

How Can Sitting Save This Hungry World?

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Question: What can we in America do to stop the starvation of the world?

Zen Master Seung Sahn: Did you have dinner?

Q: Yes.

ZMSS: Did you clean your bowl?

Q: Yes.

ZMSS: Good. So why is there this kind of problem? In this world, cause and effect are very clear. Everything has a primary cause. If you understand it, and remove it, then the problem will also disappear. We can save money and send food over to Africa and India; that's OK. But many problems will remain. Taking away the primary cause is very important. It's like a game of pool. You hit the ball directly into the pocket, and that's one ball in the pocket. But the high-class technique is to hit this ball and that ball and other balls, so that all of them go into the pockets. Zen-style action is like that; we can give money to help hungry people, but if we hit people's hungry minds, we can help change their minds so that they can help their own country. The high-class technique is to help people help themselves.

There are two kinds of hunger in this world: body hunger and mind hunger. Body hunger is easily solved: just feed people. But mind-hungry people need food

for their minds. People with mind hunger do not die. They want power, and then they want more power. They say things like "My way is correct, your way is not correct!" They want to control this world. They don't want to lose their good situation.

Nowadays, many of the people who say they want world peace are afraid of nuclear weapons. What they want is not to die, not to lose their good situation. That is not correct world peace. Most of the politicians talk about world peace that way. Russia says "We want world peace." America says "We want world peace." Which world peace is correct? These are mind hungry people, who make bombs and nuclear weapons. They talk about world peace, but it's only a world peace of the tongue, not a true world peace. There are also many people in this world who don't want world peace. They think the world is so evil that it should be destroyed. They also only want to keep their own good situation, so their world peace is only for themselves, not for other people. This is also not correct world peace.

"I want world peace only for myself"—this kind of mind is unbalanced. Take away this mind hunger, and the problem of body hunger will also disappear. If we love each other, help each other, and become harmo-

nious with each other, then world peace is possible.

You must understand this world. America makes many bombs and nuclear weapons. Why? It is not at war. If these weapons are not used, they eventually decay. But because America makes them, Russia must make them. The communist countries have less money, so they must take money from other things in order to make weapons. Eventually their economy begins to break down.

The American idea is not to fight, but to break down the economies of communist countries. When economies break down,

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hungry people appear. Now many people are hungry. This mind-set is very bad. Do you understand? Perceive this world clearly, and you will understand where hunger comes from. Everything happens by natural process. In Africa and India (and America as well), there is much killing of animals for food. There is not so much eating of rice and vegetables, as there is in East Asia. It takes more land to raise animals for meat than it does for raising grains and vegetables. Why are many people starving? This is the result not just of this life, but of causes begun many lifetimes ago. Buddha said, if you want to understand what happened before this life, look at what you are getting now. Being very hungry means that in a previous life, one gave much suffering to other people and animals, and also took food. Today's suffering is the result of those actions. There is great imbalance now between hungry people and people with a lot of food. At mealtimes we make a great deal of food, then throw away what we don't eat into the garbage. There are many thousands of restaurants in America that throw away food. If we were able to send all the wasted food to Africa and India, those people would not be hungry.

Also, if you want to understand the future, you must look at what is occurring now. Our mind-set at this moment is the primary cause of what will happen in the future: tomorrow, the next life, generations after that. Right now your mind is making the future. Right now people are killing animals for food, people are wasting food, people are spending money on weapons instead of food. Thus we make the future with our current actions. There are many articles appearing in the news about Africa. Many people are talking about the suffering and expressing feelings about it, so a "How can we help them?" mind is appearing. If this helping mind gets wide enough, it will find and remove the primary causes of the world's suffering. Many people getting this helping mind means they will get energy together, and will be able to solve the world's problems.

There is a famous American who has created many groups to raise money for Africa. I thought this was wonderful until I read that when he gets money, 30 percent of it goes into his own pocket, and only 70 percent of it goes abroad. He has this idea, "I am wonderful because I do this." He has become much admired, but it's not correct. He only looks wonderful from the outside, not the inside. Because of the publicity about Africa, many such groups have been formed in America that are concerned with helping. They raise money and send it abroad, but it's like putting on makeup. If you are hungry, you don't need cosmetics. This kind of action is like cosmetics; it creates a sense of "I am good, I am helping," but this "I" does not really help other people. It doesn't address the primary cause of world hunger. It's like a room in which many little insects ap-

pear. After cleaning the room, it's OK for a day or two, then soon the insects appear again. Cleaning once in a while doesn't help. Why do these insects appear? We must look for the primary cause. In this case, we find the room is very damp. If it were dry, no insects would appear. So we must make it dry by using a heater or building a fire, and making the room very hot and dry. Then the insects will not appear again. It's the same with the problem of hungry people.



Q: Does our sitting in meditation take away the primary cause for Africa's hunger?

ZMSS: When I came to this country fourteen years ago, I was alone. There were no Zen centers in our style. Now there are many of them around the world in our school, with many people practicing. Many people in these Zen centers are beginning to understand the correct way and the truth. Maybe in the future, our Zen centers and the many others around the world will grow and be able to teach all the people with hungry minds. Take away mind hunger, and body hunger will soon disappear. Then world peace will be possible. You want results quickly. You want to send something to the hungry people and have the problem solved tomorrow. That's not possible. In this world, cause and effect appear sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. This particular great suffering has taken hundreds of years to appear. So perhaps in this life it will not be possible to solve it, nor in the next one or the one after that. But we must try, life after life. That is our great vow: "Sentient beings are numberless; we vow to save them all." For that we must each develop a strong personal center, not just in this lifetime, but life after life. Try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop!

This is a time of complete change in the world. We are at the end of an old cycle, and the beginning of a new one. As a result, there are many imbalances and great suffering. Hunger appears because of these imbalances. Now there are entire countries with lots of food, and countries with very little.

Imbalance is our world's sickness: how can we cure it? Balance means understanding the truth. If you have no wisdom, you cannot become balanced. It is very important for everyone to find their human nature. That is why we sit Zen, to find our true human nature. So we are in a very important position, sitting in meditation. We must find our human nature, then together help each other become world peace. As human beings, we are all equal. We all have the same love mind, so why must hungry people appear? We must find the primary cause of this world's sickness and remove it. If we don't, we can never help the hungry people. ♦