

Did Buddha Chant?

Scott Martin

The following piece is an answer from Orlando Zen Center's web master to a question submitted about chanting.

Hello,

Two questions:

1. Did Buddha chant? Please direct me to your source of information.

2. Is there a reason for chanting?

Thank you,

M.

Hi M.,

Thanks for writing. Please note that I am answering your e-mail only as a member of Orlando Zen Center and not in any way as its representative. Other members would surely answer differently.

24] **You asked: "Did Buddha chant? Please direct me to your source of information."**

Don't Know! Zen is a Mahayana style of Buddhism, and as such is not so concerned with the veracity of truth claims related to the historical Buddha. Have you tried searching Google for answers to this question?

You asked: "Is there a reason for chanting?"

You can read what our founder, Zen Master Seung Sahn, said about chanting on our school website in an article titled "Why We Chant." [Or you can read the article, "Earth, Fire and Water Repaying the Universe" in this issue. —Ed.]

These are *my* reasons for chanting:

- It's part of our tradition. Our school's heritage is traditional Korean Chogye Zen Buddhism. In the 1970s, upon arrival in the United States, our founder adapted what was a purely monastic practice into something that could be practiced by American laypeople. And so the Kwan Um School of Zen was born. Many cultural elements remain, which may



Photo: Jan Sendzimir

seem anachronistic to secular Westerners, such as chanting, wearing robes, eating meals in a formal, traditional style, doing bowing practice (that is, prostrations), and so on.

- Our school puts a strong emphasis on doing things together, which we call *together action*. Chanting is an opportunity to participate in an activity where the group is of one mind, moment by moment.
- Chanting is a form of meditation. Meditation means to perceive this moment 100 percent. Meditation isn't limited to sitting on a nice comfortable cushion.
- We do silent retreats lasting anywhere from a single day to 90 days in length. They are almost totally silent, except during chanting period. It's nice to open your mouth and stretch your vocal cords twice a day.
- It's fun, and some of the chants sound cool. (I admit this may be debatable.)
- Some days you don't want to chant, and it's good and healthy to sometimes do things that you don't want to do.

Your questions are interesting, and I now have questions for you:

- If the Buddha chanted, what will you do?
- If the Buddha did not chant, what will you do?
- If you can never determine whether or not the Buddha chanted, what will you do?

The only real way to answer questions about chanting is to come and try it. If you come to practice, we would be happy to welcome you and answer any questions.

Very best regards,

Scott Martin



Photo: Scott Martin

Scott began practicing with the Orlando Zen Center in 2008, becoming a dharma-teacher-in-training in the fall of 2013. He manages many of the center's digital communications and can be reached at scott@scott-martin.com.