

# Kyol Che Man Cham—1982

*Zen Master Seung Sahn*

**Editor's Note:** Much of this issue is devoted to the practice of Kyol Che, the traditional 90-day retreat. Our school is able to offer these retreats in Europe, America and Asia at a number of centers. Students have the unique opportunity of practicing intensively during this period with a teacher's guidance and with a sangha. Some of our teachers and students have offered their perspective on this practice, which we are grateful to share. We begin with a traditional Man Cham speech by Zen Master Seung Sahn from 1982, to start the Winter Kyol Che at Diamond Hill Monastery at Providence Zen Center. Man Cham is a lengthy formal speech that was part of the Korean and Chinese tradition in the past. The speech is too long to include in its entirety here, so we left out gates 7–9. You may find the full text here: <http://www.kwanumzen.org/?teaching=kyol-che-man-cham-1982>.

*[Soen Sa Nim ascended the high stand and sat down. Holding the Zen stick and hitting the rostrum:]*

Is it Buddha?

*[Holding up the Zen stick and hitting the rostrum:]*

Is it dharma?

*[Holding up the Zen stick and hitting the rostrum:]*

Is it the true way?

Everybody already has Buddha, dharma and the true way, but some people understand, some don't understand. A long time ago someone asked Zen Master Lin Chi, "What is Buddha?" He only shouted, "KATZ!" Someone asked Zen Master Dok Sahn. He only hit. Someone asked Zen Master Gu Ji. He only held up one finger. All three Zen masters made a big mistake. But when someone asked Zen Master Un Mun, "What is Buddha?" he answered, "Dry shit on a stick." Not bad! When someone asked Zen Master Dong Sahn, he said, "Three pounds of flax." Also not bad.

Next, what is dharma?

Zen Master Lin Chi again shouted, "KATZ!" Zen Master Dok Sahn hit the floor. Zen Master Gu Ji held up one finger. These answers are OK, but one more step is necessary.

Someone asked Zen Master Joju, "The ten thousand dharmas return to the one. Where does the one return?" Joju said, "When I was in Ch'ing Chou I made a robe. It weighed seven pounds." That answer is OK, but we must find Joju's mistake.

*[Holding up the Zen stick and hitting the rostrum:]*

Next, what is the true way?

Zen Master Lin Chi again shouted, "KATZ!" Zen Master Dok Sahn only hit the floor. Zen Master Gu Ji only held up one finger.

But once Joju asked Zen Master Nam Cheon, "What is the true way?"

Zen Master Nam Cheon replied, "Everyday mind is the true way." What is everyday mind? When you are hungry, eat. When you are tired, sleep. If someone is hungry, give them some food. If someone is thirsty, give them something to drink. That is everyday mind.

Then Joju asked him, "Then shall I try to keep it or not?"

Nam Cheon replied, "If you try to keep it, you're already making a mistake."

Joju asked again, "If I do not try to keep it, how can I understand the true way?"

Then Zen Master Nam Cheon said, "The true way is not dependent on understanding or not understanding. Understanding is illusion. Not understanding is blankness. If you



*Photo: Josette LeBlanc*

4]

completely attain the true way, it is clear like space. So why do you make right and wrong?" When Joju heard that, he got enlightenment. So I ask you, what did Joju attain?

**Today is Kyol Che Day**, the first day of our 90-day retreat, Sam Dong Kyol Che. Sam Dong means winter: Winter Kyol Che. We have 90 days to find our mind, the dharma, and the true way—Buddha, dharma, and the true way. Buddha is not special. What is Buddha? Buddha is clear mind. Mind-light is dharma. Mind without hindrance is the true way. But Buddha, dharma, and the true way—where do they come from? They come from our mind. But where does our mind come from?

If someone says, "I have already found my mind," then he has already become blind; he cannot see anything. Someone else says, "I don't know my mind." But you cannot hide your body. Then where can you find your mind? If you find your mind, you have a problem. If you don't find your mind, you also have a problem. What can you do?

KATZ!

1 + 89 = 90.

*[At this point, Soen Sa Nim chanted a four-line poem in Korean. After each two lines, the Sangha joined him in strongly chanting, once, "Namu Amitabul," bowing together to the sound of the moktak. Soen Sa Nim then read the poem in English.]*

*The Great Way is not difficult;  
Only do not make distinctions.  
If you want to understand that  
There are many cars on Highway 95.*

So, for 90 days, what will you do? The great work of life and death. Shakyamuni was born in Kapila Palace. He was a prince and it was possible for him to become a king. But he had a big question: "What is a human being? What are birth, old age, sickness and death?" He wanted to understand those questions. The human route is coming empty-handed, going empty-handed. When you are born, where do you come from? When you die, where do you go? If you understand that, you understand the true way. So where are you coming from? Where do you go? That's a very important point.

**The true way is not difficult.** Don't make distinctions; then everything is the true way. When you see, when you hear, when you smell, when you taste, when you touch, when you are thinking—everything is the true way. But if you are checking your mind, checking outside, checking something—then you have already lost the true way. So don't make anything. For 90 days we do the great work of life and death. What is life? What is death? An eminent teacher said,

*Life is like a floating cloud which appears.  
Death is like a floating cloud which disappears.  
Originally the floating cloud does not exist.  
Life and death, coming and going are also like that.*

That is our life; that is our death. If you understand that, then you have no problem. Your body is like a floating cloud. But there is one thing that always remains clear, that is not dependent on life and death. What is that one pure and clear thing? If you attain that, then you will get freedom from life and death.

**We have three kinds of freedom from life and death:** first, wisdom of freedom from life and death; next, attainment of freedom from life and death; next, correct function of freedom from life and death.

First, wisdom of freedom from life and death—what does this mean? Our body is like a floating cloud: it appears and disappears, appears and disappears. But there is one thing that always remains clear and is not dependent on life and death. If you understand that, then you will get wisdom of freedom from life and death. When you go for an interview, the master dharma teacher [now called a Ji Do Poep Sa Nim] will ask you, "Where are you coming from? When you die, where will you go?"

Everybody who has sat one Yong Maeng Jong Jin already understands. It is necessary to digest this understanding and make it yours. After one year, two years, three years, four years, seven years, slowly, slowly you digest this understanding and it becomes yours. Then you can control your feeling, your condition, your situation. And your center will not move. There is no life, no death—you are very strong. Any kind of condition, any kind of situation, any kind of feeling can appear, coming and going, and your center won't move. At that time, you attain freedom from life and death. This means life and death without hindrance; no matter what kind of situation, condition or feeling is coming, going, your center is not moving. That is a very important point! So more practicing is necessary—only go straight, more practicing, practicing, practicing. Then your unmoving center can function correctly in every situation and relationship.

Some people try a mantra—only, "Kwan Seum Bosal," or "Gate, Gate," or "Om Mani Padme Hum"—and try to attain samadhi. Samadhi is not-moving mind. Not-moving mind is the absolute—there are no opposites. No opposites means there is no life, no death. No matter what kind of condition comes, only "Kwan Seum Bosal." Whatever kind of bad feeling comes, you don't care—only "Kwan Seum Bosal." So your situation and condi-

tion and feeling are no hindrance. This samadhi mind is the attainment of freedom from life and death. But you still don't understand correct function. It is necessary to go straight, go straight, more and more. Samadhi mind means no mind, so you have no direction.

Next, to attain no-hindrance mind control, more practicing is necessary. No hindrance means you don't care—any kind of feeling, any kind of condition, any kind of situation is no hindrance. And controlling your mind means that when your feelings come and go and your condition changes, you can control your feeling, condition and situation; then correct action is possible. So then, moment to moment, correct function, correct situation, correct relationship are possible. When somebody is hungry, give them food; when somebody is thirsty, give them something to drink. If somebody is sad, be sad with them; if somebody is happy, be happy together—that is correct function. Correct function means your correct situation and correct relationship. That is the function of freedom from life and death.

For 90 days we are practicing, which means doing the great work of life and death. We make life and death correct; to make them correct means to completely understand what life is and completely understand what death is. To completely understand means that there is no life, no death. If somebody has a bad feeling, I have a bad feeling. That means together you live and die.

There are three kinds of freedom from life and death. First, understand the wisdom of freedom from life and death. Life is death; death is life. Next, no life, no death. Next, freedom from life and death. If somebody cries, I cry. If somebody is sad, I am sad. That is using life and death to save all beings. So, after 90 days, you can completely understand life and death.

**How can you understand life and death?** How can you understand this kind of practicing mind?

Our school has ten gates. Today, I will talk about these ten gates. Then everybody will practice for 90 days and include the ten gates in your practicing. Then your practice and the ten gates will make wisdom of freedom from life and death, then attainment of freedom of life and death, and then the complete functioning of freedom from life and death.

**First Gate:** Someone asked Zen Master Joju, “Does a dog have Buddha nature?” Joju said, “Mu.” (“No”).

The first question is this: Buddha said all things have Buddha nature. Buddha nature means substance. All things have this substance or Buddha nature. But Joju said the dog has no Buddha nature. Which one is correct?

The second question is: Joju said “Mu.” What does “Mu” mean?

The next question: I ask you, does a dog have Buddha nature? What can you do? Older students all understand that, but understanding cannot help you. The understanding must become yours. You must attain the correct function of freedom from life and death—only understanding the wisdom of freedom from life and death cannot help you.

**Second Gate:** A monk once asked Joju, “I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me, Master.”

Joju said, “Did you have breakfast?” “Yes,” replied the monk. “Then,” said Joju, “wash your bowls.” The monk was enlightened.

What did the monk attain? This is very simple. “Please teach me.” “Did you have breakfast?” “Yes, I have.” “Then wash your bowls.” That's the correct function, correct relationship. That is everyday mind. This is an everyday-mind kong-an.



Photo: Josette LeBlanc

The first gate has three kong-ans. The first is called attached-like-this kong-an. The second two are just-like-this kong-ans. The second gate kong-an is a just-like-this kong-an. What did the monk attain? If you attain that point, you understand moment to moment correct situation, correct function, correct relationship. This monk attained his correct situation.

**Third Gate:** Zen Master Seong Am used to sit every day in the dharma room facing the blue mountain. He used to call to himself every day, “Master!” And he would answer, “Yes?” “You must keep clear!” “Yes!” “Never be deceived by others, any day, any time!” “Yes! Yes!”

Seong Am used to call to himself and answer himself—two minds. Which one is the correct master? Some people have not only two minds, but three minds, four minds, five

minds, or eighty minds, many, many minds—pain mind, sad mind, sex mind, money mind—many kinds of mind. Seong Am has only two minds: “Master!” “Yes!” “Keep a clear mind!”—two minds. Which one is the correct master? Two minds become one. If you become one, there is no mind, no master. If you attain no mind, no master, then you attain your true master. To attain this, first your master and your mind must disappear; then you are nothing. If you are nothing, then your eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body can work correctly and you can see your master—everything is your master. At interview time, the teacher will ask you this kong-an, and you must give a good answer.

**Fourth Gate:** Zen Master Hok Am said, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” What is Bodhidharma’s original face?

I ask you, why does Bodhidharma have no beard? This is an attack kong-an. Here is an example: There is a very famous painter, and everybody wants him to draw their face. They will pay him much money to do this. “Please, will you draw my face? Make a picture of me?”

So he makes a portrait of you, and when he is finished with it, there is your finished portrait. Look at that! No hair! It is like a monk! You are very surprised. He is a famous painter! Why no hair? So what can you do? Already you have paid much money, and he is a famous painter! Maybe there is some meaning! Then what do you ask him?

In the same way, Bodhidharma has a beard. Then why does Zen Master Hok Am ask, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” That, we say, is an attack kong-an. There are many kinds of attack kong-ans. Another example is this: You clean your body in the Zen center’s shower room. But where do you clean your mind? That’s an attack kong-an. Here is another example: This world is complete stillness. Where do the sun, the moon and the stars come from? These are all attack kong-ans. So, again I ask you, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” Tell me! Tell me!

**Fifth Gate:** Next is a famous kong-an: Hyang Eom’s “Up a tree.” Master Hyang Eom said, “It is like a man up a tree who is hanging from a branch by his teeth; his hands cannot grasp a bough, his feet cannot touch the tree. (He is tied and bound.) Another man under the tree asks him, “Why did Bodhidharma come to China?” If he does not answer, he evades his duty (and will be killed). If he answers, he will fall and lose his life. If you were in the tree, how could you stay alive?”

You are hanging by your teeth, so you cannot open your mouth. Also, you cannot move your hands; you cannot move your body. You cannot do anything. That, we

say is a Kyung Chul Mun kong-an. Everything is stopped. Nothing is possible, but one thing is possible. What is the one thing? Only one way. Not two ways—you only have one way. If you find that, then a good answer is possible. The question is, “Why did Bodhidharma come to China?” If you open your mouth to answer, you are already dead! If you do not answer, you evade your duty as a bodhisattva and will be killed. If you were in the tree, how could you stay alive? That is the big question.

If you pass this gate, you have finished half of the kong-ans. We have about 1,700 kong-ans. If you pass this gate, you will have passed the equivalent of 850 kong-ans. So this is a difficult kong-an. If you only pass the kong-an, it’s not interesting. If it becomes yours, then OK—your mind and your body and your world become one and function correctly. At that time you attain freedom, correct function, and freedom from life and death is possible. So attain freedom from life and death. That means there is no life, no death. But if you only have that, you have a problem, so we will check the next kong-an.

**Sixth Gate:** Dropping ashes on the Buddha. Somebody comes to the Zen center, smoking a cigarette. He blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. If you are standing there at that time, what could you do?

This is a famous kong-an. Students of one year and even older students still don’t understand this kong-an. Maybe after three or four years they still don’t understand. But if you only go straight—don’t know, try, try, try, then maybe after three years it is possible to pass this gate. In this kong-an, this cigarette man thinks, “I already have enlightenment. I already have this Buddha or dharma, or true way.” He is very attached to his idea that he has attained universal substance; he has attained freedom from life and death. No life, no death—he has attained one point. But he still has a problem because he is attached to one point, attached to emptiness—substance, everything is the same.

An eminent teacher said, “One by one, each thing is complete and each thing has it.” For example, this is a stick. The stick’s substance and your substance—are they the same substance? When you are thinking, your mind and my mind are different. When you cut off all your thinking, then your mind and my mind are the same. If you keep don’t-know mind 100 percent, only go straight—don’t know—then your don’t-know mind, my don’t-know mind, everybody’s don’t-know mind are all the same don’t-know mind. This same don’t-know mind has already cut off all our thinking. To stop thinking is no thinking. No thinking is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Your before-thinking mind is your substance; my before-thinking mind is my substance—then



everybody's substance is all the same substance. When you keep don't-know mind 100 percent, only go straight—don't know, then already you are the universe and the universe is you. You and everything already have become one. That, we say, is primary point. So don't know is not don't know; don't know is primary point. Primary point's name is don't know. Somebody said primary point is mind, or Buddha, or God, or nature, or substance, or the absolute, or energy, or holiness, or consciousness. But the true primary point has no name, no form. There is no speech, no word, because the primary point is before thinking. Only keep don't-know mind 100 percent and then you and everything have already become one.

Then if you keep this don't-know, this stick and you—are they the same or different?

*[Soen Sa Nim hits the Zen stick on the rostrum.]*

Do you understand this point? If you are only attached to this point, there is no you, no I, no mind, no Buddha, nothing at all. So you think, "Oh, I am already enlightened!" So it is possible for you to come to the temple smoking a cigarette and drop ashes on the Buddha—no problem. But you don't understand your correct situation, correct function, correct relationship moment to moment. Everyday mind is Zen mind. But this man has only attained freedom from life and death. He doesn't understand his correct function. So one more step is necessary. When he is dropping ashes on the Buddha, at that moment what can you do? How can you teach him?

So, during the 90 days of hard training, passing this kong-an is very important—not only for people on Kyol Che, but for outside working people. Sometimes the people outside Kyol Che do better than the people who sit Kyol Che. Who is better? After the 90 days, we will check, OK?

*[As noted, we are not including gates 7–9, for purposes of length.—Ed.]*

**Tenth Gate:** The mouse eats cat food, but the cat bowl is broken.

What does this mean? Does everybody understand? Some may understand, but understanding cannot help you. You must attain, and then this kong-an becomes yours. That kong-an, we say, is subject just-like-this. Mouse, cat food,

bowl, broken. So the cat bowl is broken. This kong-an. This kong-an is very easy, too simple. Can you see your nose? Yes, I can see my nose. Can you see your eyes? Not possible! If you want to see your eyes, you must put down your want-to-see mind. Then you can attain your eyes. It is the same as if you want to understand your mind—it is not possible. You must attain your mind. Someone may say, "I have already attained my mind." That is not possible—that is crazy! That is a clever mind. To become stupid means, for example, some day your stomach is not feeling very good, and you want ice cream. Then, "Oh, I have a quarter—I can get some ice cream." Then you go to the ice cream store and buy cream for 25 cents. Then you eat it, and then you feel very good! Wonderful! So a quarter is 25 cents; 25 cents buys ice cream; ice cream is gone. Then—wonderful! So the quarter is changing, changing, changing—wonderful. Mouse, cat food, cat bowl, broken, then what? Everybody is very clever. Very clever

means they don't understand. You must become stupid—then you can get the point of having a simple mind. Thinking mind becomes don't-know mind, becomes simple. Become simple, become simple. Stupid people only do it! The clever mind is checking, checking, checking all the time, or holding something, attached to something. If you want to understand this kong-an, then you must become stupid.

So for 90 days, do stupid practicing, OK? Also, outside working people must become stupid. How can you become stupid? Always take don't-know medicine. Don't-know medicine is very strong. You can digest any kind of understanding and become simple. Also, don't-know medicine

is a wonderful kind of medicine. For any sickness, any kind of problem, any kind of want, don't-know medicine can fix it and make it correct. Number one medicine! So only go straight—don't know. Then you can pass the ten gates—try, try, try. If you pass all ten gates, then this world will almost become yours. Becoming yours means you will attain the function of freedom from life and death. Then correct function, correct relationship, correct situation is possible. This is a very important point! If you pass these ten gates, I will give you a present of an eleventh gate!

**Eleventh Gate:** Three men are walking. The first man makes a sword sound; the next man takes out a handkerchief; the third man waves his hand.

What does it mean? You don't understand this? Then only go straight—don't-know, and you can attain this gate.



*Photo: Josette LeBlanc*

This kong-an is object just-like-this. Subject just-like-this means when you are hungry, what? Eat! That is subject just-like-this. If somebody is hungry, what? Give them food! That is object just-like-this. These three men have different actions, but the situation is the same. The function is different, the condition is different, but it is the same situation. So, what is the relationship? What is the function? What is the situation? Same situation, same condition, same relationship, but the function is different: one makes a sword sound, one takes out a handkerchief, one waves his hand—different action, but the meaning is the same. For example, you go to a theater where somebody is doing a one-man show. He tells a very funny story, he acts funny, talks funny, and then everybody laughs. Everybody is happy. Many different people are laughing with different styles. Somebody is laughing, “Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!” Somebody else is laughing, “Hu, Hu, Hu, Hu!” Somebody else is laughing, “Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho!”—different laughing styles. The action is different, but the condition and the situation are the same. So what kind of condition, what kind of situation, what kind of relationship? You must attain that. That, we say, is object just-like-this.

Today we are checking all the ten gates and the eleventh gate—the three men walking kong-an. Why are we checking this? Because if you don’t understand them, you must keep don’t-know mind to become stronger. If you don’t understand, don’t understand, don’t understand, then your don’t-know mind becomes very strong and a big don’t-know is possible, which means great question or great doubt. Completely don’t-know, then you will get complete enlightenment. If you have a small question, only small enlightenment is possible. There are many kinds of enlightenment—small enlightenment, middle enlightenment, big enlightenment, then finally, no enlightenment. No enlightenment is complete enlightenment. The Heart Sutra says, “No attainment with nothing to attain.”

George is teaching the 90-day Kyol Che people; Linc and Bobby are teaching the members working outside of Kyol Che, so we will have strong outside practicing and strong inside practicing.<sup>1</sup> Only go straight—don’t-know. Don’t make anything, OK? Don’t check anything, don’t hold anything, don’t want anything, don’t attach to anything. If you want something, then you have a problem; if you want enlightenment, then you have a number-one

big problem. Then you will have a headache, an energy-up headache. Don’t want anything; don’t attach to anything. “I want to sit correctly,” “I want to be a correct Zen student,” “I want correct practicing.” If you are attached to any kong-an, then you have a problem. So don’t check, don’t hold, don’t want, don’t attach—which means don’t make anything. Then your mind is already complete.

**Enlightenment is not special.** Put it all down, everything! Only don’t know. Then don’t know will open by itself. In the springtime, all flowers open up by themselves. If you go to a greenhouse in the wintertime, you will find many flowers—only hothouse flowers. That’s OK, but they are not correct, not strong. Outside, spring comes, the grass grows by itself. Flowers are blooming. That is the true way.

So I hope you only go straight, don’t know, for 90 days, and don’t make anything. Then your center will become stronger, stronger, stronger. Then you will be able to control your feeling, your condition, and your situation.

Then first, attain the wisdom of freedom from life and death. Next, attain freedom from life and death. Finally, attain the correct function of freedom from life and death.

So I ask you: First, the wisdom of freedom from life and death; next, the attainment of freedom from life and death; finally, the correct function of freedom from life and death: Which one is best?

If you find which one is best, then the dog is laughing, “Ho, Ho! You are just like me.” That is wonderful. If you cannot find the best one, then the Stone Tiger is laughing, “Ha, Ha, Ha! You are stupid.” More practicing is necessary! If you want to know which one is best, then go outside and ask the snow, “Why are you white?” Then the snow will give you a good answer.

*[Soen Sa Nim’s penetrating Korean chanting again filled the dharma room, and again, after each pair of lines, the sangha joined him wholeheartedly in chanting, once, strongly, “Namu Amitabul,” to the sound of the moktak. During the chanting Soen Sa Nim hit the rostrum three times with his stick, the final time just as the chanting finished. He then descended from the high stand.] ♦*

#### Note

1. This refers to George Bowman, now Zen Master Bo Mun; Bobby Rhodes, now Zen Master Seong Hyang; and Linc Rhodes JDPSN.



Photo: Josette LeBlanc