

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Dennis Duermeier

On December 5, 2020, Dennis Duermeier received inka in a virtual online ceremony.

DHARMA COMBAT

Tim Lerch JDPSN: We've known each other a very long time. We practiced together many years ago, and I always have fond memories of that. It seems that this dharma path is something of a long and winding road, and I think you might be a good example of that. As Bobby said, you got inka, then you stepped away, and now you've come back. I actually think that's wonderful—inspiring actually, to leave and come back. But it means it's a long and winding road. Explain to me how you've gotten here today with such a long and winding road.

Dennis Duermeier JDPSN: Through the back door.

Lerch PSN: I don't see a back door my friend.

Duermeier PSN: That's the problem with Zoom, but not enough?

Lerch PSN: Thank you Dennis.

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Question: So. The path might have been long and winding, but I was in the winding bit I think in Australia. Tell me, Diamond Sangha and Kwan Um: same or different?

Duermeier PSN: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

Duermeier PSN: Just now we are talking to each

other. Is that Diamond or is that Kwan Um?

Q: Thank you for your teaching.



Question: When you're teaching, what is the most important thing?

Duermeier PSN: How can I help you?

Q: Thank you.

INKA SPEECH

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

In this whole universe, nowhere is there such a thing as a teacher.

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

In every moment, your true teacher is right in front of you.

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

No teacher, true teacher . . . which one is correct?

KATZ!

If you pick and choose correct or incorrect, even Buddha cannot teach you.

A long time ago, I heard someone say that teachers are the fruit of the sangha. I thought that was pretty cool. Think of fruit—usually good to look at, maybe smells good, certainly tastes good. Maybe you think the fruit is the nicest, most useful part of a plant, even in some sense a culmination. I thought that when I heard the saying, and I probably thought teachers had the same relationship to a sangha. But that is a misunderstanding of a fruit's job and of a teacher's job and of fundamental relationships.

Without the blossom there is no fruit; without the branch, there is no blossom; without the stem or stalk, there is no branch; without the roots, there is no stem or stalk; without the seed, there are no roots—each one doing its own job. You cannot say any one job is more important. The job of fruit is to serve the plant, to give all



Photo: Ken Otte

of itself away, so that a seed might survive and the plant spread and flourish, all by natural process. Mysterious, but nothing special.

Similarly, the only way a teacher can appear is from within the nurturing web of relationships that we call a sangha. Teaching is only an iteration of the job we've all committed to, which comes from our clear direction, which is not for me. Again, nothing special. If a sangha thinks a teacher is special, that's a problem. If a teacher thinks teachers are special, that's a bigger problem. Be careful!

So we're all bound up in this together, and today we make this ceremony together. Sometimes, when we have a precepts ceremony, people who have already taken precepts will participate to reconfirm their precepts. So today, doing this together, we've all recommitted ourselves to our direction for the sake of this world.

I talked about a plant's job. In this world, all things know their job and just do it. Trees just grow up, up, up; water just flows down, down, down. Only human beings don't know their job. Because we have attachment thinking, we make I-my-me. Consequently, we live lives of fear, anxiety, and confusion. We create suffering for ourselves and all beings around us. Very little investigation is necessary to realize the truth of our situation.

One morning after practice many years ago, I sent a poem to Zen Master Seung Sahn:

*Outside, the spring rain falls,
Settling all dust.
How can daffodils bloom with no Dharma?*

Not long after, he wrote back and said:

*Dharma appears, then all flowers cannot bloom.
So don't make anything.
Don't touch flower's job, only find your job and do it.
Then flower is very happy.*

So we have to find our human job and just do it. How? Again, we make our direction clear: not for me. So simple and yet seemingly so difficult. An immediate conflict seems to arise. Because we make I-my-me, we love ourselves above all else. No teaching, no dharma, no teacher can resolve this conflict, this kong-an, for us. We have to look within ourselves in a sustained way, ten thousand years nonstop, to see the truth of our lives. Then, we make ours what had been an article of faith, that all beings partake of original nature but simply have not seen it. Then, living our correct situation, correct relationship, and correct function is possible. The name for that is the great bodhisattva way.

I sincerely thank all the uncountable teachers, both



Photo: Ken Otte

seen and unseen, who have helped me moment to moment throughout my life. My sincere hope is that this ceremony today helps us all to complete the great work of life and death and save all beings from suffering. Thank you.

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

Find your human-being job!

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

Just do it!

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

Finding your job, doing it, are they the same or different?

KATZ!

Flowers blooming on the altar, candles burning brightly. ♦

Dennis Duermeier JDPSN began practice with the Kansas Zen Center in 1981. He was involved in buying and renovating the first residential Zen center in Kansas, and later became its abbot. In 2000 he received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn. In 2004, for personal reasons, he left the Kwan Um School of Zen, and eventually spent several years living in Australia. In 2018, he returned to the United States and to the Kwan Um School. In 2020, under the guidance of Zen Master Bon Hae, his authorization to teach was reaffirmed. He has worked in a variety of building trades for most of his life, with later jobs in government service in both the United States and Australia, before retiring in 2018. He now lives at, and again serves as abbot of, the Kansas Zen Center.