

When Did I Ever Betray Your Expectations?

Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)

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

Are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha the same or different? If you say the same, why do we have three different names? If you say different, how is the Zen view nondual?

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

No Buddha, Dharma or Sangha!

The Sixth Patriarch said “originally nothing” so where are we to find Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?

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

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha: Are they three or one?

KATZ!

Three gold Buddhas on the altar; in front many Sangha members who have come from far and near. Welcome!

Before we chanted Kwan Seum Bosal, we recited the threefold refuge in English and Korean. The threefold refuge says: We take refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma and refuge in the Sangha. The Sanskrit word *namah*, which we pronounce “namu,” following the Korean style, is sometimes translated as “we pay homage” or “we take refuge.”

My first teacher, Swami Satchidanada, would translate *namu* as “salutations.” In Asian countries, when you greet someone, you join your palms together in front of your heart and bow. Zen Master Seung Sahn translated this *namu* as “become one,” so to truly greet another or pay homage or take refuge is to become one with. Many newer Zen students are comfortable with taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma. After all, the Buddha is the ideal meditator who attains supreme enlightenment, the awake principle that we all possess, and the Dharma is the teaching. But to take refuge in the Sangha, the community, that idea is not so comfortable for many. The Buddha on the altar never moves, but the community is always changing, and relationships can present many challenges.

In Zen Master Seung Sahn’s book *The Compass of Zen*, he equates Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with three realms of human experience—emotional, intellectual and ethical. When we come into a Buddhist

temple and see the gold Buddha, if we are drawn to such things we might feel a sense of awe, and of course the gold Buddha symbolizes our radiant, luminous original mind energy. Or if we appreciate something in nature as an expression of Buddha nature, we feel something, *abb!*

Dharma is the teaching, which we might relate to through our intellect, such as studying the sutras, commentaries and Zen writings. But Dharma also means each phenomenon or mind moment. In the four great vows we recite, “The teachings are infinite, I vow to learn them all.” That means that if we are open, each and every event can serve as a teaching.

Sangha originally meant the community of monastics



Photo: Eduardo del Valle Pérez

who were the Buddha's disciples. But Buddha also had lay disciples, so they were also Sangha. Later Sangha came to mean the vast community of sentient and insentient beings and things that make up the interconnected universe that we inhabit. This is the Maha Sangha, the Great Sangha. Zen Master Seung Sahn connects Sangha with the ethical realm. At first this was a bit puzzling to me.

Once, years ago, my dharma brother Su Bong Sunim and a group of Western monks went to meet with Zen Master Seung Sahn in his room at Providence Zen Center. After they were seated, Su Bong Sunim asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "Zen Master, could you tell us what is a monk?" Zen Master Seung Sahn told them, "You look at him and you look at him. That is a monk!" We could say the same. If you want to understand Sangha, look at each other.

Sangha is the field where ethics are applied. Abstract principles like compassion, truth, justice and precepts are actualized within community and relationships. Sangha is the field of purification where we wake each other up and develop together action.

The two teachers I studied with both had examples of this using food as a metaphor. Swami Satchidananda said community is something like making fritters. First you chop up some vegetables and mix them with batter. Then you spoon small amounts of this into a pot of hot oil. At first, as the moisture comes out of the fritters, they make a lot of noise: *ZZaaaa*. But as they get cooked, they rise to the top and float easily on the oil. Dae Soen Sa Nim said that in Korea, if you want to clean a lot of potatoes you put them in a barrel filled with water and stir up the water with a churn or stick. As the water gets agitated, the potatoes hit against one another and the dirt gets dislodged. Then you take them out. Relationships are like that: There's a lot of bumping up against each other as small "I" gets challenged.

Here is a story of a Sangha of two with some supporting characters. Zen Master Chia Shan had a student who had been with him for a long time but felt that he wasn't progressing. The student decided that he would leave and go traveling to call on other masters. Wherever he went, he was not particularly impressed with the teaching, but when asked who his teacher was, they would always respond, "Oh! Chia Shan is a great and subtle teacher." Finally the student decided

to return to Chia Shan. When he got there, he said to Chia Shan, "Wherever I went, they would say 'Chia Shan is a great and subtle teacher.' Why did you not pass this on to me?" Chia Shan said; "What do you mean? When you cooked the rice, didn't I light the flame? And when you walked with the rice bucket, didn't I hold out my bowl? When did I ever betray your expectations?" Suddenly the student had a realization.

This is about giving and receiving, and actively and receptively opening to what is given. "Didn't I light the fire for you to cook the rice, and didn't I hold out my bowl to receive it?" This is the practice of refuge in the Sangha. Also he alludes to expectations. What kind of expectations do we hold that cloud the water? You could say that unrealistic or idealized expectations need to be disappointed for the real relationship to begin. Sangha is the hard-work miracle or the "ordinary miracle" where transformation occurs. This is where we find the best teacher and teaching.

Here is one more story alluding to the benefit of Sangha. A monk was going to do a ten-year solo retreat in a cave high up in the mountains. As he passed through the plain and foothills below the mountain he met a farmer who asked him where he was going. The monk told the farmer; the farmer wished him well in his pursuit, and the monk continued up to the mountain. Ten years passed. The monk finished his retreat, and as he came down, he met the same farmer. The farmer said, "I remember you, you went to practice alone in a cave for ten years. Let me ask you what did you attain?" The monk said, "I completely conquered anger." "Really!" said the farmer with a slight tone of disbelief. "Are you really sure you completely mastered anger?" "Oh yes," said the monk. After three or four times of the farmer questioning him with mounting disbelief, the monk shouted, "Listen, I completely mastered anger!"

It is not so difficult to master anger in a cave all alone in the mountains. Who or what is there to get angry with there? But in community, in relationship, that is where you develop tolerance, patience and so on.

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

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha come from here, but where does this come from?

It is midmorning in South Florida. The sky is blue and the sun is shining. ♦