ferment and transform our food into humus—from which flowers of insight and compassion can grow—or whether we make only a stinking pile of pollution.

This choice starts with why and with what mind we eat food. A chant that monks and nuns sing in some Zen halls in Korea before each meal, makes this point clear: "As we

receive this food, may all sentient beings including ourselves come to realize our true nourishment, which is the happiness of meditation, and to be filled with dharma . . . Food is a medicine for curing the decay of the body. Let us take it for the purpose of perfecting our practice."¹ The food we eat helps us to return to our original true nature. Our practice to find our true nature does not seek to live well and die well, since our true nature is not dependent on life and death. Rather, our practice goes beyond life and death.

Once a student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "Sir, let's say there are several shipwrecked people in a small boat in the vast ocean. They are all starving and only a little food and water is left. What should they do? Who should take the food?" As fast as an arrow Zen Master Seung Sahn answered, "Together eat, together die!"

What is this thing that remains always clear during all times of together eating and together dying? If you attain this point, the whole universe says, "Thank you! Please enjoy your meal!"

Notes

1. From Martine Batchelor and Son'gyong Sunim, *Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

"Why did you come here? To sleep?"

Zen Master Bon Shim



Rather than resting the
body, rest the mind.
If you completely attain
mind, the body has
no problems.
If both mind and body
become clear,
For the God-man,
a high class job is not
necessary.¹

Zen Master Seung Sahn said that sleep is the most powerful demon. I had been struggling with it on the cushion for a long time, until its power started to loosen. Every time when we are daydreaming on the cushion or any other place, we are dreaming; we are separated; we are losing connection. In that moment we don't know what is going on and where we are. If that happens, no big deal, next moment we may be awakened and in tune with no-mind again.

Zen Master Seung Sahn told an interesting story about a monk who couldn't help himself. Every time he sat on the cushion, he would fall asleep. It bothered him a lot, because he was a sincere practitioner, so one day he went to Zen Master Seung Sahn and asked him for advice. He was told to put a roll of toilet paper on his head while he was sitting, so every

time he moved, the paper would fall down and wake him up. Not only would it wake the monk up, but the whole room would hear it and laugh at him. It continued for some time, but since he truly wanted to stay awake, he tried very hard and never gave up. Finally there was no noise from the side where the paper monk (as he was named) sat. Thanks to his determination he managed to develop strong concentration, and finally, he became a great monk.

Sleep is a close cousin of laziness. They belong to the same family. According to Buddha's teaching, sleep and laziness are one of the five deeply rooted hindrances on our Path.

When I went to Korea to sit Kyol Che, it was very hard to get up at three in the morning. I had to motivate myself: "Why did you come here? To sleep?" I used this medicine each time when I started to fall asleep during the rest of the Kyol Che. This experience taught me how to work with my hindrances, gently and with patience.

We are very lucky: with the tools we have, we can truly do everything. The only question is if we can wake up from this self-centered dream.

Notes

1. Mu Mun Kwan, Case 9. Translation by Zen Master Seung Sahn.