

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Tim Colohan

On April 9, 2022, Tim Colohan received inka at Providence Zen Center, USA.

Jason Quinn JDPSN: So I have an interesting question, because you used to be a teacher in the Golden Wind. Is that correct?

Tim Colohan JDPSN: Yes, that's correct: Golden Wind Zen Group.

Quinn PSN: Right, and now you may be a teacher in the Kwan Um School of Zen. And so my question is, Which way is the wind blowing now?

Colohan PSN: You already understand.

Quinn PSN: I truly don't. I'm asking you.

Colohan PSN: It looks like east to northeast outside.

Quinn PSN: Is that the truth?

Colohan PSN: You want more?

Quinn PSN: I always do!

Colohan PSN: The dog runs after the bone.

Quinn PSN: Thank you for your teaching.



Dennis Duermeier JDPSN: Thank you for all your years of practice and dedication. So, you work in the movie industry. I have always wondered, when the lights go down, what's left onstage?

Colohan PSN: You already understand.

Duermeier PSN: I'm sorry I don't. I'm asking you.

Colohan PSN: [*Stands up, walks to the light switches next to the altar, and turns off the lights in the dharma room.*] Is that enough?

Duermeier PSN: No! I want more!

Colohan PSN: The dog runs after the bone.



Mu Sang Sunim: OK, so once you told me that I had “thrown away all of my teachers.” So I ask you, Can I throw away you too?

Colohan PSN: You already understand!

Mu Sang Sunim: I sure do!

Colohan PSN: Throw me somewhere soft please!

Mu Sang Sunim: You've got to take your chances.

INKA SPEECH

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

Broken is whole, whole is broken.

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

There is only no broken; there is no whole.

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

Broken is broken, and whole is whole.

Which one of these three statements is the truth?

KATZ!

We are contained in an unbroken whole of time and space in this moment.

There is a river of gratitude flowing through me at this moment. To the sangha, which has supported, challenged, and encouraged me. To the monks who have inspired me and for the teachers that have helped me every step of the way. Finding the function of that gratitude is what's in front of me now.

I come from the West Coast. People said I should introduce myself a little bit in this talk. I wanted to say, I come from the planet of Los Angeles. I met Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1985 in Dharma Zen Center. And it was a period of my life when I was in a lot of difficult pain.

I come from a big family. I have eleven siblings. Some of them have passed, and my parents have passed. Years ago—some of you know this story—my younger sister Mary Kay. I was in my twenties; she was seventeen. She was at a job interview at a Safeway grocery store. She fell and crushed her skull. A week later, she was dead.



Photo: So Young Lee

My sister was broken. My family felt broken. When I saw my sister's body in the casket, I thought "That is not my sister!" It was nothing like her. This was my first experience of don't know. Where did she go?

At the time, I was a devout Catholic. My whole family was. And the Catholic explanation for this kind of thing, when it came to my grief, was like throwing a hallmark card on a bonfire. So, this was this don't know, and what I call the impermanence bomb going off in my family. And I just want to unpack that a little bit.

Some of the children were three years old. Some of the children were thirteen, fourteen, sixteen years old. I was in my twenties. And then there were a few others older than me. My parents were in their early fifties. Boom. This traumatized all of us in big ways. If you think impermanence is a philosophy, you're mistaken. It's our actual experience. And the way out of that grief is don't know. That grief had a function. And as I said in another talk, "Our broken hearts bled gold," but we didn't know it. We just did what we could do. And that led us to helping each other. And that led us to a deeper appreciation of each one of us. In the face of impermanence, you begin to cherish everyone 100 percent.

My daughter at the time was about two and a half, and my wife was pregnant. I realized later that my toddler daughter could not become a youngster without impermanence. She can't go from being a teenager to an adolescent without impermanence. My daughter now is going to be fifty years old. That's because of impermanence. So, I'll take it. I'll take whatever grief impermanence is going to cause, because it is what gives us this life!

That takes courage. That takes heart. And it means we're going to be broken. We're going to be broken and then the whole is going to unfold and show us what to do.

A few years later, this queer, gay man had to accept his identity and his sexual orientation. And divorce my wife. And leave my children. More broken hearts. Another broken family. The whole unfolds.

My children, who have given me this Technicolor experience of life, were my first teachers in how to truly emotionally connect to someone. And the shocking realization was that I did not have this Technicolor experience with everybody else. It was all black and white. So, my heart broke, my children's hearts broke, everywhere. The whole unfolded.

My devotion to them only became greater. Their devotion to me only became greater. The community threw me out. Called me bad things that had nothing to do with me. The Catholic Church threw me out. So, devotion to a practice was no longer available to me. And I was told how bad I was.

So, I heard Zen Master Seung Sahn give a talk, and it was either the second or the third dharma talk I had ever heard. He quoted the five precepts poem:

*Good and evil have no self-nature.
Holy and unholy are empty names.
Outside of the door is the land of stillness and light.
Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.*

The top of my head blew off. I had been hearing the "self" was bad or good, struggling with that since the age of six, and I had no idea what the poem meant. But here is this bald-headed man in front of a golden Buddha. I needed to get to the bottom of this. I didn't know how, but I had never heard this point of view expressed. All my ideas about good and bad were broken. I was thoroughly confused. I had no idea what these people were doing. But I was going to try and figure it out.

If we look at this world, it will break our hearts. We have to trust that. That breaking heart bleeds wisdom and compassion. And we have to welcome it in. Welcome in the breaking heart. Zen Master Seung Sahn would say to us, "Put your practice where the pain point is." That idea saved my life.

No matter how unpleasant, we just put our don't know exactly where the pain is. It's the sign. This is "rowing our wisdom boat," yeah? This is an old metaphor. We are rowing this prajna ship, this wisdom boat. This activity of finding the pain point and putting our attention there, our don't know. What is this? Having that courage: that's rowing the wisdom boat. And we don't just do it at a ceremony. We don't just do it on a retreat. We do it all day long. And we can trust that.

The Heart Sutra says: "Avalokiteshvara, while practicing deeply." You are Avalokiteshvara. You are Kwan Seum Bosal.

Look deeply into the pain point, and exactly what there is to do will appear. People naturally find this. My family naturally took care of itself the best it could. So, what appears "broken" is how we become whole. And when we're rowing this wisdom ship, we are going to get tired. Or we're going to be sick or we're going to be in too much pain to row. So, we rest. And somebody else will row for us. When we feel stronger, then we can row again.

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

This dharma speech is done.

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

This bullshit speech is done.

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

The speech I gave and the speech you heard are two different speeches.

Which one of those statements is correct?

KATZ!

The entire world is giving us a dharma talk!

Listen closely, please. And help. ♦