

# Finding the One Thing: Four Short Teachings by Zen Master Dae Kwan

## The Meaning of Precepts

Sifu was in Warsaw for Zen Master Wu Bong's 49th Day Ceremony. After the ceremony, the European sangha went out to eat. Sifu was one of the few monastics at this meal. A student came up to Sifu and offered her a glass of wine.

**Student:** Sifu, Zen Master Seung Sahn always taught us together-action. We do together action. You drink with us, OK?

**Sifu:** I am a nun. I cannot drink alcohol. We do together-action. We don't drink, OK?

## Commentary

Precepts are not about what we can do or cannot do. Precepts are about respecting our life and helping others. We don't give pork to Muslims, or guns to children. We do give morphine to cancer patients who are suffering. A calm, balanced mind is the true precept.

10]

## Clear Wind, Bright Moon

Zen Master Seung Sahn once said in one of his commentaries:

Going alone, don't call that Zen.  
Sitting alone, illuminate silent Zen.  
This life is my car; hardly, if rarely,  
anything happens.  
These eyes resting peacefully on top  
of the rock . . .  
Why does the wind blow from the  
West?

Zen Master Seung Sahn's whole life was very busy, teaching and leading retreats, traveling around the world nonstop. What kind of wind is the Zen master talking about, so that his eyes could rest peacefully on top of the rock?

Buddha said there are eight kinds of winds, or worldly conditions, that are always blowing in our life: gain and loss, fame and infamy, praise and blame, happiness and pain. Nobody in this universe can escape these worldly conditions or winds. Usually we like to have all the positive winds such as gain, fame, praise and happiness whereas loss, infamy, blame and pain are rejected as they are very negative to us.

When we first started the Zen center in Hong Kong, we had many obstacles and unpleasant comments from all directions. Students who liked our teaching immediately became our students. Some who didn't like our teaching immediately left or prevented other friends from coming.

I asked Zen Master Seung Sahn what we should do. He said to me, "You only practice. One student coming is OK, or ten students come, also welcome. Do not check your students; only practice." What he meant was to return to don't-know mind. This don't-know will help us clear all the clouds of checking our gain or loss, and clear the clouds of society's acceptance or rejection. I told Zen Master Seung Sahn that many people were making bad speech about us. He said, "Bad speech is very good; they help us advertise. At the same time we learn from our shortcomings." So infamy is not



Photo: Francis Lau

pleasant, but for Zen Master Seung Sahn, he could turn this wind into clear wind and bright moon. He always taught us not to follow somebody's speech. Anytime, if one follows or attaches to somebody's action or speech, we are like an arrow. This arrow goes straight to hell. This is suffering. If we do not want to suffer, we have to have the attitude of not attaching to fame or infamy.

There is one essential teaching in our school. Zen Master Seung Sahn always taught us to "put it all down." When we can put it all down, there is one thing that always remains pure and clear, not dependent on any conditions or the coming and going of the eight winds. It does not depend on life and death either. Then what is this pure and clear thing?

If you can find this "one thing" then you will attain Zen Master Seung Sahn's car, and use this car as if hardly anything happens, so our eyes can also rest peacefully on top of the

rock. This is truly Clear Wind and Bright Moon. Wishing you in 2014, Year of the Horse, find this “one thing,” attain Zen Master Seung Sahn’s car, and use this car freely with wisdom and love with fruitful reward.

### Facing Disaster

One afternoon a student came to the Zen center and met with Zen Master Dae Kwan. They talked about the recent disaster in Japan.

**Student:** Sifu, people have many opinions toward the disasters in Japan. I am sad and angry because at this time of great difficulty, someone gave the opinion that, “the Japanese deserve this disaster because of their brutality during World War II and we shouldn’t help them.”

**Zen Master Dae Kwan:** Everyone has his or her own view toward everything. Just like when you are shopping. Different shops and brands are promoting their own products. You buy what suits you and ignore what you don’t need. Others’ opinions are the same. After listening, our job is to just put down what isn’t beneficial to us.

A student once asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “Someone prophesied that there would be an earthquake in San Francisco. Where should I escape to?” Zen Master answered, “You should put down your own life and death and stay behind to help others.” At another occasion, someone asked, “In a disaster, there are two very hungry people, and there isn’t enough food. What should we do?” Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “If there is one bowl of rice left, each take half a bowl. If there is only one piece of bread, each take half a piece. Each one take equal share and then die together.”

In Japan, the victims faced disasters one after the other; earthquake, tsunami, nuclear leakage and snow, making their suffering heavier and heavier. At these times, it is very important how we look at the things happening in front of us with the right view. If we have the energy of practice, we can transform emotions of anger, fear, helplessness and our discriminating mind into positive emotions and correct action. Then at a critical moment, we can keep a strong center, help each other and share what we have. Then, we can accept that even if we have to die, we will die together.

Zen Master Seung Sahn always warned his students that this world is like a rotten fruit. Our practice is to find the seed inside—our true nature. In this rotten world, we have to find the thing that is not rotten. In fact, the most devastating nuclear bomb is one’s like and dislike mind and those backseat drivers—delusion, selfishness, greed, pride etc.—that keep disturbing the driver that is us, our true selves.

Now, the universe is giving us an alarm, alerting us to find the seed inside ourselves. Not only do we have to help our families and friends, but we also need to help this world.

### Valentine

February 14 afternoon, after 300 bows, Zen Master Dae Kwan said: “Happy Valentine’s Day! If I have no valentine will I be still be blessed?”

This is a very good question. *Valentine* in Chinese is composed of two characters, 情人 “*qing ren*.” A person with *qing* always has a heart as fresh as a green plant. This means your love is always fresh with vitality. If you want to love somebody, you must learn from your heart-mind. Zen means to attain and understand this mind.

Our mind is like a piece of vast land that needs to be cultivated with constant love and care. Without cultivation the land will become a scrubland filled with overgrowths of weeds and creepers. These will weaken the growth of trees, which may then die. Our mind weed is our habitual tendency of being selfish and greedy. If we don’t know how to help ourselves and instead like to depend on others, it is like a creeper. Friendship with no trust or bad speech is like thorny plants. If we leave them unattended, the forest will eventually be colonized by these creepers and thorns.

Actually Nature always gives us lots of teaching on how to take care of our mind. If you understand Nature, then you truly know how to love. Creepers depend on the life of another tree, and they eventually suck up all tree energy so that the tree will die. The love between couples or lovers is also like that. If you choose to marry, you have to take care of your loved one. When a difficult situation appears, you should help and support each other. Too much dependency on others to solve your own problems is like a creeper. Learn how to go through hardship together. To nurture true love is about caring and supporting each other.

Have you noticed that even after a fire, the damaged trees will know how to give lives to young leaves through their unharmed branches, as long as the roots are still alive? The damaged trees never complain about their situation. Trees and Nature have this attitude of never giving up. Even in a very bad situation, they will find a way to grow. This is the *qing* part of *Valentine*. Unfortunately human beings very often choose to be attached to the rotten side of life. They only indulge their emotions and complaints and do not know how to grow from it. If you understand natural love, which is your original mind, then you know how to find balance in your mind. If you know in this world there is love which is your mind, this love is always fresh like green plants.

Zen practice, meditation, 300 bows, chanting with a blessing mind is to nurture our mind. When the mind becomes independent, you will know how to support those around you and progress together toward completion. Someone asked a Zen master, “What is sudden enlightenment?” The Zen master replied, “*Sudden* means at this moment take away all illusive thinking. *Enlightenment* means having nothing to attain.” So if you know how to come back to this moment and let go of your attachment, this happiness will appear naturally. This is the correct view to turn our illusion into correct life. If treated properly, even dried weeds can become a beautiful decoration.

May Valentines Day also be your Day of True Love for All Beings! ♦