

# Build a Better Robot

Won Il Sunim

Practice can foster an evolution of consciousness similar to the transformation from child to adult, where the primal urges are subdued by the will—a wisdom that only comes with experience. These human things are reflected in the teachings—for instance, the evolution from the early teachings of the Buddha through to the Mahayana. First he taught correct behavior, our orientation toward the path. Later he revealed that there is no self-nature, that everything is ultimately of the pure and clear dharmakaya. The revolution within the self is another paradigm. It's really the heart of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching: the movement from the small self to the true self. How to accomplish it? An old master summed it up quite well:

If you cannot abandon your life, just keep to where your doubt remains unbroken for a while: suddenly you'll consent to abandon your life, and then you'll be done.

—*Ta Hui, Swampland Flowers*

Abandoning your life is another topic for another day, but I should add that everything depends on it—and good luck. The trouble with reading these old masters is that their instructions can be fairly abstract. I know what he's getting at, because I've already been through this. If I'd heard this earlier on, I would have had the wrong idea, like trying to cut everything to become *pure*. Let me give you another metaphor. It takes a long time to develop into a mature adult. Like building a robot, it takes a lot of programming. What happens when we're more fully developed? For most of us, though all of the software is in place, we keep entering more and more code, redundant information, layers and layers of software, some of which is never utilized. The entity we constantly labor over—why do all of the work to develop a persona, an identity, and never put it to use? Why else but to give this wonderful machine, flawed as it is, to the One. Everything clicks into place. Your life becomes harmony.

At some point I “gave my consent.” It was in a moment of meditation where I finally threw in the towel. Not because of my poor meditation technique—it was everything, my whole life. I was just *done*. Suddenly I was able to meditate deeply: a permanent change. Though the conditions of my life were the same, my experience of reality was, and continues to be, inextricably altered. Instead of struggling against the weight of the world, life became a beautiful, enigmatic work of art: deep and complex—extraordinarily beautiful. It became something to marvel at and enjoy.

My emotions changed. All of them. Not the content, but the experience of them. With no tether, they played out in immeasurable arcs. I'd never thought about it this

way, but the path is nourishing and emotionally healthy. It can be. If there's no tether, no requirement that things resolve in a particular way, emotions aren't pulled by their own gravity back into a vicious cycle, but allowed to be felt and known, and released. Like light gradually merging back into the energy field, emotions reabsorb into the fabric of consciousness and return to the One. It's freedom from suffering by being fully alive. The difference is one of perspective.

A recent piece in the *Washington Post* had this headline: “Time to ditch ‘toxic positivity,’ experts say: ‘It's okay not to be okay’”:

“By far the most common [phrase] is ‘It's fine,’ ‘It will be fine,’” said Stephanie Preston, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. “You're stating that there really isn't a problem that needs to be addressed, period. You're kind of shutting out the possibility for further contemplation.”

To be honest, to demand honesty and clarity in your interaction with the world, is a requirement for knowing the self. Is this what Seong Am Eon referred to when he demanded that we never be deceived?

Mind reveals itself, the expression of the One through the medium of emotions—for these conditions and properties it appears thus. It is truth, expressed this way. Further, if there is no self to be affected, any emotion resolves to a deep, direct experience of mind. It sounds out the depths, leaving only an ecstatic vibration of energy.

When you're sitting in meditation you realize quite early on that there are two aspects to consciousness: the everyday mind and the observer. When the observer consciousness becomes really strong it can see beyond the wall of self—a crucial development on the path. This is the astounding thing: the observer is the true self—very easy to access, always present. The observer is a master of working with energy and taking care of the demands of human life. Allow it. Don't waste your energy worrying about the content. Ultimately in allowing it to function the way it was designed, you become, not a robot, but fully human. Then we say, white is white, black is black, the street today is crowded and hot. Marvelous!

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*Won Il Sunim has been involved with American Zen since the late 1980s. A resident of the Providence Zen Center for several years, he was also with Dharma Zen Center in Los Angeles and Taegosa Temple in the Mojave Desert before moving to Korea to become a Zen monk. He recently completed training at Baekdamsa Temple and is now a bhikkhu (monk) in the Chogye order.*