

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Myong An Sunim

November 1, 2015 at Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple
in Kuala Lumpur

DHARMA COMBAT

Barry Briggs JDPSN: Good morning, Sunim.

Myong An Sunim: Morning, Barry

Briggs PSN: Zen Master Seung Sahn always said, “Don’t make anything.” But today we are making you a new teacher. And that is a big mistake. So how do you correct this mistake?

MASN: You already understand.

Briggs PSN: No I don’t—please teach me.

MASN: You’ve just made a big question—is that a mistake or not?

Briggs PSN: Now I understand.

Myong Hae Sunim: Hello, Sunim

MASN: Hello, Sunim

MHSN: I have one question that has been bothering me for a long time. Now your name is Myong An, which means you can see very clearly and so soon you are going to teach many different people. So I am asking you, when a blind person comes to you, how can you teach him what is the Buddha nature of the sky?

MASN: You already understand.

MHSN: No I don’t.

MASN: The sky is blue—I see for you.

Question: Firstly, Congratulations—I kind of expected it. So, I have a question for you—in the scriptures there is a description of the Buddhas and the Pure Land. But the Sixth Patriarch said that the Pure Land is clear mind. So is there a Pure Land or not—which is the true world?

MASN: You already understand.

Q: I don’t.

MASN: So what are you doing right now?

Q: Sitting.

MASN: And . . . ?

Q: Talking to you.

MASN: Pure Land already appeared.

Q: Sweet.

DHARMA SPEECH

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Mind is Buddha, Buddha is Mind.



Photo: Chin Chun Yin

[17

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

No Mind, no Buddha.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Mind is Mind, Buddha is Buddha.

Is it Mind or is it Buddha—which of these three statements is correct?

KATZ!

Behind me the Buddha’s face is gold, in front of many shining faces.

Let’s go back about 20 years. It was the autumn of 1992. I had moved from London to Hong Kong and just found a dream job so I was happy and contented. One day, a friend I had recently met called up, and she said, “Hey! Doing anything Saturday night?”

“Dunno. Maybe . . .”

“Well, a Korean Zen Master is coming here and will give a talk on Saturday night. Wanna go?”

In my head, I thought “No.” Back then, I had three priorities in my life. What I lived for was my career. My religion was my career, and my beautiful wife was my career. And I wasn’t going to hang out with people who went to dharma talks. No way.

“Uh, I think I have something going on . . .”

“Well, OK. Anyway, me and some friends are going and we’ll have supper afterward so if you want you can join us for that.”

“Yeah, OK. I’ll try.”

“Bye.”

Well, the movie I wanted to see didn’t work out. So, standing outside the cinema, I started thinking—well, my new friend—she’s kind of nice and I could get to know her a little better. We could be friends, or good friends . . . or maybe more than just good friends. Who knows? You know, I was in my 30s, single, and guys of my age think about this kind of stuff. Quite often. Women too—right?

So I decided—go! I got to the hall and saw my friend.

“Oh, hi! I thought you said you weren’t coming.”

“I changed my mind,” I lied. “Thought it might be interesting.”

“Great! Let’s grab a seat—how about here?”

“OK.”

We sat down. Me—arms crossed, looking at my watch every minute, waiting for it to be over.

The emcee came in and introduced Zen Master Seung Sahn. After he finished, the Zen master came in. He wasn’t very tall. But he had a bright face, and he was stocky and really solid looking. I got the impression that he was not someone you’d want to mess with.

Following behind him were a bunch of tall Western monks and nuns with shaved heads and gray robes. That’s when I felt it starting to get a little weird and alarm bells started going off in my head. “Uh-oh. Korean religious cult? Is he the cult leader? Is he going to try to brainwash me into joining?”

I looked at the doors—blocked? No. Good. I looked around the room—everyone seemed normal, not the crazy cult type. OK. I felt a little better. But I was still very suspicious and wary.

Then Zen Master Seung Sahn started to speak. I really paid attention to his speech so that he wouldn’t be able to brainwash me. But after about 20 minutes, something

odd happened—I was agreeing with everything that he was saying. I just couldn’t help myself.

That’s when I started to feel a bit funny—you know the feeling you get when you hear something that sounds too good to be true? You think to yourself, “It is really true? What’s really going on here?” In my gut, I knew what he said was true but I couldn’t quite allow myself to believe it. Not just yet—I had to check.

An hour passed and he finished his talk and I hadn’t even looked at my watch once.

“Any questions?” he asked. “Any kind of question—your life, your practice, your problems, any kind of question, no problem . . .”

My hand shot up immediately and they passed me the mic. Now was my chance to check him out—was he the real thing? I was a little nervous because I knew I was going to challenge him in front of everyone. So I asked him, “They said you got enlightenment at 22—is that right? You got enlightenment?”

He sort of chuckled and replied, “That’s what they said. Not me.”

OK—he got past that one, I thought. Next question. “In the introduction, they said you were a general in the Korean army. In battle, you have to order your men to kill the enemy. How can you do that? How can you call yourself a Zen master and a Buddhist monk? Everyone knows that you have taken vows not to kill.” (Actually he wasn’t a general—he was a captain, and his job was as the abbot in the army’s Buddhist temple, taking care of religious services. But somehow that had gotten lost in translation.)

He turned to a monk sitting next to him. “What did he say?” The monk explained in his ear. Then he looked squarely into my eyes and said, “When you meet your parents, you must kill your parents. When you meet your teacher, you must kill your teacher. When you meet the Buddha, you must kill the Buddha. OK?”

When I heard “you must kill your parents” I felt like he had punched me in the gut. The rest of it was the knockout blow. He had completely *hit my mind—bam!* I couldn’t move, I couldn’t think.

For those few moments, I experienced complete “don’t know.” One hundred percent. My mouth fell open, then closed, then opened again. Like a goldfish: *bop . . . bop . . . bop*. But nothing came out. I just stood there—totally dumbstruck.

Then I snapped out of it, realized what was going on

and felt very embarrassed. I could feel my face going red. Dae Soen Sa Nim saw this and chuckled, “Hahaha! Sit down please.”

I thought “Thank God!” and sat down, feeling really embarrassed.

That night, Zen Master Seung Sahn gave me a taste of “don’t know,” and it launched me onto the path of finding out who I really was and what I was doing in this world. What was it that made me want to follow, learn from him—and become a monk with him as my teacher? Was it his great dharma talks? No. Was it that he ticked the right boxes? Got enlightenment—check. Got transmission from a Great Zen Master—check. Many people call him a Great Zen Master—check.

No. It was simply . . . I believed what he believed. Just that. I believed what he believed. In my gut, I knew his teaching came from a place of total authenticity. He didn’t just talk the talk. He walked his walk. He just *did it*. For all beings—moment to moment.

In my experience with him, I never felt that he did anything selfishly for himself. It was always directed at helping others. So—I believed what he believed—that it was possible for everyone, even for me. If we really try, we can wake up, attain our true nature and help others.

Theodore Roosevelt, one of the greatest American presidents, said over a hundred years ago, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood . . . who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

At that time in my life, I could choose comfort and security, or decide to trust in “don’t know,” to just try—to try to dare greatly.

What options did I really have, when you really look at it? To work hard, make money, have security, comfort, wife and two kids? That’s what most people choose. But when I’ve have done all of that, then what? Is that just all that life is about?

Helen Keller, the first deaf-blind person in this world to earn a bachelor of arts degree, said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature.”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said many times, “In this mo-

ment, we can only decide two things: “I can” or “I cannot.” You decide “I can,” then you can. Decide “I cannot,” then you cannot. That’s all. For me—it all came down to two simple choices: either to wake up from this dream of a life, find out who I really was and use my time in this world to help others or, to continue to take care of I, my, me, chase after my wants and desires—and discover along the way that I, and many others like me, as Thoreau said, “lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with our song unsung.”

The Buddha and all the Patriarchs have shown us the way to wake up and help others. It is now up to you and me. How will you choose?

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Awake is Asleep, Asleep is Awake.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

No Awake, no Asleep.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick.]

Awake is Awake, Asleep is Asleep.

Are we awake or asleep?

KATZ!

Inside this buddha hall, many people are listening to this talk. Outside in the market, many people are buying and selling.

Thank you for listening. And thank you, Yijuan, for a great translation.

Myong An Sunim was born to a Chinese family in Malaysia in 1959. He was mainly educated in the United Kingdom, earned an MBA and worked for ten years in London, Hong Kong and Singapore in finance. In 1992, he was inspired to practice Zen after hearing a dharma talk by Zen Master Seung Sahn in Hong Kong. He served as one of the Hong Kong Zen Center’s first directors and later become a dharma teacher. After completing four full winter Kyol Ches in Korea, he ordained in February of 1997, becoming the last monk to be ordained by Zen Master Seung Sahn. He continued to sit two full retreats annually, and in 2000 moved from Hwa Gye Sa Temple to Mu Sang Sa Temple. He served in various positions there, helped organize the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference in 2002 and continues as a member of its board. Returning to Malaysia in 2013, he started the Haeng Won Zen Centre in Penang in a rented house. He is currently developing plans to turn a donated piece of land into a Zen meditation retreat center. ♦