

# Primary Point



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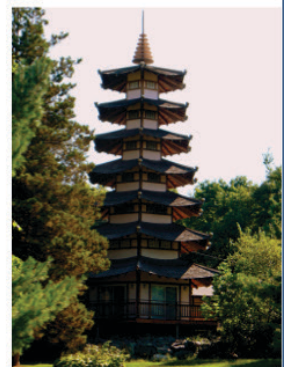


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Primary Point  
99 Pound Road  
Cumberland RI 02864-2726 U.S.A.  
Telephone 401/658-1476  
www.kwanumzen.org  
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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 2,100 copies.

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Zen Master Seung Sahn

**School Zen Master**  
Zen Master Soeng Hyang

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Cover: A student takes a hike near Gak Su Temple on Lantau Island, Hong Kong. Photo by Francis Lau, who adds: "Gak Su Temple is located in the area of Luk Wu (Deer Pond), where a history of over 130 years of Buddhism has continued. As we walk the trail and practice in this area, we benefit from the wisdom and hard practice of many who came before us."

# The Platform Sutra

## Chapter 6: On Repentance

Translated by Zen Master Dae Kwang and Zen Master Dae Kwan

At one time a large gathering of scholars and commoners from Guangzhou, Shaozhou and other places asked the patriarch to teach. The patriarch took the high seat and delivered the following talk:

In practice, we should always start from our true nature. Moment to moment, let us purify our minds through our own efforts, realize our own dharmakaya (dharma body), attain the Buddha in our own mind and deliver ourselves by keeping the precepts. If you do this, your visit will not have been in vain. Since all of you have come a long distance, the fact of our meeting here shows that there is a good affinity between us. Let us now kneel and I will give you the formless repentance.

The first is the incense of precepts, which means that our mind is free from the taints of misdeeds, evil, jealousy, greed, anger, aggressiveness and hatred. The second is the incense of samadhi, which means that our mind is unperturbed in all circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable. The third is the incense of prajna, which means that our mind is free from all hindrances, and is constantly perceiving our essence of mind with wisdom. Here we refrain from evil deeds and cultivate good acts without being attached to them. We are respectful toward our superiors and considerate of our inferiors. Also, we are sympathetic to the destitute and the poor. The fourth is the incense of liberation, meaning that our mind does

not cling to anything, thinking neither good nor bad—free and without hindrance. The fifth is the incense of the knowledge realized on the attainment of liberation. When our mind clings to neither good nor evil, we should take care not to let it dwell on emptiness or remain in a state of inertia. We should rather widen our study and broaden our knowledge, so that we can know our original mind and understand thoroughly the principles of Buddhism. We should be kind to others and get rid of every idea of “self” and “other.” We must realize that up to the time when we attain bodhi, our true nature is always unchanging and immutable. This is the incense of knowledge realized on the attainment of liberation. The fragrance of this fivefold incense permeates our mind from within and should not be sought from outside.

Now I will give the formless repentance that will extinguish the sins committed in our past, present and future lives, purifying the karma of our thoughts, words and deeds. Learned audience, please repeat after me:

May we always be free from the taints of ignorance and delusion. We repent of all our sins and evil deeds committed in delusion and ignorance. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again. May we always be free from the taints of arrogance and dishonesty. We repent of all our arrogant behaviors and dishonest dealings in the past. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again.

May we always be free from the taints of envy and jealousy. We repent of all our sins and evil deeds committed in an envious or jealous manner. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again.

Learned audience, this is what we call formless *chan hui* (repentance). What is the meaning of *chan* and *hui* (Sanskrit: *ksamayati*)? *Chan* refers to the repentance of past sins. To repent of all our past sins and evil deeds committed in delusion, ignorance, arrogance, dishonesty, jealousy, envy and so forth, so as to put an end to them, is called *chan*. *Hui* refers to repentance concerning our future conduct. Having realized the nature of our transgressions, we make a vow to never sin again. Hereafter we will put an end

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Photo: Michal Rachůnek

to all evil committed in delusion, ignorance, arrogance, dishonesty, jealousy or envy. This is *hui*. Because of ignorance and delusion, common people do not realize that in repentance they have not only to feel sorry for their past sins but also refrain from sinning in the future. Since they take no heed of their future conduct, they commit new sins before the past ones are extinguished. How can we call this repentance? Learned audience, having repented of our sins, we will now take the following four great vows:

*The sentient beings inside our mind are numberless;  
we vow to save them all.*

*The suffering of our mind is endless; we vow to  
extinguish it all.*

*The teachings of our true nature are numberless;  
we vow to learn them all.*

*The Buddha way of true nature is inconceivable;  
we vow to attain it.*

Learned audience, all of us have now declared our vow to save an infinite number of sentient beings, but what does that mean? It does not mean that I, Hui Neng, am going to save them. Also, who are these sentient beings within our mind? They are the delusive mind, the deceitful mind, the evil mind and so forth—all these are sentient beings. Each one of them has to save themselves by means of their own true nature; then the deliverance is genuine.

What does it mean to save oneself by means of one's own true nature? Inside our mind we have delusive, ignorant and suffering beings. We use right views to save them. With the aid of right views and prajna-wisdom, the barriers raised by these ignorant and delusive beings may be broken down. Then each of them may deliver themselves through their own efforts. Let the fallacious be delivered by correctness, the deluded by enlightenment, the ignorant by wisdom and the malevolent by benevolence. Such is genuine deliverance.

The vow to extinguish the endless suffering of our mind refers to the substitution of our unreliable and illusive thinking faculty with the prajna-wisdom of our true nature.

The vow to learn the numberless teachings means that there will be no true learning until we have seen face-to-face our true nature and conform to the orthodox dharma on all occasions.

The vow to attain the Buddha way refers to always being humble and acting correctly in all situations. When prajna arises in our mind moment to moment, then we can detach from both enlightenment and ignorance. We can do away with both truth and falsehood, see our Buddha nature and attain buddhahood. ♦

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*Excerpt from the opening of chapter 6 of The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch by Hui Neng. Translated in 2007 by Zen Master Dae Kwang and Zen Master Dae Kwan for the third anniversary of Zen Master Seung Sahn's death. Published by Su Bong Zen Monastery, Hong Kong, 2007.*

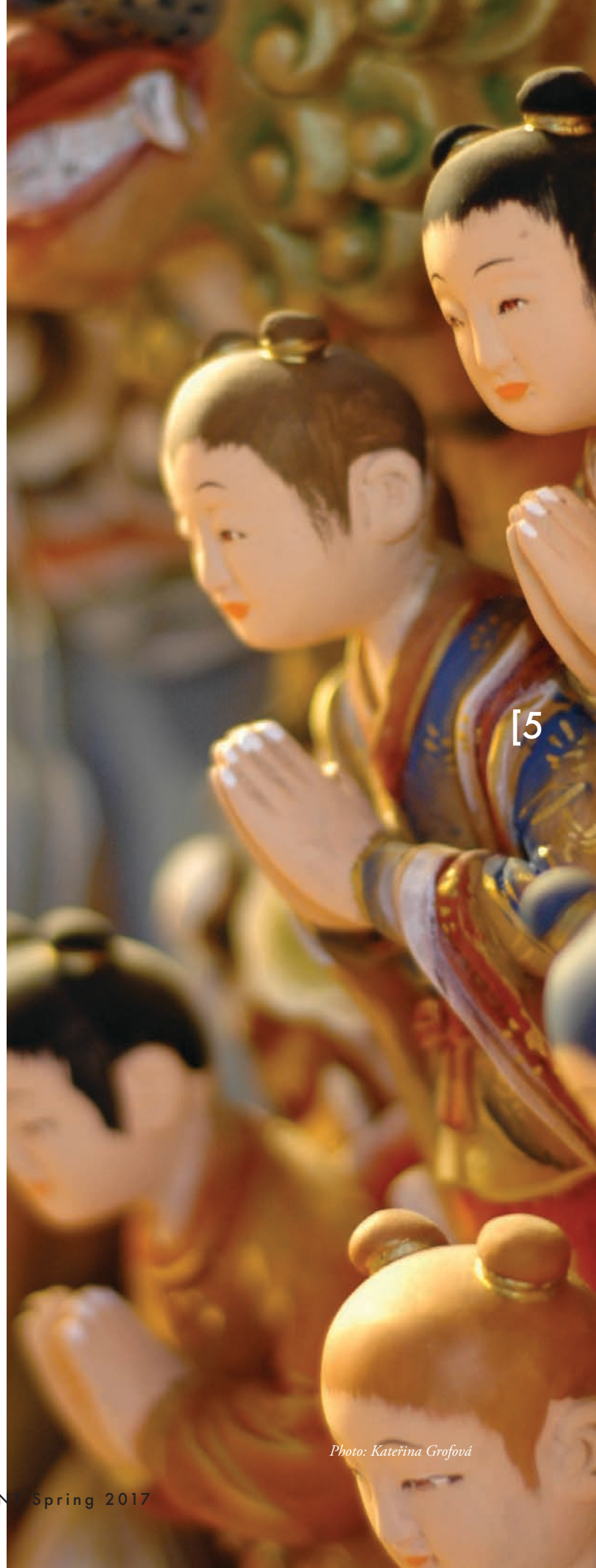


Photo: Kateřina Grofová

# The Eightfold Path

## Introductory Note

*Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Bobby Rhodes)*

The eightfold path was taught by the Buddha to help us find the way out of our our confusion. This way can be explained, but will never be perceived unless we are able to grab the great question "What am I?" and not let go. Our human consciousness is very complicated; the path is right in front of us; WAKE UP!

As we read the teachings from some of our teachers, let us bow to the tremendous effort, care and sincerity that went into each offering. The Kwan Um School's process, which can eventually put a student in the position of having the title Ji Do Poep Sa or Zen Master is long and arduous. Once the responsibility to teach at those levels is given, the appointed teachers are required to sign something we call the teachers' compact. This compact is unique in the realm of Zen institutions. The teachers, regardless of where they live in the world, agree to be a part of a whole. We agree to act together, to follow the forms and teaching tools that were were taught to us by our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. Any significant changes are made together. Acting and staying together in this way requires a large amount of trust. Without practice, this trust can erode, and our ability to listen to each other can erode.

As I write this, I realize how tremendously grateful I am to our founding teacher, who set up this model of what he called "put it all down and act with others." Our international Zen school is a product of sincere practice. This practice opens up our ability to truly understand the eightfold path not through words but through our true selves. So as you read these teachings offered from around the world, realize how precious is the vehicle that brings them to you. May we always walk the path with courage and gratitude.

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## Right View

*Zen Master Bon Hae (Judy Roitman)*

The first step on the eightfold path is right view. *Right*, of course, doesn't mean the opposite of left. It means correct. *View* here doesn't mean "oh what a pretty view." It means viewpoint, how you organize your perceptions.

In the Theravada tradition, correct viewpoint means to see everything through the lens of impermanence. Things arise, they stick around for a while, they disappear. Everything is changing all the time. No matter what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, you are aware of its impermanence. No matter what your situation, you are aware of its impermanence. Whatever you are thinking about, you are aware of its impermanence. Your thoughts themselves are impermanent, and you are aware of this. Ideologies are impermanent. Relationships are impermanent. War is impermanent. Peace is impermanent. Your life is impermanent. The sky is impermanent. Even earth. Even space. Time, by definition, is definitely impermanent.

That's the Theravada version of correct viewpoint: everything is impermanent.

A long time ago I read an exchange in which someone began to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn a question by saying, "Since everything is impermanent . . ." and Zen Master Seung Sahn immediately interrupted, "Where did you hear that? Everything is originally emptiness!" Which brings us to the Mahayana view of correct viewpoint.



*Photo: Nick Gershberg*

In the Mahayana tradition, correct viewpoint means to see everything through the lens of emptiness. Everything is empty. No matter what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, you are aware of its emptiness. Your situation is fundamentally empty. Everything you think about is empty. Your thoughts themselves are empty. Ideologies are empty. Relationships are empty. War is empty. Peace is empty. Your life is empty. The sky is empty. The earth is empty. Space is empty. Time is empty. Even emptiness is empty. But this is not nihilism. Emptiness is not the same as nothing. It is not the void.

We can try to understand emptiness intellectually. But then we're just being seduced by grammar—*emptiness* is a noun, so there has to be some *thing* it represents. That is a well-known philosophical trap known as reification, inventing some kind of reality because there's a word for it. Also, the adjective *empty* isn't like green or purple. *Green* and *purple* are adjectives that distinguish things—some things are green and other things are purple and still other things are neither—but *every* thing is empty. What can an adjective mean when it applies to everything?

The Mahayana view understands all this. It understands that emptiness is not a thing. It understands that saying something is empty is not like saying it is green or purple. Emptiness/empty is a tool for overthrowing our conceptual thinking, so trying to understand it conceptually isn't very helpful. Sometimes we say “no self nature” to explain emptiness. But Sanskrit has two different words: *sunyata* for emptiness, and *anatman* for no self nature. They are not quite the same. Metaphors are more helpful. Zen Master Seung Sahn used the metaphor of cookie dough—everything comes from emptiness in the same way that you can make tree cookies and house cookies and soldier cookies and dog cookies out of the same cookie dough. Another metaphor comes from quantum physics: quarks and leptons and bosons continually flicker in and out of existence not only *in* space, but *of* space. That is, it is the nature of space to continually produce sub-atomic particles that instantaneously disappear, just as it is the nature of emptiness to produce the manifestations of form we see all around us—form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Both of these metaphors (cookie dough, space) of course fail because they still have some *thing*—cookie dough, space. Metaphors are helpful, but the only real way to really perceive emptiness is to practice hard. To *attain* emptiness. To carry it in our awareness like the air we breathe.

That's the Mahayana version of correct viewpoint: everything is empty.

In the Theravada version of correct viewpoint, everything is seen through the lens of impermanence. In the Mahayana version of correct viewpoint, everything is seen through the lens of emptiness.

But why have any lens at all? The sky doesn't say “I am impermanent” or “I am empty.” Your dog doesn't say that

either, or your shoes. Human beings like to make stuff up, so they say things like that, but it just gets in the way.

So we come to the Zen version of correct viewpoint: correct viewpoint is no viewpoint. No viewpoint means completely open. Completely open means don't know. Whatever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think is exactly what it is. You don't have to know anything about it in advance. In fact you *don't* know anything about it, or about anything else, and you never will. Your world doesn't need to be run through any filters, except of course the natural filters our bodies supply (for example, we can't see light waves that are too high or too low on the electromagnetic spectrum, and we can't hear sounds that are too high or too low).

A long time ago I was sitting a solo retreat and suddenly I felt I was possessed by a demon. Everywhere I looked, it wasn't me looking, it was the demon looking through my eyes. It was terrifying. I felt that if I woke up the next morning with the demon still inside me, I would have to check myself into a mental hospital (because that's how our culture deals with demons). But I kept up my retreat schedule—sitting, chanting, walking, bowing. And then, while doing walking meditation outside on my small porch, my view of the trees shifting as I walked past them, and I realized that nobody looks out through my eyes; the world comes in through my eyes. And the demon vanished.

This is correct viewpoint, right view. Letting the world in completely. No viewpoint. Only don't know.



## Right Resolve (a.k.a. Right Thought)

*Zen Master Hae Kwang (Stanley Lombardo)*

The noble eightfold path is traditionally divided into three parts, with steps one and two, right view and right resolve, paired together as the first group and termed *prajna* (wisdom). The next three steps—right speech, right action, and right livelihood—are grouped together as *sila* (morality). And the final three—right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi—are collectively referred to as *dhyana* (meditation). Instead of a straight-out series of steps that begins with right view and culminates in samadhi, the path as a whole can be regarded as a kind of loop trail, with wisdom growing out of meditation practice and leading to correct function in this world, and then continuing around in a deepening cycle. Or the eight steps can be regarded as eight practices that we should try to cultivate simultaneously. In either scenario our practice has no beginning and no end. When we look at the noble eightfold path in this way, the second step, understood as right resolve, is crucial to the whole system, because without a strong resolve nothing happens, there is

no impetus to begin or to continue along the path.

The second step, *samyak samkalpa* in the original Sanskrit (*samma samkappa* in Pali), is sometimes translated as right resolve and sometimes as right thought. The latter is how the early Chinese Buddhist translators rendered *samkalpa*, using two characters that each have the radical for heart-mind and mean “thinking” or “pondering.” The Chinese translation was probably made under the influence of Theravadan sources of interpretation. Examples of right thought from traditional Theravadan sources include wholesome thoughts, thoughts of nonattachment, thoughts of loving-kindness. Our thoughts influence our actions, the next three steps on the path, for better or worse; and keeping our thoughts pure prepares our minds for the meditation practice that constitutes the three steps after that. And, completing the cycle, our meditation practice fosters the wisdom that are steps one and two. So, given the overall structure of the noble eightfold path, there is good reason to translate *samyak samkalpa* as right thought.

But there is another tradition, Mahayana and the spirit of the bodhisattva ideal, which interprets *samyak samkalpa* as right intention, or right aspiration, or right resolve. This translation is justified from both a scholarly point of view and, more important, from the point of view of our practice. To see why, let’s first look at the Sanskrit word more closely, keeping in mind that in Sanskrit, as in most languages, a given word can come with a rather wide range of meanings depending on the context in which it is used.

The word *samyak*, an adjective applied to each of the eight steps, means “complete, perfect, correct, right.” *Samyak* also occurs in the Heart Sutra in the phrase “*samyak sambodhi*,” which can be translated as “perfect, complete enlightenment.” (For some reason this phrase is left in Sanskrit in both the Sino-Korean and English versions of the Kwan Um School of Zen’s Heart Sutra).

The *sam-* prefix in *samkalpa* is the same as in *samyak*. *Kalpa* here (no relation to the better known word *kalpa* meaning an eon) signifies an act, especially an act of the mind or, more commonly, the will. If *samkalpa* means “thinking” it is something like the English use of the word in expressions like “I think I will do this,” meaning “I’ve made up my mind to do this,” conveying a considered intention rather than dreaming up ideas or even thinking good thoughts. The prefix *sam-* adds an intensive force, so *samkalpa* means a strong mental or volitional act—not just an ordinary thought or a wish, but rather a firm commitment, a resolute decision.

And adding *samyak* to *samkalpa* strengthens its meaning even more. This is no ordinary thought or decision or resolution that we have in the second step of the noble eightfold path, but a complete (*samyak*) commitment (*samkalpa*) on the order of great vow. It is the “fierce determination, resolute practice” that is the literal transla-

tion of the Sino-Korean *yong maeng jong jin* (an intensive meditation retreat, sometimes poetically paraphrased as “to leap like a tiger while sitting”). It sums up the essential spirit of the four great vows, in which we pledge to reorient our lives on every level toward wisdom, compassion and bodhisattva action. And we find it in its simplest, most direct form in the very first sentence of the Temple Rules: “You must first make a firm decision to attain enlightenment and help this world.” This injunction contains the three major divisions of the noble eightfold path. The firm decision comes first.

This kind of intense, total commitment might at times seem difficult to the point of being overwhelming. Zen Master Ko Bong said, “You should practice as if your hair were on fire.” But unconditional resolve actually clears away a lot of obstructions, imagined and real, and creates a sense of freedom, a bright, liberating energy that can sustain us through any difficulty. When our mind is truly made up and we are all in, we naturally “only go straight” and “just do it” and “try, try, try for 10,000 years nonstop” as Zen Master Seung Sahn often put it. And this leads to a snowball effect, the energy mass getting larger and gaining momentum as it rolls down the path. It’s up to us to get the ball rolling. When we recite the four great vows first thing every morning that is just what we are doing.



## Right Speech

*Zen Master Bon Shim (Aleksandra Porter)*

Words do not have a fixed meaning. The meaning of words depend on the context: who is speaking and who is listening, the underlying tone. Let’s go back to the roots and remind ourselves what Buddha taught about right speech.

Buddha divides correct speech into four elements:

- Refraining from false speech
- Refraining from harmful talk
- Refraining from unkind, rude talk
- Refraining from gossip

### *Telling the truth*

One who is speaking the truth is dedicated to it, reliable, trustworthy, not deceiving other people. Such a person never consciously lies for self or others’ gain, or any other reason. He teaches his son, the young monk Rahula: “Rahula, do you see the remaining water in the bowl? This is the spiritual achievement of someone who deliberately lies.”

Pouring out the remaining water from the bowl, Buddha said, “In this way, the one who lies is erasing all of his spiritual achievements. Do you see now this empty



bowl? Like this bowl, the one who lies without feeling ashamed is just spiritually empty, without any moral ground.”

Then Buddha flipped the bowl upside down and said to Rahula, “Do you see this bowl now? In the same manner the one who lies flips his spiritual achievement upside down cannot grow.”

It is said that in training toward enlightenment one can break any vow except that of telling the truth.

The vow of correct speech (telling the truth) is simply about relying on what is real, not delusional, about relying on the truth gained by wisdom and not about fantasies that emerge from desires.

### ***Refraining from harmful talk***

Harmful talk is one of the most serious moral misbehaviors and it creates damaging karma, so it is extremely important to refrain from unkind, rude and sarcastic talk.

The opposite of harmful talk is speech that comes from a caring and compassionate mind. It elevates the spirit of connection and oneness. We ought to pay attention to how we speak and communicate with more patience for the weaknesses of others, keeping in mind our own imperfections and respecting different opinions and views.

### ***Refraining from gossip***

Gossip has the power to destroy relationships. It has the power to tear a community apart. Speaking idly may not cause harm. However, the habit of being thoughtless about speech can lead to indulging in gossip.

There is a story from Buddha’s time about this. It is in one of the oldest sutras, the Hemavata Sutra. In it, the deceitful minister Vassakara goes to the Vajji kingdom at the direction of King Ajatasattu, who wanted to overthrow the kingdom. There, Vassakara befriends the ruling Licchavi princes, whose strength was their harmony. After gaining their trust, he slowly broke their bonds of friendship. He did this by whispering harmless phrases into their ears, for example, “Have you taken your meal? What curry did you eat?”

When other princes saw this, they would ask what Vassakara whispered. Each prince told the truth about what Vassakara said. However, none of the other princes would believe it because it had no real meaning. Why would Vassakara whisper that? Each thought the others were lying. Eventually, they began to speak ill of each other and then to mistrust each other. When the harmony was broken, Ajatasattu was able to conquer the kingdom.

Our practice leads us to speak what is appropriate and beneficial. This natural harmony arises from sincere practice. Then it’s possible to perceive our own mind and then see others’ minds. Strong practice supports clear vision and guides clear speech.



## **Right Action**

*Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila Malinowska)*

### ***Can you take a day off from correct action?***

Ultimately, a Zen practitioner cannot take a day off, a minute off or even a second off from right action, but practically, if she were to take a day off, then her job would be to perceive this and return to the correct moment, which means being present 100 percent and facing in the right direction.

What is correct action? Correct action is about being in the moment correctly. It’s about keeping a correct situation, a correct relationship and a correct function. It is not an easy task to do this 24/7. Usually, the human mind goes somewhere. We are often not aware of this, and by starting meditation we become able to see our mind and how it works. It is hard and intensive work to bring the mind to the present moment again and again.

### ***Inside work and outside work***

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to talk about inside work and outside work. Inside work or action means keeping a clear mind and being present; outside work means helping others. That was his style. By connecting inside and outside a human can become one. Zen Master Seung



*Photo: Nick Gershberg*

Sahn usually expressed that as a big “Boom!” or “Aha!”

Correct action is relatively easy in the Zen center during a retreat. We know the schedule and we learn the routine quickly. At 5 a.m. we do bowing, then chanting, then meditation, then breakfast, work and so on until late evening. Then we go to sleep, and every day is the same. It is so easy that the only work is to follow the schedule, no matter what. The Zen practitioner has the support of people—Zen center staff and the other retreatants—who help her to follow the schedule and the rules correctly.

Can we do the same in our daily life? I am sure we can. Does that mean that we can organize our whole life the same way as we do during YMJJ? I think, again—yes, we can make a “YMJJ life.” It comes slowly but is followed by an increase in discipline, and we can be clear from moment to moment in all our relationships and situations.

### *Don't make anything*

Making something and following that kind of idea only causes trouble for us. We have an example in the Sixth Patriarch, who was almost killed by a monk-general who wanted power and who desired to be a Zen patriarch. In response to the threat to his life, the Sixth Patriarch said to the jealous general who was following him, “Don't make good and bad.” His teaching helped this man to wake up. The Sixth Patriarch also used a kind of magic just before his main teaching, so the man could let go of his feelings of envy, one of the strongest human hindrances. It was very special. Sometimes doing special things is necessary not only to preserve our lives but also to help people let go of troubling and extremely strong feelings and desires so that they can become clear, open, nonjudgmental and free as a human being.

What was the Sixth Patriarch's special magic? When the monk-general had almost caught up to him, the Sixth Patriarch put the robe and bowl (symbols of transmission) on a rock and hid behind a tree. Then he said, “This robe is nothing but a symbol. What is the use of taking it by force?” When the monk-general tried to pick up the bowl, he could not move it and broke out in a sweat, then finally humbly asked for the teaching.

Where was the magic? In his words? In the bowl? In the rock? In the monk-general's mind? How did it work?

How did the Sixth Patriarch know what to do and what to say? Correct action means not making anything, just doing, or *gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*. What does that actually mean? It means being in the moment completely, 100 percent, and recognizing our correct job, our correct relationship to the situation. Sometimes it means taking quick action, sometimes words, sometimes silence. Some people call it being completely one within, and others call it enlightenment.

### *Appears by itself*

This is actually a very natural way of being and it appears by itself. This is sometimes vividly present in extreme or

traumatic situations. The person is not thinking but is just doing. Someone is about to fall under a train. You instinctively reach out to catch him. Afterward, though you may be surprised by how it happened, you may say to yourself, “It was just what I had to do—nothing special.” When the question of fear or strength appears, the helper says, “I am really not sure how that happened; it was just obvious; it just came out.” This is what all humans have had from the beginning of time. It comes from the core of our humanity, from deep compassion and a strong will to help without even caring about life in that very moment. But in our daily lives, we don't have to wait for a train. Just helping someone when they fall is already the functioning of our original mind.

### *It's just natural, so why is it difficult?*

So why, if this is so natural, do humans struggle to access that part, that bit of the self that knows what and where and how to do it? Some humans struggle more, some less, but the point is that someone is deeply satisfied and happy if he or she can act from this compassionate and wise part. It makes humans deeply satisfied because it gives a sense of being, a sense of life and a sense of death. A human is able to just do it.

A deep and sincere willingness to access this is the first step to doing so. People want to be fully human, and whatever they say or do, they all have this human question: What am I doing here in this world?

Correct action can be many different things, because circumstances are different. It is often obscured by different internal limitations and hindrances, desires or habits, or what is referred to in psychology as the external locus of evaluation, such as family, tradition, culture, religion or political groups. These can prevent us from seeing our circumstances clearly. People become confused if they are not able to develop an internal locus of evaluation, which sometimes means leaving tradition, family, country and religion and leaving very old patterns of life, letting go of desires and overcoming karma. After that, correct action based on great courage appears, even if the person sometimes risks his or her reputation, promotion, relationships, money, position or even life. It is stronger and more powerful than worldly things and values.

Sometimes, correct action means not being understood or being rejected or even killed. This is extreme, but we have many Zen stories confirming how the teacher's internal self was leading their action, even if it shocked society and was not understood. Their reasons became clear only in light of further events, and then everyone could understand why they acted as they did.

There is the example of a greedy monk, who charged large amounts of money for ceremonies but then saved the money and used it to buy medicine during a plague. Another monk took care of a young child after he was falsely accused of being in an illegal intimate relationship

with a young woman, who actually had the child with another man, out of wedlock. When accused, he merely said, “Is that so?” and took the baby. People scorned him. Later, when she finally admitted what had happened, he returned the child to her, saying only, “Is that so?” Then people praised him. But he was attached to neither praise nor scorn and only did what was right for the child.

This is not saying anything new, but when we look at it, it is amazing how it works. The kong-ans we work with come from such a way of being correctly in the moment and from not checking or judging either oneself or others. This is powerful and infinite and always accessible if someone knows how to operate this energy once he or she starts practicing.

### ***Right precepts path***

In the *Compass of Zen*, in the chapter on the Eightfold Path, Zen Master Seung Sahn says, “The Buddha had very clear teachings for how we could help this world with right action. This is sometimes called path of precepts.” He then goes on to say that whenever one is thinking, one makes karma—cause and effect—and we create a mental habit for that action: “Right action means always being aware of how our actions affect other beings, because that also affects our mind. This is why Right Action is sometimes translated as ‘right karma.’”

Sometimes, people manipulate precepts for their own purposes, telling others that they should use them but

not following them themselves. This is particularly true if someone has strong ambitions or desire for power or money, or is full of jealousy. This is especially dangerous in those who claim to be spiritual leaders. Because of their charisma, their followers may not experience this as abuse of power. Both leader and follower become blind. Even if there is a nagging internal sense that something is not right, they lose the ability to listen to it. When the truth eventually emerges, much damage has already been done. An extreme example is the Manson family. Another is the Jonestown community, where the spiritual teacher led many of his students to commit suicide the 1970s.

This kind of pride and self-deception operate in our own lives also, and we too become blind. Mouthing the precepts is easy. Following the precepts demands more.

### ***Difficult and simple***

Right action sometimes means undertaking a path that appears risky and difficult in order to follow the guidance of our own true nature. Surprisingly, this can create the shortest and simplest way. Zen Master Seung Sahn liked to tell a story about a clever dog called Clear Mary. She was a greyhound who ran in competitions to catch an electric rabbit going around a track. She suddenly understood that going around in circles chasing after a fake rabbit as the other dogs were doing was not the way to win. She stopped, looked around and then ran across the center of the track to catch the rabbit. She made her own brilliant shortcut and won.

Right action flows from not being attached to thinking and not being attached to habitual action. It means just perceive this moment, then only do it. That is possible for all, just as it was possible for Clear Mary.

### ***Correct action and kong-ans: learning to trust the true self***

Correct action means being in touch with our true self, acting from the true self. We refer to it as acting from primary point or before thinking.

Studying and practicing with kong-ans, I have found, is one of the most amazing techniques to learn how to act from our true self. We can discover correct action again and again and build trust in our true self. Doing this work, we find that we can bring a case into daily life to digest, and then finally to connect it with our own life. Life itself becomes our kong-an space, and we realize kong-ans aren't just puzzles or things we do merely routinely. One slowly develops an internal leader, a teacher in every moment of one's life.

As the true self becomes familiar with its own qualities, it finds the ability to pilot one's life. The true self then remains in a leading role by discovering how to keep don't-know—that is, a before-thinking mind. The individual becomes ready to respond to situations with open eyes and ears, from the very simple to the very complex, to complicated and challenging circumstances. As our life becomes our teacher, right action emerges by itself.



*Photo: Nick Gershberg*



## Right Livelihood

*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*

Since it involves an important part of our life, our job has an effect on the mental habits we create. Let's have a closer look at this.

Our ego is always screaming: I want this! I want that! It never stops and it is very convincing. If our mind is not clear, we follow those impulses—our karma—like mechanical puppies, and we become their slaves. It works like this. First I want something. Because of cause and effect, I get something, but I also get a good (or bad) feeling. Our attachment or aversion to this feeling fires off the next search for a good feeling. This never stops, because our wanting mind is never satisfied. And every time we don't get what we want, we suffer. That's how we program ourselves for a ride into the neverending cycle of samsara.

A few years ago I met somebody with a special professional experience that could only result in a specific mental habit: violence. He contacted me as a prisoner to get advice about Buddhist training. He used to be an elite soldier, often engaged in extremely dangerous situations in the hottest places on earth. He believed so strongly in the values that he was asked to protect that he was ready to die for them. He was truly convinced that every time he received an order to do a special intervention, he helped many people to avoid a lot of suffering. He was ready to die any moment. Death was always so close to him that life and death became the same thing. He was not afraid

to die because somehow he was already dead. Indeed, the terrible side of his job was that, little by little, his compassion and empathy for others disappeared. Almost.

There was something that remained: the shadow of a doubt. Although he believed in the value of his job, often this question appeared: Is it correct what we are doing? Does it really make sense? This put a heavy weight on his heart. And when he went out with friends during his free time, he didn't feel any joy. He lived in a world of extreme violence, and he relied on violence to survive. When somebody would come to him and slap him on his shoulder to say hello, without thinking his first reaction would be to put this guy on the ground. Violence became second nature, difficult to take away.

One day a secret mission left some traces behind, and that's how he ended up in jail. Of course he was very, very angry for a long time. After all, he only did his job and felt betrayed to be left alone by his military hierarchy! So, his mind became dark as night. There was only hate and anger. Being outside of his familiar military environment, he started to suspect everybody. Whenever he met somebody, he saw an enemy. Now he understands that he suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, but at that time he felt more like an animal than a human being.

One day, an old priest told him, "You know, you cannot go on like that." He realized that was true and decided to change. Because he came from a Buddhist background, he contacted me to get advice and started his Zen training with a lot of energy. He doesn't know how many years he will still be in jail, so he concluded that the only useful thing for him to do is to practice hard, get rid of his heavy karma and try to attain enlightenment. For several years now he has done a thousand bows a day along with daily

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*Photo: Nick Gersberg*

sitting meditation. He has found a new job! And slowly, slowly he opened his heart and his eyes came back to life.

However, during meditation he realized that his whole life was only a big illusion. Although he built strong relationships with some friends, he could lose them any day. It happened several times that he was transferred to another prison without even being able to say goodbye. He has nothing and nobody to rely on. His whole life is like sand slipping through his fingers. So he had this idea: Everything is an illusion, and prison is an illusion too.

This gave him inspiration to practice stronger and attain freedom by breaking through the walls of his mind. However, after a while he found out that the more he tried to break out, the more solid the walls became around him. He could feel them physically pushing him down. The more he wanted to get rid of the chains of samsara, the stronger the underlying wheel of cause and effect was pulling him back. There is an interesting kong-an about this.

### *Pai Chang's Fox*

Pai Chang (720–814) was a Chinese Zen master during the Tang Dynasty. He received transmission from Matsu. His students included Huang Po and Lin Chi.

An old man said to Zen Master Pai Chang, “I am not really a human being. During the time of Mahakashyapa I was the master of this mountain. At that time somebody asked me: ‘Is an enlightened person subject to samsara, the wheel of cause and effect?’ I said, No. Because of that mistake I was reborn as a fox for 500 generations. Please, Master, give me a turning word to be free from my fox’s body.”

“Cause and effect are clear,” Pai Chang said. Upon hearing these words, the old man got enlightenment and said, “I am already liberated from my fox’s body, which can be found in the cave on the other side of the mountain. Would you please bury it as you would a dead monk?”

This kong-an is about trying to escape from samsara, our suffering world. But if I want to avoid suffering, this is already desire. In other words, saying that I step out of samsara, I actually step into it. Whatever position I take, inside samsara, outside samsara, dependent on it or not, I make two things: samsara and I. And when you have I, you have attachment and suffering. That was the reason why the ancient master of the mountain lost his human body. It seems to be a magic tale, but it is very close to our own life. It happens every time we blindly follow our karma and make I-my-me, creating ignorance, desire and anger, and losing our love, compassion and humanity.

Being born a fox is very dangerous. Avoiding being born a fox is also very dangerous. If you are not born a fox, what will you do? If you are born a fox, what will

you do? Keeping a clear mind moment to moment, the matter is already resolved. The sky is blue, the grass is green, a dog is barking, woof! Woof! But if we are not careful, this just becomes another dream. We understand that Zen is a good idea and it becomes our lifestyle, following it as a prisoner in a golden Zen cage. So, be careful and don’t hold your ideas too strongly! That’s why Zen Master Kyong Ho said, “Always keep the mind that doesn’t know and you will soon attain enlightenment.” His student, Man Gong Sunim, understood what a great gift this teaching was. For the next three years, he did very hard training and always kept don’t-know mind. One day he heard the great bell ring and his mind exploded. He returned to Kyong Ho, bowed, and said, “Now I know why the bodhisattva faces away: because sugar is sweet and salt is salty.”

If you don’t know what this means, only try, try, try for 10,000 years nonstop—like Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say—attain enlightenment and save all beings from suffering. Not a bad job after all.



## **Right Effort: Direction + Try Mind = Enlightenment**

*Kathy Park JDPSN*

In the *Compass of Zen*, Zen Master Seung Sahn says, “Only try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop.”

We have the experience as a beginner in anything new that a concerted effort is made when we want to learn to do something for the first time. Then the newly learned thing becomes a habit and it becomes easier to do it. For those of us who practice Zen, we may experience that, although we have a habit of practicing after some time, it still doesn’t feel easier. The legs still hurt, the backache doesn’t go away, the breath is still shallow, and the mind still goes round and round in circles. Still, we keep trying for some time and the habit of practice becomes stronger. Then some good feeling can appear, our mind can be more still, more clear, and even if the body still hurts, we can experience it without too much attached negativity. This cycle keeps repeating as we continue, sometimes getting much easier, or at other times, even after many years of practice, we hit a brick wall, or some even quit.

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say that there are three kinds of Zen students. Low-class students are those who practice only when they suffer, middle-class students practice when they have a good situation, and high-class students are those who practice all the time, not attached to any condition. Correct effort in Zen has two aspects. The first is direction: What is the direction of our effort? Why do we practice? What do you want? A clear direction sets the path and becomes the fuel. The second is trying

mind. Trying mind is the mind that Zen Master Seung Sahn would say does not hesitate to “put energy into.” Having a clear direction gives us the power to work through one moment after the next, as we use our body, breath and mind to become clear. Our trying mind is the engine that develops the habit of repeating relentlessly and continues to not give up until the engine can run itself effortlessly.

When we don't have a clear direction why we practice it is more difficult to gather the energy to do it. Instead, our energy gets dispersed into other activities that eventually take away our motivation for practice. Having correct effort in our practice means waking up moment to moment, reminding ourselves of our direction by the act of doing the practice itself. As we return to our before-thinking mind in each moment, we repeat the habit of functioning from don't-know. The more we repeatedly return to the moment when body, breath and mind become one, the more quickly we become one with the universe. Sincerely doing it is already correct effort, correct direction and enlightenment. Then we get universal energy. That's what we call “Just do it.” That means when we walk, we just walk 100 percent. When we eat, just eat 100 percent. When we sit, we just sit 100 percent. It is a complete, fulfilled action, and because it has a clear direction it benefits all beings.

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Making correct effort in our practice means making the habit of practice stronger by doing it, but also seeing when it becomes routine, whether that's on or off the cushion. A clear habit is not necessarily a dead, routine activity. Making a strong effort does not mean practice hard to break yourself, but to put a sincere effort of attention into each moment to wake up. When you lose it, return immediately. Leave no gap. Consider each moment as the last because in our life there is only this moment. Put effort into just this moment—that's all. Then try again. Then practice is not routine no matter what is our activity. We don't fall asleep, and being clear and awake, already our true self is functioning with innate wisdom and compassion in whatever we do. Not only that, but we also become one with the universe, so even as we are on the wave of the ebbs and flows of the changing world, we can be in harmony with it.

Some years ago, a student began practicing at our Zen center. She was quite diligent about trying to do it in her daily life and had a strong beginner's mind. While at work, she would try to keep Kwan Seum Bosal when at her desk and she didn't have to talk, when taking a walk, or whatever she was doing. Sometimes in the midst of her day this question would appear, “What am I?” One day as she was driving back home from work there was heavy traffic and many cars were inching their way forward very slowly. Next to her car, a man was trying to push his car in front of her in a bullying manner. She quickly realized he was not going to give in, and right away, her own fight-

ing mind appeared—“I won't let you!”—and she inched ahead with her car, too, trying not to give him any room to butt into her lane. This kept going for a few minutes between them, and the man knew she was not going to give up too, which made him even more competitive. Although growingly frustrated with the traffic and this bullying man, she was trying to quietly keep Kwan Seum Bosal. At one moment as her car moved forward, she stepped on the brake and this question appeared in her mind: “What am I?” Then suddenly she looked to the side and saw the man in the car next to her staring back at her. When she saw his face, she smiled and gestured with her hand for him to go first. The man was shocked and did not know what to do for a few seconds. He just looked back at her a bit flustered, tried to ignore it, then a little abashed, and finally drove off ahead. The student was also surprised at herself because letting him go first was the kind of thing she would never have done before. She experienced being able to change her karma for the first time. This made her very happy.

When we keep our practice moment to moment and just try over and over and never let go, that is our trying mind. Having a great question—“What am I?” is our direction. As Zen Master Seung Sahn said, correct direction + try mind = enlightenment. He also said that getting enlightenment is easy, but keeping it is very difficult. So moment to moment, try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop. That is correct effort.



*Photo: Nick Gersberg*



## Right Mindfulness

Zen Master Dae Kwan

In Hong Kong we have a retreat center, Gak Su Temple, which is situated on the beautiful Lantau Island in a historic area called Luk Wu (Deer Pond). Luk Wu has a practicing history of more than 130 years, and many great Chinese monks have practiced and gotten enlightenment here. The well-known Chinese monk, Ven. Xu Yun (Empty Cloud), once led a retreat in this area.

This past winter we held a three-month Kyol Che retreat in Gak Su Temple. One day during the formal meal, I heard some chanting from a nearby temple. As soon as I heard the chanting, I got a headache. When this strong headache appeared, some past experiences with this temple also appeared in my mind. At that time I asked myself a few questions: Why do you let this sound of the chanting control you? Why do you give power to this chanting? What is this? As soon as I asked these questions, the headache disappeared. I was able to come back to this moment and continue the formal meal, and at the same time listen to the sound of the chanting as it came without any emotions!

Right mindfulness in Chinese is 正念. The first part, 正, means “right” and the second, 念, means “mindfulness.” The second character is itself made up of two characters: 今 means “now” or “present.” And 心 means “mind” or “heart.” So right mindfulness means how to correctly pay attention to this moment!

Zen practice is not only focused on our experience with the body and the mind; it is also about how we keep a clear mind, wide like space, and how we use this clear mind like the tip of a needle, moment to moment. This is similar to sewing. If one makes a small mistake when sewing a straight line, the entire garment would not be correct. It is the same with our practice. When one has right mindfulness, one will not be deluded or chase after what is appearing and disappearing in front of us.

So keeping big questions—such as “What am I?” or “What is this? Only don’t know . . .”—without any labeling will help us return to who we really are and not who we think we are! You can try this when you have a headache or any emotions or thinking. Then this mind by itself will be able to pay attention to what you are doing right now without any hindrance, without making pure or not pure, happy or sad, indulgence or rejection. This is how we use right mindfulness to sew our mind. This is the Zen path of not repeating the habit of our karma. We can follow and act, moment to moment, according to correct situation, correct relationship and correct function.

One of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings that can help us attain don’t know, or a clear mind, is before-thinking. Don’t-know mind is a direct and powerful tool that opens up the inner treasures of the eightfold path in order to help ourselves and this suffering world!



## Right Meditation

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

Lord Buddha taught that there are two ways to meditate: like a dog or like a lion. If you throw a stick at a dog, he will chase after the stick; but if you throw a stick at a lion, the lion will chase after you. You can throw as many sticks as you like at a dog, but at a lion, only one.

—*Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*

There are many kinds of meditation, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. For example, lately “mindfulness meditation” is a buzzword. From Silicon Valley to inner-city elementary schools, everyone tries to become more mindful. Definitely there is a benefit to being mindful of the present moment, but is it the right meditation for you? Is that what you want?

Before we choose to practice some form of meditation, it is good to ask ourselves three questions: Why? What? and How?

### Why?

“Why?” is the most important question, a real time saver. Why do I want to meditate? Meditation takes time, so it’s better not to waste time on something that won’t give us the result we are looking for. The results depend entirely on our motivation. Different motivations create different results.

### What?

When the “why?” is clear the next step is to match our aspirations with the method. What meditation do I need to practice to achieve that result?

If you want to become more calm and feel better in this lifetime, simple mindfulness meditation will do. However, this is not a Buddhist meditation.

Buddhist meditation is not separated from the Buddhist view. Buddha taught that correct meditation is the most important thing you can do to attain liberation. In Buddhism we have three vehicles, which culminate in three results. We can aspire to become an arhat, a bodhisattva or a buddha. For each aspiration, a different kind of meditation needs to be practiced. If you want to become an arhat, meditation in the Theravada tradition is a good choice because it will enable you to remove the cause of rebirth in samsara. If you want to progress on the bodhisattva path, practicing meditation in the Mahayana tradition will enhance your ability to help beings. You cannot become a bodhisattva if you practice in the Theravada tradition, nor can you become an arhat if you practice in the Mahayana tradition. Both traditions offer gradual progress, through the four stages to become an arhat, and through the ten stages to become

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Americas: Carol Bordeau • [wwsf2017@gmail.com](mailto:wwsf2017@gmail.com)

Europe: Barbara Pardo • [wwsf2017.europe@gmail.com](mailto:wwsf2017.europe@gmail.com)

Asia: Myong An Sunim JDPSN • [wwsf2017.asia@gmail.com](mailto:wwsf2017.asia@gmail.com)



A wooden Buddha statue in a meditative pose, with its eyes closed and hands resting in its lap. The statue is set against a light background with a few orange and yellow tulips to the right. The entire image is framed by a red border.

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# Everything Becomes Buddha

Muchak JDPSN (Namhee Chon)

From a dharma talk given during the Summer Kyol Che at Warsaw Zen Center on September 3, 2008.

As you just heard, my name is Muchak. When I got five precepts, I received this name, which consists of *mu*, meaning “no”, and *chak*, meaning “attachment.” I was proud of my name. At that time I checked very much: I checked myself and I checked others. One teacher called me “Checking Woman.” Even still, I checked myself.

I’m not so much attached to money, and not so much attached to sleep, or sex, or fame. I checked myself, and thought, “I’ve got not so much attachment.” I thought I could give up everything, like this [*snaps fingers*]. And so I thought, this name is really good for me.

And then I went to Korea and met a very strong Buddhist woman. She asked me, “What is your Buddhist name?” I said “Muchak” and she immediately knew the meaning. Then she told me, “Your master must have reasons to give you this name.” I never thought of it from this viewpoint. So my ego got hurt.

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After a while I noticed my mistake. There was so much “I.” “I can do this, I know this, I can . . .” Everything I, I, I, so big. Even if we give away our life and the whole world, if we keep hold of our “I” then nothing happens.

Buddha said once that when we look closely, all the origins or roots of our suffering come from this “I.” We have something to protect, to be nourished, and to be praised. From that come the so-called five poisons: pride, jealousy, desire, hatred, ignorance.

But what is this “I”? Who am I? To find out what this is we come here together. Once during a summer retreat in America, in Providence, I sat and I got really lost in huge mountains of memories. You already know what it is like: you have lots of memories, and I saw lots of people whom I saw before, whom I loved, whom I hated, with whom I fought. Places I had been to, and wonderful experiences and bad experiences—all this stuff.

But somehow I could manage to come back to this moment where I was sitting. So I looked at the floor and suddenly a question appeared to me: “This person, this person in my memories, is it still me? Is it still me who loved this person and hated that person, who did this and that?” And I must say “No.” I was no longer this person. I could not say, “This is I, this is me.”

In this way I could see that this very person who asked this question, whether this person is me or not, soon this person will also not be me. So I somehow got into a panic. Then “What am I? Where is this I?” I was kind of desperate to look and find, to search . . . There was no answer.

Now on this day there was an interview. The teacher rang the bell and I went into the interview room. As soon as I bowed and took a seat, Zen Master Dae Kwang (then called Do An JDPSN) asked me “WHO ARE YOU!”

And all of a sudden I had to cry, I had to cry hard tears. There was no way to find out. After some time Dae Kwang Sunim told me “shhhh” and then said, “Listen!” And outside at that very moment a bird was singing. I was so happy! I was so sad and at that moment Dae Kwang told me, “Listen!” And then he said, “That’s all.”

The rest of that retreat I spent with hearing. Each and every sound I heard was wonderful. The wind, birds, doors banging constantly. There was only this sound, this wonderful sound . . . It’s not only hearing. When we are really stuck, when we don’t know, when we have this “Don’t Know” completely, then everything—whatever you hear, whatever you see, whatever you touch—everything becomes Buddha. Everything is like what it is. There is nothing to add, nothing to take away. Everything is OK.

So we sit. Many of you sat already the whole retreat, and some of us just for several weeks. We sit, looking, perceiving how the thoughts are coming, going, coming, going. This is actually all that we are doing. Our work during sitting time is to sit and watch as thoughts are coming and going. And don’t touch this; then the thought itself is Buddha.

There is no good thinking and bad thinking. There are thoughts. We don’t welcome them, but we don’t reject them. And so we sit, straight but relaxed. We just naturally—without manipulation, just relaxed—we watch. But the thinking, the sounds that we perceive are not that important. Our minds just reflect these things, but they come and go.

But one thing is important: we stay awake, aware of what is coming, what arises. And each thing we let go. This awakening from moment to moment is very important. In this way we can be master of our house. We don’t get controlled by others or by our mind.

So we don’t need to keep saying, “How may I help you”—all this is bullshit. This is only speech. If we, from moment to moment, stay awake, and be aware of what is coming, that is already a big help. So I hope we keep clear mind from moment to moment, save ourselves from suffering, and at the same time save others. Thank you. ♦

# Why Blame the Knife?

Jan Sendzimir

Once during my recent solo retreat I was hurrying between meditation sessions to finish preparing lunch. In my rush to cut up all the vegetables I cut the tip of my left thumb so deeply that it did not stop bleeding for a day. Amid all the pain and blood my mind scrambled for how to fix this mess, and the first answer was to never again use such sharp knives.

But with time it became clear that this was just another way to blame something else and run away from the real problem. Knives are not the problem. They may be very sharp, but they cut exactly where we direct them.

The razor edge of the knife points right at whoever is holding it—at the mind that crams things together, stumbling in a hurry while peering elsewhere (the future, the past).

Why do we not slow down and follow the knife edge right to this moment? Along that edge the vegetable opens, and so do I, as I perceive clearly how each moment is unique. One hundred cuts are not the same as one hundred and one. My thumb can tell you this. It certainly tells me. ♦

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## THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

(Continued from page 15)

a bodhisattva. Those practices take time and, according to scripture, may take many lifetimes. If you don't have time to go through the stages and instead believe that you can attain your true self, become Buddha and save all beings from suffering, then Zen meditation might be the best choice for you.

### How?

When “Why?” and “What?” become clear, the next step is to find out how to do it.

Whenever humans want to learn something, even basic life skills like walking, writing or eating, we need a teacher who will give us some instruction. Meditation is not different. We can't get results without the help from a qualified teacher. Receiving instruction might be the easiest part, but what if it was the wrong instruction or we misunderstood it? The only way to find out is to try it sincerely for some time. I've met many meditators who were complaining that they were not getting results in their practice. Either their motivation was not clear or they received unclear instructions, or instructions were clear but they didn't understand them, or they haven't created a habit of meditating regularly.

If you are reading this article the chances are that you are practicing Zen. The word *Zen* literally means meditation, and in Zen schools we sit meditation a lot. All the Zen schools teach how to have a correct sitting posture and how to breathe correctly. All of this is very important, but Zen is not a “body-sitting” method; it is rather a “mind-sitting” lifestyle.

In our school, Zen sitting means cutting off all attachment to thinking and returning to our before-thinking mind. “When walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, being silent, moving, being still—at all times, in all places, without interruption: ‘What am I? Don't know.’”

Don't-know is our unmoving self-nature, and when we return to don't-know everything becomes clear. Clarity means that our inherent wisdom starts functioning meticulously, “like the tip of a needle.”

As Sixth Patriarch said, “At the very moment when there is wisdom, then meditation exists in wisdom; at the very moment when there is meditation, then wisdom exists in meditation.” They are not two different things.

In the beginning of practice we tend to divide our time into “meditation” and “post-meditation.” It's easier to keep don't-know on the cushion than off the cushion, but our goal is to remove this division and practice “mind-sitting” all the time. If we keep don't-know while walking, that is walking meditation. If we can keep it while eating, that is eating meditation. If we can keep it while washing dishes, that is working meditation. The more we meditate, the more we can keep correct situation, correct relationship and correct function. We are no longer blind dogs but keen-eyed lions, just like Buddha.

One moment of being a keen-eyed lion is better than many lifetimes of being a blind dog. ♦

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# Book Review

## *Great Doubt: Practicing Zen in the World*

By Boshan, translated and introduced by Jeff Shore,

foreword by Brad Warner

Wisdom Publications, 2016

Review by Zen Master Bon Hae (Judy Roitman)

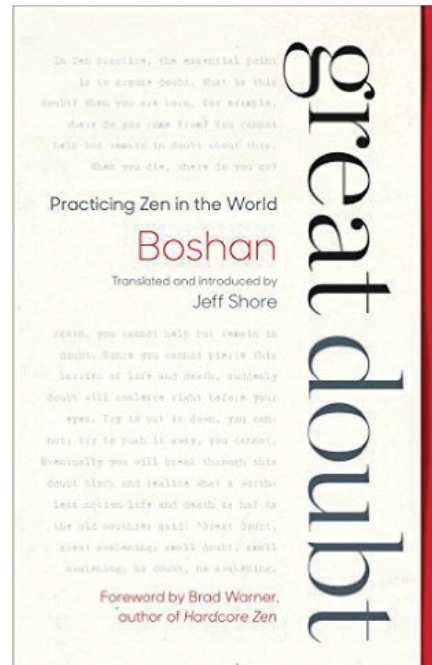
After the first flourishing in the Tang dynasty, the history of Chan/Soen/Zen goes something like this: uncompromising teachers arise but their inspiration dissipates over the generations until uncompromising teachers arise but their inspiration dissipates . . . Dogen in Japan, Hakuin in Japan, and Kyong Ho in Korea are perhaps the most famous examples of this phenomenon, but they were not alone. Toward the end of the Ming dynasty, Wuyi Yuanlai (1575–1630) was part of a similar reformation. Following custom, he was known by the name of the mountain on which he first taught: Bo Shan (Shan = mountain).

His translator, Jeff Shore, is a lay successor of the late Japanese Rinzai teacher Keido Fukushima Roshi. Shore lives in Japan and is a professor at Hanazono University in Kyoto, which is affiliated with the Rinzai school. He runs a worldwide organization of more than 30 Zen groups called Being Without Self. He has a number of other published books on Zen, and some of his writing and talks are available on his website as downloadable PDFs; a rough draft of this book is available in two parts at <http://terebess.hu/zen/boshan.html>.

The book at hand consists of two short, clearly related texts, *Exhortations for Those Who Don't Rouse Doubt* and *Exhortations for Those Who Rouse Doubt*, part of a compilation whose title can be translated as *The Chan Exhortations of Boshan*. This larger text was translated into both Japanese and Korean; Boshan's influence was widely felt.

Doubt is fundamental to Zen. The three essentials of Zen practice are great doubt (a.k.a. great question), great faith (a.k.a. great trust), and great courage (a.k.a. great effort). Traditionally, doubt plays two roles in Zen. In *hwaatou* (*hwadu* in Korean, a.k.a. great question) practice, it is the thing that grows and grows until it bursts and shatters everything. And it is the fundamental state of mind that is essential to living clearly in the world, that is, don't know mind.

Five hundred years before Boshan, the great master Ta Hui, who essentially founded the kong-an tradition, delineated what he called the ten sicknesses associated with practicing with kong-ans. In some sense these summarize everything that can go wrong with practice, and have been referred to ever since as a handy shorthand. Boshan delineates ten diseases for those who don't raise doubt, and ten diseases for those who do, thus both imitating Ta Hui and doubling the stakes. Each collection of *Exhorta-*



tions in this volume has ten short chapters, one for each disease. Each chapter is at most two pages long.

The text is formulaic. All of the chapters in *Exhortations for Those Who Don't Rouse Doubt* begin the same way: "If you're unable to rouse doubt when practicing Zen, you may . . ." [insert description of disease, e.g., "fall into self-indulgent and wild ways"] and continue "this is simply your wavering mind; it is not Zen." Then there's a further description of the symptoms of the disease, ending with either a suggested course of action ("find a true Dharma friend"), a warning (e.g., "you'll become as one demon-possessed"), or the fruit of a cure ("When your Dharma eye opens, you'll see . . .").

The chapters in *Exhortations for Those Who Rouse Doubt* all begin, "Rousing doubt when practicing Zen, one accords with dharmakaya. Then . . . [name fruit of practice here, e.g., "the whole world is radiant without the slightest hindrance"]." This is followed by an explicit or implicit but . . . For example, "the whole world is radiant, without the slightest hindrance"; *but* "then you try to take control and can't let it go." And so on. Following the description of each error, Boshan states, "Sick through and through, this is not Zen." He then gives instruction on what to do, ending each chapter with either motivating questions ("How can you foolishly hold on to your ignorance . . .?"), or warnings ("You're but a fraud scratching the surface . . ."), or encouragement ("I (Boshan) want to be a dharma friend to him!").

Boshan is deeply immersed in Chinese Buddhist literary culture. This can make his writing seem at times surreal:

(Continued on p. 22)

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(Continued from p. 20)

Simply and easily turn and be transformed from a single blade of grass into a ten-foot-tall golden buddha. Otherwise, it will be like trying to row a boat by hammering down the oars, or trying to catch fish up a tree.

But it isn't surreal. Boshan is referencing stories and texts that his reader would easily have recognized—like when we talk about leaping tall buildings in a single bound, or of someone or something turning into a pumpkin. Being a 21st-century American who isn't a scholar of Chinese Buddhism, I have no idea what Boshan's references are. There is a gap here that I'm not sure any translation can truly bridge.

Jeff Shore's commentary, about the same length as Boshan's short text, provides some context. Aside from more fully discussing the experience or concept of great doubt, Shore discusses influences on Boshan, later teachings similar to Boshan's, experiences of modern practitioners and teachers in the light of Boshan and so on. I would have liked a little more. For example, I learned from Jess Row that the image of a blade of grass transforming into various things is an idiom that would have been known at the time; Shore simply mentions a Chan master named Tiantong as a source. But someone with different tastes than mine might be grateful that Shore does not go into detail on Boshan's sources.

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I don't know if Boshan is speaking in Shore's voice (after all, Shore is the translator), or if Shore's commentary is staying close to Boshan's voice, but the commentary somehow does not quite seem contemporary. To give one

example: "Illumine that and the essential work is done. Then the single saucer lamp is quite enough . . . Don't just follow my words; confirm it in your bones." Shore's language is as tightly strung as Boshan's and at times seems to come from the same era.

Rather strangely, Boshan doesn't really talk about doubt past its formulaic mention at the beginning of each chapter. (Shore does say more about it.) Instead, Boshan is demolishing many more than 20 mistaken notions about Zen practice—each section may seem to hinge on one, but in fact brings up many others. Whatever you think Zen practice is: it isn't. Whatever method you think will get you there: it won't. Whatever fruit you think you will attain: forget about it. Boshan's text ends with the warning words, "In Zen there is no sickness worse than that." On the other hand, Shore's commentary ends with the welcoming words "But that, too, will be the Dharma in its fullness."

Shore has performed a valuable service to the English-speaking Zen community by translating this book. But I can't recommend it unreservedly. Because of its terseness and its many arcane references, it will seem opaque to many contemporary readers. Don't expect to read it quickly—while the combined text and commentary only take up 80 pages, those 80 pages are incredibly dense. But for those folks who get dharma energy from reading old texts (I know I do) and have the time to put into it, reading one small section at a time, allowing each chapter and its commentary to sink in before moving on to the next, it can be quite rewarding. ♦



Photo: Francis Lau

# Book Review

## ***What's Wrong with Mindfulness (And What Isn't): Zen Perspectives***

Edited by Robert Meikyo Rosenbaum and Barry Magid  
Wisdom Publications, 2016

Review by Arne Schaefer JDPSN

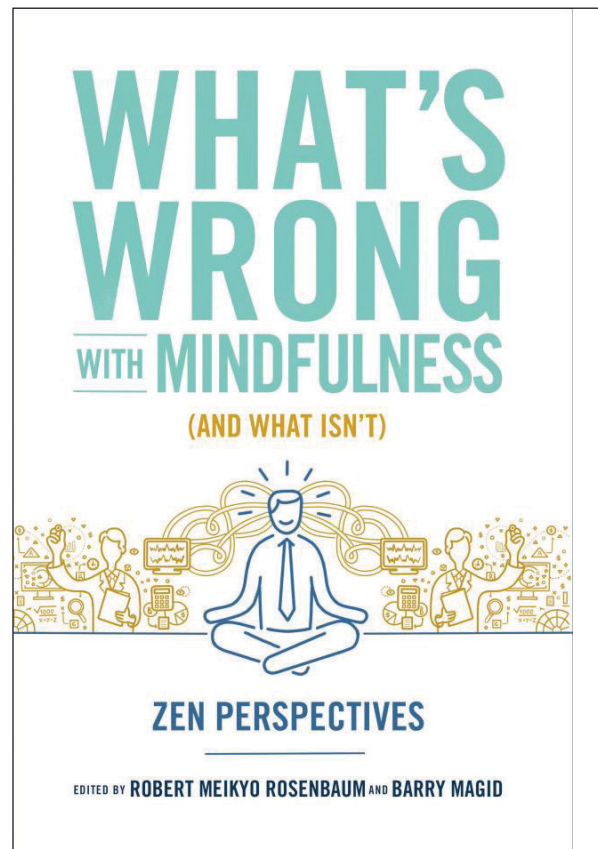
Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1970s, has become very popular. Scientific research supports its use of techniques and methods which, while derived from a Buddhist tradition, demand no religious commitment from practitioners. Not only do individuals benefit from the increasing offerings of MBSR techniques and instructors, but companies like Google are also looking to help their employees to find a better balance in life and be more effective in their jobs. Athletes are looking for more skills to be more successful in sports. Even the U.S. military<sup>1</sup> has used the skills of MBSR instructors to support their troops. But the moment you bring mindfulness into the context of killing, it is understandable to look at the question “What’s wrong and what isn’t about mindfulness?”

The term *mindfulness* is used in so many ways that it is difficult to distinguish between its original meaning and the way it is used now in the “marketplace in the West” (p. 2). The authors see a threat that the success of the mindfulness movement (they call it hype) in the market will obscure even the fundamental nature of Buddhism itself.

The book has two parts: “Critical Concerns” consists of six articles from five different authors and focuses more on facts and a scientific approach to the subject. “Creative Engagement: Zen Experiences with Mindfulness Practice” consists of another five articles by six authors and reflects a more personal approach to the topic. After the epilogue and a short coda the book offers 20 pages of notes and another 20 pages of index and some basic information about the authors and editors.

All the authors come from Zen traditions in the United States with Japanese roots. Some also have a profound training in Vipassana techniques, and some have a clinical background.

The subtitle, “Zen Perspectives,” clarifies the book’s point of view and scope. The strong attraction of mindfulness-based techniques today reminds us of the interest of the beat generation of the 1950s and the hippies in the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom were attracted to Zen. The implementation of Zen in the West had—and still has—its own difficulties and cultural misun-



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derstandings. Knowing about the pitfalls can help to see the problems of establishing mindfulness as a technique that fits anyone today.

Zen schools in the West haven’t flourished in the same way as approaches involving mindfulness, and so the critical parts of this book read as if the authors have some resentment. That was my impression about the first part of the book; I got a little tired by the critical analyses of Marc R. Poirier and Robert Meikyo Rosenbaum, and there were moments when I thought, “I will give back the job of writing this review.” Why isn’t mindfulness wonderful, I thought, if people get some insight from practicing it and report positive effects on their lives? Why should it be important to buy the whole package of Buddhism?

But wait a minute! What is “correct” practice? That is the subject and the value of this book, and there are some interesting aspects to look at more closely and from which to learn.

The two editors, Robert Meikyo Rosenbaum and Barry Magid, are both senior Zen practitioners with a clinical background. Rosenbaum is a neuropsychologist and psychotherapist, while Magid is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and a Zen teacher authorized by Joko Beck. They and the other contributors tell us to be aware that Zen in America has undergone a transformation with some difficulties and missteps, and thus are concerned the mindfulness movement could carry these sorts of problems to an extreme, since the techniques are “removed from its rich—and rigorous ascetic—Theravadin context” (p. 3). Nevertheless, there are well documented and tested benefits of mindfulness techniques, so the authors try to get the reader to see the risk that mindfulness could become just another program among the numberless ego-centered offerings in our consumer world. They encourage us to take a look at how the originally spiritual practice of mindfulness became a secular activity: Is one’s experience of mindfulness in a secular context still the same experience as the same experience in a religious context? Or is it something else? The equation of Buddhist practice = meditation = mindfulness = therapeutic practice (Robert Sharf, epilogue) should be questioned. Marc Poirier’s critical point is to differentiate between *practitioners* and *consumers*. A consumer is driven by desire and aversion (value-maximizing behavior), while a practitioner looks for transformation and uses more ritualized practices of attention such as meditation.

When I worked as a coach I had learned about a Buddhist approach that used the Buddhist concepts of karma and emptiness to get a deeper understanding of our conditions, but also our possibilities. I liked the work and met interesting people. But I could perceive that some of my clients just wanted a trick to help them become successful. Nothing is wrong with success, but it is definitely not the same as stopping want-



ing something—a core aspect of meditation practice. Poirier’s point makes sense: using practice as a goal-oriented technique for a business commitment to “enforce the model of gain from practice” (p. 24) has different results than using a technique for the practice of non-pursuing, as it is taught on the Zen path, expressed in the aspect of emptiness of the Mahayana traditions and explicitly stated in the Heart Sutra (no path, no wisdom, no attainment, and so on). Liberation has a very different point from goal-oriented techniques. It means to let go of everything, even our ideas of “meditation” and “mindfulness.”

Buddhism has undergone a transformation in the



West from a monastic sangha to a lay sangha. That is why for the two authors Barry Magid and Marc Poirier it is necessary to make another differentiation between a secular practice as seen in the mindfulness approach—a practice compatible with scientific, psychological and philosophical theories and practices not committed to any religious practice—versus a lay practice that is the extension of the Buddhist teaching to laypeople beyond the traditional renunciant monastic sangha.

Both differentiations (consumer versus practitioner, lay versus secular) are interesting, and in our modern times, when acquiring things has become our society's religion, this pattern of turning anything into a form of consumption will also happen to other practices like yoga or Zen. There is no guarantee that exactly these tendencies are not found in Zen practice or any other spiritual practices. This problem was well explained by Chögyam Trungpa in his book *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, in which he describes the mistakes that spiritual seekers commit by turning the pursuit of spirituality into an ego-building and confusion-creating endeavor based on the idea that ego development is counter to spiritual progress. So yes, we have to look closely at what “mindfulness” is about and with what intention it is taught—and this is true for any technique and practice, be it yoga, meditation, mindfulness or the art of archery. In his article “I Doesn't Mind” Robert Rosenbaum indicates this: “All practices are poison; they invoke the very problems they address” (p. 29 ff).

Rosenbaum also warns us of other pitfalls. For instance, even the word *mindfulness* is at risk of connoting that there is something like a “mind” or even a “wise mind” that can be achieved or accessed. Concerning the multitude of scientific studies focusing on the changes of the brain by practicing mindfulness, Rosenbaum declares mind would be “fast beyond measurement,” since it is more than the brain. “The mind relies on the brain, but . . . it also relies on and reflects the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys” (p. 58).

In part 2 I read Gil Fronsdal and Max Erdstein's article, “Creative Engagement,” with strong interest. Both authors have long practiced Vipassana intensively. Fronsdal was a Theravadin monk in Burma in 1985, and Erdstein is a Vipassana teacher trained by Fronsdal and who also practiced in Japan, Thailand and Burma. They look at the roots of the word *mindfulness* as we use it in the West today and show that it refers to the mind (Pali: *sati*). The Pali word *Vipassana* means “clear seeing” and refers to the results of practice: clearly seeing the nature of conditioned phenomena. The basis for practicing clear seeing is the knowing faculty of mind—*sati*—usually translated as mindfulness: “mindfulness meditation matures into vipassana” (p. 94). The

meditation instructions come from the Satipatthana Sutta, which teaches the key techniques for achieving mindfulness, that is, careful attention instead of the recollection of the Dharma. The practice of right mindfulness is essentially a wholesome quality of mind that is free from filters of greed, hate and delusion. Zen training imprints a certain way of presence with unconditional acceptance (nondiscriminating mind) and seeing the world as it is. Anything is practice, and everything that is happening can be fully experienced.

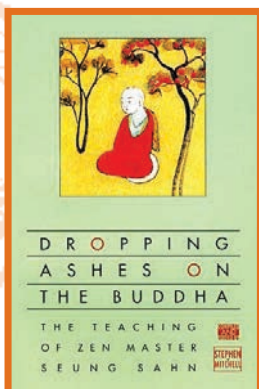
Erdstein and Fronsdal argue that *mindfulness* may not be a good match for how *sati* was used in the ancient Buddhist texts, so they decided to use *sati* in their discussion instead, mainly because *sati* actually refers to a result developed by techniques other than *sati* itself. *Sati* means simply to be present, so “awareness” would actually be a more appropriate translation. Thus *sati* had a different meaning than mindfulness, describing an active practice of directed attention—to be mindful of something or the practice of *sati*. The word mindfulness, on the other hand, corresponds better to the Pali word *sampajanna* (clear comprehension).

*What's Wrong with Mindfulness* is a compilation of interesting aspects of mindfulness and shows mindfulness techniques used in many different ways and offered by many different teachers. It certainly makes sense to continue to discuss and investigate the mindfulness trend and evaluate its positive and negative results. The authors do not doubt the results and effects of mindfulness practice, but they do doubt whether mindfulness is better than other meditation techniques or treatments. The attempt is to “throw some light on the ditches that line the path and offer a warning to tread slowly and carefully” (p. 52). In their coda Rosenbaum and Magid remind the reader that a major teaching of Buddhism is impermanence, and therefore integrating Buddhism (or meditation, be it mindfulness or Zen) into our current society is an ongoing experiment. An ongoing and open discussion of mindfulness will benefit not only representatives and teachers of the mindfulness movement, allowing them to offer better standards and quality in their work, but it will also help “established” Buddhist schools, leading them to important insights into how their paths and engagement can be fruitful and beneficial. In this sense the last line of the book ends with a blessing: “Whatever we may think about it, this is our practice. Practice is alive—which is beyond birth and death, beyond usefulness, beyond gain or loss. *Bodhi Svaha!*” ♦

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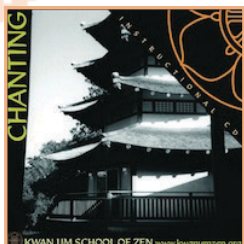
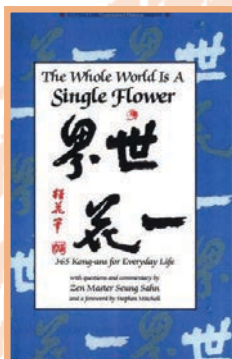
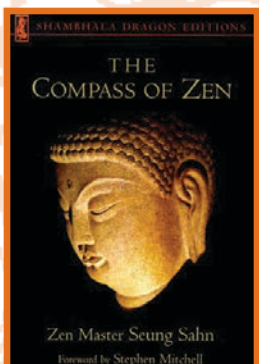
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 2200 Parker Street  
 Berkeley, CA 94704  
 510/845-8565  
[info@emptygatezen.com](mailto:info@emptygatezen.com)

### Connecticut

New Haven Zen Center  
 Mu Gak Sa  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 193 Mansfield Street  
 New Haven, CT 06511  
 203/787-0912  
[info@newhavenzen.org](mailto:info@newhavenzen.org)

### Delaware

Delaware Valley Zen Center  
*José Ramírez JDPSN*  
 P.O. Box 240  
 Newark, DE 19715  
 302/533-8819  
[dvzinfo@gmail.com](mailto:dvzinfo@gmail.com)

### Florida

Cypress Tree Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 647 McDonnell Drive  
 Tallahassee, FL 32310  
[ctzg@webdharma.com](mailto:ctzg@webdharma.com)

Gateless Gate Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 P.O. Box 12114  
 Gainesville, FL 32604  
 352/614-0512  
[gateless.gate.zen.center@gmail.com](mailto:gateless.gate.zen.center@gmail.com)

Orlando Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 515 S. Crystal Lake Drive  
 Orlando, FL 32803  
 407/897-3685  
[orlandozencenter@gmail.com](mailto:orlandozencenter@gmail.com)

South Florida Zen Group  
*Carlos Montero JDPSN*  
 7110 SW 182nd Way  
 Southwest Ranches, FL  
 33331  
 954/324-3925  
[southfloridazengroup@gmail.com](mailto:southfloridazengroup@gmail.com)

### Illinois

Dharma Flower Zen Center  
*Zen Master Hae Kwang*  
 861 Clay Street  
 Woodstock, IL 60098  
 815/236-2511  
[dharmaflowerzen@gmail.com](mailto:dharmaflowerzen@gmail.com)

Ten Directions Zen Community  
*Zen Master Soeng Hyang*  
 c/o Craig Coatney  
 1020 Ceder Avenue,  
 Suite 216  
 St. Charles, IL 60174  
[director@tendirectionszen.org](mailto:director@tendirectionszen.org)

### Indiana

Indianapolis Zen Center  
*Lincoln Rhodes JDPSN*  
 3703 North Washington  
 Blvd.  
 Indianapolis, IN 46205  
 317/921-9902  
[director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org)

### Kansas

Kansas Zen Center  
 Nam Pung Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 1423 New York Street  
 Lawrence, KS 66044  
[kansaszencenter@gmail.com](mailto:kansaszencenter@gmail.com)

Prairyerth Zen Center  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 c/o Rebecca Otte  
 8000 SW 23rd Street  
 Topeka, KS 66614  
 785/224-4678  
[prairyerthzen@gmail.com](mailto:prairyerthzen@gmail.com)

Tallgrass Zen Center  
 P.O. Box 304  
 Alma, KS 66401  
[tallgrasszen@yahoo.com](mailto:tallgrasszen@yahoo.com)

### Maine

Northern Light Zen Center  
 Buk Kwang Soen Won  
*Terry Cronin JDPSN*  
 202 Meadow Road  
 Topsham, ME 04086  
 207/729-6013  
[northernlightzencenter@gmail.com](mailto:northernlightzencenter@gmail.com)

### Massachusetts

Cambridge Zen Center  
 Dae Gak Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Yeon*  
 199 Auburn Street  
 Cambridge, MA 02139  
 Office 617/576-3229  
 Fax 617/576-3224  
[director@cambridgezen.com](mailto:director@cambridgezen.com)

Cape Cod Zen Center  
*Barry Briggs JDPSN*  
 169 North Main Street  
 South Yarmouth, MA 02664  
 508/760-1814  
[capecodzencenter@yahoo.com](mailto:capecodzencenter@yahoo.com)

Open Meadow Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Haeng*  
 212 Marrett Road  
 Lexington, MA 02421  
 781/512-2518  
[openmeadowzen@yahoo.com](mailto:openmeadowzen@yahoo.com)

### Mexico

Mexico City Zen Centre  
*Zen Master Bon Soeng*  
 Tajín #617-1  
 Colonia Narvarte  
 Mexico Distrito Federal  
 C.P. 03300, Mexico  
 +52 555 6051489  
[kwanumzendf@gmail.com](mailto:kwanumzendf@gmail.com)

### Nevada

Zen Center of Las Vegas  
 Dae Myong Sa  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 Chaiya Meditation  
 Monastery  
 7925 Virtue Court  
 Las Vegas, NV 89113  
 702/293-4222  
[zencenteroflasvegas@gmail.com](mailto:zencenteroflasvegas@gmail.com)

### New Mexico

Deming Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 200 South Nickel Street  
 Deming, NM 88030  
 575/545-7613  
[info@demingzen.org](mailto:info@demingzen.org)

### New York

Chogye International Zen Center  
 of New York  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 400 East 14th Street, Apt. 2E  
 New York, NY 10009  
 212/353-0461  
[info@chogyezencenter.org](mailto:info@chogyezencenter.org)

Three Jewels Binghamton  
 Zen Group  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 c/o Michael O'Sullivan  
 14 Wayman Drive  
 Otego, NY 13825  
[mklllo@stny.rr.com](mailto:mklllo@stny.rr.com)

Three Treasures Zen Center  
 of Oneonta  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 14 Wayman Drive  
 Otego, NY 13825  
 607/988-7966  
[abbot@thethreetreasures.org](mailto:abbot@thethreetreasures.org)

### Oklahoma

Red Earth Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 Windsong Innerspace  
 2201 NW I-44 Service Road  
 Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
 405/248-7480  
[contact@redearthzen.com](mailto:contact@redearthzen.com)

### Rhode Island

Providence Zen Center  
 Hong Poep Won  
 Head Temple, North America  
*Zen Master Bon Haeng*  
*Nancy Hedgpeith JDPSN*  
 99 Pound Road  
 Cumberland, RI 02864  
 401/658-1464  
[director@providencezen.org](mailto:director@providencezen.org)

### Washington

Ocean Light Zen Center  
 Hye Kwang Sa  
*Tim Lerch JDPSN*  
 9131 California Avenue SW  
 Seattle, WA 98116  
[info@oceanlightzen.org](mailto:info@oceanlightzen.org)

### Wisconsin

Great Lake Zen Center  
 Dae Ho Soen Won  
*Zen Master Dae Kwang*  
 1721 S. 81st St.  
 West Allis, WI 53214  
[info@glzc.org](mailto:info@glzc.org)  
 Isthmus Zen Community  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 1715 Hill Street, Room 170  
 Madison, WI 53705  
 608/212-8406  
[cbeyond@charter.net](mailto:cbeyond@charter.net)

## Asia

### Seung Sahn International Zen Center

Mu Sang Sa  
 Head Temple, Asia  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
*Hye Tong Sunim JDPS*  
 Chungnam Gyeryong-shi  
 Eomsa-myeon  
 Hyangjeoksan-gil 129  
 32816 South Korea  
 Office +82 42 841 6084  
 Fax +82 42 841 1202  
[info@musangsa.org](mailto:info@musangsa.org)

Haeng Won Zen Centre  
*Zen Master Dae Kwang*  
*Myong An Sunim JDPS*  
11A Persiaran Kelicap 3  
11900 Bayan Lepas  
Pulau Pinang  
Malaysia  
+60-10-3739886  
haengwonzc@gmail.com

Hoeh Beng Zen Center  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
*Chuan Wen Sunim JDPS*  
18-A Jalan Raja Bot  
50300 Kuala Lumpur,  
Malaysia  
+60 3292 9839  
Fax +60 3292 9925  
hoehbeng@hotmail.com

Kwan Um Seoul Zen Group  
Yolrin Zen Center  
*Andrzej Stec JDPSN*  
*Kathy Park JDPSN*  
Jongno-gu Suseong-dong  
51-1  
Dusan We've Pavilion 8FL  
#826  
03150 Seoul, South Korea  
+82 10 2031 8813  
info@kwanumseoul.org

Kwan Um Daejeon Zen Group  
*Andrzej Stec JDPSN*  
*Kathy Park JDPSN*  
Seo-gu Shingalma-ro 262  
Dae Op Bldg. 3FL  
35227 Daejeon, South Korea  
+82 10 2031 8813  
info@kwanumdajeon.org

Pengerang International  
Zen Center  
Kwan Yin Chan Lin  
*Gye Mun Sunim JDPS*  
Lot 109 Telok Ramunia  
81620 Pengerang Johor,  
Malaysia  
+60 7 826 4848  
kyclzen@singnet.com.sg

Singapore Zen Center  
Kwan Yin Chan Lin Meditation  
Center  
*Gye Mun Sunim JDPS*  
No. 21, Lorong 25 Geylang  
Singapore 388299  
+65 6392 0265  
Fax +65 6392 4256  
kyclzen@singnet.com.sg

Su Bong Zen Monastery  
Gak Su Temple International Zen  
Center  
*Zen Master Dae Kwan*  
32 Leighton Road  
5/F Starlight Hse  
Causeway Bay, Hong Kong,  
China  
+852 2891 9315  
Fax +852 2575 0093  
info@subong.org.hk

## Australia

Brisbane  
27 Bredden Street  
Chapel Hill  
Brisbane QLD 4069,  
Australia  
+61 407 821 081  
(Hae Kwang-Frank Storey)  
kwanumzen.oz@hotmail.com

Gold Coast 1  
23 Sundance Way  
Runaway Bay QLD 4210,  
Australia  
+61 402 289 923  
(Julie-Bup Wol)  
goldcoastzengroup@hotmail.  
com

Gold Coast 2  
(Retreat Centre)  
102 Bonogin Road  
Mudgeeraba QLD 4213,  
Gold Coast, Australia  
+61 402 289 923 (Julie-Bup  
Wol)  
+61 437 070 897 (Kathy  
Brackenridge-Bup Hwa)  
kwanumzen.oz@hotmail.com

Phoenix Zen Centre  
3C Albury Street,  
Deagon QLD 4017  
Queensland, Australia  
+61732697393  
daehaeng@gmail.com

## South Africa

Jung Shim Zen Group  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
P.O. Box 690  
Wilderness 6560  
Republic of South Africa  
+27 823 773 280 (Gerry)  
alreadyone@webmail.co.za

## Israel

Haifa Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Ofer Cohn  
Bikurim 50  
Haifa, Israel  
+972 53 4319816  
(Ofer Cohn)  
ofercohn@gmail.com

Hod Hasharon Zen Center  
*Yuval Gill JDPSN*  
c/o Rowena Gill  
16a Ha Tchelet Street  
Hod Hasharon,  
Israel 4526446  
+972 54 4831122 (Yuval Gil)  
hasharonzencenter@  
gmail.com

Pardes-Hanna-Karkur Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Boaz Franklin  
15 Beit El St.  
Pardes Hanna 33087, Israel  
+972 54 6522812 (Boaz  
Franklin)  
zen.pardeshanna@gmail.com

Tel Aviv Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Yael Bar Levy  
24A reines St, 2nd floor Apt 3  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
+972 50 4321501  
(Avichai Ornoy)  
+972 54 7289466  
(Yael Bar Levy)  
telavivzen@gmail.com

## Europe

**Austria**  
**Kwan Um School of Zen Vienna**  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*

Kwan Um Zen Schule Zen  
Zentrum  
Kolingasse 11/4  
1090 Wien, Austria  
+43 680 55 396 11  
(Knud Rosenmayr)  
info@kwanumzen.at

**Belgium**  
Brussels Zen Center  
*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*  
Rue de l'Oiselet. 16A  
1080 Molenbeek  
Brussels, Belgium  
+32 497 596 659  
(Koen Vermeulen)  
kwanumzenbe@gmail.com

**Czech Republic**  
Brno Zen Center  
Dae Gak Sa  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zenové centrum školy Kwan  
Um v Brně  
Výletní 7  
62300 Brno, Czech Republic  
+420 775 988 882 (Ondráš  
Přibyla)  
kwanumbrno@gmail.com

Liberec Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
Dr. Milady Horákové 1  
Liberec 46001, Czech  
Republic  
+420602756401  
(Jakub Kopecký)  
zen.liberec@gmail.com

Olomouc Zen Group  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zen group školy Kwan Um v  
Olomouci  
c/o Petr Klásek  
P. Bezručů 4  
783 35 Horka nad Moravou  
Czech Republic  
+420 603 449 959 (Petr  
Klásek)  
olomouc@kwanumzen.cz

**Prague Zen Group**  
**Soeng Kwang Sa**  
**Head Temple, Czech Republic**  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
Zen centrum školy Kwan Um  
Praha  
Kwan Um, Shambala center,  
Varsavska 13,  
Prague 2, 120 00, Czech  
Republic  
+420 728 836 211 (Vera  
Hrusova)  
praha@kwanumzen.cz

Vrážné Zen Center  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
c/o Vrážné Zen Center  
Vrážné 3  
Jevíčko 569 43, Czech  
Republic  
+420 608 169 042 (Jiří  
Hablbauer)  
abbot@vraznezen.org

Zlín Zen Group  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zen group Kwan Um ve  
Zlíně  
Lhotka 44  
763 02 Zlín  
Czech Republic  
+420 739 672 032 (Kamila  
Karlíková)  
krmila@email.cz

**France**  
**Paris Zen Center**  
*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*  
C/O Carine Nottin 1,  
allée Edouard Quincey  
94200 Ivry France  
+ 33 613 798 328  
(Eanjo Kim)  
contact@kwanumzen.net

**Germany**  
Bad Bramstedt Zen Group  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
Warnemünde-Ring 19  
245767 Bad Bramstedt,  
Germany  
+49 419 2306 8360  
(Uwe Schmidt)  
bad-bramstedt@  
kwanumzen.de

**Berlin Zen Center**  
**Chong Hye Sa**  
**European Head Temple**  
*Muchak JDPSN*  
Gottschedstraße 4  
Aufgang 5  
13357 Berlin, Germany  
+49 304 660 5090  
berlin@kwanumzen.de

Cologne (Köln) Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Michael Chung  
MAINDO Akademie  
Maarweg 141  
50825 Köln, Germany  
49 1777156558  
(Michael Chung)  
koeln@kwanumzen.de

Dresden Zen Center  
Oh Sahn Sa  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
Rieser Strasse 32  
01127 Dresden, Germany  
+49 176 7008 2636 (Ronny  
Herzog)  
dresden@kwanumzen.de  
www.kwanumzen.de/dresden

Hamburg Zen Group  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
c/o Shambhala  
Meditationszentrum  
Hansastrasse 19  
20149 Hamburg  
Germany  
+49 (0) 179 466 2706 (Sung  
-Yon Lee)  
hamburg@kwanumzen.de

**Great Britain****London Zen Centre****Ja An Sa****Head Temple, Great Britain**

*Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila Malinowska)*  
Ilex House, Crouch Hill  
Holly Park  
London N4 4BY, Great Britain  
+44 207 502 6786  
+44 774 297 9050  
zen.london@hotmail.co.uk

The Peak Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Kubong-Sa  
High Tor Road  
Matlock DE4 3DG  
Great Britain  
+44 7400 028488 (Peter)  
jibul@kwanumzen.org.uk

**Hungary**

Budapest KUSZ Zen Group  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
+36 70 457 0486 (Tamás Mészáros)  
mesztamas@gmail.com

Szeged KUSZ Zen Group  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
+36 30 5864090  
(Kasza Péter)  
szongdzsin@vipmail.hu

**Latvia**

Jurmala Zen Group  
Kwan Ji Sa  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
c/o Tatjana Tračevska  
Raina Street, 83  
LV-2016, Jurmala, Latvia  
+371 29191137 (Tatjana Tračevska)  
kwanumzen@inbox.lv

**Lithuania**

Kaunas Zen Center  
Kam No Sa  
*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
c/o Tomas Stonis  
Verkiu 25c  
LT-44466 Kaunas, Lithuania  
+370 601 56350  
+370 698 29299  
108tomas@gmail.com

Šakiai Zen Center  
Son Kwang Sa  
*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
Šakiai KC, Nepriklausomybės  
717  
LT-71122 Šakiai, Lithuania  
+370 686 56392 (Vytautas Smirnovas)  
smirnovas.vytautas@gmail.com

**Vilnius Zen Center****Ko Bong Sa****Head Temple, Lithuania**

*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
Mokyklos 21A  
LT-08413 Vilnius, Lithuania  
+370 675 16008 (Modestas Kazlauskas)  
songji108@gmail.com

**Poland**

Gdańsk Zen Center  
*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
ul. Sztormowa 9,  
80-335 Gdańsk Żabianka,  
Poland  
tel. +48 507-587-532  
(Emilia)  
gdansk@zen.pl

Katowice Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
ul. Zagrody 22  
40-729 Katowice-Ligota,  
Poland  
+48 501 430 062 (Waldek)  
katowice@zen.pl

Kraków Zen Center  
Do Miong Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
ul. Stradomska 17/4  
31-068 Kraków; Poland  
+48 530 677 081 (Slawek)  
krakow@zen.pl

Łódź Zen Center  
*Igor Piniński JDPSN*  
Lodzki Osrodek Zen  
ul. Piotrkowska 93/14  
90-423 Łódź, Poland  
+48 509 241 097 (Alicja)  
lodz@zen.pl  
opole@zen.pl

Płock Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
ul. Antoninów 1  
09-520 Łąck, Poland  
+48 607 317 084 (Alicja Pelkowska)  
alap7@gazeta.pl

Rzeszów Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
c/o Artur Sikora  
ul. Korczaka 4/69  
35-114 Rzeszów, Poland  
+48 797 019 351  
(Artur)  
rzeszow@zen.pl

Toruń Zen Group  
*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
c/o Piotr Iwanicki  
ul. Prosta 28/5  
87-100 Toruń, Poland  
+48 609 696 060  
torunskagrupazen@gmail.com

**Wałbrzych Zen Group**

*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
ul. T. Chałubińskiego 17/2  
58-301 Wałbrzych, Poland  
+48 502308996 - Marek  
+48 511968917- Grażyna  
walbrzych@zen.pl

**Warsaw Zen Center**

**Wu Bong Sa**  
**Head Temple, Poland**  
*Zen Master Joeng Hye*  
ul. Małowiejska 22/24  
04-962 Warszawa-Falenica,  
Poland  
+48 (22) 872 05 52  
+48 537 84 54 87  
kwanum@zen.pl

Dharma Hall in City Center  
ul. Rzymska 29  
Saska Kępa, Warszawa,  
Poland

Wrocław Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
ul. Paulińska 4/8  
50-247 Wrocław, Poland  
+48 606 940 686 (Elżbieta)  
zen.wroclaw@gmail.com

**Russia****Saint Petersburg Zen Center**

**Dae Hwa Soen Won**  
**Head Temple, Russia**  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
The Buddhistic Temple in  
Saint Petersburg  
Kwan Um School of Zen  
Datsan Gunzechoinei  
Primorsky pr. 91  
197374 Saint Petersburg,  
Russia  
+7 (921) 373-95-35  
contact@kwanumzen.ru

Rostov Zen Group  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
c/o Leonid Kosmynin  
“Dromtonpa” Buddhist  
Dharma center.  
pr. Sokolova, 85,  
Rostov, Russia  
+7 904 504 2111  
(Leonid Kosmynin)  
poephaeng@gmail.com

Veliky Novgorod Zen Center  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
ulitsa Bolshaya Moskovskaya  
86, kv. 30  
Veliky Novgorod  
Russia 173000  
+79816016567 (Myong  
Gong Sunim)  
sunim@zendao.ru

**Slovakia****Bratislava Zen Center****Myo San Sa**

**Head Temple, Slovakia**  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
c/o Peter Košút,  
Hanulova 5  
841 01 Bratislava, Slovakia  
+421 905 368 368 (Lubor  
Košút)  
bratislava@kwanumzen.sk

Košice Zen Center  
Sin Dzong Sa  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
c/o Dušan Silváši  
Letná 43  
040 01 Košice, Slovakia  
+421 903 134 137  
(Dušan Silváši)  
kosice@kwanumzen.sk

**Spain**

Barcelona Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
Bori Centro Zen  
c/o Mauro Bianco  
c/Beates 8, 3º, 2ª  
08003 Barcelona, Spain  
+34 690 280 331 (Mauro Bianco)  
boricentrozen@hotmail.com

Bori Sa, Retreat Center  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
c/o: Bárbara Pardo  
Mas Puli, Sales de Llierca  
17853, Alta Garrotxa (Girona)  
+34 655 033 018 (Bárbara Pardo)  
+34 872 005 192 (Bárbara Pardo)  
boricentrozen@hotmail.com

**Palma Zen Center**  
**Head Temple, Spain**

*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
Centro Zen Palma  
Plaza Bisbe Berenguer  
de Palou nº 1, 1º, 2ª  
07003 Palma de Mallorca  
Illes Balears, Spain  
+34 686 382 210 (Tolo  
Cantarellas)  
palmacentrozen@gmail.com

**Prison Groups**

Arizona State Prison Florence  
East Unit  
Lowell Correctional Institution,  
Florida  
Lowell Annex, Florida  
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