

# *Cicadas Mean Summer, Crickets Mean Autumn*

*Eunjoo Ha*

I used to be one of those people who starts going to the Zen center to practice when suffering appears, only to stop all of that when things get better. Then one day, I got confused and noticed that there is something wrong in this life, something that I tried to keep up with but couldn't. The world seemed to be going too fast and becoming too complicated, and I doubted if that was what I was looking for. But I was too timid to look deeply enough into this problem, because I was strongly attached to my job, my relationships, and other things that seemed important.

Soon, the company I was working for had financial problems and let many employees go. I was one of them. It was a hard time, and I felt resentment toward the people who had made the decision. But much later, I realized that those people were true bodhisattvas who gave me a strong shock to wake me up. Instead of getting a new job or carrying on with my previous life, I traveled for some months, and then returned to Korea and signed up for two months of the winter retreat at Musangsa Temple. It was my first long retreat. I would later keep coming back to join these retreats for some time, and eventually I decided to move into Musangsa.

Twice a year, Musangsa holds three-month silent retreats, once in the summer and once in the winter. Musangsa is rare among Zen monasteries because monks, nuns, and laypeople from all over the world live, work, and practice together. I worked in the kitchen most of the time, and sometimes did other chores and special projects around the temple.

We wake up at 4 a.m., go to bows, do chanting, and some people continue the full formal practice schedule, sitting for many hours throughout the day. There are also working people like me, who attend formal practice according to our schedule or the jobs that we are given. For the first few months, I was trying to adjust to temple life and build relationships with people from different cultures. Although living in the temple was challenging and frustrating at times, I ended up staying for four years, and I realized later that practicing with a sangha was a powerful experience.

Our guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Bong, often tells us that together action is very important because it helps us put down our opinion, be able to follow others, and make harmony with everyone else. It is one of the most wonderful teachings, but it is not an easy thing to do. The problem was that my direction wasn't

clear, so I wasn't clear. When I would meet some irritating situation or person, I would easily get agitated and let out my negative emotions, rather than reflecting the situation back to myself.

Most of the time, it wasn't about a particular situation or person. Instead, I was bringing emotions from something that had happened in the past. Many situations forced me to see my own limitations, which I felt I was supposed to overcome by accepting others and putting down my opinions. Instead of making harmony and doing together action with others, though, I failed to follow them and created conflicts on many occasions. I got so tired sometimes, because of nonstop garbage thoughts and getting caught up in my emotions. My mind became like muddy water.

Many times I didn't want to get up at four in the morning. But my roommates woke up and turned on the light and were getting ready for the day. So I followed them. Many times I thought about skipping some of the formal practice and formal meals. But everybody in the temple would go to the Buddha hall to chant, go to the dharma hall to sit, and go to the dining room to eat the formal meal. So I made an effort to follow all of those as well. After some time of continuing to do the same thing every day, I got used to the daily schedule and my mind became quiet.

There is something deeply satisfying about doing a retreat together with people, because I always feel that I get tremendous support from this practicing group. For three months we spend most of the time together, either in the Buddha hall or the dharma hall. Everyone is doing the same thing without being able to talk about it.

A ringing bell means there are kong-an interviews. We go to the interview room and have a long interview with the teacher. They put on their kasa, sit on the cushion, and are ready for us. The moktak (wooden drum) early in the morning means wake up. The moktak after sitting means eating time. We go to the dining room, and all the food is ready for us. The chugpi (bamboo clapper) in the dining room guides the formal meal. The first three hits of the chugpi signals us to lay out our bowls. The second three hits of the chugpi means to eat. The final three hits of the chugpi means the end of the formal meal. The moktak after some rest means sitting. We go to the dharma hall and sit. The first three hits of the chugpi in the dharma hall means sit. One

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# Eat? What's the Point?

Myong An Sunim JDPS

Why do you eat every day? This question seems innocuous, almost banal. When Zen Master Su Bong first asked me in a kong-an interview, I was a little nonplussed. I answered, "Because I'm hungry," thinking, "It's pretty obvious isn't it?" He shook his head. No, not the answer he wanted. In my mind, it was a perfectly serviceable answer and I felt mildly irritated by his rebuff. It was only after more meditation practice that I discovered that there was a greater depth to the question.

Food and eating are central to the fabric of our lives. Many of us love to eat. Some of us live to eat. We often eat to celebrate, to romance, to commiserate, and to comfort. We love to talk, think, and share about food. At restaurants, you will see patrons snap photos of their meals, sharing them *ad nauseam* on social media. We celebrate, even idolize famous chefs like rock stars, because they make great food. We buy their books and watch their TV programs by the millions.

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Eating well is a pleasure that unites us across cultures. We strengthen our social bonds with friends and family over shared meals. We treasure intimate moments with our loved ones over dinner. Our favorite foods can elicit strong memories, and we sometimes crave them so much that we're willing to go a long way just to get a taste of them.

All living things have to eat. It's a question of survival. Our bodies are biologically well-adapted to telling us when they need food. We feel hungry; our stomach starts to rumble. Hunger is unpleasant and we have little patience to endure it. The only way out is to eat

some food.

Most of us now take food for granted. It is available on demand, a few taps of a smartphone away. Not so for the 800 million people around the world who have to go to bed hungry each night, or the 2 billion who are malnourished. For them, the search for food occupies their daily existence as they endure a simple hard truth—food means life.

Those of us who are blessed with an abundance and variety of food often carelessly waste it. In certain Asian countries, ordering more than you can eat is a symbol of affluence and privilege. Leftovers are thrown away. Globally, one-third of all food produced for humans is wasted each year. This unthinking waste of our food brings into sharp focus the question "Why do you eat every day?"

Many Zen students easily find the answer to the kong-an after some practice. I have found that merely answering the question correctly is just the first step. On closer inspection, it directs us to a deeper, more fundamental question: Why are you alive? What does it mean for you to live on this earth?

These questions nudge us to look at our own lives more closely. They prick us to wake up from our soporific dullness to the reality of our existence. Without such questions, it is easy to fall into sleepwalking through life.

Awakening to "Why do you eat every day?" and embracing it as a part of our lived experience leads us on a path to a meaningful life. Putting it into practice, moment to moment, is the work of a lifetime. ♦

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hit of the chugpi means walking meditation. We follow people in single file and walk around dharma hall. The second three hits of the chugpi means the end of sitting. Rain means bring an umbrella. Cicadas mean summer. Crickets mean autumn.

I would like to share an inspiring quote by Zen Master Dae Bong.

We will be able to be responsible for what appears in our life and use it in a way that really benefits everybody. That is what Buddha did, and that is what everybody came here want-

ing to learn how to do. We all can, because that is our true nature.

The whole universe is keeping correct situation to help me. That means when I keep correct situation, I also can help everybody. ♦

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*Eunjo Ha took five precepts in Providence in 2006. She joined the winter retreat at Musangsa Temple in 2015 and continued to live and practice at the temple for four years until 2019.*