

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Matt Keeler

Inka ceremony at Providence Zen Center, U.S.A., on April 2, 2017

DHARMA COMBAT

Question: So yesterday you and I were pondering, when we're not playing our instruments, are we still musicians? So my question for you as a Ji Do Poep Sa: Where is your instrument?

Keeler PSN: You already understand.

Q: Please tell me.

Keeler PSN: *[Drums on the floor.]*



Keeler PSN: Colin *[Colin Beavan aka No Impact Man]*, before you start, I have to say, I haven't seen you in some time, but I always think of you when I sit . . . on the toilet . . . and I take one sheet, or maybe two at the most, but usually it's like one sheet of toilet paper.

Question: Thank you for your teaching!

Keeler PSN: It's a really good thing, it helps to save paper, and it helps the environment.

Q: So, on a different subject. We've been dharma brothers for a long time. Also, a lot of our life paths have paralleled each other. We got married at the same time, we had children at the same time, and we got divorced at the same time.

Keeler PSN: And you tried to kill Eli on the sled . . .

Q: But I broke my ankle instead. So in a different context sometimes I'm asked to teach, and not in a Zen context. One time somebody said to me, "You're divorced. What right have you got to teach me when you can't even maintain a commitment to your own wife and to your own child?" And of course it hurt, but I had to think about that. I had to answer it for myself. So my question for you is, given all the messes that you have in your life—as I have in my life—what right do you have to teach the rest of us?

Keeler PSN: You already understand.

Q: But I'm asking you.

Keeler PSN: Elizabeth and I co-teach the family program at the Reading Meditation Center.

Q: And I'm so proud of you.



Keeler PSN: Hello, fellow math teacher.

Question: I have a math question.

Keeler PSN: Uh oh! I better back up a little bit.

Q: What's the radius of a point?

Keeler PSN: *[Hits the floor.]*

Q: *[Bows.]*

INKA SPEECH

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

Zen is everyday life, and everyday life is Zen.

Can you just do the laundry, and then fold the clothes?

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

But the Heart Sutra says no attainment with nothing to attain.

So, there's no Zen and no everyday life.

There's only— *[Listens to the silent room.]*

But if you attach to this nothing, how can you make a sandwich for somebody? How can you call your congressman?

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

Zen is Zen. And everyday life is everyday life.

So this before-thinking mind is already clear.

But why is there so much suffering in this world?

KATZ!

Outside the sun is shining. Thank you for coming today.

The first dharma talk I ever saw was at the Cambridge Zen Center, many years ago, and it was billed as a dharma talk by Zen Master Seung Sahn. And, as befitting our tradition, as soon as you walk in the door, you get hit, because

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Photo: Brenton Sheehan

you don't get what you came for since Zen Master Seung Sahn doesn't actually give the talk. A student gives the talk, then Zen Master Seung Sahn would answer questions. So, right away, it's a little bit of a hit. The student giving the talk looked to me like someone who had some experience but was pretty new. (I had been sitting for a little bit.) But although he was new he was a very good public speaker. My main impression of the talk that the student gave was this: Although I felt connected with Zen practice and I liked it a lot, my reaction to the talk was that it was too bad that I wouldn't be able to continue practicing there. If it was expected that new students had to give a dharma talk, there was no way in hell I was ever going to get up on stage and talk about Zen meditation in my pajamas.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said some interesting things. They were very simple but there was something about them that kind of caught your attention. They were things that were true. He said, "the wall is white," and he said, "when red comes, red." Red! "When people are hungry, give them some food." So those words point at this truth-mind, and it's not readily apparent when you first hear them, but over time some wider meaning starts to sink in.

As Zen Master Wu Kwang said previously, I lived at the Chogye International Zen Center for a few years, and I'd like to thank Zen Master Wu Kwang, my guiding teacher, for all the support and practice. And also I'd like to thank all the teachers up here. I've sat with everybody here at some point, and we're very fortunate to have so many dedicated practitioners. You know, when I look out into the audience, I see all these people I've sat with before, a number of them at Kyol Che. Thank you Carlos for the hits at Kyol Che. I was there for a week this winter and it was very helpful and I encourage everybody to try to go sit Kyol Che if you can. We have a situation now where Kwan Haeng Sunim and Kwan Jin Sunim really run a great ship up there, a really tight ship, but not too tight. It's a very good situation to practice in. Teachers come and go but those guys are doing a great job setting up a situation where you can go and practice for a week and you can really engage with your practice.

As Zen Master Wu Kwang was talking about before, I've spent a lot of time at Kyol Che, and it's one of the things that our school offers. To have this three-month retreat is something that I've found extremely valuable. It's life-changing to go, whether it's in the summer for three days or a week in the winter or whatever you can do. I encourage people to go if you can. So for as long as I lived at the Zen center, Zen Master Wu Kwang's retreat flyers had this phrase on them: "Zen is everyday life, and everyday life is Zen." So I was always a pretty good sitter, from being a musician, it was just like adding another thing, a regular thing to practice during the day, so it was never a problem for me to practice by myself or with a group of people. But the whole everyday life thing was a

little bit harder for me. It was harder to integrate the practice with everyday life. So the teaching that "Zen is your everyday life," it's a great starting point, it's something you can really hang your hat on. Then, over the years, it really starts to sink in that this is it. Things are already complete as they are, just doing the laundry is a complete experience. Just doing the dishes. Already, one by one, everything is complete.

So JoJu asked Nam Cheon, "What is the true way?" Nam Cheon said, "Everyday mind is the true way." JoJu said, "Should I keep it or not?" And Nam Cheon said, "If you try to keep it, you're already mistaken." JoJu said, "But if I don't try, how can I understand the true way?" Nam Cheon said, "The true way is not dependent on understanding or not understanding. Understanding is illusion. Not understanding is blankness. If you completely attain the true way of not thinking, it's like space, clear and void. So why do you make right and wrong?" With those words, JoJu had some kind of deep experience.

A story Zen Master Wu Kwang used to tell in one of his books was about a Japanese Zen master who used to go to a park with a student or two, and he'd practice his English by asking them, "What is this called?" So one day they were in the park, and the master said, "What do you call that black bird over there?" The student said, "Blackbird." The master says, "I can see it's a black bird, but what's the name of it?" The student said, "Blackbird." The master continued, "Yeah I can see it's a black bird, but what are you going to call it?" And the student says, "Blackbird, Roshi." "Oh! Blackbird!" "Yeah . . ."

So in the Zen tradition you have these phrases, and you have these kong-ans that mean something at one point, and then something turns around, something flips sometimes. You can have this kind of experience while you're washing the dishes; you can have this kind of experience while you're walking down the street. It is washing the dishes. It is walking down the street.

Zen Master Wu Kwang and I share some musical karma, and as I said before, I understood how to work at a craft, how to practice something and be able to improve the craft. So I was a little taken aback when Zen Master Wu Kwang would talk about what it means to have a practice. He would say, "Well, it's not like practicing a musical instrument. It's more like having a law practice or medical practice. It's a direction."

So whether you have that much work or not, it's your everyday life. You go to your office and you practice law or medicine. Some weeks you might not have as much work, but it's a long-term thing. We're playing the long game. If you slept in this morning, and you didn't practice, that's OK. Just own your posture, take a deep breath and bring

up this inquiry again: “What is this?” Maybe you didn’t practice yesterday either. That’s not good or bad. Maybe you didn’t practice last week; maybe you’ve been too busy and all last year something happened or maybe ten years went by. That happens. Somewhere, Zen Master Seung Sahn just started his practice again. Zen Master Su Bong, Zen Master Wu Bong, they all just started again and brought up this inquiry. Who is doing this?

Zen Master Wu Kwang told the story of Hui Neng yesterday, and I thought I would talk about the first part of the story. The second part, that he talked about, was very dramatic with the transmission, but his story is very interesting, and the whole idea of sudden enlightenment in the Zen school in large part hangs on this story. So Hui Neng lived in Beijing, China. Beijing is roughly 500–600 miles west of North Korea as the crow flies, in the northern part of China. Hui Neng’s father was a government official, and he lost his job and the family was banished to the south, to what is sometimes called Canton (Guangzhou), a little bit outside of Hong Kong, which is maybe 400–500 miles west of Taiwan. When I think of this story and I try to relate it to my life, I think, “Well, it’s kind of like if I lost my job and then I moved to the panhandle of Florida and joined a country band.” Maybe it’s not exactly analogous to that, but—actually it’s not that analogous to it in that there was a dramatic change in his life when his family is banished to the south. So then his dad dies and Hui Neng is left to take care of his mother by himself. The only thing he can do is chop wood and take it to sell in the marketplace. So one day Hui Neng has delivered his wood and he walks out of the shop and he hears a monk chanting the Diamond Sutra. When he hears the line, “Not attached to anything, thinking arises,” all of a sudden something flipped for him. When we talk about what it means to practice, we wouldn’t say that Hui Neng actually had a conscious Zen practice. But all day long, he was just involved in doing some action, really doing it, with this attitude of trying to help his mother, with this bodhisattva-action attitude. So your true self isn’t dependent on robes or a title or anything else. You already have it. Everybody already has it.

There’s another story I like to tell. It’s about the ugly duckling. The ugly duckling was a different color than the other ducks. The ugly duckling had a funny bill. He was bigger and kind of gangly. He moved funny. He just couldn’t make that quacking sound correctly, and he was teased by all the other ducks. But his mother did the right thing, she loved him and she just tried to take care of him as best she could. But eventually the ugly duckling was miserable and his mother was kind of getting sick and tired of him, too. The wolf had something to say, she had some helpful words. She said, “Well, why don’t you just get another community? Get another pack, maybe that will help you.” The owl said,

“You know what? Things will pass, it will be OK. Maybe if you just try to concentrate on your school studies a little bit more, you’ll be OK.” And then the rabbits had something to say, too. They said, “It’s probably your sex life.” Then one day, the ugly duckling is looking at the pond, just looking in this mirror and he sees himself reflected back and also, there is another ugly duckling next to him that is also reflected back. At that moment, something flips, and he realizes, “Oh. I’m not a duck. I’m actually a swan.” So he already has his perfect before-thinking self-nature. He already has it. But he didn’t realize it. Then, he looks inside, and something flips, and there it is. He already has it.

Keeping with the water fowl theme here, I’ve got one more thing to say. So there’s this duck that goes into a convenience store and he goes up to the cashier and the cashier says, “Hey, how’s it going, pal?” The duck says, “Oh, very good.” The cashier says, “What would you like?” The duck says, “I’d like a box of raisins.” The cashier says, “Sorry, we don’t have any raisins. Sorry, can’t sell them to you.” The duck says, “Thank you very much.” A few days later, the duck comes in, walks around a little bit, goes up to the front. The cashier says, “What’ll it be today, pal?” The duck says, “Well, you know, I’d really like some raisins.” The cashier says, “You know, you came in here the other day, I told you we don’t have any, I can’t sell them to you.” The duck says, “Thank you very much,” and walks out. He comes back a few days later, walks up to the cashier. The cashier goes, “What’ll it be today, pal?” The duck goes, “Well, you know, I’d really like some raisins.” The cashier says, “If you walk in here one more time and ask for a box of raisins, I’m going to nail your beak to the floor!” The ducks says, “Thank you very much,” and he walks out. A few days later, he comes back and he goes up to the cashier. The cashier says, “Yeah?” The duck goes, “Got any nails?” The cashier says, “No.” The duck says, “Well, I’d like a box of raisins.”

So I hope everybody can keep this inquiring mind, whatever your question is. Whether it’s “What am I?” or “What is God?” or whether you have a traditional kong-an that’s kind of taken you by the throat. I hope we can really keep this inquiry and everybody wake up together.

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

Thanks for listening. ◆

Matt has been practicing Zen for 29 years and lived at Cho-gye International Zen Center in New York City for 7 years. He received inka at Providence Zen Center on April 2, 2017 from Zen Master Wu Kwang. In addition to being the director of the family program at Redding Meditation Center in Redding, CT, Matt also teaches high school math. Previously he was a professional musician. Matt lives in Ridgefield, CT, where he is a single father with a 13-year-old son.