

# Yuval Gill

March 20, 2016 at Wu Bong Sa Temple, Poland

## DHARMA COMBAT

**Question (Daniella, Yuval's 11-year-old daughter):** Now that you will be a JDPSN, you are supposed to be even more generous, yes?

**Gill PSN:** Yes.

**Q:** Does that mean you increase my monthly pocket money?

**Gill PSN:** You will receive much more Zen money. Do you want an advance?

**Q:** Yes.

**Gill PSN:** Come close. *[Hugs and kisses his daughter.]*

**Question:** You are from Israel, so you are probably the most qualified person to answer this. Is God Jewish?

**Gill PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** Please tell me.

**Gill PSN:** What color is the floor?

**Q:** Brown.

**Gill PSN:** Is that Jewish?

**Q:** It's brown.

**Gill PSN:** So you already understand.

**Q:** Thank you.

**Question:** During the Kyol Che I had the housemaster job, and there was something that confused me, so maybe you can help me. The entry day is Saturday but you arrived on Friday. What was that about?

**Gill PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** No. That is why I'm asking.

**Gill PSN:** What day is it today?

**Q:** Wait I have to check, ah yes, Sunday.

**Gill PSN:** You got it.

**Q:** Thank you.

## DHARMA SPEECH

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

Life is death; death is life.

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

Originally, no life, no death.

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

Life is life; death is death.

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

Which statement is alive?

KATZ!

Life is breathing in and out; death is not breathing.

Hello everyone, we have three ceremonies here today, so I will make it short and I hope you find it interesting.

I want to share with you today how kong-an practice really saved my life.

However, before I do that, let me express my deepest gratitude to all our wonderful school's teachers.

Zen Master Wu Bong explained it this way: Our school is all about the student and not the teacher. That means, when you see a student transform into a teacher, like today, it is the result of a collective effort of our school's teachers.

I see many teachers here today to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. But, I will mention only Zen Master Dae Bong, who was the first teacher to visit with Mu Sang Sunim in Israel and support us in starting the Kwan Um Israel sangha, and Zen Master Wu Bong who guided the Israeli sangha for 12 years from the early wild days until his passing away three years ago. And our wonderful guiding teacher for the past three years, Zen Master Ji Kwang. Thank you for your teaching. *[Bows.]* I also want to thank my family—my mother, my sister, my wife and my two daughters, sangha friends and close friends who came from far away to witness and participate in this event. Thank you all!

Over 20 years ago, I started practicing meditation in Israel. After a couple of years, I decided to spend time in Hwa Gye Sa Temple in Korea until I figured out what to do with my life. So I joined the winter Kyol Che. When the Kyol Che ended, I had some time off and traveled to Bali, Indonesia, to meet my beloved sister and spend a vacation together. Some of you may already know that Bali is famous for good surfing because of its beautiful beaches and big waves. So we decided to go to the beach, and I went in the water for an "after Kyol Che swim."

What we did not realize was that we had chosen the beach called Cemetery Beach or Graveyard Beach. The name came from the fact that every year surfers would die there because of the powerful waves and shallow water.

I entered the water at about waist high and saw a wave rising in front of me. I tried to swim under it. *Big mistake!* This wave grabbed me like a matchstick, turned me upside down, raising me up about two to three meters high before it nailed me to the ocean floor, headfirst.

All this happened so fast, but something very interesting happened during these few seconds. Because my mind was after Kyol Che clear, it was like a kong-an, but a real life-and-death kong-an. What can I do? What meditation could save me?



Photo: Grzegorz Piaskowski

So, in that brief moment I completely let go. I, my, me, time, thinking, everything: *ptchewu!* Disappeared! Gone! At that moment, there was only the great energy of water and white surf everywhere.

While I was completely letting go, something opened in my mind and I experienced endless calm, boundless space, and just one thought appeared: What a beautiful day to die!

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Because I was so relaxed, the hit to my neck hurt but it did not kill me. Because I let go of what we call “small I” I could stand up from the shallow water to see my sister’s worried face turn to relief. That was how kong-an practice saved my life.

When our vacation was over I went back to sit Kyol Che for three months and had a chance to digest this experience.

I needed life to really bang me on the head, but I finally got it. This point. [*Hits the table.*] There is no I. We make it, and we can unmake it. Another name for that is clear direction. It means that my question in life is not how to help my life, my situation, but how to help this world. This means keeping a wide mind.

We call it “for all beings,” or in short, “for you.” This is our great Zen vow, the great way of the bodhisattva.

So getting this “for you” point—really getting this point—means changing life 180 degrees. Changing life’s direction from life that is about me, to life that is for you. But how do we actually do it in our lives?

In our school, we have this formula from Zen Master Seung Sahn:

clear direction + practice try mind = enlightenment

That means that in order for it to be part of our lives we have to practice. But what does true practice mean? In our school, we have all these wonderful formal together-action practices: Kyol Che, seven-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin, three-day YMJJ and also solo practice. But what is really true practice?

Here is a little hint: Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson go out on a camping trip. They are lying in the forest in the middle of the night looking up at the stars. Sherlock turns to Watson and asks: What do you make of this? Watson answers: “Looking at all these stars makes me realize how small we are compared to this vast universe. Gives a great perspective on life.” So Sherlock answers: “Watson, you fool. Somebody stole our tent!” [*Big laughter.*]

The point of this joke is don’t be fooled by philosophical ideas, but keep clear moment to moment. We call it true practice. Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “try try try for 10,000 years, only go straight, don’t know.” This effort of never stop trying to return to this moment, transforms us and turns our lives around.

This is all for you.

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

To die before we die is to wake up to life.

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

Before thinking, there is no dying or waking up.

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

How can we wake up and find our correct-moment life?

KATZ!

Thank you all for being here, now, Sunday, March 20, 2016. ♦

Yuval Gill was born in 1964 in England and arrived in Israel with his family in 1969. He started practicing Zen in 1995 with an Israeli Zen teacher. In 1998, he traveled to Korea to practice at Hwa Gye Sa Temple. Upon his return to Israel in 1999, Yuval cofounded the first Kwan Um Zen center in Tel Aviv. Today, he is the abbot of Kwan Um Israel. For the past 10 years, Yuval has lived in Hod Hasharon Zen Center with his wife and two daughters. Yuval studied finance in London and law in Israel. He is a family and business lawyer and mediator. In 2001, he established a mediation company that operates peace-making programs in schools and communities throughout Israel.