

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Colin Beavan

On April 9, 2022, Colin Beavan received inka at Providence Zen Center, USA.

DHARMA COMBAT

Zen Master Hyon Ja (Alma Potter): So I have a question for you. You wrote a book on how to save our planet. That's a little bit too much for me. All I want to know is, who are you going to save first, the Russians or the Ukrainians?

Colin Beavan JDPSN: Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal.

ZMHJ: Thank you, thank you.



Question: You might remember a conversation we had when you were giving consulting interviews during the retreat and we spoke during my interview about my difficult relationships with the teachers. As happy as I am for you, I confess to a bit of selfishness. When I saw you on that cushion I felt like I was losing you a bit as a friend, because now you're going across that line to become a teacher. What's going to happen to our friendship, now that you are in this new role?

Beavan PSN: Kelly, I love you. Which side of the line is that?

Q: I love you, too, Colin. Thank you very much.



Question: I don't know you in person, but I was hearing questions and getting from the context that you've been studying Buddhism for many years. How can you dedicate your life for so long to things that you've never seen, like Buddha? I never met him in person.

Beavan PSN: I see you!

Q: [Looks confused.]

Beavan PSN: Just keep that mind.

INKA SPEECH

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

Knowing how to live your life is not knowing how to live your life. Not knowing how to live your life is knowing how to live your life.

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

There is no knowing how to live your life. There is also no not knowing how to live your life.

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

Knowing how to live your life is knowing how to live your life. Not knowing how to live your life is not knowing how to live your life.

Does anyone truly know how to live their life? Does anyone truly not know how to live their life?

KATZ!

Right now I am going to do some more talking. The polite thing for you to do is listen. The polite thing for me to do is keep it short.

Thank you: Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe), Paul Majchrzyk JDPSN, Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel), Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Bobby Rhodes), Zen Master Bon Yeon (Jane Dobisz), Zen Master Hyon Ja (Alma Potter), and Barry Briggs JDPSN. Thank you to all the other teachers in the Kwan Um School of Zen.



Knowing how to live your life is not knowing how to live your life. Not knowing how to live your life is knowing how to live your life.

When I was in my late twenties, I had already been successful in two careers. I had been a researcher in electrical engineering and got a PhD. I had also run a boutique public relations firm for organizations with a social mission. Supposedly, I knew how to live. But I couldn't understand it. What did any of it mean? How was it important? How would I feel about it all on my deathbed? What was a good life? Where should I live?

Though people thought I knew how to live, I really didn't. I couldn't understand. I remember being scared because I had had a terrible depression in my early twenties and I was scared that I would fall back into a new depression.

I remember distinctly people telling me to let go of my questions because I would drive myself mad. I remember being in a car in Israel in the dark and discussing all this with my father and watching the red glow of his cigarette.

I began to read about Buddhism and mystical Christianity but I was also suspicious of everything I read because I didn't believe anyone else knew how to live either. I couldn't believe any religious writers. This reminds me of something I read recently in a Kwan Um teaching email: Zen Master Seung Sahn held up a cup of orange juice. He said, "This is a cup of orange juice. You keep the orange juice if you have the cup. But if you have no cup, the orange juice has nowhere to stay." Suffering is like that. If you have I-my-me then suffering has a place to stay. But if you are not attached to I-my-me then suffering has nowhere to stay.

These are lovely words, but what I like best is that Zen Master Seung Sahn then said, "Merely understanding these words cannot help you. You have to attain something for yourself."

Back in my late twenties, I was in a dark night of the soul. My knowing how to live had become not knowing how to live. No one else's words could help me. I had to attain something for myself.

There is no knowing how to live your life. There is no not knowing how to live your life.

Around that time, I went to a 12-step meeting in Providence. Someone told me about this Korean Zen master who said, "You must wash your mind with don't-know soap." I loved that. Not "I have something to say to you" but "Don't know and lose all the things that have already been said to you."

I started going to the Kwan Um sitting group on the Brown University campus. After a couple of years I moved to New York City, and I went a few times to my home temple, the Chogye International Zen Center of New York. I didn't like it. There were all these robes and

chanting. I stopped going. But then Zen Master Seung Sahn came to me in a dream. That was the only time I met him. So I went back to the temple.

Before long, I went in for an interview and was given the kong-an "Hyang Eom's Up a Tree." It is only now that I realize how perfect that kong-an was for where I was at. Hyang Eom said, "It is like a man hanging from a tree. He is holding on to a branch by his teeth. His hands and his legs are all tied, so he cannot grasp another branch, and he cannot grasp the trunk of the tree. The only thing that is keeping him alive is clinging by his teeth. Then just at that time somebody comes and asks him, 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China?'"

He is a monk, and his vow is to teach, but if he opens his mouth to answer he will fall to his death. If he doesn't answer, he betrays his nature, his fundamental vow to help all beings.

The question is: How does he stay alive?

The monk clung to life by his teeth. That was like me clinging to trying to figure out how to live. We are like this. We cling to the idea of getting what we want. But first we cling to the idea that we have to figure out what to want. I want something, I just don't know what it is. This is all thinking.

Meanwhile, underneath all that is our fundamental nature. That nature and the nature of the rest of the universe are not two. Deep inside, we know that we want to be kind and we want to help all beings. We don't want to betray that nature. But we get caught up in what we want and wishing we knew how to live. But knowing how to live appears not in each thought but in each situation.

When we are hungry, what? When someone else is hungry, what? When someone needs our teaching and we are all tied up and clinging, what?

Over the last couple of years, my family had a huge crisis. If we said we knew how to deal with it, we wouldn't have been open to what was actually happening and we would have made huge mistakes. On the other hand, if we said we didn't know how to live, we would have been paralyzed. At moments like these, there is neither knowing how to live nor not knowing how to live. Only correctly perceiving your situation and allowing correct function to arise.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche said, "The bad news is you're falling through the air, nothing to hang on to, no parachute. The good news is, there's no ground."

Knowing how to live is knowing how to live. Not knowing how to live is not knowing how to live.

For whatever reason, as I was writing this speech about knowing how to live or not knowing how to live, I began to think about when my mother asked me how to die. When she was in hospice, she told the social worker that she was a Buddhist, which was news to me. The social worker asked if there was a Buddhist she wanted to talk to. She said, "my son." Yikes.

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meant strong enough to stay on the path and not get swallowed up by mental demons.

In my time spent in close proximity with Zen Master Seung Sahn, there were a number of times that great teaching came from him directly to me. One example: A number of us were sitting outside having a picnic lunch with Dae Soen Sa Nim on the Zen center grounds on a hot summer afternoon. I was recovering but still felt unsteady. He looked across at me and said, "Your consciousness jumping around." He then imitated a little bag of consciousness, like a little bird, swooshing around above my head. I laughed. That was exactly what was happening. It was such a relief to see that and understand it. While it did not immediately cure that problem, it took the mythology and intimidation out of it. I began to tell the difference between the state of presence in which consciousness was grounded, and I felt strong and down to earth, versus the states of unsteadiness in which thinking was so intense that I felt I left my body and was outside of it. That's probably the origin of idioms like "He was beside himself with rage."

I continued living at Providence Zen Center for another four and a half years, gaining strength and equanimity in the process, which eventually allowed me to move to Boston and enter the business world. Eventually I got married to my soulmate and teacher. We had a son, and I am continuing

my practice, always with my wife, who is also on the path of liberation from the ego. I am grateful to my great Zen Master Seung Sahn, who pulled me out of the fire and set me on the right way. Thank you, Dae Soen Sa Nim.

One afterword: One of the prerequisites for successfully practicing transforming out of despair into balance is having a strong community behind you. I could not have asked for a more supportive group than my teachers and fellow Zen students at the Providence Zen Center from 1980 to 1984.

I fondly and gratefully remember the insightful teaching and solid support that came from George Bowman (Zen Master Bo Mun), who took me under his wing and lifted me up. And Bobby Rhodes (Zen Master Soeng Hyang) and Linc Rhodes JDPSN, who provided great wisdom and solid realism. And I fondly remember Louise Sichel, the head dharma teacher, who kindly put up with the sweat-stained bowing mats. And Shana and Davy Klinger, and Fred Rosen and Sam Rose, Jim Pallett, Domi Stauber, Tony Sager, and a host of others! ♦

Sol Sandperl has studied Zen Buddhism for a number of years in a Zen monastery in Japan and in the Providence and Cambridge Zen centers. He works as a sales manager in a chemical company. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Marilyn, and son, Joe.

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One day, I asked her if there was anything she wanted to discuss. Her eyes snapped open. "Yes," she said. "I want you to tell me how to die."

We talked a little and then she said, "You seem like you have it all together."

She cried a bit. I said, "Are you crying because you wish you had it all together?" She said yes. She was falling from an infinite height to an infinite depth and she didn't know how to live or how to die.

She cried some more. She said, "Do you? Do you have it all together?"

I said, "I don't think that quite reflects my experience. I often wake with anxiety and worry about money. I feel lonely because I have no partner . . ." (I do now, though.) I said, "But I do have a certain peace with my humanity. I don't fight the fact that I don't have it all together. I think I am largely OK with not having it all together."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

I said, "I don't think any of us completely 'have it all together.' We are all struggling with being human. If no one has it all together, in a certain way, that means all of us do have it all together. Not having it all together, if you are human, is in fact having it all together."

She fell asleep then. Something I'd said had relaxed her. I think I gave her permission not to know how live, not to know how to die. I think telling her that that was the human condition made her feel she no longer had to fight.

We fight it, but it's OK not to know. In fact, not know-

ing is our original condition. Stop fighting. Let go. There is nothing to fight. Everything is just like this. We can relax. We have arrived because we never left.

But merely understanding these words cannot help us. We must each attain something for ourselves.

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

Zen Master Bon Haeng (Mark Houghton) once said to me, "Our practice is about becoming comfortable with not knowing." Is that knowing how to live?

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

Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Bobby Rhodes) once said to me, "Let me give you the best advice you'll ever get. At the moment of your death, ask, 'How can I help?'" Is that knowing how to die?

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

Not knowing, is that life or is that death?

KATZ!

Thank you for listening to me. I hope I didn't go on too long. With any luck, those of us at Providence Zen Center will soon be eating cake! I hope cake appears for those of you on Zoom, too! ♦