

Primary Point



Volume 38 • Number 2 • Summer 2021



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Kwan Um School of Zen
99 Pound Rd
Cumberland, RI 02864-2726



2021 - 2022
Musangsa
Kyol Che

Summer Kyol Che* May 26, 2021 - August 22, 2021

Winter Kyol Che November 19, 2021 - February 15, 2022

*Kyol Che guidelines may be subject to change according to Covid19 regulations. For online teaching program updates: <https://www.musangsa.org> <https://www.facebook.com/musangsa/>
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Led by Zen Master Dae Bong, Guiding Zen Master
Hye Tong Sunim JDPS, Guiding Teacher
& Visiting Teachers from the Kwan Um School of Zen



Winter Kyol Che 2022



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Published by the Kwan Um School of Zen, a nonprofit religious corporation. The founder, Zen Master Seung Sahn, 78th Patriarch in the Korean Chogye order, was the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. In 1972, after teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, he founded the Kwan Um sangha, which today has affiliated groups around the world. He gave transmission to Zen Masters, and inka (teaching authority) to senior students called Ji Do Poep Sas (dharma masters).

The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 1,400 copies.

The views expressed in *Primary Point* are not necessarily those of this journal or the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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Cover: Kwan Seum Bosal at Su Dok Sa Temple, South Korea.
 By Allan Matthews.

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.

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Kwan Haeng Sunim

On December 13, 2020, Kwan Haeng Sunim received inka in a virtual online ceremony.

DHARMA COMBAT

Carlos Montero JDPSN: Hello Sunim, good afternoon. So good to see you. I also miss you a lot.

Kwan Haeng Sunim: Nice to see you. We enjoy your talks up here.

Montero PSN: You and I have sat a lot of retreats together, and in the last few years you've been head dharma teacher for Kyol Che when I would come as a guest teacher and teach for a week. I will never forget, one morning we were doing bows and I was keeping count, and at the number 107 you said last bow. And I was wondering, what happened to the 108th bow? What happened to it?

KHSN: You already understand.

Montero PSN: I'm asking you.

KHSN: Last bow!

Montero PSN: So what happened to it?

KHSN: Not enough?

Montero PSN: No, not today.

KHSN: Dog runs after the bone.

Montero PSN: All right, thank you my friend.



Terry Cronin JDPSN: Hello Sunim! It is so good to see you here. I have a question for you. You're a black man, I'm a Caucasian man. But we're both men. Where do we stand on the privilege pecking order in this country?

KHSN: You already understand.

Cronin PSN: Please teach me.

KHSN: We're sitting here talking together. Why are you making all these silly things?

Cronin PSN: [Laughing.] To test your mind, my friend. Thank you for teaching me.



Question: Thank you so much for becoming a teacher. I can't wait to have an interview with you.

KHSN: I'm looking forward to it!

Q: A while back you had a talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, and you shared with us how you found the path of Zen because you had a lot of anger and you were trying to do something with that anger. And your talk helped me a lot because I have a lot of anger. My question for you is, what is original anger?

KHSN: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

KHSN: Argh!

Q: [Laughing.] That's what I thought. Thank you.

INKA SPEECH

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

Black is white. White is black.

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

Not black, not white.

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

Black is black, white is white. What are you?

KATZ!

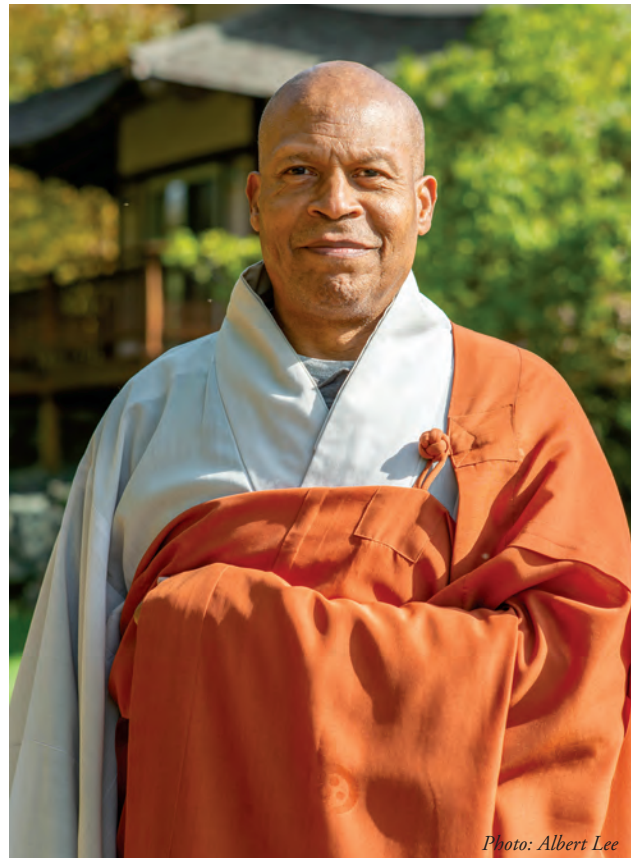


Photo: Albert Lee

We are all sitting here, and there are many colorful faces in the Zoom this evening.

Many years ago, Zen Master Hui Neng went to see Zen Master Hung Jen. When he went to see him, Hung Jen said to him, “Why do you come here?” And Hui Neng said, “I come here only to become a Buddha.” Hung Jen said to him, “But you’re a southerner, an aborigine, how can you become a Buddha?” And Hui Neng said, “In Buddha nature, is there a south or not?”

We have the four great vows, and I want to talk about the second great vow. “Delusions are endless; we vow to cut through them all.” Originally, this universe was empty. Then something appeared. What appeared is delusion. If we cut our attachment to this delusion, then life can be bliss. And so, Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is inside.” The Buddha said, “The Tathagata lives in the land of bliss, even while he’s still in his body.”

For myself, what I do practicing here at the Zen center is I go into the dharma room and I sit down, and I practice. Like all of us. Just back to this moment. I don’t plan to walk around in a blissful state, and no Buddhist actually does. And so what happens when I sit down and bring myself back to this moment, whatever I’m holding on to in that moment lets go.

And then of course my mind wanders and picks up all that stuff. And once again I bring myself back again to this moment. And again, my mind goes, I bring it back. In this process of just bringing myself back to this moment, a very simple process, just always have this beginner’s mind, because there’s nothing really to learn here but only persistence, try mind, and direction.

Any time when I do that and sit in the evening or in the morning, when I leave the Zen room my consciousness is always lighter. I’m holding on to less. Actually, there’s not a whole lot to say about that, because that’s what the practice is. You do that. And of course, when you do that, you have direction, because you understand, there is no I, my, and me. So why see only what I can do for myself? Instead, how can I help others?

Years ago, when I was an adolescent, I was diagnosed with PTSD, this stressful state. I was taking medicine at the time. Post-traumatic stress syndrome, I guess is what it is. And I took medicine at the time. I was actually quite sensitive to noise, and noise would bother me and annoy me a lot. But later on I started practicing, and you can imagine in the Zen room, while sitting, sometimes I would be quite annoyed and stressed with the noise going on around me.

One time I went to see Zen Master Seung Sahn. This was back in the 1980s, and he had come here for sangha weekend, and I had come up here to this room to see him. [*Kwan Haeng Sunim is giving this talk from Zen Master Seung Sahn’s room at the Providence Zen Center.—Ed.*]

I said “Zen Master Seung Sahn, you know when I’m

practicing in the dharma room with this certain particular teacher, his YMJJ retreats are always noisy! You’ve got to say something to this guy. I don’t know what’s going on there.”

And Zen Master Seung Sahn looked at me and said, “That noise is like alarm clock.”

He didn’t usually speak a lot to me when giving me teaching; he was just very clear, and that has been one of the best teachings in my life.

So what is this “That noise is like alarm clock?” Like alarm clocks waking me up. And it’s been a teaching, to the extent that I could attain that teaching, that has helped make my life easier.

The meaning of that is, when I’m sitting there, and there’s noise, I just listen to the noise. And after a while my mind goes away, and then maybe comes back. And I will just hear. And that noise and this moment are not different. That’s the process I learned.

This post-traumatic stress syndrome for me is far much less than it was. I won’t say it’s 100 percent gone, but it’s a whole lot less. It just takes looking at oneself and seeing who or what we are. How do we connect with the universe?

Before that I had no idea who I was and where my body ended and where society’s body began.

Having said that. This dharma talk kinda comes to an end.

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

Red is yellow, and yellow is red.

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

Not red, not yellow.

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

Yellow is yellow. Red is red.

Who are you?

KATZ!

I thank you for your support this evening. ◆

Kwan Haeng Sunim met Zen Master Seung Sahn at the Cambridge Zen Center in 1986. He ordained as a novice monk in 1998 at Chik Chi Sa Temple in South Korea, and in 2003 he received full bhikkhu (monastic) precepts at Tong Do Sa Temple, also in South Korea. He has lived and practiced mainly at Hwa Gye Sa and Mu Sang Sa temples in Korea, where he performed the jobs of housemaster, media director, and head monk. Kwan Haeng Sunim received inka in December 2020, and he currently teaches and practices at the Providence Zen Center, Rhode Island.

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Dyan Eagles

On December 13, 2020, Dyan Eagles received inka in a virtual online ceremony.

DHARMA COMBAT

Question: So last year we sat the first week of Kyol Che together, which was wonderful. But this year there's a pandemic and so we're not sure about Kyol Che. So where should we sit Kyol Che this year?

Dyan Eagles JDPSN: You already understand.

Question: So please teach me.

Eagles PSN: At your house!

Q: *[Laughing]* OK! Welcome! I'll see you then. Thank you very much.



Zen Master Bon Hae: I'm gonna start crying. Forty-four years ago when I started practicing, you were already a dharma teacher. And I remember you and Mark *[Zen Master Bon Haeng]* running around spritzing each other with plant spray in your dharma robes the first time I walked into Cambridge Zen Center. And you were so important to me in my own practice when I was in Cambridge and I'm so grateful to you. My question to you is, what took you so long?

Eagles PSN: *[Laughing.]* You already understand.



Photo: Barbara Gaskin

ZMBH: But I'm asking you.

Eagles PSN: Better late than never, Judy!

ZMBH: *[Laughing.]* All right!



Question: So Dyan, we had the distinct pleasure of sitting all of Kyol Che together last winter.

Eagles PSN: Yes.

Q: And you sat across from me. I was in the moktok seat, and if you remember, almost every night, we would do yoga together and inevitably Sunim would have us go like this. *[Mimics jumping up and down.]* And you and I would look at each other and do our best just not to start laughing—we'd have these big smiles on our face. I think you had to leave for the last week. Is that correct?

Eagles PSN: Yeah. Yeah I had to leave.

Q: Yeah. And you're gone, and so I'm doing this. *[Mimics jumping up and down again.]* But you weren't there and I missed you. I had no one to smile at. So my question is, at first I had someone to smile at and go like this with. *[Mimics jumping up and down.]* And then you were gone and I had no one to smile at. What does that mean?

Eagles PSN: Theran stand up for a minute.

Q: OK.

[Both Dyan and Theran stand up.]

Eagles PSN: Are you ready?

[They both start jumping up and down together and laughing.]

Eagles PSN: All right!

Q: Only that?

Eagles PSN: Not enough?

Q: Fifty percent.

Eagles PSN: Go drink tea.

Q: Thank you, Dyan.

DHARMA SPEECH

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the floor with the stick.]

An eminent teacher once said, "Better late than never."

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the floor with the stick.]

She also said, "Better never late!"

[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the floor with the stick.]

Late, never late: which one do you like?

KATZI!

Today is December 13, 2020 and we are gathered on Zoom for this inka ceremony.

Welcome everyone. I'm so happy that you could be here today on Zoom with me. First, I'd like to express my gratitude to everyone who has taught me and practiced with me for all these years, and it certainly has been many. I'm especially grateful to Zen Master Seung Sahn for his teaching and for showing me my direction in life. I so wish that Dae Soen Sa Nim could be here today. I think he would be very happy. He always wanted me to be a teacher. I met him when I was only twenty-two years old, and of all the people in my life, he's had the most profound influence.

I would also like to express special gratitude to Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Bobby), who's been like an older sister to me since the very beginning; Zen Master Bon Yeon (Jane), my guiding teacher; Zen Master Hae Kwang (Stanley); Zen Master Bon Shim (Ola); and Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard). I'm blessed to have you as good friends and teachers. And thank you to all the sangha, and especially my good practicing friends at the Cambridge Zen Center.

I'm very honored to accept this new job of Ji Do Poep Sa Nim. I'm looking forward to learning to be a teacher and to fulfilling my obligation to my own teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching boiled down to two things: find your true self, and then use your life to help all beings. He was a master at both, and an inspiration to me. He always said, "This life has no meaning, no reason, and no choice. So you! You must give it great meaning, great reason, and great choice." But how do we do that? For me, that's always been a big question. How do I use my life?

When I first lived at the Zen center, I drove a truck delivering Pepsi-Cola. I was Pepsi's first woman truck driver. My only claim to fame in this lifetime. I was an ardent feminist, and I loved my job. I loved having my own route, and I loved being in the union. I was very proud of myself. And I loved being living proof that a woman could do all these things that previously had been the sole domain of men. At that time, a woman might work in an office all week and only make \$125. Every week at Pepsi, I just punched the clock, and without selling a single case of soda, just showing up at work, I made \$400 a week. I loved that. In the wintertime when the business was slow, I would pull my truck over by the side of the road and I would read the Third Patriarch's famous poem, the *Hsin Hsin Ming* ("Faith in Mind"). I'm sure you know it. It goes "The great way is not difficult; only don't make likes and dislikes." I had a little booklet that I kept in my truck.

I was a young Zen student with a big truck and a big question. Then, one day, a group of us had to go somewhere. I think it was to New Haven Zen Center to make the *Perceive World Sound* chanting tape. I was sitting in the back seat with two other people, and Bobby was sitting up in the front, in the passenger's side. I was going on and on about how great my job was and all the money I was making, and just on and on. And suddenly Bobby turns around and she says to me, "Well, I don't see what's so great about selling poison to

people." I couldn't believe it! I couldn't believe that she said that. I was so mad at her. I was really mad. She burst my bubble.

But her remark penetrated my consciousness. I had never thought about my job that way before. I had only thought about my job in terms of how it benefitted me, what was so great about it for me. So, as the days went on, I started to feel like maybe I should do something else with my life. I still kept working at Pepsi, but it wasn't really the same anymore. Finally, one day they offered me a job in management, and I would have to travel around the country for my training. And I was just about to marry a local boy who worked in his family's business. So it seemed like a really good time to leave the company, and so I did.

Now I wasn't sure what to do next, so I decided to do a hundred-day retreat. Bobby was about to go off and do her first hundred-day retreat, and I wanted to do that too. I always tried to be like Bobby. She was my role model, and actually she still is. So, I asked Zen Master Seung Sahn if I could go, but he said no. It was too soon. But I begged him and finally he said OK, and he made a schedule for me and told me what to eat and not to be afraid if the demons came at night. And so off I went on my hundred-day retreat up in Maine.

But he was right. It was too soon. I was back in twenty-one days. I missed my boyfriend too much. My demon was a very cute one. His name was Mark Houghton, who is now Zen Master Bon Haeng. But while I was on the retreat, the idea for DharmaCrafts appeared. I thought to myself, "Yes! Finally! A good way to use my life! I will make a company, and it will support people's practice by making meditation cushions. It will serve as a vehicle for the propagation of the dharma by selling books and teaching materials. And finally, it would provide a venue for Buddhist artists to sell their work. What a great idea!" You could see it was too early. It was a "many-thinking" retreat.

So when I got home, I went to Chinatown in Boston with ten dollars. I bought some fabric, and I started DharmaCrafts in my bedroom at the Cambridge Zen Center. Now with DharmaCrafts, my Zen aspirations and my everyday life came closer together. But DharmaCrafts was still only my outside job. My body's job. It was mostly an idea—a good idea, but an idea, nonetheless. I still needed to find my inside job. What am I? What does it mean to be a human being? What is my true human being's job? How do I change no meaning to great meaning?

We are all so lucky to have our practice. We have an actual way to look inside and find our human nature and our true job. Zen Master Seung Sahn always said, "To practice correctly, we need two things: correct direction and try mind." Correct direction means wanting to understand our true self and help this world. Try mind means moment to moment, do it! Try! Other people can point us in the right direction, but only we ourselves can try. So it's important for everyone, all of us, to try. Then we can find our true way in this world

(Continued on p. 23)

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Rebecca Otte

On December 5, 2020, Rebecca Otte received inka in a virtual online ceremony.

DHARMA COMBAT

Paul Majchrzyk JDPSN: A lot of people here who don't know you don't realize that you're a midwife and you've brought into this world over fifteen hundred human beings. But Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say that human beings were "number one bad animal." So by bringing all these human beings into the world does that make you a saint or a demon?

Rebecca Otte JDPSN: *[Mimicking a baby crying.]*

Majchrzyk PSN: *[Laughing and bowing.]*



Jason Quinn JDPSN: This question is not, I would say, important, but it is a curious question I have been wondering. You've been in the school for a long time, right? You must have been asked a lot of questions over the years. What I'm curious about is what is the stupidest question someone has asked you?

Rebecca Otte JDPSN: The stupidest question anyone has ever asked me is what is the stupidest question anyone has ever asked me.

Otte PSN and Quinn PSN: *[Laughing.]*

Otte PSN: Thank you!

Quinn PSN: Thank you! I'm stupid.

Otte PSN: Not so much!



Question: When she was introducing you, Zen Master Soeng Hyang said we need to have this authentic listening. I don't understand, because our ears are always open. Even when our eyes are closed, our ears are open. Our heart is closed, but our ears are open. Our mind is closed, but our ears are open. Even when we sleep . . .

Otte PSN: I'm sorry. I can't hear you, Marshall.

Q: Shall I start again? Oh! *[Bows.]*

DHARMA SPEECH

The Compass of Zen tells us that great faith is an essential element in Zen.

Great faith is no faith. No faith is great faith.

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

No great faith. No "no faith."

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

Great faith is great faith. No faith is no faith.

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

What can you have faith in?

KATZ!

The sun is shining. The sky is blue.

I'm so grateful for each and every one of you. I also want to express my gratitude to Zen Master Ji Haeng and to all the members of my committee as well as all the teachers who have patiently taught me and supported me through the years of practice. This wonderful Zen practice, handed down to us through the millennia, really does change the world. So I want to encourage you to keep trying. No matter what, just do it. Even if you fail wholeheartedly, just keep trying.



Photo: Ken Otte

We have a Taoist kong-an in the *Whole World Is a Single Flower*:

*See the world as your self.
Have faith in the way things are.
Love the world as your self;
Then you can care for all things.*

Why is having faith in the way things are important to me?

Great faith means having faith in the way things are. It is easy to have faith when everything is going well, you are happy, you just passed your kong-an, or perhaps after a retreat when we all feel bonded to our fellow meditators and are showing our gratitude. But what about having faith in the way things are when you're doing the dishes? What about having faith in the way things are when your best friend dies or when you have a flat tire? What about having faith in the way things are when you've turned sixty-five and your knees don't work anymore?

The Buddha was right—everything has this quality of suffering, dukkha, this dissatisfaction with the way things are. How can we have faith in the midst of our suffering, the suffering of others, and the suffering of the planet?

There is a story about Dipa Ma and one of her attendants. They were on a plane that had hit some bad turbulence and the plane was jolting the passengers. During one particularly bad lurch, her attendant screamed. Dipa Ma reached across the aisle, took her hand, and very quietly said, "The daughters of the Buddha are fearless." I love that. The Heart Sutra says "the mind is no hindrance. Without any hindrance no fears exist." The daughters of Buddha are fearless. This is having faith in the way things are. Zen Master Seung Sahn said the most important thing you can do is to find the one pure and clear thing—that even if the world were to explode tomorrow, it couldn't touch the one pure and clear thing in the least bit. Dipa Ma knew in that moment that even if the plane were to crash, everything would be OK. Such equanimity, you know? Having faith in the way things are allows you to accept whatever comes before you without judgment and with tranquility.

One of our wonderful Zen stories is about a farmer whose horse has run away. The neighbors come and bemoan the fact that his only horse has run away. "What terrible misfortune!" The farmer says, "We'll see." The next day, the horse comes home with several wild horses in tow. The neighbors come to celebrate. "How wonderful! What good fortune!" The farmer says, "We'll see." The next day the farmer's son is trying to break one of the wild horses, the horse bucks him off, and his son breaks his leg. The neighbors say, "How unfortunate!" The farmer again says, "We'll see." The next day, the army general comes through town looking for conscripts. And the son can't go because his leg is broken. "The neighbors say, "How fortunate."

But again the farmer says, "We'll see."

The farmer's openness and calmness in the face of what could have been distressing events is having faith in the way things are. Having faith in the way things are is the ultimate expression of this wide don't-know mind.

And there is another aspect to this as well. Have faith in the way you are! Zen Master Lin Chi says, "Don't create troubles by manipulating your way of life. Just be as you are. Stay with yourself when life circumstance is upon you. Be confident in your own standpoint, and there will not be a single problem with you."

Be confident in your own standpoint! How many of us lose sight of our own standpoint? It is, after all, the everyday mind. So simple and yet so marvelous, and it is always there. Zen Master Seung Sahn says our true nature is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds cover it over, but the moon doesn't disappear. When the clouds move away, the moon is still shining brightly.

The Buddha said, "How wonderful! Each thing has it! Each thing is complete! It and dust interpenetrate." The Buddha wasn't talking about some abstract person or some great bodhisattva—he was talking about you. He was talking about all things. Even your woundedness is part of the wholeness that is you and the part of you that allows you to have empathy, so that you can help this world. How wonderful! You have it! You are complete!

The Buddha said all things are complete. You can have faith in that.

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

The Sixth Patriarch said all things are emptiness. You can have faith in that.

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

Are you complete, or are you empty?
Complete is not complete. Empty is not empty.

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

KATZ!

Today is December 5. The sun is shining. Many Zooming faces. ♦

Rebecca Otte JDPSN began studying Zen at the Kansas Zen Center in 1995. She cofounded Prairyerth Zen Center in 1997 and is currently the abbot. She began studying with Zen Master Ji Haeng in 2013, and took bodhisattva precepts in 2015. She received inka in December of 2020. She worked as a nurse-midwife and retired in 2017. She has two sons, a daughter-in-law, and a grandson. She lives with her husband and two cats in Topeka, Kansas.

Ethics as Practice, Practice as Ethics

Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel)

I've been reflecting a lot during these complicated times about ethics in our practice. I recall that, in a meeting of teachers, Zen Master Seung Sahn responded to a complicated situation by saying, "You're all religious leaders." That's stayed with me as a reminder of the responsibility we carry as teachers, and that we all carry as practitioners of the path. How do I engage painful and hurtful moments personally and as a teacher? I need to hear my own voice and the voices of others, and I realize that many in the sangha look to the teachers for guidance.

These times have strengthened my appreciation for inquiry as the heart of practice. It's also clarified for me that, when inquiry fades, suffering increases. As the ancients said, if there's even one hair's breadth, heaven and earth are separate. It's also clarified both the long arc and the specific moments of how cause and effect unfold, how views emerge, and how this leads naturally to where we are now.

The intensity of our times highlights how we all participate individually and together. To speak is to participate. Not to speak is also to participate—and either way, you say something. How do I speak from the fundamental? Naturally, this can only reflect what I see from where I stand, and what I see from the posture I take in the space I'm in. That's a benefit and a limit, as well; all the more reason to promote investigation. At best, then, our ethical inquiry reflects right view, right understanding, and right speech, and it promotes right action. Do we see speaking and listening in ordinary moments as practice as well?

Practice involves approaching difficult matters with care and viewing them with the same spirit of inquiry that we bring to the cushion. Of course, it also involves approaching simple matters with care. Approaching simple matters with care strengthens our capacity to exercise the same care with more difficult matters. How do we approach both and embrace this as dharma? Where do wisdom, compassion, and responsibility fit into all this?

The three poisons are the source of suffering. The three poisons are also the source of wisdom. If greed, hate, and delusion generate greed, hate, and delusion, how do we use that to turn the dharma wheel, so that, by tracing back the radiance, they generate wisdom and compassion? If we avoid these as qualities of mind, we avoid our own true nature.

Greed, hate, and delusion suppress the eyes, the ears, the heart, and the voice, internally. Externally, they oppress the eyes, ears, hearts, and voices of others. In light of this, what does it mean to walk the path?

Precepts and ethics are essentially investigation, not a set of proscriptions or prescriptions. They are a

voicing of what emerges from inquiry into our nature. There's a fundamental trust in that, a trust from experience that if we inquire, we see clearly. From inquiry emerges right view. From right view emerges right understanding. From right understanding emerge right speech and right action.

How is it that sangha is one of the practice jewels? Without sangha, the jewels in Indra's net have no relationship with each other. If one jewel shines, all jewels shine. If one jewel is damaged, all jewels are damaged. Ethics is the network of threads among the jewels. Naturally, the bodhisattva can't enter nirvana alone. It's not that it's altruistic; it's that it's impossible.

If ethics is the thread, then one effect of the three poisons is to break the thread. Ethical action restores the thread. Greed, hate, and delusion harm connections. Internally, they harm connections with our fundamental nature. Externally, they harm connections among us all. If we take dukkha and samsara seriously, we see that there will always be damage: delusions are endless, after all.

One way to look at the root cause, then, is as being disconnected. From that view, practice is restoring, preserving, and sustaining connection, and the ethical response, then, is to do that. What we do after the harm has happened rests on what we have already done before that. If we have done the work before, then the effect is more present and enduring; something of value has already been built.

Naturally, this has layers. I, myself, in my life, in the place I occupy—What is my posture? What are my activities? What is my practice? How do I honor my day-to-day, moment-to-moment connections? The communities I belong to—How do we honor our connections with each other—especially my home sangha? My multiple communities—How do I live in those connections? And where and how are they connected? And the broader society—How do we relate to that large space? Each layer is an inquiry. Each layer is an opportunity. Activity in each layer ripples through all layers.

Practice is refuge; connecting is refuge; healing is refuge; sangha is refuge. To have a place of refuge is to already have a place to go to heal when there has been harm. We can heal only in the before-harm place. We heal together in the before-harm place together. Then right view inquires: Where is this place? Right understanding is how to live in this place. Right speech is to speak from this place. Right action is to act from this place. If we join with this mind, then we join others with this mind as well; we become refuge together. ♦

Interview with Doshō Port

Zen Master Hae Kwang (Stan Lombardo)

The following is a conversation about Doshō's recent book, *The Record of Empty Hall: One Hundred Classic Koans* (Shambhala, 2021).

Zen Master Hae Kwang: Welcome, Doshō. Most of us had never heard of Xutang Zhiyu's *Record of Empty Hall* before your translation appeared from Shambhala in February. Tell us how you learned about it. And what motivated you to translate and comment on it?

Doshō Port: Xutang for me, too, was an unknown. I'd stumbled on his name at some point. The thing with a lot of these Chinese teachers is that they have multiple names, and you've got the Wade-Giles and the pinyin spellings, as well as the Japanese and Korean pronunciations, and so it's all quite confusing. Hakuin refers to him quite frequently, saying he was the greatest Zen master ever—but I'd never heard about this guy and really didn't have a clear sense of who he was. So I started digging, and found that the *Record of Empty Hall*, one section of a ten-volume work, seemed really important. I dug some more and found a translation of it by Yoel Hoffmann from the 1970s, the same guy who published a book with "answers" to all the koans. I was a little suspicious, but I thought it was worth looking into. From the point of view of koan work, I might want to try to make clearer what was actually going on in Xutang's koans. It was the 1970s, so Hoffman's was a "version 1.0" translation. It was great that he got it out there, but I thought I'd want to try to do something myself with the original text.

More important, I was looking at this right at the beginning of the Trump era, and there was so much ugliness and divisiveness, I just wanted to try to do something that would offer people a view of the world different from the Twitter bitter world. And these koans, well, I think there's just an incredible amount of joy and beauty in them. So I wanted to do what I could to put that out there.

ZMHK: Well, thank you very much for doing so; we're certainly grateful for it. I really like Xutang Zhiyu's death poem that you translate and post right after the title page. What else do we know about him aside from his authorship of this koan collection?

DP: Let me share that poem. I'm glad you like it. I do too.

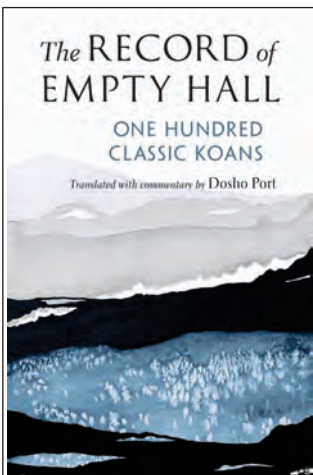
*Eighty-five years
Not knowing buddhas and ancestors
Walking casually with arms swinging
Extinguishing great emptiness.*

For a thirteenth-century monk with those really long sleeves that they're always supposed to keep their hands in, walking with arms swinging was a very free, casual expression. I can just see him. As a young monk, he trained mostly in the Linji tradition. But he studied widely before he found his teacher, Yun'an, and he had a couple of powerful enlightenment experiences with him and then went on to have a fruitful career. He was a clear-eyed Zen master, but he also would have had to be an astute bureaucrat and politician because he was the head of all ten of the main Chinese monasteries. He was part of this elite group that included monastics, intellectuals, ministers, and the military, as well as the aristocracy—so he was a member of the ruling group in China in the thirteenth century.

His influence was wide, and he also had a number of disciples—particularly many Chinese disciples that went to Japan. I'm not sure about Korea, but certainly to Japan. There had been a lot of exchange between China and Japan at this time, and due to the pressure of the Mongols in the north, emigration was looking pretty good. So some of his disciples and other people that worked with him who weren't direct dharma heirs wound up going to Japan.

And there were also Japanese monks who came to China and worked with him. One particular monk was Daio, also known as Nampo Jongmyo, who studied with him for nine years before going back to Japan. And it's through him that we have the main line of modern Japanese Rinzai Zen—"main" in the sense that it's the one that survived and continued. It's said that there were twenty-four different transmissions from China to Japan, though the actual number is probably greater than that. But of those twenty-four, Dogen's Soto school and Daio's Rinzai school are really the only two surviving from that early transmission. So he had this powerful, long-lasting impact on Zen.

Xutang's influence also continued because he was a master of verse samadhi—going to zero and saying something; going into the koan case in these examples and expressing the vivid aliveness of the case. And that also had a powerful impact on a lot of practitioners in his generation, including Dogen and a little before that to Hongzhi, both of whom were very interested in this point—creat-



ing from the meditation experience, doing something to express and share the vividness of nondual experience. I think that is why this strongly influenced the transmission in Japan, in both Soto and Rinzai. I think that's why it was successful, why a successful transmission occurred. Because they're not only doing something with dharma, but also doing something that people widely could connect with—this beautiful, incredible art that flowed from the practice. So I think that's something for us to pay attention to.

ZMHK: I'm glad you've brought it to our attention. Thank you. So this koan collection, the *Record of Empty Hall*, how does it compare to the three classic koan collections most Zen students are familiar with—the *Gateless Gate*, the *Blue Cliff Record*, and the *Book of Serenity*? Are there any overlaps? Any significant differences? How do they compare?

DP: The *Blue Cliff Record* is like the basis; it was earlier, about a hundred years earlier, more or less, than the other most widely known collections. And Yuanwu from the Linji lineage took the cases and verses from Xuedou in the Yunmen lineage. So there was an interesting mix there. And then he added several layers: pointers, capping phrases for almost every line, and then commentary both on the koan and the verse. It became a really complex, rich, literary work—so much so that Dahui, Yuanwu's successor, had it burned. Apparently, people were getting so distracted by the beauty of it that they weren't doing the work of awakening. Fortunately, it was reconstructed later. It's hard to keep a good book down. It wiggled its way somewhere and found the sunlight later on.

The *Gateless Gate* (also called the *Gateless Barrier*) and the *Book of Serenity* were written about the same time as each other, about a hundred years later in the 1220s. And the *Record of Empty Hall* was also written about that time. So Xutang must have known about the *Blue Cliff Record*. He probably also knew about the *Gateless Gate*, because it was from a closely related lineage and was probably floating around the same monasteries that he was in. He probably didn't know about the *Book of Serenity*, as that was in northern China. In contrast to the many levels of these texts, he cuts it all away in *Record of Empty Hall*, and has just one capping comment to the koan. His style in approaching the literature is vastly different than either Yuanwu or Wansong or even Wumen.

And then also the koans that were selected are distinct from those in the other collections. The *Book of Seren-*

ity has a third overlap with the *Blue Cliff Record*. So the *Book of Serenity* in a way is like a commentary on the *Blue Cliff Record*. And even when the cases differ, it's basically the same set of Zen teachers; there are the same forty Zen teachers out of the hundreds or even thousands of masters of the Lamp Transmission. The three standard collections actually present a narrow range of what's in the Lamp collections, both in terms of the Zen teachers and the types of encounter dialogues that are selected. In the *Record of Empty Hall*, on the other hand, Xutang presents a very different character of Zen. The koans have a kind of subtlety to them. And a kind of a quiriness—even kinkiness is a word that comes to mind. For example, Nanquan, in addition to killing a cat, did all these odd things that resulted in odd koans. Xutang doesn't shy away from that, but actually goes into the oddness and into the brokenness. Xutang seemed to be looking for cases that were about the bits and broken pieces, and rehabilitating brokenness seems to be one of his main themes in the record.

ZMHK: You've given us a lot there. And you just pointed out that Xutang's own commentary was very short, just phrases, maybe capping words, or something like that. And so what we have here mostly are your commentaries. And when I read them, they seem very much alive, that they come from dharma talks, live words rather than being literary essays. So I'm curious. How has your work on the *Record of Empty Hall*—both in terms of the commentaries, but also in general—how has it intersected with, influ-

enced perhaps, your own teaching?

DP: Well, they were written, although I have given talks about a number of cases here. And we're in the process now of working through them all. But my process with them was to write them rather than to work from transcription. Even if I had given a talk about it previously, I'd sometimes look at my notes, but I found that it actually can feel more alive if I write it freshly, rather than work from a transcript. It's such different media, giving a verbal talk and writing something, that I prefer to do them separately. And I think one way it's impacted my teaching now is in the clear brevity of it. In the Soto tradition, talks are usually at least an hour. Katagiri Roshi used to go on for an hour and a half or two. It wasn't unusual for him to talk for two hours. So that's where I grew up. It's inspiring to me to try to keep it simple.

ZMHK: Much appreciated. As you know, I do a lot of translation myself from various languages. And so I'm really interested—can you tell us a little about what your translation process was like, any particular problems you



Photo: Courtesy of Wisdom Publications

encountered? And maybe you can give us an example or two of important words or phrases that are difficult for anyone to translate?

DP: Well, there's a lot of problems out there. I was recently listening to an interview with David Hinton, who is a wonderful translator, mostly of Chinese poetry, classical poetry.

ZMHK: I'm reading his *China Root* right now.

DP: Just as an aside, I think Hinton overplays his case, quite a bit, asserting that Taoism was the predominant, or even exclusive influence in early Chan. It turns out that the influence might well have been the other way around. I've heard from scholars who study the issue that some Taoist texts were back dated so as to appear to influence Chan. In any case, it seems to me to be quite a selective understanding of Chan to set aside the profound influence of the Diamond Sutra, Surangama Sutra, and Lankavatara Sutra especially. Rather than the primacy of any particular influence, which is pretty hard to know retrospectively, it seems reasonable to acknowledge many sources of influence coming together. Nevertheless, Hinton is very clear with Chinese characters, really digging deeply into the root of the characters. He argues that translation is a practice of failure. I think it totally is, so we can only do our best. In that sense, Zen practice is really good training for translation. So just that try-mind again and again.

One example of how difficult it is to translate from a language like classical Chinese into modern English is that ancient Chinese is a broad-gate kind of language; word context is everything. English is much more specific and requires a subject, verb, and object. Chinese, not so much. Also the tenses—past, present, or future—are very clearly delineated in English. In classical Chinese that's not the way it is. A sentence is going in multiple dimensions. So when you're pressed to take something that has multiple dimensions, and put it into a language like English that's more like two dimensions, that's part of where the failure comes in. You have to come down on some side to make it English. And so, based on Zen training, I tried to come down on the side that helped point to and open up the koan as much as possible.

For example, a simple word like Tao is usually translated “road” or “path,” but it can also mean “truth” or “reason.” It also means just that somebody said something. It's totally dependent on context. What I do in my translation process is to go really slowly. I enjoy hanging out with these old dead Zen masters, anyway, so I take my time, and just let it percolate. I've played Go a little and it is that same kind of mind: just hanging out there with the circumstances and then suddenly, oh, the move becomes clear.

Another word that comes up a lot, which is also central to Chinese philosophy, is *li*, often translated as “principle” or sometimes “*noumenon*.” But I think *noumenon*, as I understand it, is as if there were some essence. So *noumenon*

is confusing, I think. Hinton translates *li* as “inner pattern,” which I think is a powerful way to render it.

ZMHK: You have to like the Italian saying, *traduttore traditore*: a translator is a traitor.

DP: [Laughs.] That's great.

ZMHK: Well, thank you, Dosho. Those are all the questions that I actually had. But is there anything else you'd like to address? Do you have any other projects on the horizon that you're working on now?

DP: One thing that comes to mind, and this is what I tried to say in several talks that I was able to give about the book, is that one of the things that the literature of Zen/Son/Chan shows is that there's a rich collection of resources for all of us. And so there are lots of possibilities to find our shared Zen route. It's important—and important to me personally—to maintain the different lineage styles, but at the same time not to get so divided. I think it is important to find one Zen school, and then embrace the lineage traditions that are coming to us as we go forward in this more ecumenical spirit.

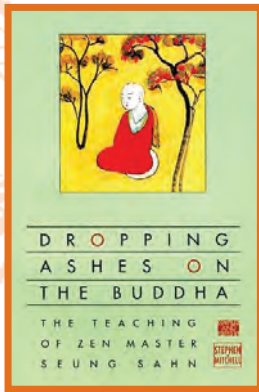
ZMHK: So are you actually thinking of writing something along these lines?

DP: Yeah, yeah, I am. And one of the projects that I'm working on now has that kind of covert agenda. I'm translating something by Wansong, a thirteenth-century teacher in the Caodong lineage. He did for those writings what Yuanwu did for the *Book of Serenity*, pulling it all together. I was going to do the *Book of Serenity*, because I don't think Cleary really got the rough tone of Wansong, but it's already been done. So I thought I'd rather do something else that hasn't been done, because there are so many possibilities. So this is called the *Going through the Mysteries: One Hundred Questions*. A Japanese monk came to study with Wansong and asked him a hundred questions. Wansong answers each question. So it's a big project to make this one point, but yes, I am working on it.

ZMHK: I look forward to that. And I want to thank you again for the *Record of Empty Hall*, Dosho, and for this interview. We'll meet again in ten thousand years! ♦

Dosho Port, also known as Dōshō Rōshi, began practicing Zen in 1977 and now co-teaches at the Nebraska Zen Center with his wife, Tetsugan. Dōshō also teaches with the Vine of Obstacles: Online Support for Zen Training, an internet-based Zen community. Dōshō received dharma transmission (authorization to teach Zen) from Dainin Katagiri Rōshi, and inka shōmei from James Myōun Ford Rōshi in the Harada-Yasutani lineage. Dōshō's translation and commentary on the Record of Empty Hall was published in February 2021 by Shambhala. He is also the author of Keep Me in Your Heart a While: The Haunting Zen of Dainin Katagiri (Wisdom, 2009). You can find Dosho's blog, Wild Fox Zen: Living the Dream, at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/wildfoxzen/>

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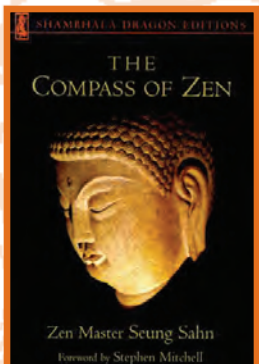
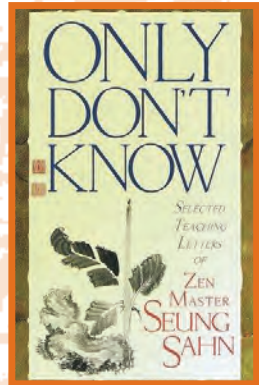
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The Mirror of Zen Study Guide

Jess Row

Note: This excerpt is from a guide prepared for Chogye International Zen Center's study group. The full document can be found at this link: <https://kwanumzen.org/resources-collection/mirror-of-zen-study-guide> —Ed.

The *Mirror of Zen* (*Songagwigam*) is a uniquely important text for Kwan Um School of Zen students. It's one of the fundamental texts of the Korean Zen tradition, and the source of some of Zen Master Seung Sahn's most famous teaching phrases and concepts. Korean Zen, much more so than Japanese or Chinese Zen, is a syncretic tradition that embraces scriptural study, chanting (including Pure Land chanting), the use of mantras, and other practices. Korean Zen also has a distinctive approach to the use of kong-ans. The *Mirror of Zen* condenses many centuries of debate and doctrinal dispute into a kind of "mission statement" for Korean Zen that is respected and embraced by many different traditions.

The author, Hyujeong Sunim, also known as Sosan Daesa (alternate spellings include Seosan Daesa and So Sahn Taesa), lived from 1520 to 1604 in the Choson Dynasty, a time of state repression of Buddhism under a conservative Confucian government. He's credited for restoring the legitimacy of Buddhism in Korea by organizing an army of monks to defend the country from a Japanese invasion, and he is considered a folk hero in Korea.

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The *Mirror of Zen*, like most premodern Korean Buddhist texts, was written in classical or literary Chinese, which was the prestige language of the time, in the same way that Latin was the prestige language used by scholars and clerics in Europe until the eighteenth century. In Chinese, its language and structure echo foundational Zen texts from the Song Dynasty, such as the *Gateless Gate*. Hyon Gak Sunim translated a version in modern Korean by the great monk Boep Jong Sunim. This translation, while excellent, did not have access to the original Chinese characters. Since I've based my translation on these, I've translated to clarify the meaning in accordance with the meaning in Chinese as I see it.

One: Fundamental Principles of the Way

1.

There is only one thing. From the beginning until now, it remains vivid and luminous, unborn and without end. It has no form and no name.

2.

The Buddha and the founders of Zen appeared in this world like waves on a windless ocean.

3.

The dharma has many shades of meaning, and people have varying abilities [to understand it]. This does not obstruct or alter the importance of using whatever provisional systems are useful for teaching it [including sutras, commentaries, kong-ans, and so on].

4.

[Many of us have a tendency to] get strongly attached to names and terms like "mind," "Buddha," "all sentient beings." Don't depend on these names as a way of deepening your understanding. The essence is just like this. If your mind moves, that's already a mistake.

7.

I have one thing to say:

Cut off your thoughts and all your objects of mind,

Sit still and do nothing.

Spring comes, grass grows by itself.



Photo: Sven Mahr

35.

All beings exist in the unborn, yet they think of themselves as existing [in the realm of] “birth,” “death,” and “Nirvana.” It’s as if they see flowers appearing in the empty sky.

36.

Bodhisattvas save sentient beings by leading them to Nirvana. Yet in reality there are no sentient beings and no Nirvana to lead them to.

42.

Pure and unobstructed wisdom, with no hindrance, comes from meditation practice.

43.

During meditation, your mind is able to see how all things arise and disappear in the phenomenal world.

44.

If you let no thoughts appear in response to objects of your perception, this is called the unborn. The unborn can also be thought of as “without thinking” or “without attachments.”

45.

It’s a mistake to think that our way of practicing is intended to help us extinguish our attachments and karma (that is, to attain Nirvana). Our dharma teaches that the mind is originally clear and still, free of all such attachments. This is why we say, “all dharmas are already marked by extinction.”

49.

Keep your original true mind—that is the most important practice.

58.

The Buddha said, “Everything in this impermanent world is burning, and every sentient being in the four directions is engulfed in flames of suffering and bitterness. Eventually the afflictions we suffer as human beings will rob us of our lives.” People of the Way: pay close attention! Practice as if your own head is on fire!

Three: Mantras, Chanting, and Studying Scriptures

50.

On mantras: your practice may help you address your present karma, but your past karma is harder to remove. It requires the spiritual power [of using mantras].

52.

There’s a difference between reciting with your lips and chanting with your whole mind and heart. Merely reciting the Buddha’s name does nothing to help you along the Way.

[*Note:* Be sure to read the entire commentary to section 52—this is the core of Sosan’s teaching on the unity of Zen practice and Amitabul or Pure Land practice.]

54.

If you study the scriptures without keeping up rigorous practice, you could read the entire canon and still not achieve any benefit for yourself or others.

Four: Buddhist Ethics and Right Conduct

38.

Misusing sexual feelings while practicing Zen is like steaming sand to make rice. Being involved in murderous behavior or violence while practicing Zen is like plugging your ears and shouting at the same time. Practicing Zen while tolerating theft and greed is like expecting a leaky cup to fill to the brim. Deceiving yourself and others while practicing Zen is like carving a dried turd to look like incense. Remember: even the wisest person can fall into Mara’s realm.

[*Note:* This list, based on the five precepts, uses single characters to refer to killing, theft, lying, and sexual misconduct, without elaborating on what Sosan has in mind. This is a case where a translator could simply follow the pattern of the original sentences, in which case the first sentence would read, “Embracing perversion while practicing Zen is like . . .” and so on. This brings up a fundamental, and complex, question about how Buddhist ethics—as defined in premodern India, Song-Dynasty China, or seventeenth-century Korea—should be rephrased for contemporary practitioners.]

46.

When a poor person appears before you, give them as much as you can according to your abilities. Reflect that you and the person in front of you share the same fundamental nature, and manifest compassion for them. This is the true meaning of dana.

47.

When someone has done you harm, focus on your quality of mind at that moment. If you allow rage and thoughts of revenge to overtake your mind, you will create enormous obstacles for yourself.

59.

If you constantly crave fame and attention, praise, credit, personal profit—the transitory and insubstantial benefits of “making a name for yourself” in this world—your negative karma will only increase.

69.

When you have hurt someone or made a mistake, apologize immediately. Be mindful of the fact that you have caused negative karma to arise, and take full responsibility for your actions; that is the best use of your energy. Promise that you will correct your behavior and follow through; that way you will cause this negative karma to dissipate. ♦

Jess Row is a senior dharma teacher at the Chogye International Zen Center of New York and the author of four books, most recently White Flights: Race, Fiction, and the American Imagination. He’s translated many short texts from the Chinese for teaching purposes in the Kwan Um School of Zen, including Baizhang’s “Instructions for Sitting Zen,” the Heart Sutra, and the Xinxinming.

Living Zen in Life

Hang Ruan

I started practicing with the Kwan Um School of Zen in 2001 with the Orlando Zen Circle, and joined the Ten Directions Zen Community after I moved back to Chicago in 2002. Since moving to Seattle in 2009, I have been practicing with the Ocean Light Zen Center with guiding teacher Tim Lerch JDPSN. He and the sangha have supported me through many big changes in my life.

Family and Zen

For the past four months, I have had a new routine each evening. At 7:30 each evening, I flip open my laptop and turn on Zoom. There, in the meeting room “Family Zen” I am joined by my father, mother, and brother to do ten minutes of silent meditation together. I am logging on from my home in Seattle, my father and mother join from their home in Brighton Park, Chicago, and my brother joins from his apartment in Hyde Park, Chicago.

This is remarkable for several reasons. First, we live thousands of miles apart, yet meditation unites us every evening for some family time and together action. Indeed, I can’t remember us ever spending time together as a family so consistently. As a family of immigrants, my parents worked long hours to give me and my brother a comfortable life. Long days and nights at work meant we got to have dinner together only once a week, on the day that my dad was off. And as my brother and I grew older, even that weekly dinner got passed up for other activities that seemed more important to us (the sons) at the time.

Second, I would never have imagined that I would one day find us meditating together as a family. When I took up Zen meditation twenty years ago, at a time when my life was filled with confusion and turmoil, my parents were skeptical, if not worried. Their perception of meditation, as individuals who came of age during China’s Cultural Revolution, is characterized by suspicion and fear. I grew up hearing them tell me stories about people who lost control of their minds and bodies because of meditation. Furthermore, my venture into meditation was a final straw of sorts, a confirmation that I may have completely given up on, or failed at, the Chinese-American dream of assimilating into American culture, completing college, and getting a secure, good-paying job. Fast-forward twenty years: I am now working as a clinical social worker and living a stable life. My parents have witnessed my journey and saw that Zen practice lifted my life out of chaos and enabled me to build a life of meaning. Over the years, as they observed the impact Zen practice had on my life, their opinion of meditation and Zen practice has shifted from skepticism to curiosity, and now they have become Zen students themselves!

Work and Zen

I have been teaching meditation at the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital since 2009. It was a gradual process of integrating mindfulness meditation into the fabric of the clinical work and environment. As we began to see more positive feedback from patients about their encounter and experience with mindfulness meditation, demand for more meditation training increased, resulting in the first mindfulness group launched in 2012.

This was an ongoing weekly mindfulness group with hands-on meditation practice and discussion. Unlike many other mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) utilized in health care settings, this group was not based on a protocol or built on a model of progression. The format of this group is heavily influenced by my Zen training, and offers a plain, repetitive structure each group, week in and week out.

My guiding teacher, Tim Lerch JDPSN, had been an important resource and mentor throughout the development and implementation of this group, and I often brought in questions and issues to discuss with him in interviews or other settings. Without his guidance and support, I probably would not have started this group, or continued with it all these years. This group has grown in popularity over the years, and now there are three mindfulness groups each week in the clinic, all based on the same format. Patients have the opportunity to show up in any or all of the groups and just practice. I left this clinic five months ago, and all three mindfulness meditation groups have continued and are now facilitated by other clinicians who share a passion for meditation.

I now work for VA VISN 20, which is in the northwest region of the country. In my new job I now have the opportunity to teach meditation for individuals as well as groups. I developed a mindfulness skills training program where patients can have ongoing support in their practice. What I’ve seen from my years of teaching meditation at the VA is that most people find it challenging to continue practicing on their own, and yet this consistent routine practice is key to our growth. Many patients have noted that this consistency has been the missing link in their meditation journey, having the ongoing support to help them sustain their routine practice.

As for me, doing this work is part of my Zen practice and training. Tim suggested that I always keep three things in mind when a patient is in front of me during a mindfulness session: (1) return to zero (that is, don’t-know); (2) don’t want anything for the person; and (3) prioritize making a connection over teaching technique. I have realized how these three things are always teach-

ing me moment to moment. It has been illuminating just how often I drift off from zero, how often I want something for the person (or, if I'm being honest, how often I want something from them), and how often I fail to truly connect with the person in front of me. I have noticed that I do all of those things all the time, whether I am in a mindfulness session or other type of clinical encounter, whether I am with a patient or a staff member, and whether I am at work or not! Approaching my work in this way has shown me, over and over again, that every moment is an opportunity to practice Zen—no matter where I am, what I am doing, or who is front of me.

While I have been facilitating meditation practice for patients since 2009, I did not begin doing that for staff until 2018. There was an interesting situation that led to my teaching mindfulness meditation to VA staff. I was the program leader for the co-occurring disorders program at the time, and often grappled with how to address provider burnout, as the work we did (treating veterans with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance use disorders) was very difficult and challenging. During each staff meeting, we would begin with a “burnout check-in” where we would go around and just give a number that reflected our burnout level that day and week (0 being none, 10 being completely burned out). As you can imagine, many staff members’ burnout check-ins were quite high at times, with some consistently around 7 or 8. Perhaps due to my Zen practice, my burnout level was consistently low, usually at a zero, sometimes peaking at a 1 or 2. One particular staff member (a senior employee who had been there for thirty years) often gave me a hard time for it, hinting that the reason I was not burned out was because I was not working hard enough.

At one meeting, she made those comments again in front of the whole team, saying that I was not working hard enough or don't have enough patients. I actually got a little angry at that moment and told her that I didn't appreciate her making those assumptions about me purely based on my burnout check-in. She then said, “I don't understand. How can your burnout check-in always be so low?” I replied, “Because I meditate for an hour every day, and have been doing so for the past twenty years.” Surprisingly, upon hearing that, her resentment and suspicion toward me immediately evaporated. She said, “Wow, maybe I should do more meditation, too!” Without hesitation, I said, “That's a great idea! And I'd be happy to meditate with you!” After that meeting, we started doing a twelve-minute silent sitting three days a week. Amazingly, her burnout check-in dropped to around 0 and 1 after two or three weeks of regular meditation. She and I have grown much closer since then, just from sitting in silence together several times a week. She loved the experience so much that she began advertising it to other staff, inviting them to join, and describing the experience as “sweet.”

Over time, other staff members started joining us, and I had to get more chairs for my office.

When I got a new job in the pain clinic in April 2020, I duplicated the twelve-minute silent sitting there. This was started during the COVID pandemic, so these sittings were done virtually. This turned out to be even better, as it provided more flexibility to include staff from anywhere in the hospital. Participants started forwarding the invites to other people, and soon we had staff and trainees attending from across service lines, and from various departments and buildings, including staff members’ homes. It was a wonderful way to start the day, with interdisciplinary staff coming together to “solidify our intent”—as one participant beautifully described—before parting ways to care for patients.

Recently, I was asked by hospital leaders to offer a weekly mindfulness class for VA staff as part of a program called Employee Whole Health Wellness. Through these different venues of meditation and together action with staff, I have come to appreciate the fact that this hospital is made of many human beings. Oftentimes, we get siloed in our work and lose sight of the bigger community of which we are a part. This myopia sometimes even results in turf-based mindsets, leading to an us-versus-them mentality among units and departments. I feel grateful to be able to come in contact with staff from all over the medical system, and to have some time set aside to appreciate their presence and to perceive our interconnectedness. In fact, we are connected with not just each other in the hospital, but in the broader community, the world, and the universe.

Work and Home

During a dharma talk in a retreat in Chicago, Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Barbara Rhodes) talked about work life and home life. She said, “when I'm working, I don't think about when I get to go home, because I'm already home.” That has always stuck with me. To me, that means don't make work and home separate—wherever I am, I am already home. Furthermore, that means don't make anything separate. Don't make the Zen center separate. Don't make Yong Maeng Jong Jin separate. Of course, it's all easier said than done. I'll be the first to admit that I often find myself thinking about going home while still at work, but Zen practice helps me to continually return home each moment. When I return home, when I return to zero, there is no work, no home, no Zen center. That means I can practice Zen no matter where I am. ♦

Hang Ruan is a senior dharma teacher at the Ocean Light Zen Center in Seattle, and started practicing with the KUSZ in 2001. He has a masters degree in social work from the University of Chicago, and is a clinical social worker and psychotherapist. He maintains the blog MindfulnessFAQ. He is also a musician, and his new ambient album Already Complete will be released in summer 2021.

Book Review

COVID19 SUTRAS

Hank Lazer

Lavender Ink, 2020

Review by Zen Master Bon Hae (Judy Roitman)

Hank Lazer began writing his wondrous *COVID19 SUTRAS*—a collection of twelve-line poems, four lines to a stanza, three stanzas to a poem—around the time that everything was closing down: “books and blossoms / spring & all . . .” are the opening two lines. The second of these is not an accident; *Spring and All* is the title of William Carlos Williams’ 1923 book whose title poem begins “By the road to the contagious hospital . . .” Williams was a doctor, and his poem was written soon after the end of the devastating flu pandemic of 1918 and 1919. Lazer is not a doctor—he is an eminent American poet and a long-standing Zen practitioner—and he is writing at the beginning of a pandemic, not afterward. But the impulse is the same. On the one hand, a worldwide pandemic sickening and killing people in large numbers that we can barely comprehend, upending normal life, in 1918 as in 2020, with schools and businesses closing, people advised to wear masks, social gatherings forbidden or restricted, hospitals at times overwhelmed, some people and places taking it seriously, others not so much, with the expected outcomes of such choices. On the other hand, there is the natural world, which doesn’t care about a virus killing humans. Not only “blossoms/spring” but, at the end of the first poem:

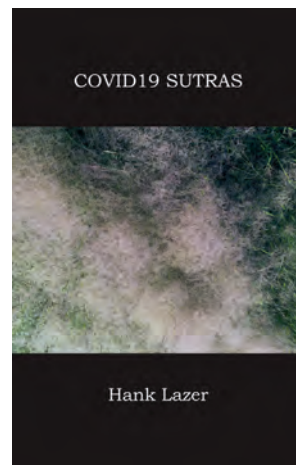
*foxes—young ones
came by for the wild
salmon cooking on
the gas grill*

Lazer, who lives part-time on an Alabama farm and part-time in Tuscaloosa, where he teaches at the University of Alabama, is alert to the disjunction. And he is also alert to the provisional nature of human life

*i am ready
to become something
else am i
really dissolve*

*dissolute to face
or turn away from
who said or ?
this is it*

*& when the virus
hit can we
change or does
connection break away*



As the poem above makes clear, Lazer has deeply absorbed his Buddhist practice, so deeply that it does not leave an obvious trace. But just as it is not necessary for a reader to notice the invocation of William Carlos Williams in the book’s second line, these poems can do the work of poems on the reader whether or not the reader has any knowledge of Buddhism.

There are many of these quiet Buddhist invocations. For example:

*the treasure store
is open you
can take what
you want—no*

*you can take
what you need
through practice
you may learn*

*to receive what
is already yours
here is the bell sound
to awaken you*

This is as an excellent summary of a good chunk of Mahayana and Zen Buddhism. But it’s OK if you don’t recognize this. Lazer is telling us something deeply human: what you want to receive is already yours; listen and awaken. We don’t need any other context.

Lazer is writing at the beginning of the strange new COVID world—“what will we do / cut our hair / go bowling”; “apart & together / we gather / by means of / our devices”—and the book appeared in mid-summer, so was written when we still might have had the delusion that the plague would end if not immediately then reasonably soon. Its chapter headings are: *early days; flattening the curve; phased reopening; we’re back?;* and the last section, after the death of George Floyd, *I can’t breathe*. Because the pandemic has lasted so much longer than we thought at the time, some of

these seem naïve—did the curve ever flatten? Are the phases of reopening well defined or chaotic?—but at the time that is how we thought. As Ezra Pound said, poetry is news that stays news—and Lazer, reporting in the moment, has the sense to put a question mark after *we're back*.

The last section is anchored in George Floyd's death, and in some of its poems the horror of human injustice forces the poetic lines out of the space the page allows. For example, here is a single line invoking the demonstrations after Floyd's death:

*Yes, shattered glass, burning building, these are the
voices of the unheard, mixed in with others intent
on something else*

Yes, that is a single line. If you were reading it out loud, it would be read with one breath. Finally, the political/medical/human moment is distilled:

*so that the words
equality justice democracy
mark something other
than our shame*

*pain goes straight
to our emptiness
repeated videos enshrine
the victims what to do*

*with two viruses
death of a nation
blurred as i age
into what's next*

We can recognize “pain goes straight / to our emptiness” as a sort of double-meaning pun—Buddhist emptiness? Emotional emptiness?—but what's important is the challenge that Lazer is giving us: In the multiple crises facing us, what do we do? What comes next?

The curious reader may wonder why these poems are called *Sutras*. Just as this book is connected to William Carlos Williams's response to a similar pandemic moment, so it is connected to a similar political moment, the antiwar protests of the 1960s, which produced Allen Ginsberg's *Wichita Vortex Sutra*, and to the ecstatic early encounter by beatniks with Buddhism, for example, Ginsberg's *Sunflower Sutra*. More traditionally, as a long-time student of the Soto teacher and poet Norman Fischer, Lazer is deeply connected to Dogen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra*—on which Fischer recently published a book, *Mountains and Rivers Sutra* (Sumeru Press, 2020). Finally, the dominant format of short stanzas is reminiscent of such pithy teachings as some of the Theravada sutras, and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. So why not call these poems *sutras*? They are, in the ways that matter, wisdom poems. ♦

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(Continued from p. 9)

and find our true human being's job.

We all come into this world with empty hands, and we leave with empty hands. Nobody said to us, “Hey! How would you like to spend a little time on planet earth?” And when it's time to go, nobody asks our permission. When our time is up, we're gone. There's no reason, and we have no choice in the matter. But while we are alive, what should we do? How do we live our life? How do we put our empty hands to work?

Every day, all of us have to do many things. But most important is why do we do something? What is our motivation? Zen Master Seung Sahn always asked, “Why do you eat every day?” That is a very important question. Is it for love? Is it for money? Is it only for me? Or is it for all beings?

Our human life is a precious opportunity to transform no reason into great reason, and no choice into great choice. But how do we do that? That is a million-dollar question that all of us have to answer every day. Each one of us for ourselves, moment to moment to moment. It is called the great work of life and death.

Today, I'm getting a Zen stick and a new job: Ji Do Poep Sa. My hands have new work to do. “Ji Do” means “point the way.” “Poep Sa” means “teacher,” which means helping other people. To me, this means that my inside job and my outside job have finally come together. It has taken a long time, and I am very happy.

[Raises the Zen stick over her head.]

This life has no meaning, no reason, and no choice.

[Hits the floor with the Zen stick and raises it again.]

But through our practice, we can change no meaning to great meaning, which is great love. We can change no choice to great choice, which is our great vow, the great bodhisattva way.

[Hits the floor with the Zen stick and raises it again.]

No meaning, no reason, no choice, or great meaning, great reason, great choice? Which one do you choose?

KATZ!

The candles are burning brightly; the Zoom screen shows me smiling faces. Thank you for coming. ♦

Dyan Eagles began studying with Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1974. She received inka in December 2020. Dyan is one of the founding members of the Cambridge Zen Center, where she served as housemaster and head dharma teacher. Prior to retiring in 2019, Dyan was the founder and CEO of DharmaCrafts, Inc.

Book Review

Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out

Ruth King

Sounds True, 2018

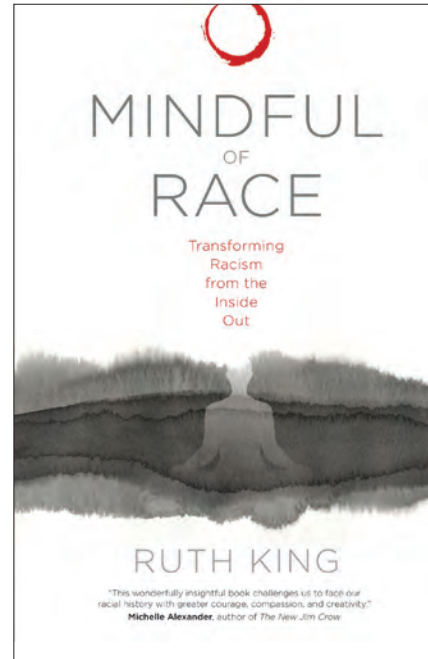
Review by Kendra Fehrer

Ruth King's *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* is a thoughtful, tender, and pragmatic guide to how meditation practice can help us wake up and show up in a world suffering from racial injustice. Whatever our personal racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, or class identity, King's work guides us to expand our ability to sit with racial discomfort, keep a spirit of inquiry and openness, and act compassionately in the world.

King wrote much of this book in the final year of Barack Obama's presidency, on the eve of Donald Trump's 2016 election. The aggressive, inflammatory, racialized language of the Trump campaign, along with a resurgence of the white supremacist alt-right was just beginning to surface. In South Carolina, where King wrote, Keith Lamont Scott, a forty-three-year-old African American father of seven, had just been killed by a police officer while waiting in his car to pick up his daughter at school. Less than a year prior, Dylann Roof, a white male and Confederate loyalist, had murdered nine African Americans in a historic black church in downtown Charleston.

Since 2016, race relations in the United States have come to a head, catalyzed by a number of high-profile killings of African American civilians by police officers. The United States has a long history of racism and racial injustice, dating back to the transportation and enslavement of African peoples, as well as the displacement and genocide of native peoples, both of which ushered in the founding of our country. Federal and state policies continued to discriminate against black Americans, restricting everything from voting rights to educational access to financial and lending practices. Our criminal justice system also reflects this inequity; people of color are disproportionately more likely than their white peers to be pulled over while driving, targeted for harsher sentences, and incarcerated. (For more on race in the criminal justice system see www.sentencingproject.org.)

King situates her book as a response to this painful context. King is a longtime meditator and teacher in the Insight Meditation tradition, and has led diversity training for corporations, nonprofits, and religious communities for decades. She also draws on her personal experience as an African-American woman, lesbian, mother, and grandmother, raised in Los Angeles in the 1960s. I, the reviewer, am a white woman, mother, educator, and



social science researcher, raised in the San Francisco Bay Area of the 1980s. As a long-time social justice activist, I have spent many years reflecting on race, racism, white privilege, and the systems of inequality that so deeply harm our society. As a reader, I came to this book seeking insight into how meditation practice could help me grapple with the heartbreaking events of 2020.

King begins her book by framing racism as a heart disease. Race and racism cut to our very essence, our ability to see and act clearly, without hindrance, to relieve suffering. King challenges us to see “the world’s heart is on fire and race is at its core.” The first part of the book makes visible to the reader the pernicious and often unseen ways that race shapes our individual, group, and societal experiences. For readers just entering their journey of understanding of racial dynamics in the United States, these chapters will be illuminating and perhaps challenging. For those already engaged in the work of dismantling racism, they will be a refreshing take on elucidating the mechanisms of racism through a dharma lens.

Chapter 4 is especially compelling, as King details the “Six Hindrances to Racial Harmony.” The chapter shines light on common mental patterns that create “habits of harm.” One habit that King illuminates is

the propensity of white people to see racial incidents as individual encounters (“stars”), rather than part of a broader pattern of systemic racism (“constellations”). King describes how two participants—one white, one black—in a workshop she attended reacted to a video showing the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed African American man, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. While both participants were outraged, the white participant read the event as a horrific and unfortunate incident (a “star of harm”), whereas the black participant read that same event as part of a broader pattern of violence against blacks (a “constellation of harm”).

King beckons the reader—especially those of us insulated by racial privilege—to become aware of these racial patterns of harm. “It’s not just a handful of police killing black bodies that is the pattern. Although we could point fingers at the individual police officers, it is the system that fails us. . . . The constellation of harm here is embedded in the system that condones such behavior as normative. . . . These struggles interconnect; they are not separate.” For white people, becoming aware of this individualized way of thinking as part of our “mental programming” is part of waking up to race.

King reminds her audience, “Some white readers may feel put upon by this discussion, and some people of color may feel like they’ve heard this all before or that they are being painted as a victim. Keep in mind that the hindrances we’re looking at speak more to racial group dynamics, not so much to individual actions. They are meant to stimulate deeper inquiry. When we think we know or we don’t want to know, we stop being mindful, and by so doing, we live with a heart disease.”

Part 2 of the book offers meditation and mindfulness tools for dealing with racial distress, no matter our position. Whether one is a white person uncomfortable with confronting their role in structural racism for the first time, or a person of color healing from the injury of repeated racial harm, mindfulness meditation practice can help us “slow down and investigate our experiences with care and wise attention.”

King’s chapter on kindness practice is particularly inspiring. She writes, “We all have ways of protecting ourselves from racial harm. We may strike out, walk out, or numb out, depending on the situation. Yet underneath all of our actions . . . is a shared and deep desire for kindness—to both offer it and receive it. We all wish to be able to stand in the center of racial ignorance and distress without parking our hearts at the door.” King guides the reader through practices to help embrace racial fear and distress with a warm and open heart. By creating space for the full range of our experience, we minimize escalation and distortion, allowing ourselves to investigate and digest our experience, in turn paving

the way for wise and compassionate action. For practitioners in the Kwan Um School, this invitation to “expand the container,” without pushing away or holding on to our experience, should sound familiar.

In the final part of the book, King offers a roadmap for taking wise and compassionate action. “As you become more mindful of race, there is a social responsibility you can’t easily escape. For example, if you are doing harm, you feel the need to put a stop to it. If you see someone else doing harm, you feel the need to stop them. If you see systems at work that harm others or that harm the planet, you feel the need to join with others to make sure the harm stops.” The final chapters of the book walk the reader through a series of potential actions, ranging from the intimate and personal (for example, “keeping kindness and non-harming at the forefront of our awareness”) to the community-facing (taking political action, for example, or forming a racial affinity group).

King has a chapter with specific suggestions for how white people can use their racial privilege to support racial justice, and another on how people of color can work together to support each other in healing from racial trauma. King challenges white readers to become aware of their own racial identity, talk with children about what it means to be a white American, and use their positions of leadership and privilege to foment culture change in their organizations—not as a special “diversity” initiative, but rather, to transform the values, beliefs, policies, and structures needed to create more equitable and inclusive organizations. King’s invitation for readers of color focuses on attending to internalized oppression, prioritizing self-care and healing, choosing strategically when to engage in challenging bias and harm, and fostering resilience in children.

King also highlights the importance of creating safe spaces for engaging in difficult conversations around race in our personal, work, and community lives. She offers concrete tools to support such conversations.

While there are many excellent books on Buddhism and race, King’s book is particularly aligned with the teachings of our school. Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings prod us to wake up, see clearly what is in front of us, and respond with compassion: *Who am I? What is this? How can I help?* King’s book attunes these questions to the context of race and racial injustice today. Who am I, in this racialized world? How might my preconceptions be distorting my views? How can I keep an open heart in the face of discomfort? How can I show up to help this world? *Mindful of Race* offers a warm, practical, and insightful field guide to help us do just that. Our school has a famous kong-an: The whole universe is on fire; through what kind of samadhi can you escape being burned? King gives us both an invitation and a challenge to step into the fire. ♦



PRIMARY POINT ARCHIVE

Did you know? There is an extensive, searchable archive of *Primary Point* available online, offered courtesy of Universitat de les Illes Balears: <http://joanmascaro.uib.cat/greenstone/bdeo/collection/primaryPoint/page/about/>



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