

Wired for Enlightenment

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A student once asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “How do you do all this nonstop work of teaching, traveling, making Zen centers, and organizing the worldwide Kwan Um School of Zen?” Zen Master Seung Sahn replied, “I only make a hole so all my students can pass through.” For us on the Buddha path, we have the great privilege of being able to step through that hole, which our founding teacher had made his whole life’s mission to generously open up for us.

A few years ago, I was asked by Zen Master Soeng Hyang to initiate a proposal for the Kwan Um School of Zen to spread our teaching more widely through the internet. A slow learner and clunky when it comes to technology, I don’t have much administrative skill either. I’d much prefer doing something in the moment, be carefree, far from any job looking at the computer for long hours. If anyone had asked me to recommend someone for that job, I’d be the last person to name. However, Zen Master Soeng Hyang’s ask was not so much a request to do a job for the school as coming from a teacher’s encouragement. That really meant, “. . . you must do it!” We all check ourselves. Am I good enough? Can I really do it? Am I able to deliver? Or, how can I possibly get enlightenment? Can I really become Buddha?

As we practice for some time, we wake up. We also begin to recognize that we are fully capable of a singular purpose that we did not know was even possible: becoming Buddha and helping all beings be free of suffering. As the Buddha and all eminent teachers reveal to us, it becomes our vow. The moment that vow clicks in our entire being, we also connect to every other person’s very same

capacity for great love, great compassion, great wisdom, and great function. As the vow sets root deeply in our core, we are unstoppable. It becomes the source of our courage and delivers us to be what we really are. Full of energy, full of zeal, we keep going, and try, try, try nonstop. We give our life to it. We don’t care about reward or recognition. Enlightenment, no enlightenment, doesn’t matter. We just keep practicing and any job appears, the courage to just do it for others swells out of that well. There is no self. Just doing it makes us complete. No choice is freedom.

As many of us may experience by now, including myself, we prefer being on the cushion in the dharma room over being in front of a computer facing a flat Zoom screen. I long to sit together with dharma friends and breathe the same air in a retreat, and rub like potatoes to burn off our karma together, even if a while back, I may have complained about some of that potato rubbing. Nowadays, as much as solo practice is useful, at times it pains me not to have that precious together-action practice in silence in a dharma room with worn-out floors. Our current bad situation is the perfect situation to realize our own true nature and humbly have sincere gratitude for this don’t-know teaching and for our sangha.

Out of sheer necessity, more people from all over the globe are now entering the dharma gate via the internet. With each growing online participation, the practice is alive and well despite the circumstances. We are grateful for the opportunity that began with Zen Master Soeng Hyang’s request to develop the online sangha program three years ago, so that we could be of service when COVID-19 hit this year. Zen centers globally are adjusting quickly, providing activities both online and offline. There will be more challenges coming as our world is faced with new changes on all levels. As Zen practitioners, honing our skills to adapt and swiftly learn new ways to train and deliver on our bodhisattva vow is upon us now more than ever as we isolate, quarantine, keep social distancing, and face more uncertainty due to the pandemic, plus all the economic, political, and social changes in the days ahead. With a strong bodhisattva vow and diligent practice, nothing can stop us from being connected mind to mind and continuing to practice together as a sangha in whatever format we will need to adjust to in the future. Together, we keep that hole wide open, more inclusively, so that as many people as possible can enter into the path. Stay safe, and take care of your true self and all those around you. ♦

12]



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