

The Five Precepts

The first precept: I vow to abstain from taking life.

The second precept: I vow to abstain from taking things not given.

The third precept: I vow to abstain from misconduct done in lust.

The fourth precept: I vow to abstain from lying.

The fifth precept: I vow to abstain from intoxicants, taken to induce heedlessness.

Already, now, it is too late.

Our offenses have no self-nature, but arise only from our minds.

If our minds are extinguished, then our offenses will be likewise destroyed.

When both our minds and our offenses are extinguished, and both are seen as empty, this is termed true repentance.

The Four Vows

*Sentient beings are numberless,
I vow to save them all.*

*The defilements and passions are inexhaustible,
I vow to destroy them all.*

*The teachings are manifold,
I vow to learn them all.*

*The Buddha-way is supreme,
I vow to attain it.*

Long ago, Bodhidharma sat in Sorim. One day Hui-Ko came to Sorim and asked him, "Would you please teach me the Dharma?"

Bodhidharma said, "Would you believe me?"

Hui-Ko answered, "Yes."

"What proof do you have of this?"

"How can I prove this?"

"Cut off your hand and give it to me."

Hui-Ko cut his left hand off, which was very painful. He said, "My mind hurts very much. Please give me a healthy mind."

"Bring me this pain in the mind."

"I can't see or hold my mind, so I can't give it to you."

"Then put it down."

Like lightning, Hui-Ko attained Satori.

Hui-Ko became the second Chinese patriarch and the twenty-ninth in line from Buddha.

The Four Gates

1. The ice frog is flying into the sun.
2. The mud bird swims in the water, and returns home.
3. The kapok fish rides the bone of space and sings a spring song.
4. The wooden dog eats steel, shits fire, and runs far away.

One of these four gates has become the Buddha gate. Which one?

Long ago, Zen Master Hui-Ko went to the house of a student, who was incurably sick.

The student asked the Zen Master, “In my past lives, I have accumulated much bad karma, and so am now very sick. I am suffering greatly. I wish this karma would disappear, that you would teach me the way of repentance, and that I may live.”

The Zen Master said to him, “Is that so? Now, bring this karma here. I must make it disappear.”

After a few minutes, the student said, “I have searched for the karma, but cannot find it. How can I become well?”

“It is your karma that you cannot find it. I have just made it disappear.”

At this moment, the student understood both karma-nature and Buddha-nature. So, he became the third Chinese patriarch, Seng-ts’an.

*At South Mountain, clouds are formed.
At North Mountain, rain falls.*

One day long ago, Seung Sahn Soen Sa gave a speech to all his students.

“An egg is placed into a small-necked bottle, and kept warm. After twenty days, the egg hatches and a small chick come out. Food is passed through the neck of the flask, and the chick grows each day, bigger and bigger, until it is full-grown. At this point, the neck of the jar is much too small for the chicken to get out.”

“How can you get him out without either breaking the jar or killing the chicken?”

*Clouds rise up from below to the sky.
Rain falls back down to the ground.*

One day, a thirteen-year-old boy came to Zen Master Seng-Ts'an's temple, and bowed to him.

The Master asked, "What teaching do you want?"

"Have compassion on me and give me the teaching that delivers all people from suffering."

"Who bound you?"

"No one bound me."

"If no one did, why do you want the teaching of deliverance?"

At this, the child was freed and said, "Thank you very much, Master."

"What do you mean by this thank you?"

The child only stood up and bowed.

The Zen Master said, "Very good, wonderful."

Afterwards, the child became the fourth Chinese patriarch, Tao-shin.

Long ago, Seung Sahn Soen Sa visited the Dharma room at Brown University and gave a Zen talk.

“When you are thinking, all minds are different. When you are not thinking, all minds are alike. The not-thinking mind is your substance; your substance and the substance of all things is the same, so the substance of the Universe and you are the same. You are the Universe; the Universe is you.”

At this point, one person asked him, “What do you think of the sun?”

“If you think there is North, South, East and West, then you have these. If you do not think so, you do not have them. Mountain and river are only names; there are no mountains or rivers. They are made only in the thoughts of people. The name of all things is the same. Originally, there is no name. You think of the sun; therefore, you have sun. You do not think of the sun; therefore, you do not have it. You are the sun; the sun is you.”

The student said, “Thank you. I understand now.”

“What do you understand by ‘Thank you?’”

“I understand One.”

“What is One?”

“One is truth.”

“What is truth?”

“Truth is all.”

“Then, is two truth?”

“Yes. Two is one; one is two.”

“What does one come from?”

After a moment, the student said, “I don’t know. Please teach me.”

“If I taught you, would you believe me?”

“If I taught *you*, would *you* believe me?”

Soen Sa said, “Yes, I believe everything. Would you like me to teach you?”

“Yes.”

“Come here.”

The student came and sat in front of Soen Sa. Soen Sa hit him and said, “Do you understand?”

“Yes, I do.”

Then I ask you: This stick, the sound it makes, and your mind—are they different or the same?”

“They’re the same... no, they’re different... no, they’re both different and the same.”

“If you say they’re the same, I’ll hit you thirty times. If you say they’re different, I’ll hit you thirty times. If you say both, I’ll hit you sixty times.”

The student covered his mouth with his hands and returned to his seat.

One day, Zen Master Tao-hsin was walking and met a strong young man. The Master thought to himself, "This man is very strong; he could become a great container of the Dharma." When the man came close, the Master asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name? That name is not so good; underneath, I have a nature-name."

"What is your nature-name?"

"I am forced to make the name 'Buddha-nature'."

"If that is your last name, what is your first name?"

"My first name is Empty."

"Then are you empty now?"

"I don't need to answer. You already understand."

The Master laughed heartily.

The young man later became the fifth patriarch, Hung-jen.

One day long ago, Seung Sahn Soen Sa was staying at a student's house in Boston, and many people came for lunch. One person asked, "With what mind do you practice Zen?"

"Did you eat lunch yesterday?"

"Yes."

"The mind with which you ate lunch yesterday and the mind today—are they different or the same?"

"Different."

"Why are they different?"

"Yesterday's mind is past mind; today's mind is present."

"Where did yesterday's mind go? Where is today's mind coming from?"

The student couldn't answer this question. Soen Sa said, "The Diamond Sutra proclaims, 'One cannot attain past mind, present mind, or future mind.' Zen mind is no mind; mind is only name. Thus, there is no past, present, or future. If we put sugar in a glass of water, it becomes sweet; salt, it is salty; medicine, it becomes medicine. If we think good thoughts, our mind is good; bad thoughts, it is bad; no thoughts, it is empty. Emptiness is suchness of mind."

"Thank you very much. I understand. This is Zen mind."

"So you understand. This book and your mind, are they the different or the same?"

"They are the same."

"You now understand that your mind is empty. This book is not empty. Why are they the same?"

For a short moment, the student's mind overflowed with thoughts. Soen Sa hit him and asked, "Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"What do you understand?"

"My mind is not empty."

"Then, is it full?"

“Yes.”

“What is it full of?”

“Full is empty; empty is full.”

Soen Sa hit him once more. “Is this full or empty?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know. This don’t-know mind is Zen mind.”

The student bowed and thanked Soen Sa Nim.

*When I am hungry, I eat.
When I am tired, I sleep.*

Long ago, the Chinese boy Ro made a living by gathering firewood. He would chop trees down on the mountains, cut them up, and then sell the wood in the city. One day, he heard a monk reciting a verse from the Diamond Sutra that said, "When there is no attachment, the mind truly appears."

He stopped dead in his tracks. His body became hot, and his mind became clear. He asked the monk, "What are you reading?"

"This is the Diamond Sutra."

"Where did you learn this?"

"I learned this on Huag-me Mountain, where the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen is teaching many students now."

Ro thanked the monk, and after a few days, went to the mountain and met Hung-jen, who asked him, "Where are you coming from?"

"I am from the Southern Sea."

"That is far away. What do you come here for?"

"I will learn Buddhism."

"It is not necessary for you to speak. Men from the Southern Sea have no Buddha-nature; they are the same as trees and rocks. How can they become Buddha?"

"People have South and North. Does Buddha-nature have North and South?"

"You are very conceited. Go over to that rice-mill and start working."

Ro worked only at the rice-mill for six months, after which, he was given the Transmission and became the sixth patriarch, Hui-neng.

*Birds fly in the sky.
Fish swim in the water.*

One day long ago, after sitting Zen, Seung Sahn Soen Sa and his students spoke to each other. Soen Sa picked up the bell on the floor and said, "This is a bell. If you say this is a bell, you are attached to name and form. If you say it is not, you are attached to emptiness. Is this a bell or not?"

One student shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa said, "Do the other students have an answer?"

A second student said, "The bell is my mind; my mind is the bell."

"Next answer."

A third student grabbed the bell and rang it.

"Are there no other answers?"

A fourth student said, "From out of the bell, a wooden chicken cries, 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!'"

"Are there more?"

The fifth student said, "The sky is high, the ground is wide."

"More?"

"Now the light is on. The room is bright," said the sixth student.

Soen Sa said, "Everyone gave a different answer," and turning to the seventh student asked, "What is your answer?"

The last student did not speak; he only sat.

Soen Sa said, "Seven students have now answered. One of the answers has both killed and revived all people. It is freedom. Which answer is this? Next time, tell me."

With this, the students bowed and went to the kitchen for tea.

Oriental medical doctrine says that if the body is hot with fever, it is good to take hot medicine. If the body is having chills, it is good to take cold medicine. Therefore, if you have many thoughts, practicing a "many thinking" koan will eventually arrest those thoughts.

One day long ago, Zen Master Hung-jen was teaching five hundred students Zen. They all gathered together for a speech.

“Time does not stop. All things change rapidly. Life and death are a very great problem. You must quickly attain Satori, and so understand your original nature. I am now an old man, and must complete Transmission of Dharma. Each of you must write a verse describing your understanding, and the person who writes the best verse will receive the robe and bowl of Dharma.”

Everyone thought that the best Dharma teacher, Hsin-su, would become the next patriarch. However, he had not attained Satori and had no self-confidence, so he did not sign his verse and waited until nighttime to put it on the Master’s door.

The body is the Bodhi tree.
The mind is a clear mirror’s stand
Always keep the mirror clean.
Let no dust fall upon it.

The next morning, everyone saw it and made a great noise in the hall. Hung-jen came and asked, “What is this?” He took one look at the poem and knew it was Hsin-su’s language. “This is a very good verse. If you read and sing it often, you will not go into a bad path, and in the future, you will see you own nature and attain Satori.”

Everyone sang and read the poem very frequently, on the Master’s advice, and Ro, while working at the rice-mill, heard one young student singing it, and asked, “What are you singing?”

The boy answered, “This is Hsin-ju’s Transmission verse, and the Zen Master said we should all sing it to attain Satori.”

Ro said, “Maybe it is a good verse. I will say a verse to you, and you will put it on the wall next to Hsin-su’s verse.”

Originally, Bodhi is not a tree.
The clear mirror has no stand.
Originally, there is nothing.
So where can the dust collect?

The next morning, in front of the Zen Master’s room, there was a great commotion, with everyone arguing over which was the better verse. Hung-jen came out and immediately recognized the new verse. Everyone became still.

In the afternoon, the Master went to Ro at the rice-mill and asked him, “Are you finished making rice?”

“I have already finished, but I do not have confirmation.”

The Master hit the mill three times, and, holding the stick behind his back, he returned to his room. In the third hour of the night, Ro entered the Master’s room through the back door. He was secretly given Bodhidharma’s robe and bowl, received the Transmission of Dharma, and, while everyone slept, he secretly left the monastery and went South.

One day long ago, Seung Sahn Soen Sa was eating dinner with his students in the kitchen. In the center of the table, there was a jar of honey. Everyone wanted Soen Sa to speak, so he asked them all, "In the center of the table is a jar of honey. How can everyone attain extinction and enter into the honey jar? Please answer."

One student said, "It is very sweet."

Another student answered by saying, "The jar is on the table; the flowers are in the vase."

The third student ate honey from the jar.

A fourth student said, "We have not yet left the jar. How shall we go back in?"

Soen Sa said, "All of these are very good answers, but I will hit you all thirty times. However, this will not liberate you, so then, I will hit myself thirty times. This also will not liberate me, so where is the mistake?"

If you do not go into the tiger's cave, you will not catch the tiger.

The morning after Ro escaped the monastery and fled South, the Zen Master did not come to breakfast. One student went to his room to find out why, and was told that the Master, having accomplished Transmission of Dharma, had completed his life's work and had no further need to teach. As only Ro was missing, all the other students knew that he must have received the robe and bowl. They became angry, for Ro was not even a monk, and together started South to try to catch him. Amongst the monks was a tall, strong veteran of the army, who could run very fast. When he got the base of a mountain, farther up the pass, he could see Ro. The mountains echoed as he shouted, "Ro! Put the robe and bowl down! Give them to me!"

Ro put them down on a boulder and hid behind some trees. The monk soon arrived, and as he was picking up the symbols of the patriarch, Ro said to him, "You are only believing in things. This is not the Transmission. Take them and go away."

When the monk tried to pick them up, he couldn't. The robe and bowl were stuck to the rock, as though they were very heavy. The monk lifted so hard that the boulder itself began to shift. He became very fearful and stammered, "Help me, Ro. I must now understand the Dharma. I do not want the bowl and robe anymore. Please teach me."

Ro came out from behind the trees and said to him, "I will be very happy to teach you."

The monk thanked Ro, and bowing, waited for him to speak. Ro quietly said, "You must not think of good or bad. Right now, what is your original nature?"

On hearing this, the monk attained Satori and asked, "Now I understand the secret teaching. Is there any other meaning?"

Ro replied, "What I have just said is not secret and has not revealed the secret mind. The truly secret mind is only understood by yourself. Keep this mind all the time, and you will save many people from suffering."

The monk was deeply moved, and crying, thanked Ro. The two men left, Ro to the South and the monk to the North. In the South, Ro became the monk Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch.

One morning, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “How can one control thinking while sitting Zen?”

Soen Sa replied, “If you are attached to thought, your practice and your thoughts are different. If you are not attached to thoughts, thinking is practicing; practicing is thinking. This is called only practicing.”

The student asked, “What is only practicing?”

“When you first start driving, you cannot give your attention to sights or sounds, or else you will crash. However, after much practice, you can talk, look at things, and listen to the radio without any problem. Talking and sightseeing have become only driving. Your seeing, hearing, and speaking are non-attachment. It is the same with Zen. ‘Only Zen’ contains walking, eating, sleeping, talking, and watching television. All of these have become unattached thinking. This is only practicing.”

“What is attachment thinking?”

“If you are attached to your thoughts while you are driving, you will go through a stop sign and get a ticket; you will cross the center line and have a crash; you will, thinking that you go to Boston, instead head for New York. In this way, attachment to thinking leads to suffering.”

The student said, “Thank you very much. I understand well.”

“Since you understand, I will now ask you, are thinking and not thinking different? Are they the same?”

“When I am thirsty, I drink.”

“Very good. Go drink tea.”

Then the student and Soen Sa went to the kitchen and drank tea.

Red is red. White is white.

[Letter withdrawn from circulation.]

One day long ago the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, was staying at Cho-ge Mountain Temple. A person came to him and said, "I must understand the Dharma. Please teach me."

The Master asked, "Where are you coming from?"

"I come from Seung San."

"What thing has come from Seung San?"

The visitor could not answer, bowed, and returned to the distant mountain. Every day he sat, asking himself, "What am I?"

As the sun each day went down over the West mountain, he would hit the ground and lament that he had not understood. Finally, after six years, his mind grew clear.

He returned to Hui-neng and said, "To use this thing as a doorbell is not correct."

When Hui-neng heard this, he was very happy, and transmitted the Dharma. The student became a great master, the thirty-fourth patriarch from the Buddha.

Long ago, Zen Master Ko-Bong, teacher of Seung Sahn Soen Sa, was staying at Yang-San in Korea. In a large temple there, he was a student. Every day he worked very hard at making a new field in the mountains, and was fed very bad food.

One day when the Zen Master He-Wol had gone to town, Ko-Bong suggested that they sell the monastery's cow and go buy wine and meat with the money. Everyone agreed, so they sold the cow, spent all the money in town, and in the evening they came back drunk.

The Zen Master returned late, after everyone fell asleep, but in the morning noticed that the cow was missing. Very angry, he called everyone together in the Zen room, and they were all afraid. When the Zen Master demanded that his cow be returned, Ko-Bong took all his clothes off, crawled around the Zen room on all fours saying, "Moo!"

When the Master saw this he became very happy, and hitting Ko Bong thirty times on the ass, said, "This is not my cow. This one is too small."

Everyone returned to their rooms very happy, and the subject was not brought up again.

Yellow comes and reveals yellow.

White comes and reveals white.

Zen Master Man-Gong, Seung Sahn Soen Sa's grand teacher, was staying at Dong-Hak temple and learning the Sutras, when he was only a thirteen-year-old child. The day before vacation was to start, everyone gathered together to listen to Dharma-lectures.

The Sutra Master said, "You all must study hard, learn Buddhism, and become as a big tree, with which great temples are built, and like a large bowl, able to hold many good things. The verse says:

"Water becomes square or round according to the shape of the bowl it is placed in. Likewise, people become good or bad according to the friends they keep."

"Always keep the Buddha in mind and keep good friends. In this way you will become great trees and containers of Dharma."

"This I sincerely wish."

This made the child very happy, and he felt very good. At that point, a visitor staying at the temple, who wore only rags and never shaved, was asked by the Sutra Master, "Please speak, Zen Master Gyeong-heo, everyone would like to hear your words of wisdom."

Although he at first refused, after being asked again and again he reluctantly consented to give a talk.

"You are all monks. Monks are great teachers, are free from the ego, and live only to serve all people. Wanting to become a big tree or a great container of Dharma prevents you from being a true teacher. Big trees have a big use, little trees have a little use; good and bad bowls both have uses. None is to be discarded. Keep both bad and good friends. This is your responsibility. You must not reject any element; this is Buddhism. This verse from the Sutras you must understand. My only wish is for you to free yourself from conceptions."

Everyone, including the child, was filled with deep admiration. The Zen Master walked out the door. The child ran out after him, calling to him. "Please take me with you. I wish to become your student."

The Master shouted, telling him to go away, but the child would not leave.

"If I take you, what will you do?"

"I will learn Buddhism. You will teach me."

"You are a child. You cannot understand Buddhism."

"Although people are young and old, in Buddhism is there youth or old age?"

“You are a bad boy. You have killed and eaten the Buddha. Come here!”

The Master took the child to Chung-Jung temple, introduced him to the abbot, and there the child became a monk.

The Chung-Jang Temple Nembutsu Master told the new monk Man-Gong that he must learn prostration, praying, and sutra-reading first. He learned to bow and chant very well, and many people came to hear him and have him say prayers for them. He read and understood all the sutras. When he was eighteen years old, on the Buddha's birthday, he chanted from early morning on—all day long—with no stop. Finally, when he was just leaving for dinner an eleven-year-old child came up to him.

Man-Gong asked, "Where are you coming from?"

"I come from the land at the bottom of the mountains."

"Why did you come here?"

"I have one question I must ask you."

"What is it?"

"Do you know the saying, 'All of the ten thousand Dharmas reside in One?'"

"Yes."

"Where does this One reside?"

Man-Gong could not answer. His face turned many colors, and he was stunned, as if hit by a hammer. He was completely beside himself, and could not think or feel anything. The child, seeing this, said, "You also don't know," and went away.

Man-Gong felt only shame and resentment; with these his mind was full. When he returned to his room, he was not hungry any more. He could only ask himself, "Where does the One reside?"

When the kitchen help came with food, Man-Gong would not eat it. Later when he went to bed he could not sleep; he could only think of that single question. After a number of days like this, the Nembutsu Master called him in and said, "You have not eaten in days, and are quite distracted. Are you in love?"

"No."

"I think it is one of those pretty girls in town. That is very bad for a monk, you know."

"No, it is not that."

"What is it then? Why do you not eat and why are you sickly? Your mind is distracted and you cannot act straight. Why is this?"

Man-Gong was forced to recount the whole incident with the child, and then asked the Master, “Where does the One reside?”

“I don’t know. You must have the Zen sickness. I can do nothing for you. You must go to a Zen temple.”

After a few more days, Man-Gong gathered his belongings and left for Bong-gok-sa Zen temple.

So Man-Gong went to the Zen temple, and, every day while sitting Zen, he kept the one question, "Where does the One reside?" in his mind. Sometimes he didn't even sleep, but sat up all night.

One day he was sitting facing the wall, when a large hole appeared in the wall, and he could see the entire landscape beyond. He touched the wall and it was still there, but it was transparent like glass. In the night, he saw right through the roof. He became very happy, thinking that he had penetrated the nature of all things. The next morning he proclaimed to the Zen Master, "I have attained Satori."

The Master said, "Oh, you have? What is nature?"

"I am now able to see through both wall and ceiling, as though they were not there."

"Is this answer the Truth?"

"Yes, I have no hindrance. This is the Truth."

The Master hit Man-Gong on the head once with his stick, and asked, "Is there any hindrance now?"

Man-Gong was astonished. His eyes grew wide, his face red, the walls and ceiling became solid once again. The Master asked him, "Where did your truth go now?"

His mind clouded over, and he could only say, "I don't know. What can I do?"

"What koan do you practice now?"

"Where does the One reside?"

"Do you understand One?"

"No, I don't know."

"You must first understand One. This is Satori. What you saw was made by a color demon. Do not be led astray by it. Always keep this koan in practice. With hard training it is possible you will soon attain."

Man-Gong thanked him, bowed three times, and returned to the sitting hall.

So Man-Gong became very strong-willed, and directed all of himself to attaining Satori. Many nights he sat up in the Zen room. When he was twenty-one years old, he used to get up in the early morning to ring the bell. One morning in the fresh, cold air he sang:

“If people want to understand all the Buddhas of past, present, and future, they must perceive the universal nature, for all is made only by the mind.”

Having sung this, he struck the great bell. Just then, his mind opened, and he understood that all Buddhas dwell in the ring of a bell. He became very light-headed and happy.

He quickly ran down to the Zen room, and kicked the person who used to sit next to him. He looked up astonished and asked, “Are you crazy?”

Man-Gong replied, “This is Buddha nature!”

“Did you attain Satori?”

“All the Universe is only one; I am Buddha, I am Dharma.”

Soon, when vacation came, he packed his belongings on his back, and marched from one temple to another. He came to a Sutra temple, where many students were studying scriptures, and asked, “What book do you all read?”

“The book of the Beginner’s Mind of Man.”

“What is the Beginner’s Mind?”

The Sutra Master said, “When people first come to study Buddhism, this is Beginner’s Mind.”

“Then, what is the Finisher’s Mind?”

“Last mind? I have never heard of such a thing. I don’t know.”

“Why do you have a Beginner’s Mind, but not a Finisher’s Mind?”

“I don’t know.”

“If you don’t know the Finisher’s Mind, how can you understand Beginner’s Mind?”

The Sutra Master could not reply, and Man-Gong hit him. The Sutra Master screamed, “Ow! Ow!”

“This is the Beginner’s Mind.”

With this great victory, Man-Gong became even larger, so he went to another, very large temple to visit a Sutra Master who had studied the Diamond Sutra.

“You teach the Diamond Sutra. What does it mean?”

“It teaches the principle of emptiness.”

“Is it all empty?”

“Yes, it is.”

“If it is all empty, where does the Sutra come from?”

“Uh... uh... uh?”

Man-Gong said, “You don’t understand the Diamond Sutra,” and hit him.

“Ow, ow!”

“It is from this that the Diamond Sutra comes.”

Man Gong proceeded to do this everywhere around the country, becoming very famous. People said, “He is a free man, he has no hindrance.”

On the day of Man-Gong's grand teacher's death (one year after) there was a ceremony at Ma-Gok Temple. All of his followers came, and the great Zen Master Kyong-Ho came to stay at the temple. Everyone bowed to him and gave many presents. All people gave him respect equal to the Buddha. When Man-Gong came, he said to himself, "This Kyong-Ho and myself are the same. Both of us have attained Satori. He is Buddha, so am I. We are both Zen Masters."

"But, as he gave me the five precepts, I will still bow to him."

So he went in to Kyong-Ho's room, bowed once, and said, "How are you, oh precepts teacher?"

"Welcome, Man-Gong! Please have a seat."

"Thank you," Man-Gong said, and sat down.

"I have not seen you for a long time. How are you?"

"I am very fine, thank you."

"I have heard that you have attained Satori. Is this true?"

Confidently, Man-Gong said, "Yes, I have."

"That's wonderful! I will now ask you a question."

"Please, feel free to do so."

So Kyong-Ho picked up a fan and a writing brush, put them in front of Man-Gong, and asked, "Are these two different or the same?"

"The fan is the brush; the brush is the fan," Man-Gong replied with confidence.

So, for an hour, Kyong-Ho told many old Zen stories and master's experiences. Like a grandmother, he spoke only out of concern for Man-Gong, but this was all to no avail, for this went in one ear and right out the other and Man-Gong considered it only a nuisance. So Kyong-Ho asked him one more question. "Do you know the chanting in the internment ceremony for dead people?"

"Yes."

"In it there is a verse that says, 'The statue has eyes and tears silently drip down.' What does this mean?"

Man-Gong was stunned, and utterly crushed. His ears were stopped, his eyes went dark, and he could feel nothing.

Kyong-Ho, exceedingly angry, shouted, "If you do not understand this, why did you say that fan and brush were the same?"

Only with the utmost effort could Man-Gong open his mouth, for he had become as hard as rock. He said, "Pardon me."

"Do you understand your mistake?"

"Yes, what can I do?"

Kyong-Ho's face became very compassionate and he said, "I will teach you."

Man-Gong stood up, straightened his robes out, bowed three times, and waited silently.

"When Jo-Ju was asked long ago whether a dog had Buddha-nature, he said, 'No.' What does this mean?"

Man-Gong said, "I don't know."

"Keep this mind that said 'I don't know' in your practice, and you will become clear and attain Satori."

This was to Man-Gong a very great gift. He went to the Tong-do Zen Temple, and through very hard training was reduced to skin and bones, and bitter tears. After three years like this, he heard one morning a great bell and understood Jo-Ju's answer. He was twenty-four years old.

Man-Gong returned to Kyong-Ho and said, "For the first time I understand why the Bodhisattva faces away, because sugar is sweet and salt is salty."

This made Kyong-Ho very happy and so Man-Gong became the seventy-sixth patriarch.

One day Seung Sahn Soen Sa visited the Dharma Room at Brown University, and many students came to hear his lecture. After Konstan Poep Sa was finished with his introductory remarks, he asked if there were any questions.

One person asked if there was a God.

“You think God, you have God. You do not think God, you do not have God.”

“I think there is no God. Why do I have God if I think God?”

“Do you understand God?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“Do you understand yourself?”

“I don’t know.”

“You do not understand God; you do not understand yourself. How would you know if there was a God or not?”

“Then, is there a God?”

“God is not God, not God is God.”

“Why is God not God?”

Holding up the stick, Soen Sa said, “This is a stick, but, this is not a stick. Originally, there is not stick. It is the same with God: originally there is no ‘God.’ God is only name. The same is true of all things in the Universe.”

“Then, is there no God?”

“The philosopher Descartes said, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ If you do not think, you are not. So the Universe and you are one. This is your substance, the Universe’s substance, and God’s substance. It has no name and no form. You are God, God is you. Do you understand God?”

“Yes, I think that there is no God, and I have no God.”

“If you say that you have no God, I will hit you thirty times. If you say that you do, I will still hit you thirty times.”

“Why will you hit me? I don’t understand. Please explain.”

“I do not give acupuncture to a dead cow. Today is Tuesday.”

The student’s mind suddenly became very large and open, and he said, “I must sit at the Providence Zen Center.”

All of the students left contented.

One day the Zen Master Nan-yueh was visiting the Prajna temple. He knew that one young monk there would become a great master in the future, for he did not talk, play, or ask questions, but only sat Zen. So the Master asked him one day, “What are you doing here?”

“I am sitting Zen.”

“Of what use is that?”

“I will become Buddha.”

The Zen Master asked no more questions, but instead went outside, got a broken tile, went back and sat down in front of the student, and started polishing it.

The student asked, “Why do you try to polish that tile?”

“I will make a mirror.”

The student laughed loudly, saying, “Ha! Ha! You can polish the tile forever, but you will never make a mirror from it.”

Then the Zen Master laughed right back, saying “Ha! Ha! You can sit Zen forever but you will never become Buddha.”

The monk, startled, understood that his sitting Zen was like polishing a tile. Earnestly he asked, “What can I do?”

“If you have a cow harnessed to a cart, when you hit the cow, you hit the cart.”

To this, the monk had no reply. It was as though a ring of hot steel was in his stomach, and he was deeply pained. Later he became Nan-Yueh’s student, attained Satori, and became the next patriarch, Ma-tsu.

Long ago the future Zen Master Yak-San as a young monk had memorized all the Sutras, and looked forward to being a Sutra Master. However, at that time in South China everyone studied Zen, so he was not sure. It was said, "Understand your mind, become Buddha." He did not know if Sutra and Zen were different or not, so he went and asked Master Sok-du, "I have spent a long time and learned all the Sutras. An eminent teacher said, 'Transmission is outside the Sutras, and does not rely on language. It is directly pointing to the mind. See nature, become Buddha.'

"I don't understand this. Please teach me."

"If you say this verse is correct, you will not attain. If you say it is not, you will not attain. Though correct or incorrect you will not attain. Right now, do you understand?"

He could not speak. His mouth hung open like a cow's and he only stood still. Sok-du, seeing this, understood the student's mind.

"Don't you know? Staying here is not good for you. You must go study under the great Master Ma-tsu."

Yak-san left his temple and went to receive teaching from Ma-tsu. He asked the same question of Ma-tsu that he had asked Sok-du: what the meaning of that one verse was.

"Some people have said, 'It is like this,' but I sometimes lift my eyebrows, blink my eyes, or shut them. Do you know which of these three is correct?"

Suddenly, the student's mind opened like lightning. As he straightened himself up and bowed, there was a slight smile on his face.

"Why do you bow to me?"

"When I was staying at the previous temple, I was like a mosquito biting the horns of a cow. This is why I bow to you now."

"Oh, this is admirable! Now it is your honor to go to Sok-du. He has been very good for you. You are now his son. Remember this well."

Yak-san bowed three times and left. For three years he only sat, taking care of himself. Later he became a great master, and saved many people.

One night Seung Sahn Soen Sa and some of his students went to the Dharma Room at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston. After chanting, sitting and some short talks by two Dharma-teachers, one of the visitors asked him, “If there were no people to perceive or conceive of the universe, would there be a universe?”

“If there are people, there is a universe. If there are no people, there is still a universe.”

“I understand that if there are people, they have the universe. But I do not understand why there is a universe if there are no people.”

“Not having is having, having is not having.”

“How is having a universe different from not having a universe?”

“In the Nirvana Sutra there is a verse that says, ‘That all of the universe is transient is the appearing and disappearing of the Dharma. The disappearance of appearance and disappearance is extinction. This annihilation is Nirvana.’ Because ‘having’ and ‘not having’ are in your mind, when these disappear, you are the universe, the universe is you.”

“Does the universe exist all the time?”

“If you think of the universe, you have the universe. If you do not think of the universe, you do not have it.”

“Thank you very much. I now understand.”

“Very good. What do you understand?”

“When I think of the universe, I have it. When I do not think of it, I do not.”

“Then your mind and the universe, are they different or the same?”

“My mind makes the universe; thus they are the same.”

Soen Sa held up the koan text and asked, “This book and your mind, are they different or the same?”

“I see it.”

“What sees this book?”

The student could not answer. Soen Sa said, “If you say they are the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will hit you thirty times.”

Everyone laughed, so the student said, “What can I do?”

“When you ate dinner, did you understand the taste? If you understood this, you would understand yourself.”

“Do you understand taste?”

“I ate Kim Chee; it was hot. I ate honey; it was sweet.”

All the students were joyful at this answer, and left hoping they would see more of Soen Sa.

Long ago Zen Master Yak-san, after attaining Satori and becoming a Zen Master, read and memorized many Sutras. His students were surprised and wondered. Yak-san told them that before he attained Satori he had never once read or seen a Sutra. He told them that if they now read Sutras they would become enslaved to them and so he prohibited them from reading Sutras.

One day, one student was reading a Sutra. Yak-san, seeing the student, asked him, “Why are you reading the Sutra when I told you not to?”

The student said, “You told us not to read the Sutras, but why are you always reading the Sutras?”

The Zen Master said, “I only put the Sutra in front of me; but after you do this the Sutra reads your mind.”

The student did not answer. At this time the first Dharma teacher came to Yak-san and said, “You have not given us students a speech in a long time. All the students are waiting for you to speak.”

Yak-san agreed to speak, and the gong was sounded for the students to meet in the Dharma room. The students gathered in the Dharma room, and Yak-san walked up to the high stand for speaking. The Zen Master sat still a long time and did not say a word. The Dharma room was very quiet. The students’ complete attention was given to hearing what Yak-san would say. He then laid down his Zen staff, and quickly went back to his room.

The first Dharma teacher went to the Zen Master and asked, “Why did you say not even one word, and then go back to your room?”

Yak-san said, “I am not a Sutra Master. I am not a Precepts Master. I am not a Mantra Master. I gave a big talk, but because your mind has no ears you did not hear.”

The Dharma teacher understood, bowed, saying “Thank you,” and returned to the students saying, “The Zen Master’s not speaking is a great proclaiming of the Dharma.”

Long ago, many students came to the Zen room to listen to Zen Master Hyang-Um speak.

“A man whose hands and feet are tied behind his back is hanging from the branch of a tree by his teeth. The tree hangs from the edge of a cliff over a very deep pool. A person shouts from the cliff, ‘Why did Bodhidharma come to China?’ If he does not answer, this is a violation. If he speaks, he falls into the water and drowns. What can you do?” asked the Master.

“If you have even the best speech, it cannot be used. If you understand all Sutras, you can not attain. Any and all actions are useless. What was once a dead path becomes an alive path. When you do not think of life or death, you will first attain. If you do not understand this, you are waiting to ask the future Buddha Maitreya.”

Long ago Zen Master Song-Am used to open the window that had a view of the mountains and looking up, shouted, “Master!”

Looking down, he said, “Yes?”

“Always keep clear.”

“Yes!”

“Do not be tricked by people!”

“Yes, yes.”

Munon Zen Master said, “Song-Am, he sells himself, he buys himself. Because of this, many men with the faces of gods and demons come out and dance.”

“Why?”

“Eeeiii... !”

One called out, one answered; one was kept clear, one was not tricked by the people. Which one is the real Song-Am? If you are mistaken, you will have a fox’s opinion.

One day long ago, Seung Sahn Soen Sa was staying at the Providence Zen Center. A person visited the Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, "Is a small baby thinking or not thinking?"

Soen Sa replied, "Babies are thinking. However, their thinking is no-attachment thinking. When they are five years old they begin to have memory. This is attachment thinking and causes karma."

The person asked, "What is karma?"

Soen Sa said, "If I hit you, the blinking of your eyes would be no-thinking action, and there would be no resulting karma. However, if you got angry, this would be karma."

The visitor asked, "Why would a person respond with anger?"

Soen Sa said, "Karma acquired in the past, both immediate and distant, programs a person's present and future actions. Karma is life; life is karma. Thus, if one acquires good karma his present and future life will be happy; but if one accumulates bad karma his life will be full of suffering."

The visitor then asked, "What is good karma and bad karma?"

"Do you understand good and bad?"

The person did not answer and was confused.

"Originally there is no good nature and no bad nature. There are no Good and Evil in intrinsic nature. The Holy and the Worldly are false names. In front of the door is the quiet and illuminated land. Spring has come, so grass grows."

"The American people feel their way is good, the Russians feel their way is right, and the Chinese think they are right. Only thinking makes good and bad."

The student said, "Thank you. I understand." Then he asked Soen Sa, "I have an ant in my hand and I am about to kill this ant. If you try to save this ant, are you thinking?"

Soen Sa said, "When you are only thinking of saving all people from suffering, this thinking is no-attachment thinking. This is Bodhisattva thinking. Attachment thinking is 'small I' thinking. No-attachment thinking is 'big I' thinking and is infinite time and infinite space. 'Big I' is the universe; the universe is you."

Once again the student understood and said, "Thank you."

Soen Sa said, "You say you understand. What do you understand?"

The student said, "Thinking makes karma."

Soen Sa said, "Karma makes thinking. Thinking makes what?"

The student said, "Thinking makes mind."

"What is mind?"

The student did not answer.

Soen Sa hit him. "Do you understand?"

The student's mind was blank. All thinking was cut.

Soen Sa said, "Yellow comes: yellow. Red comes: red."

The student bowed and left.

One time long ago, Zen Master Poep-An was master of a big Zen Room. One student, Hean-Chuk, came to the Zen Room and for three years he did not once visit the Master's room to speak. Zen Master Poep-An one day asked him why he had not once, in the three years he had been coming to the Zen Room, come to visit him.

The student replied, "I did not come to visit you not because I am lazy, but because before I stayed with Zen Master Chung-Bon and attained a comfortable mind. So I have no questions; consequently, I did not visit you."

The Zen Master asked, "What did you Zen Master teach you?"

The student said, "I asked Zen Master Chung-Bon, 'What is the original I?' He answered, 'Fire god comes and wants fire.' Having heard this I soon attained a comfortable mind."

The Zen Master said, "This is wonderful; however, there is something still lacking."

The student was indignant and said, "I do not yet understand Chung-Bon's koan?"

The Zen Master said, "That's right. This koan is very difficult."

The student was more indignant and said, "How's this difficult? 'Fire god comes and wants fire' is the same as 'Buddha comes and wants Buddha.' My mind is Buddha, Buddha is my mind. What's so difficult?"

The Zen Master said, "Before you said this I already understood that you didn't understand." He shook his head up and down, laughing, "Ha, ha, ha!" And said, "If you have attained this comfortable mind give me one more answer."

The student only remained indignant. The Zen Master said, "You are angry because you do not understand this one koan clearly. If attaining Satori were as easy as you say, then Zen would have already died out."

The student angrily was thinking that this Zen Master was no good and quickly left. He went to a mountain top and stayed, constantly thinking about whether he understood or not. He was thinking that this Zen Master was a great Zen Master who had five hundred students. He wondered what his mistake could be and he was undecided whether or not to see this Zen Master once more. He decided to go see the Zen Master again and so visited him and bowed before him.

The Zen Master said happily, "Oh welcome, welcome. You have a question for me?"

The student's mind was clear and he asked, "What is the original I?"

The Zen Master said seriously, "Fire god comes and wants fire."

Just as if lightning had struck, the student understood. His eyes opened like headlights. He stood up and bowed three times and said, "You are very kind."

The Zen Master said, "Not thinking and not speaking is Zen."

The student thanked him again, and said, "I will keep this mind." In the future he became a great monk.

Long ago after the Dharma teacher spoke at the Dharma Room at Brown University, one student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa many questions, one of which was, “What is the stick you’re holding?”

“This is a Zen stick.”

“What is it for?”

“While sitting Zen, sometimes people sleep. Hitting them with the stick wakes them up. Sometimes when a person is thinking a lot, a hit with the stick cuts this thinking. Sometimes this Zen stick makes Buddha.”

The student said, “About sleeping and thinking, I understand, but how does it make Buddha?”

“This stick has eyes, and understands all the students’ minds. When it cuts all thinking all students’ minds become empty. Because the Zen stick is a freedom stick, it stays empty, and sometimes becomes Buddha and sometimes kills Buddha.”

The student asked, “Why kill the Buddha?”

Soen Sa said, “Sometimes this becomes as big as the Universe, sometimes smaller than dust. This Zen stick cuts all name and all form. Then, this stick is able to make all things appear and disappear. Therefore it can kill Buddha, all eminent teachers, and all the people. So, this stick is Buddha, is God, is the Universe, is you.”

The student asked, “Why is the stick I?”

Soen Sa said, “When you’re thinking, you and the stick are different. When you’re not thinking, you and the stick are the same. Why! Your substance and the stick’s substance are one. So, you are the stick; the stick is you.”

The student said, “Thank you very much; I now understand.”

Soen Sa said, “Wonderful! Wonderful! Then I will ask you, ‘What is this?’ If you say ‘stick,’ you are attached to form and to name. If you say this is not a stick, you are attached to emptiness. What is this, then?”

The student was totally confused.

Soen Sa hit him, and said, “Now the stick makes you Buddha, and so three times three equals nine.”

The student wanted to sit Zen and to attain Satori. He thanked Soen Sa and left.

One day a hunter went up into the mountains hunting for birds. All day he saw not one bird, and so became hungry and tired. The sun was setting in the west, and it was evening. It was getting dark and he lost his way. He decided to walk slowly in a southern direction since his house was in the south.

Just then a tiger jumped in front of him and gave out a ferocious roar. The hunter, completely forgetting about being hungry, tired, and lost, ran as fast as he could, because his gun was for killing birds and not tigers. He was tearing along, totally unaware of where he was running. Just as the tiger was about to grab him, he fell into a deep miner's hole. Luckily he caught onto a strong vine, and he sighed, "Oh my God, I'm safe." He was dangling from the vine as up above the tiger roared viciously. Just as he had regathered his senses and was feeling safe, he heard a strange noise below. He looked down, and saw three huge snakes anxiously waiting for him to fall down. He didn't know what to do, for he could not climb up or climb down. He felt desperate.

Just then he heard more noises above him. He looked up and saw a black and a white mouse eating away at the vine. He was getting more and more desperate. His mind was totally clear of all wants and desires, and he was only thinking that he was already dead. His mind was totally empty.

Suddenly he heard the buzzing of a bee above him and he saw that it was making honey. The honey was dripping down the vine. He tasted the honey, which was sweet, and his only thought was that he was hungry, and so ate the honey. He forgot about the tiger, the mice, and the snakes. He only ate the honey.

The man is only eating the honey, but he will soon be dead. However, there is only one road of life. What is this road?

The tiger is uncertainty. The black and white mice are past time. The three snakes are anger, greed, and ignorance, the three bad karmas. The honey is the many attachments of enjoying life. The man represents all people.

One day a person from Chicago came to the Providence Zen Center, and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, "What is Zen?"

Soen Sa held the Zen stick above his head, and said, "Do you understand?"

The student replied, "I don't know!"

Soen Sa said, "This 'don't know' mind is you. Understanding yourself is Zen."

"What do you understand about me? Teach me."

Soen Sa said, "In a cookie factory different cookies in the shape of cars, people, mountains and airplanes all have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same material, and they taste the same.

"Likewise all things in the Universe, the stars, the sun, the moon, the mountains, rivers, people, and so on, have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same substance. This basic substance is unknown, and knowing its nature is only supposition. Universal organization consists of opposites: light and dark, man and woman, mountains and rivers, sound and silence, good and bad. However, they are all mutual because they are made from the same substance. Name and form is different, but the substance is the same. Name and form are made by people's thinking. Not thinking is no attachment to name and to form; only, all substance is one. So your 'don't know' mind is cutting all thinking. This is your substance. The substance of this Zen stick and your substance are the same. You are this stick; this stick is you."

The person said, "Thank you very much. Some philosophers say this substance is energy, is mind, is God, is materialism. Which one is true?"

Soen Sa said, "One day four blind men went to the zoo, and visited the elephant. One blind man touched its belly, and said, 'The elephant is like a wall!' The next man touched his nose and said, 'The elephant is a big snake!' The next man touched his leg, and said 'The elephant is like a column!' The last man touched the tail, and said 'The elephant is like a broom.'

"The four blind men started to fight amongst themselves, each one believing he was right. They all called their own friends to help, and soon there was a great fight going on. They only understood whatever part they touched, but they did not understand the whole.

"Substance is no name and no form. Energy, mind, God, and materialism are all name and form. Substance is absoluteness. Having name is having opposites. Therefore, the whole world is like the blind men fighting amongst themselves. Not understanding yourself is not understanding truth; consequently there is fighting amongst ourselves. If all

the people in the world understood themselves they would obtain the truth of absoluteness. Then the world would be at peace. World peace is Zen!”

The person asked, “How can practicing Zen make world peace?”

Soen Sa said, “People want money, prestige, material wealth, love, comfort, and so on. All this wanting is thinking. Thinking is suffering. Suffering means no world peace. Not thinking is not suffering. Not suffering is world peace. World peace is the truth of absoluteness. Truth of absoluteness is I.”

The person said, “How can I understand this truth of absoluteness?”

Soen Sa answered, “You must understand yourself.”

“Yes, I want to understand myself.”

Holding up the Zen stick, Soen Sa said, “Do you see this?”

Soen Sa then quickly hit the table with the stick: “BANG!” and said, “Do you hear this? Then, this stick, this sound, and your mind, are they the same or different?”

The person answered, “They are the same.”

Soen Sa said, “If you say ‘the same’ I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will hit you thirty times. Why?”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa shouted “KATZ!!!” Then he said, “Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.”

On April 8, 1973 the Providence Zen Center held a celebration of the Buddha's birthday upon which occasion Soen Sa Nim gave the following talk:

“Long ago an eminent teacher said, “The Buddha did not come to the Kapila empire and was not born of his mother, for he had already saved all people from suffering.” This is having one thousand mouths, and not needing them. If you understand this, you will understand that in the palm of your hands you hold the noses of all the eminent teachers from the distant past to the present. And so you first attain. If you do not understand, you should not speak for that is only blood dripping. It is better for you to keep your mouth shut as spring passes.

The Buddha sprang from the right side of his mother took seven steps in each of the four directions. He then looked once each way, raised one finger to the sky, and touched the ground with his other hand. He said, “In the sky above and the Sky below, only I am Holy.” You must understand this speech and understand what this ‘I’ is. ‘I’ is empty. Empty is full. It has no name or form, and does not appear nor disappear. All people and all things have it. So, where is the Buddha coming from?”

Long ago Zen Master Un-Moon said, ‘On the Buddha's birthday, as he sprang from the side of his mother, I hit him once and killed him, and gave him to a hungry dog. The entire world was at peace.’

“What the Buddha said on his birthday is no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What the Zen Master Un-Moon said is also no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What I have just said is no good, so I will hit myself thirty times.”

“Where is the mistake?”

“KATZ!”

“Today is the Buddha's birthday, and outside white snow is falling.”

After the lecture on the Buddha's birthday, Soen Sa asked if there were any more questions.

One guest asked, "Some people say the Buddha is a divine entity, others say he was super-human and god-like, still others say he was just a wise old man who understood a little more than most. What is Buddha?"

"How did you get here?"

"By foot."

"Why did you come by foot?"

"I had no car."

"A man drives a car. What is it that drove your body here?"

"I don't know."

"The mind that doesn't know is the Buddha."

"Why do you celebrate Buddha's birthday then?"

"As I mentioned earlier, the great Master Un-Moon once said, 'On the Buddha's birthday, as he sprang from the side of his mother, I hit him once and killed him, and gave him to a hungry dog. The entire world was at peace.' Do you understand what this means?"

"No, I don't."

"This is the Buddha's teaching. When you understand this, you will come to understand why we celebrate his birthday."

As it is.

One day long ago Seung Sahn Soen Sa asked all of his students, “One plus two equals what?”

One student replied, “One plus two equals three.”

Soen Sa said, “No, one plus two is zero.”

“Why zero? If you add two apples to one apple you will have three apples.”

“If I eat one apple and two apples, then there are no apples.”

“This isn’t right.”

“You say that one plus two equals three. I say one plus two equals zero. What is right?”

The student did not answer.

Soen Sa hit him and said, “A lion grabs and claws people; the dog only runs away with a bone.”

On another day, Soen Sa asked the students the same question: “What does one plus two equal?”

One student shouted, “KATZ!”

“Is this the truth?”

“No, it is not the truth.”

“What is the truth?”

“One plus two equals three.”

“I understand that you are a blind dog, but now I see a keen-eyed lion.”

Every Sunday night at the Providence Zen Center there are devotions and then a Dharma Speech. Many students attend these lectures and ask questions after the speech. One Sunday night a student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “When practicing Zen, how can one keep a Zen mind?”

Soen Sa said, “Do you understand your mind?”

“I don’t know?”

“This ‘don’t know’ mind should be kept while practicing.”

“Then, is this mind thinking?”

Soen Sa said, “Cutting all thinking is the great question ‘What am I?’”

“How can one keep this question ‘What am I?’ while practicing, and attain Satori?”

“While practicing one must have great faith, great courage, and great sincerity.”

The student asked, “What is great faith?”

Soen Sa said, “Great faith is believing I am already Buddha. This is faith in oneself. This faith must be unwavering. Just as a hen sits constantly on an egg for twenty days, this faith must be maintained. If the egg is left without heat just for an hour it will not hatch. Likewise, great faith must be kept constantly while practicing Zen.”

The student understood and asked about great courage.

Soen Sa said, “When a cat is chasing a mouse and the mouse runs into a hole, the cat’s total concentration is on the hole. When the cat only concentrates on the hole, there is no thought of cat, only complete, total focus on the hole into which the mouse ran. Likewise, in the army, when fighting in battle, a man does not think of life and death; he only thinks of killing the enemy. With this rigor and courage Zen should be practiced.”

“What is great sincerity?”

“A baby only wants its mother. A man in a desert without water only wants water. A man who hasn’t eaten for three days only wants food. With such great sincerity Zen should be practiced. Only the question ‘What am I!’ Each person has will, intellect, and feeling. ‘Not thinking will’ becomes great faith, ‘not thinking intellect’ becomes great courage, and ‘not thinking feeling’ becomes great sincerity.”

“What is not-thinking will, intellect, and feeling?”

“When will, intellect, and feeling become one this is not-thinking. Only the great question ‘what am I?’ is left. Cut all thinking, and become ‘I don’t know’ mind. This ‘don’t know’ mind is the three—faith, courage and sincerity.”

“Thank you, I understand.”

“Who understands?”

“I understand.”

“What are you?”

The student did not answer.

Soen Sa hit him. “Do you understand?”

“I don’t know!”

“This ‘don’t know’ mind is the three—great faith, great courage, and great sincerity.”

“Thank you!” He bowed. He wanted to sit Zen and to attain Satori.

Long ago, the young monk Pai-Chang Huai-Hai was staying at the temple of Master Ma-tsu as an attendant. One day he went with the Master on a boat ride. The boat rocked in a leisurely way back and forth in the swells. Suddenly, a wild goose started up out of the water and, with a great noise, went South. The Master asked Huai-Hai, "What is this?"

"This is a wild goose."

"Where is it going?"

"It is flying South."

Suddenly, the Master grabbed him by the nose and twisted it hard. Huai Hai screamed in pain. Ma-tsu shouted, "Now just you say *again* that the goose is flying South."

Already deeply pained by his wrenched nose, the student heard the Master's shout like thunder in a storm. His mind suddenly opened up, and he felt as though he were floating in the air.

When they returned to the temple, Huai-Hai could only scream and wail. A friend of his woke up and rushed to him, asking, "Why do you scream? What happened? Are you hurt?"

"No, no, no! Wo! O! O!"

"What has happened?"

Huai-Hai could only cry and cry.

"Please tell me! Why are you crying?"

"My nose hurts so much! O! O! O! He grabbed it so hard and just twisted it. O!"

"Oh, now I understand. Master hits us all the time. Why has he done it this time?"

"O! O! I don't know. Go ask him!"

The friend left and went to the Master's room.

"Huai-Hai came hurrying back to the temple screaming and crying. He said his nose hurts too much and told me to ask you. Why?"

"I don't know. When he is better, ask him," the Master said quietly.

The friend returned to Huai-Hai. “The Zen Master said you will understand why you hurt when you get better. What the hell is wrong?”

All of a sudden, Huai-Hai jerked up. “Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The friend’s eyes grew wide and he said, “You must be crazy. Here you’ve been crying, and now all of a sudden you laugh.”

“Sure, that’s right. If only I could show you the taste of crying and laughing, but I cannot. When I am sad I cry; when I am happy, I laugh.”

Thus, as a great relief, Huai-Hai attained Satori, and became the thirty-sixth patriarch Pai-Chang.

One day a small boy named Sin Hae came to Hui-neng's temple, and wanted Hui-neng's teaching. Hui-neng said, "You have come from far away. You are a very good boy. You want to learn Zen. Did you bring the origin of learning here? If you say you have the origin, then what is your Master? Quickly give me an answer!"

Sin Hae said, "No attachment to all things is the origin and perception is my Master."

Zen Master Hui-neng said "Your language is very good."

Sin Hae said, "I will ask you, when you sit Zen do you see or not see your Master?"

Just as soon as Sin Hae had said this Hui-neng hit him and asked, "Do you feel pain or not?"

Sin Hae said, "Sometimes painful, sometimes not painful."

"Just so, sometimes I see my Master; sometimes I do not."

Sin Hae asked, "Why sometimes see, sometimes not see?"

The Zen Master said, "When I see, I am mistaken. When I don't see, other people are mistaken. When you feel pain, this is thinking. Thinking is for common people. When you do not feel pain, you are the same as a rock. The appearing and disappearing of feeling pain is all thinking. What you said before, 'No attachment to all things is the origin,' is not true. What can your Master do about perception?"

Sin Hae stood up and bowed, saying, "Teach me."

The Zen Master said, "You should not think of good and bad; cut all thinking and all speech. Right now, what is your Master?"

Sin Hae bowed, saying, "I don't know."

The Zen Master said, "Keep this 'don't know' mind at all times, and you will understand your Master."

After the passing of a few years, Sin Hae said, "The 'don't know' mind is origin of Buddha and of my Buddha-nature."

Hui-neng said, "The 'don't know' mind is no name and no form. Why do you say, 'the origin of Buddha and of my Buddha-nature'!?"

Sin Hae just then understood and stood up and bowed three full bows. He went to the south and became a great Zen Master.

Long ago, Zen Master Pai Chang, named after the mountain on which he taught, was famous for his temple rule: "If you don't work, you don't eat."

One day he gave a great speech to all the assembled monks, and, when he had finished, everyone left. There remained only an old man. Pai Chang asked him, "Who are you?"

"I am not a human being. Five hundred lifetimes ago I was the Master who taught on this mountain. One student asked me whether one who is enlightened is subject to karma. I answered, 'No, he is not.' For this answer I have remained a fox since then. Please answer this same question, and release me."

"Karma is quite obvious."

At this, the old man understood. He bowed and said, "Thank you very much. Now I will leave my fox's body on the mountain. Please perform a monk's funeral service for me."

The next day, Pai Chang gave instructions for a monk's funeral to be performed. No one understood this, for no one had been sick or died.

After dinner they all went around to the other side of the mountain. In a small cave, Pai Chang found the corpse of an old fox and there cremated it.

That evening, Pai Chang related the entire story to the monks, and one student, Huang Po, asked him, "Long ago somebody gave a wrong Zen answer, and became a fox for five hundred lives. What would happen to a Master if he always gave right Zen answers?"

Pai Chang said, "Come here and I will teach you."

Huang Po walked up to the Master and slapped him on the face. Pai Chang clapped his hands, laughed and said, "I know that Westerners have brown beards. Now that I see a brown beard, I know a Westerner."

Huang Po, Pai Chang's student, later became the teacher Lin-chi.

Long ago Master Seung Sahn Soen Sa was sitting in the kitchen with some students. In the center of the table was a bowl filled with apples and oranges. He picked up one apple and asked, "What is this?"

"It is an apple," one replied.

Lifting up an orange, he again asked, "What is this?"

"It's an orange."

"This apple and orange, are they the same or different?"

The student took a bite of the apple.

Only the orange was left on the table. Soen Sa pointed to it and said, "Does this orange have Buddha-nature, as the Buddha himself proclaimed?"

"No."

"Why not? The Buddha said it does. You say not. Which one is the truth?"

The student, without speaking, handed the orange to Soen Sa.

"I don't want that orange. Give me another answer."

"The orange is orange-colored."

Soen Sa said, "Before, I did not know that it was orange-colored, but now that you tell me, I know that the orange is orange-colored."

At this point, the lunch gong was hit, and everyone came to eat with them.

As a young man, Hsin-chan went to live with the Sutra Master Ge-hean, in order to study the Buddhist scriptures. For three years he studied and memorized the scriptures, but the longer he spent on Sutras, the more he desired to practice Zen and truly understand them. So he asked the Master to send him to a Zen temple. The Master replied, "No, you stay here. Very shortly you will have finished your studies, and will become a great Dharma teacher."

This did not satisfy Hsin-chan, so one night he secretly left and went to Pai-Chang's temple. For three years he studied very hard, and later returned to his old temple. When he met the Sutra Master again he bowed.

The Master said, "I am happy to see you, but where have you been? What have you attained?"

"I have attained nothing."

"What have you been doing these past three years? Wasting your time? You will now be my private servant, keeping my room clean and attending to my needs," he said angrily.

One day the Master was taking a bath, and called him to come scrub his back. While he was doing this Hsin-chang said to himself, "The Dharma room is very well, but the Buddha inside is not so wonderful."

His teacher turned around quickly, wondering what this meant.

Hsin-chan said, "Although the Buddha is not so bright, he still perceives radiance."

A few days later, while he was sweeping the Master's room, he noticed a fly beating against the paper door. Although one of the screens was torn, the fly did not find it, but kept buzzing against the paper. He sang out loudly:

Why does the fly not use the empty gate,
But rather buzzes foolishly against the wall?
If he were to drill at the old paper for one hundred years,
When would he ever escape?

This startled the Sutra Master, who was close by. He said, "Why do you sing this? You compare me to a mere fly, both trying to escape through paper."

The student did not answer.

"When you were gone for three years, did you go to a Zen temple?"

"Yes, I studied under Master Pai-Chang."

“Oh, I see. What did he have to say? Please tell me.”

Hsin-chan put on his robes, and the Sutra Master sat down before him.

“Pai-Chang once said, ‘The Universe is filled with original light. When the six senses are left unused, the Dharma-body truly appears at all times. Speech cannot touch it, the nature of mind is not tainted. The original self becomes a sphere. Only all thinking must be cut; like this is Buddha.’”

The Sutra Master wept tears of joy on hearing this, and, bowing three times, said, “I am now too old to go to the temple of Pai-Chang. Please teach me here in his stead.”

From that time on he studied Sutras no longer, but devoted all his time to hard Zen training, and, before his death came to understand.

Long ago Seung Sahn Soen Sa went to Brown University, and after a short Dharma talk, there was a question and answer period.

One student said, "Please ask me a question."

Soen Sa said, "Long ago Zen Master Jo-Ju, when asked whether a dog had Buddha-nature, said 'No.' Long before him, the Buddha said, 'All things have Buddha-nature.' Jo-Ju said, 'No,' the Buddha said, 'Yes.' The first question I will ask is, which answer is right? Next, I ask you, what does Jo-Ju's answer mean? Last, I ask whether Jo-Ju's answer is right or wrong."

The student said, "The answer Jo-Ju gave is both right and wrong."

"If you say it is right, I will hit you thirty times. If you say it is wrong, I will still hit you thirty times. However if you say it is both, I will hit you sixty times."

This left the student confused. Soen Sa had already struck the student's mind, and had taught the dog's Buddha-nature.

Afterwards, the same student asked Soen Sa, "Why did you come to America? What are you doing here?"

Soen Sa said, "When I am tired, I sleep; when I am hungry I eat."

Both Soen Sa and all of the students went away contented.

In one temple in China, there was an Eastern and a Western Zen Center, both being taught by Master Nam-chou. One day, a cat was walking between the two, and people from both centers claimed it was theirs. Soon, many monks had gathered and there was a great noisy argument, both groups claiming the cat. The Master, hearing all of this, came up right to the center of the gathering and grabbed the cat. He said, "Give me one word. If you do, the cat will live; if you do not, I will kill it!"

Everyone had been shouting. Now complete silence reigned. The Master took his sword and chopped the cat in two.

In so doing, the Master killed not only the cat, but also the grasping minds of the students. He destroyed both the object of clinging and all the clinging minds, leaving only a great empty space.

In the evening, when his best student Jo-Ju returned, the Master related all that had happened, and asked him, "If you had been there, what would you have done?"

Jo-Ju bent over, picked up his shoes, put them on his head, and walked right back out the door.

The Master said, "If you had done this, the cat would have been saved. As it was, I killed the miserable thing."

1. *What does Jo-Ju's answer mean?*
2. *The cat is dead. Where did it go?*
3. *Was the Master's killing of the cat a right or wrong action?*

Long ago, a lay disciple of Pai-Chang, Sa-ma-tu-ta, was an adept of the art of geomancy. He once went for a tour of Southern China, examining the landscape. Upon returning, he said to the Master, "I have just made a great tour of Southern China. One mountain, Te-hui, is magnificent and large. It is a very good mountain on which to build a monastery. Whom shall we send?"

The Master said, "That's very good. I'll go, O.K.?"

"No, that's not good. By your face, I see you can only teach five hundred students, while this mountain is good for fifteen hundred."

"O.K., I won't go. Pick out a suitable person from among my students, and he can go."

Sa-ma said, "Have each of your students come and I will look at their faces, and decide which one is to go."

Pai-Chang's first Dharma teacher came in, but Sa-ma said that he was not the proper one. Next, the housemaster came, and, on seeing him, Sa-ma slapped his knee and exclaimed, "This man is excellent. He will be fully able to control such a large monastery on Te-hui Mountain."

That night, the housemaster came to Pai-Chang's room and was told, "You will go to Te-hui, open a new Zen Center, and teach students. You will be in charge of the monastery."

It annoyed the Dharma teacher that someone his junior was appointed before him. Pai-Chang knew this, so he arranged for the Dharma teacher and housemaster to have an interview.

"Here on this table is a water jug. If you say it is a jug, you are attached to name and form. If you say it is not a jug, you fall into emptiness. What is this?"

The Dharma teacher said, "This is a wooden bottle."

The housemaster stood up, kicked the bottle out the door, and walked after it. At this, Pai-Chang and Sa-ma burst out laughing. "I am sorry," he said to the Dharma teacher, "but you unfortunately cannot be Master of Te-hui."

So the housemaster went to the mountain, taught many students, and became the first patriarch of one of the five schools of Zen. He was Hui-san, Master of the Hui-san branch of Zen.

Every Sunday morning after practice, Soen Sa gives interviews to his students. He asks many questions of his students, and one Sunday he asked, "What is Nirvana?"

One student slapped the floor.

"In the Heart Sutra it speaks first of Nirvana, then of Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. What is this?"

Once again the student hit the floor.

"Then are the two the same?"

Again, the student hit the floor.

"You only hit the floor. You are clinging to this answer. Give me another."

The student hit the floor.

"You do not distinguish between white and red. You have eyes, but you are a blind man. A second offense is not permitted."

After that person bowed and left, another one came in and was asked by Soen Sa, "What is Nirvana?"

The student hit the floor.

"What is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi?"

"When the sun comes up, the whole world is bright."

"Then are the two different?"

The student hit the floor.

"Is this the truth?"

"No."

"Why not? What is truth?"

"The sunlight falls on the floor, and the cat lies sleeping."

"I will meet you again in five hundred years."

The student bowed and left.

Thirteen hundred years ago there was a great Chinese monk named Ho-tei who wandered everywhere, and visited many cities. With his left hand, he carried a large sack over his shoulder. In his right hand, he held a bell that he rang. Out of the sack he could draw anything that anyone asked for, but when people peeked in the sack, it was always empty. Still, Ho-tei could find in it anything he wanted.

At night, he would sleep in any convenient place: under trees and rocks and beneath the eaves of houses. He would walk through the cities ringing his bell, and preach whenever a crowd gathered. He had a saying:

When light comes, hit light.
When dark comes, hit dark.
When the four and eight directions come, hit them like a fan.
When space comes, hit it again and again.

In his travels he helped many people, and worked with Master Lin-chi. Throughout the country he was famous, and all people respected him as a great monk.

One day, he went all over the city, saying, "Give me one robe, please."

Many people came and offered silk and brocaded, expensive robes, but all were turned down by him. "These are too expensive, too fancy. I do not deserve them."

Soon, Master Lin-chi heard about this. He had a coffin made, and instructed a student of his to take it to Ho-tei. As soon as he saw the coffin, he became very happy, and said, "Who brought this here? Ah, are you a student of Lin-chi? This is such fine clothing."

The student said, "Yes, Lin-chi had me bring this to you."

"I thought so. He is a truly wonderful man, and very wise."

So Ho-tei strapped the coffin on his back and walked through the streets. Ringing his bell, he announced, "Tomorrow at the East gate, at eleven o'clock, I will enter into Nirvana."

The next morning at eleven he came to the East gate, but only stood and looked at the sky for half an hour.

"Bad weather," he said. "I will enter into Nirvana *tomorrow* at the same time, at the South gate."

Many people went away disappointed, but the next day there was a very large crowd at South gate at the right time. Ho-tei was consulting an astrological text and, after half an hour, looked up and said, "Today is not auspicious. I will have to postpone it until tomorrow at the same time, at the West gate."

The next day, many people had gotten fed up, so there was only a small group waiting. Ho-tei once again stood for a while, and finally said, "The wind is bad today. Tomorrow, at eleven o'clock, at the North gate, I will enter into Nirvana."

The next day, Ho-tei arrived at the North gate, and saw that no one had bothered to come. "Today is just the right day," he said, and putting down the coffin, climbed in. A short while later, a farmer with his ox came by, and Ho-tei asked him to nail the lid on.

The farmer obliged. As he was doing this, people walked by, and all of them asked, "What are you doing?"

The farmer replied, "In this coffin Ho-tei is entering Nirvana. He asked me to nail the lid down, and of course I obliged."

Very quickly, a great crowd gathered around the coffin. All demanded proof that Ho-tei was inside. They argued with the farmer, knocked on the box, and lifted it up.

"It's too light to have a person inside."

"He may have tricked us again."

"The farmer is telling a lie."

So, the crowd, dissatisfied, opened the coffin back up, and it was completely empty.

Just as they started to get angry at the farmer, each person heard the sound of Ho-tei's bell ringing, and it seemed to come from the top of each other's heads. After a while, the ringing sound began to rise and become fainter, and manifested itself as a glowing sphere in the sky.

This too, gradually disappeared. In this way, Ho-tei entered into Nirvana at the North gate, as he had promised.

April 30, 1973

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? We are all doing very well, thank you. In the mornings I get up and ask what am I?

Sometimes thinking, sometimes little thinking.

Alban and Roger built a very good fence around the garden. Soon many flowers and vegetables will be growing. Please come back soon and eat some of our vegetables.

I like you. I sent you a letter from the hotel man (bad karma) and the new newsletter.

See you later,

Bobby

Dear Bobby,

Thank you for your letter, which I have received with great pleasure.

I believe everybody are well and are doing sit Zen very seriously.

I also thank you for Alban and Roger, who built a very good fence around the garden and hope see it very soon, once more.

I wish you will be ready to a lot of vegetable for me. I am going to back to you soon.

Today, we have a big ceremony of Five precepts for 33 peoples here.

Recently I am very busy for a big anniversary ceremony on coming May 10 (lunar calendar, April 8) which is the great Buddha's birthday. And I am sending an acupuncture book for you, you studying it hard please.

So you said, "Sometimes thinking, sometimes little thinking." Thinking is good, thinking is truth. But even though you may get in you can not attain, and you may throw away the result will be the same.

What can you do in these cases?

KATZ!

In a clear mind there is no inside or outside. All five skandhas are empty and stay among the white clouds, where the first bright moon is rising on the ocean. A monkey is crying on the tree on rocks.

May 5, 1973

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Tonight was special Zen. No one was sleeping. When we finished Alban walked around with the stick and hit everyone very hard. Good Zen Master. Tonight we had five customers, sometimes we have none.

My father wants more kimchee.

Today I went to many stores and bought alot of food. You are not here—no good. I like you to help me.

I hope you are well. Do not eat a lot. Everyone here is O.K. Many eat, many sit Zen, many mantras say, many thinking. Spring is here, the flowers are blooming. The Buddha is smiling.

Bobby

P.S. Thank you for the tea.

May 14, 1973

Dear Bobby,

Thank you for your letter, books, and pictures. So far I am very well, and we had a real great and sincere ceremony for the Buddha's birthday on May 10th, with more than two hundred laymen.

I am very pleased to hear that everybody is doing sincere and earnest Zen sitting and Alban is doing a good job as Zen Master there. All the time, I am thinking and worrying about you because you are doing a hard job taking care of everything for the Zen Center there, but I believe and hope you can do everything very well. I wish to come back there as soon as possible and help you.

As you said, I am always taking care of my food, eating quite little, and I thank you again for your attention to my physical condition.

It is a very nice sentence in your letter saying "many eat, many sit Zen, many mantras say, many thinking," of which I wish to ask you one more question.

These kinds of actions were done inside of your mind, or outside of your mind?

One more sentence: “Spring is here, the flowers are blooming, the Buddha is smiling.”

1. Originally, everything is empty. Where does spring come from?
2. The real Buddha has no name or any color. How can the Buddha be smiling?

Now, if you answer, I will hit you thirty times. If you do not answer, I will also hit you thirty times.

Why?

A wooden cock is swimming in the water.
A stone fish is playing in the sky.
It might be happen a big trouble is it?
Karma-body and color-body are a real one and are coming
from a thinking.
Dharma body is real clear and pure and infinity without end.
On the water of thousand rivers, thousand moons are staying.
There are no clouds over ten thousand miles,
That is sky on ten thousand miles.

May 10, 1973

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for the acupuncture books. Thank you for the very beautiful letter. It is good letter.

Today is Buddha's Birthday. We have special incense burning on the altar. Last night Professor Pruden came for dinner. He ate many many tempura and salad. We did some Buddha's birthday chanting for him, and he looked very happy.

I utter the lion's roar and kill all the Buddhas, all the eminent teachers, and all people. So all the mountains fall, and the seas become empty.

What is it that utters the lion's roar? I don't know. KATZ! Today is Buddha's birthday. The sun is shining.

Bobby

Dear Bobby,

How are all of you?

It is so glad and thankful for me that you sent a letter and the books, *The Teaching of Buddha*.

Also, it is wonderful that you celebrated Buddha's birthday.

I do thank you for it, and I'm happy to hear that you shared the same seat with Dr. Pruden.

You've written me a good letter, which is the result of you sitting Zen a lot for that time.

Speaking of the sentence, "I utter the lion's roar." It likes an arrow to fall into hell even though you kill Buddha, all eminent teachers, and all people. So all mountains fall and the seas become empty.

For there is nothing originally, we however don't need to kill and keep alive and to let the mountains fall and the seas empty. Isn't all thinking?

By the way, it is well done to be said, "I don't know. KATZ!" by you.

But how can we tell the color between red and white and how can we divide top and bottom since there is no head and tail or no eye and ear in the words, “I don’t know. KATZ!”?

Therefore, even if you pass beyond the infinite time, you couldn’t attain Buddhahood.

Coming out of that place, you said that today is Buddha’s birthday and the sun is shining.

How should I applause you?

You are praiseworthy. Like this, is the truth.

Even though you did so, if you don’t know the fact that fine hairs grow on the bone of space, you still don’t the human being by itself what can you do?

Blue mountains don’t move naturally.
Fleecy clouds come and go by themselves.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Happy Buddha's birthday. Last night Professor Pruden came to eat dinner with us. Before he came we did special chanting for Buddha's birthday with Chung Dal.

There is many rain here in Providence. The ground is very wet. Bobby and I can't plant vegetable and flower seeds in the garden because it is too wet.

Nowadays Jacob sits Zen all night. On May 7th we had a retreat. Mike Konstan and Professor Jim sat too.

Alban is learning Dharma play. I teach him. He learns very quickly. 7th consciousness play is very easy for him. He likes it. 8th consciousness play is not so easy. Roger is also learning Dharma play.

In Dharma play, Jacob saw his before before life. He was sitting in front of a fire in the mountains. He did Zen and mantras. What was I in my before before life? Was I a man or a woman? In Dharma play I saw my before before life. I saw a burning house, many fire, many smoke. I am making an altar. Jacob and Alban give me many things to put on it. I like it.

Nowadays when I sit Zen there is many, many thinking: "Thinking is no good, why am I thinking?" and energy up in my head.

Sometimes for two or three days little thinking, then after start many thinking again.

We have four or five new customers. We do not see David, Sheila, Paul or Lynn anymore.

Now I am not speaking for 3 years. Only I will speak to teach Dharma play, and answer the telephone, and interviews Sunday mornings. Do you say O.K.?

Soon Alban goes, Jacob goes. Please come back soon.

Becky

May 18, 1973

Dear Becky,

I received your letter unexpectedly which makes me happy.

Are Jacob, Roger, Jim, Chung Dal, Konstan, and newcomers all right during my absence?

I thank you for the celebration of Buddha's birthday, and I'm happy to hear that Alban and Roger learned how to Dharma play. I hope you teach them kindly.

Now, I have come to the time to tell you that you should not spend too much time on the space before life.

I think it is better to go back to the space before original mind, being free from all thought and self-effacement, and plan on staying there for a long time.

Being before life is karma body. Original mind is Dharma body and then the fundamental purpose of Dharma play is getting together with the Universe, and is to open the eye of your mind that will be cleaned by the stay on the Dharma body.

Although you don't Dharma play then, you'll be recognized all the truth and the space before life naturally.

Actually, I hope you practice as above.

So, you gradually won't suppose many thinking which you're worrying about and you don't concern about it even when you think.

The thinking will be disappeared naturally if you come to think only the big question, "What am I?"

Then, there is no need to worry about it even if you have many thinking.

"A mind follows many rolling views. Those views in much darkness. If you catch those in the nature, there is no glee and worry."

It is great and respective opinion that you are going to keep silence for three years.

I really agree with you. Buddha sat and kept silence under a bo tree for six years. So did Bodhidharma in a cave surrounded by small forest, for nine years.

I wish that you keep good health, and accomplish your great desire.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

Zen Master Ma-tsu Tao-i, the 35th patriarch, had many students, among which 139 received the transmission of Dharma.

His number one student, Dae-Ju, when he first came to Ma-tsu, was asked by Ma-tsu, "Where are you coming from, and what do you want?"

"I came from Won-Ju, and I want to understand Buddhism and to attain Satori. Please teach me!"

Ma-tsu replied, "Within yourself you have a treasure. So why do you keep searching outside yourself? I am nothing, and so there is nothing that I can teach you."

Dae-Ju asked, "Then, what is this treasure within myself?"

Ma-tsu smacked his lips two times and said, "Now, I questioned you, and you answered by questioning me. This answer is your treasure. This treasure is already one with the Universe. Using all things in the Universe is freedom. So, death and life are freedom. Your treasure is infinite in quantity."

Dae-Ju, hearing this, like lightning attained Satori. He stood up, walked around Ma-tsu, and bowed to him.

After, Dae-Ju sat Zen for six years without speaking. He then went back to Won-Ju, established a large temple, taught many students, and wrote many Zen books.

Ma-tsu, hearing of Dae-Ju's deeds, went to see him, and said, "You are a great Zen Master. Your treasure is like a light lighting up the darkness of the Universe." Thus Ma-tsu expressed his admiration for Dae-Ju.

One day a Sutra Master came and he questioned Zen Master Dae-Ju. "I understand that you attained Satori. What is Zen?"

Dae-Ju said, "Zen is very easy. It is not difficult at all. When I am hungry, I eat; when I am tired, I sleep."

The Sutra Master said, "This is doing the same as all people do. Attaining Satori and not attaining are then the same."

"No, no, no, people on the outside and on the inside are different."

The Sutra Master said, "When I am hungry, I eat. When I am tired, I sleep. Why is the outside different from the inside?"

Dae-Ju said, “When people are hungry they eat. Only the outside, the body, is eating. However, on the inside they are thinking, and they have desire for money, fame, sex, food, and they feel anger. And so when they are tired, because of these wants, they do not sleep. So, the outside and the inside are different. But when I am hungry I only eat. When I am tired I only sleep. I have no thinking, and so I have no inside and no outside.”

The Sutra Master bowed respectfully. He did not read Sutras any more, and became a Zen student.

Lin-chi (Rinzai) went to Zen Master Huang Po's temple. There he sat Zen diligently for a long time; however, he did not attain Satori. The head Dharma teacher, wondering about Lin-chi, asked him why he did not go to see the Zen Master. Lin-chi asked, "What would I say to the Zen Master?"

The Dharma teacher asked Lin-chi if he understood Buddhism. Lin-chi, saying 'No,' was told to ask the Zen Master what Buddhism is. So Lin-chi went into the Zen Master and asked, "What is Buddhism?"

Swiftly, without saying a word, Zen Master Huang Po hit Lin-chi twenty times. Lin-chi was stunned and only cried out. He left and sadly returned to the Zen room. He was confused, and he told the Dharma teacher what happened. The Dharma teacher told Lin-chi that he should go to see the Zen Master once more.

So Lin-chi went to Huang Po, and again Huang Po swiftly hit him again twenty times. Lin-chi was even more confused and sad. He asked the Dharma teacher why he had been beaten two times. "Where is my mistake?"

The Dharma teacher said, "Your Zen Master is a great man. He tested you twice. The third time you will get good instruction. So tomorrow you should see him once more."

The next day Lin-chi went to see the Zen Master and asked, "What is Buddhism?"

Once again the Zen Master hit him twenty times.

Lin-chi was raging and he stormed out of the Master's room slamming the door. He went to his room and angrily started packing his bags. The Dharma teacher asked, "What are you doing?"

Lin-chi said, "I'm getting out of here. This place is no good. Why did he hit me all those times? I'm leaving."

"Where will you go? You have sat Zen here for a long time. Before you leave, you should pay respects to the Zen Master."

So the Dharma teacher went to see the Zen Master and said, "Why did you hit Lin-chi? He is a great student. At least direct him to another Zen Master."

The Zen Master agreed.

Lin-chi thanked the Zen Master and said he was now leaving. Huang Po said, "Wonderful. I will introduce you to a good Zen Master, the student of Ma-tsu's student. His name is Dae-U."

Lin-chi thanked Huang Po and left to see Dae-U.

Arriving at the temple he met Dae-U. Dae-U asked Lin-chi, "Where are you coming from and why do you come?"

"I come from Huang Po's. Three times I asked Huang Po, 'What is Buddhism?' and sixty times he hit me. I can't see what my mistake is."

Dae-U, hearing this, became angry and said, "Huang Po's teaching is great Buddhism. It is truth you are no good."

Just then Lin-chi attained Satori and laughed loudly and said, "Before I thought Huang Po's Buddhism was great, but now I see it's not so hot."

Dae-U shouted, "You are ill-mannered. Before you asked me what your mistake was and now you are saying Huang Po is not so good. What do you mean by this?"

Quickly Lin-chi grabbed Dae U's arm and punched him three times in the stomach. Dae-U cried out, "Agh-agh-agh. What is this? You and I have no relationship. Go back to Huang Po."

Lin-chi returned, met Huang Po, and bowed. Huang Po already understood, and asked, "Why do you come back?"

Lin-chi explained.

Huang Po said, "This Dae-U is no good. His speech is simple. He's an old man, and if he comes here I will hit him on the back."

Lin-chi said, "He is not coming so we will not wait. I will hit you," and Lin-chi smashed him on the back.

Huang Po cried, "You're no good. This is a tiger's room. How can you pull the tiger's whiskers? I'll eat you up."

Lin-chi, "Rwar rwar rwar," like a tiger roared at Huang Po, and was ready to pounce.

"Help! Help! This is no good! Hold him back and get him out of here."

They all gathered in the Zen room, there was a big ceremony, and Lin-chi received transmission and became a great Zen Master, the 38th patriarch.

One day Seung Sahn Soen Sa stayed at the Dharma Zen Center in Los Angeles. A person came and asked him, “How are Christianity and Buddhism different?”

Soen Sa said, “They are the same.”

“Isn’t Christianity believing in God, and Buddhism is seeing nature and becoming Buddha? Why do you say they are the same?”

“Long ago an eminent teacher said, ‘Rocks, mountains, stars, and rivers all have the same nature!’ Therefore God’s and Buddha’s original natures are the same, although the names are different.”

“Christianity says that God is the creator of the existing Universe. God is all Holy, and thusly people believe in Him. Is this truth?”

Soen Sa said, “The Heart Sutra says, ‘Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.’ Then the Universe is emptiness. Emptiness is the Universe. So God is not the creator and the Universe does not exist. Only your thinking makes the Universe. If you were not thinking there would be no Universe.”

“I understand, but I am not sure what you mean about, ‘thinking makes the Universe and not thinking being no Universe.’”

Soen Sa said, “The philosopher Descartes said, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ ‘I am’ is having North, South, East, and West. The Orientals have East and West. The Americans have East and West. But East and West is different for each because their thinking is different. When you’re not thinking you have no East and West. You only become one with the Universe.”

“Thank you. I understand.”

“You are Christian. In the Bible, John 14:6, Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, the life.’ This ‘I’ is what? Is it God, is it you, is it Jesus Christ?”

“I think this ‘I’ is God.”

“Now you said God. God never said, ‘I am God.’ God is not God. Only people make the name God. Your thinking is your having existence—having God. Not thinking is not having existence—only God and you are one.”

“Oh, I understand. Thank you, thank you.”

Soen Sa asked him, “Now are you God?”

“No.”

“Why no? No is thinking. You have an attachment to name. So if you say ‘no’ I will hit you thirty times. If you say ‘yes,’ I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?”

“I don’t know.”

“This ‘I don’t know’ mind is God, is Big I, is in the Bible ‘I’.”

There was silence.

Soen Sa said, “Inside it is very cold. Outside it is very hot.”

Long ago Zen Master Duk Sahn, whenever asked a question, would answer only by hitting. Zen Master Ku Ji would answer only by raising one finger, and Zen Master Lin Chi only by shouting “KATZ!” And so the stick of Duk Sahn, the finger of Ku Ji and the “KATZ!” of Lin Chi became famous.

Lin Chi always shouted “KATZ!” Sometimes the “KATZ!” cut people’s thinking, sometimes the “KATZ!” was a testing of Zen progress and sometimes the “KATZ!” opened up minds.

One day a person came and asked Lin Chi, “What is Buddhism?”

Lin Chi shouted “KATZ!” The person bowed and left.

Another day a person came and bowed. As soon as the person raised his head from bowing, he shouted, “KATZ!” Lin Chi made no reply, but as the person turned his head to leave Lin Chi shouted, “KATZ!”

Another person came and as he was bowing, Lin Chi shouted “KATZ!” The person raised his head, looked at Lin Chi and then shouted, “KATZ!” Quickly Lin Chi shouted “KATZ!” and walked away.

Another person asked Lin Chi, “Nowadays, what are you doing?”

Lin Chi only yelled, “KATZ!”

These are Lin Chi’s four ways of using KATZ. He used it freely and opened many students’ minds.

One day a person asked Lin Chi, “What is Zen?” Lin Chi only held up a whip made with horse hair. The person shouted “KATZ!” Lin Chi hit him.

Again the person asked, “What is Zen?”

Lin Chi still held up the whip.

The person shouted, “KATZ!”

Lin Chi immediately returned, “KATZ!”

The person was confused and did not know how to answer. Lin Chi hit him.

One day many people gathered in the Zen room. Lin Chi was standing on a high platform and said, “Your flesh is red and it forms an enclosing wall. Inside resides the utmost

master. Through the six doors this master often goes out and often comes back. Do you understand?”

One person came forward and stood at the bottom of the platform. Looking upward he asked Lin Chi, “What is this utmost master?”

Lin Chi swiftly ran down the stairs and grabbed the man and shouted, “What is it? Tell me! Tell me!”

The person was stunned and did not answer. Lin Chi flung the man away and said, “I understand your utmost master. Now you are dry shit on a stick.”

Lin Chi went back to his room.

Lin Chi was ferocious. Sometimes he held up the whip. Sometimes he shouted “KATZ!”, and sometimes used other actions. These actions sometimes cut thinking, cut discriminations, and made empty minds.

These teachings then make it clear that red is red, white is white, good is good and bad is bad.

Lin Chi gave the transmission to ninety students. Lin Chi became the founder of the Lin Chi (Rinzai) school of Zen.

One day Seung Sahn Soen Sa stayed at San Bo Temple in San Francisco. In the morning Soen Sa bowed 108 times with many people in the Dharma room. Afterwards a person asked Soen Sa why they bowed.

Soen Sa said, “These are known in Buddhism as the 108 repenting bows. In our minds we have many different kinds of bad thoughts. The mind has ten levels; these ten levels have 108 levels; the 108 levels have 84,000 levels. Bowing 108 times expurgates the mind of these many kinds of thoughts and fantasies.”

The person asked, “Emptying the mind is repentance? Isn’t repentance praying to Buddha or to God for happiness?”

Soen Sa said, “No. In the Five Precepts ceremony it says: ‘Our offenses have no self-nature, but arise only from our minds. If our minds are extinguished, then our offenses will be likewise destroyed. When both our minds and our offenses are extinguished, and both are seen as empty, this is termed the true repentance.’ Then emptying the mind is becoming one with Buddha.”

“You say that an empty mind is Buddha. Why do you bow 108 times? Isn’t keeping an empty mind without bowing good?”

“Your eyes see color, your ears hear sound, your nose smells, your mouth tastes, your body touches, and your mind thinks. Are these actions internal or external?”

“They are both!”

“You say they are both. Then do you understand your mind?”

“I don’t know!”

Soen Sa hit him, “BONG!”

The person was stunned and confused.

“This is your mind. This is Buddha. If you don’t understand, you must bow and empty your mind. Bowing is stopping the external and emptying the internal. So bowing is becoming one with Buddha, one with the Universe. To bow is to become truth. This is the meaning of the one hundred eight repenting bows.”

“Thank you very much. But I still have another question. You have attained Satori and you always keep an empty mind. So why do you still bow?”

Soen Sa said, “Have you ever seen pictures of Bodhisattvas? They wear beautiful earrings, necklaces, and clothes. Why?”

“I don’t know.”

Soen Sa said, “They do not cherish these. They wear them for the sake of all people, not for their own. My bowing is the same.”

“Oh! Now I understand.”

“Now I ask you, before you bow, what is it that wants to bow?”

“I have much bad karma, so I wish to repent for this bad karma. I bow to Buddha to restore happiness to me.”

“Your mind before you bow and your mind after you bow, are they different or the same?”

“Different.”

“How are they different?”

“My before mind is full of wants and thinking; however, my after mind is not thinking.”

“You said your mind is now not thinking. What is a not thinking mind?”

The person could make no reply. Soen Sa said, “In the evening the sun sets in the west. This you must understand. You bow 108 times to understand this truth.”

All the people there were pleased and left happy.

Long ago Duk Sahn, before becoming a Zen Master, was a Sutra Master. He lived in the north of China where the sutras were read diligently. In the south, the sutras were not read often, but Zen was practiced earnestly. Hearing about the South, Duk Sahn was angered, and decided to go straighten out the misled demons.

Duk Sahn travelled to the south by foot. At lunchtime, being hungry, he stopped at a tearoom, where the tearoom master was an old lady. Duk Sahn went in and asked for lunch, and the tea master welcomed the monk graciously and asked him, "Where are you going?"

Duk Sahn said, "I am a Sutra Master from the North. I heard that in the South they only sit Zen, seeking to see nature and to become Buddha. These men are crazy demons. I am going to heal their minds."

The tea master asked, "What is that you are carrying on your back?"

Duk Sahn said, "It is the Diamond Sutra."

The tea master said, "In the Diamond Sutra it says that one cannot attain a past mind, a present mind, nor a future mind. Then with what mind will you eat lunch? If you can answer I will give you lunch free of charge, but if you cannot, you will get no lunch at all."

Duk Sahn, who before had been sure that he was the finest Sutra Master in China, was totally confused by this woman's questions. He was bewildered and all the blood rushed to his head in embarrassment.

The tea master, seeing Duk Sahn's shame, patted him on the back and said, "You only understand Buddha's language, but Buddhism you do not understand."

Duk Sahn was belittled and he timidly asked, "Where did you learn Buddhism?"

"Go a little farther south to the Huang Mae mountain and there you must meet Zen Master Yong Dam."

So Duk Sahn went to Huang Mae and met Zen Master Yong Dam. They talked a long time about the Sutras and Zen. Duk Sahn explained his intention in coming to the south and about how the old tea master had changed his attitude. Soon it was evening, and it was time to retire. Duk Sahn was going to sleep in the guest room, but when he opened the door to go out he saw it was very dark outside. So Zen Master Yong Dam gave Duk Sahn a rope candle. Just as he took the candle, Yong Dam blew it out.

Instantly, Duk Sahn's mind opened and the Universe was no longer dark but bright. Duk Sahn, overjoyed, bowed to Zen Master Yong Dam. The Master asked him, "What are you so happy about?"

Duk Sahn said, “Before I did not believe the eminent Zen Master’s teachings; but now I understand. Before you said that the Sutras are the words of Buddha, but that Zen is Buddha’s mind.”

A month later people were called to the temple by the ringing of huge bells and a big ceremony was held. Zen Master Yong Dam walked up to the high platform and gave a Zen talk, and lastly he said, “Amongst us there is a big monster. His eyes are as big as dishes, his mouth as big as a bucket, and his head a big boulder. I hit him but he feels no pain.”

Duk Sahn immediately understood. He took his precious Diamond Sutra which he had carried everywhere and he went outside and set it aflame. Duk Sahn said, “The eminent Zen teachers give many big speeches, but I am not deceived by them.”

Duk Sahn received the transmission from Yong Dam, and he became a great Zen Master, using the stick, “KATZ!”, and one finger freely.

One day after bowing 108 times, sitting Zen and chanting, Seung Sahn Soen Sa gave a Dharma talk:

“Very long ago, after breakfast an eminent Zen teacher took three grains of rice and turned them into a tiny cow. At first this cow was very small and very hungry. He looked around the table and saw a needle and began to eat it. He then proceeded to eat every object he could fit into his mouth. This cow soon began to grow. The more he ate, the bigger he became. Soon he was big enough to eat the eminent Zen Master, which he did with great pleasure.”

“He then consumed the entire kitchen and went into the Dharma room. He ate the moktak; he ate the incense; he ate the Buddha! He was still very hungry, so he ate the whole temple and all the buildings surrounding it.”

“The cow grew and grew. He had no excretions, so everything he ate just made him that much bigger. Although it was a frightening experience to be eaten by this cow, it did not harm the people physically.”

“But soon there was much suffering. Once inside the cow’s stomach people had attachment to name and form. They formed conceptions of good and bad, time and space, light and dark. The cow continued to eat and eat. He ate all the mountains and rivers, and all the bodhisattvas, eminent teachers, and Buddhas.”

“So all infinite time and space, the entire universe, was eventually contained within this cow’s stomach.”

Seung Sahn Soen Sa finished his great Dharma talk by saying, “Now you are all in this cow’s stomach where all things appear and disappear. You have name and form attachment. Outside of the cow there is no suffering; nothing appears and nothing disappears. You want to get out of this stomach.”

“What can you do? How can you get outside?”

One day Seung Sahn Soen Sa said in his morning Dharma talk, "This morning I will tell you a story about Duk Sahn. He was famous for only answering questions by hitting with his Zen stick. In this same period there lived three other famous Zen Masters: Lin-chi, Dong San, and Un Moon. Lin-chi only answered questions by shouting, "KATZ!" and the Lin-chi(Rinzai)school of Zen was formed after him. Dong San, when asked, "What is Buddha?" said, "Three pounds of flax," and the Soto school of Zen began. Un Moon when asked, "What is Buddha?" said, "Dry shit on a stick," and the Un Moon school was started. All of these great Zen Masters lived in the same century, but today I will only talk about Duk Sahn and his Zen stick."

One day Duk Sahn put a big post on the side of the road in front of a big city. On it he wrote, "When the Buddha comes, I will hit him. When the eminent teachers come I will hit them. So when the Buddha comes and sees this post he will quickly run away in fright. When the eminent teachers come and see the post, they also will run away very frightened."

This post was a very good Zen teacher. Some people, after seeing the words on the post, would soon open their minds and attain Satori. But some people would only read words, keeping their name and form attachment and the post would hit them. The post was always teaching Zen.

One day Duk Sahn went into a big temple to give a Zen talk. He stood on a platform in front of the people, holding his Zen stick and said, "Today there will be no questions and answers. If you ask me a question I will hit you 30 times."

So a student walked up to him and only bowed. Duk Sahn hit him 30 times.

"Why did you hit me?" asked the student. "I only bowed and did not ask any questions."

Duk Sahn asked, "Where are you coming from?"

His student said, "I am from the east."

Duk Sahn said, "Before you leave the east I will hit you 30 times."

So Duk Sahn hit him 30 times. The student bowed and returned to his seat.

One day a student came to Duk Sahn and bowed. Duk Sahn immediately hit him. The student said, "Where is my mistake?"

"I'm not going to wait for you to open your mouth."

Another time a monk came into Duk Sahn's room. He was very strong and confident and his eyes were clear. He understood that Duk Sahn only hit people, so he was ready to be

the first to strike. He raised his hand, but Duk Sahn had already raised his stick. “What is this? Your action is not permitted!”

The student was startled and confused and began to back out of the room. Duk Sahn hit him across the back. The student looked up and Duk Sahn shouted, “KATZ!”

The student only stood still, and looked very frightened. Duk Sahn said, “Is this all the capital you have?”

The student bowed deeply and said, “I am sorry.”

Duk Sahn patted him on the back, saying, “Good, good, good.”

So Duk Sahn only hit his students, and opened many minds.

Seung Sahn Soen Sa said, “Now Duk Sahn’s stick and my stick, are they different or the same? If you answer I will hit you thirty times. If you don’t answer I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?”

Every Sunday morning at the Providence Zen Center Seung Sahn Soen Sa has an interview with each of his students.

One one of these mornings a student came into Soen Sa's room and bowed. Soen Sa asked, "What did you bring here?"

The student hit the floor.

Soen Sa said, "Is this truth?"

The student again hit the floor.

Soen Sa said, "You understand One. You do not understand Two."

The student hit the floor again.

Soen Sa hit him thirty times, and the student left.

The next student came into the room, and Soen Sa asked, "What did you bring here?"

The student said, "I don't know."

Soen Sa asked, "How long have you sat Zen?"

The student answered, "I have been coming to the Providence Zen Center for three months. Before that, I did not sit Zen."

Soen Sa asked, "Why do you sit Zen?"

"I have much thinking. I like this quietness."

Soen Sa asked, "Where does this thinking come from?"

"I don't know."

Soen Sa said, "This 'don't know' mind cuts all thinking and is the true quiet mind. So ask yourself, 'What am I?' all the time, and keep your 'don't know' mind."

The student said, "Thank you very much."

Soen Sa said, "Next time, bring your 'don't know' mind here."

The student said, "Yes, sir," and bowed and left.

Many students came and went. One student came and Soen Sa asked, "What did you bring here?"

The student shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa put his hands over his ears and said, "Your 'KATZ!' has broken my ears."

The student shouted, "KATZ!" again.

Soen Sa asked, "Is 'Katz!' all you brought here?"

The student said, "No."

Soen Sa said, "Then give me something else."

The student stood up and bowed and asked, "Did you sleep well last night?"

Soen Sa said, "Like this, like this. You go drink tea."

The student left.

The next student came. Soen Sa said, "What did you bring here?"

The student hit the floor. Soen Sa said, "Is this truth?"

The student said, "No."

Soen Sa said, "What is truth?"

The student said, "Today is Sunday, July 22, 1973."

Soen Sa opened his koan book, and said, "Long ago a Zen Master said, 'When you hear a wooden chicken crow you will understand your mind.' What does this mean?"

The student said, "A stone girl dances to the music of a flute with no holes."

Soen Sa said, "Ah, your answer is very good. Now, one more question for you. A person comes to the Providence Zen Center smoking a cigarette and blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. If you are the Zen Master, what can you do?"

The student said, "I would hit him."

"This person is very strong. He only understands he is Buddha, he is Dharma. He will hit you back."

The student said, "I will only sit."

Soen Sa said, "You are a Zen Master. You understand he has an emptiness attachment. If you only sit you will not teach him."

The student said, "I'm not a Zen Master. I don't know."

The student and Soen Sa laughed and smiled. Soen Sa said, "You must practice hard training in sitting Zen. I wish you may soon attain Satori."

The student said, "Thank you very much," bowed and left.

Before attaining Satori Zen Master Seorl Bon travelled to many Zen Centers, but he never sat Zen in the Zen rooms, he only worked alone in the kitchen. There he cooked three times a day, sometimes for five hundred, three hundred, or two hundred people.

He stayed a long time at the Don San Zen Center. One day he was preparing rice. Before boiling the rice he had to sift out the pebbles that were mixed in with the rice. The Zen Master at Don San came into the kitchen and asked Seorl Bon, "How much rice will you prepare today?"

"I will make two large kettle-fulls."

"Is this sufficient?"

Seorl Bon replied, "Not everyone is going to eat. So it is enough."

The Zen Master asked, "But if everyone does eat, what can you do?"

Seorl Bon was thoroughly confused. The Dharma teacher who was Seorl Bon's good friend, was standing by, and he said, "If everyone eats, and the rice is insufficient they can eat the truth."

These questions and answers did not make rice. They only made mind-rice.

Another day, Seorl Bon was again preparing rice. The Zen Master came into the kitchen and asked him, "Are you now sifting out the rice or the pebbles?"

Seorl Bon said, "Both."

"Then, what will everyone eat?"

Seorl Bon was sifting the rice with a small bowl. The rocks stayed at the bottom of the bowl, and the rice he poured into a large bowl. Without saying a word to the Zen Master, he quickly dumped the rocks into the big bowl with a bang.

All thoughts of Buddha-nature, people, attaining Satori, not attaining Satori, Nirvana, life and death, and all other relative thoughts were wiped from his mind.

The Zen Master, seeing Seorl Bon's state of mind, told him that he had stayed a long time at this Zen Center and that he should go to another Zen Master and ask the Zen Master for teachings.

Seorl Bon thanked him, and traveled to Duk Sahn's Zen Temple. Meeting Duk Sahn, he asked him, "I've been to many Zen Centers, but I only did work Zen and did not sit Zen. I don't know whether or not I have attained Satori. Please test me!"

Zen Master Duk Sahn ignored his question and only hit him thirty times. Seorl Bon understood that Duk Sahn's hitting him was the Zen way to clear his mind. So he stayed at Duk Sahn's temple and again only did working Zen for five years.

Once more Seorl Bon got the urge to travel. This time with his comrade Am Du he set out to go to Lin Chi's temple. He journeyed many days, and while travelling he heard that Lin Chi had died. He turned back for Duk Sahn's temple.

One day it was snowing heavily, so the two monks stopped overnight at a house in the country. They had walked many miles and Am Du was exhausted and slept. When he awoke he saw that Seorl Bon was sitting Zen and he was as solid as a rock.

It soon became late at night and it was chilly. Am Du wanted to sleep but he felt guilty because Seorl Bon was sitting Zen so earnestly. He said to Seorl Bon, "You have been sitting Zen a long time. It is good that you now sleep and when you awake you will be fresh to sit Zen again."

Seorl Bon said, "You have already attained Satori and so you have no hindrances. I have not attained Satori, so my mind is restless. Consequently, I cannot sleep."

Am Du said, "Your mind is restless? What is this restless mind? Take it here so I can check it."

Hearing this Seorl Bon's mind, which had half-opened at Don San, now closed and the whole Universe was dark. Am Du fell asleep, but Seorl Bon continued to sit Zen. Am Du slept so soundly that he fell off the bed and hit the floor with a bang.

At this bang Seorl Bon's mind opened up and the sky was no longer dark but bright blue.

Seorl Bon sat Zen for thirty years until he was nearly fifty years old. But many people said, "Great talent matures late."

He received the transmission of Dharma from Duk Sahn and became a great Zen Master.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

An evil man has a bomb capable of blowing up the Mt. Sumeru. He has planted the bomb and is playing with the ignition button.

You must stop this man. But let's have none of your vile language which you call the teaching of Zen. Isn't there enough suffering in the world?

See you soon,

Jacob

Dear Jacob,

One-mind perceives infinite time.

One is All. Everything is One.

To let go one's hand when hanging over a cliff is to be a great man.

Winter goes North, Spring comes from the South.

Seung Sahn Soen Sa

One day a young woman came to the Providence Zen Center to visit one of the Zen students.

She had previously been to India with the Divine Light Mission, and had practiced meditation the way it was taught by the Divine Light Mission.

After lunch, Seung Sahn Soen Sa, the Zen student, and her friend went into the Dharma room, and the Zen student taught her friend about karma and sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses.

Soen Sa asked the student's friend, "Have you done much meditation before?"

She said, "Yes I have."

Soen Sa said, "That's very good. There are many kinds of meditation: Yoga, Hinayana, Mahayana, Zen. What kind did you do?"

"I followed the Divine Light Mission's method," she said.

"Oh? What did you keep on your mind?" asked Soen Sa.

"I concentrated on the Holy Breath," she answered. "The Guru helps us to realize the Universal Energy. Soon you become one with this Energy, and experience great bliss. So I, God and the Universal Energy are One."

Soen Sa said, "You understand One, so you must already understand yourself and God and Energy."

She said, "Yes."

Soen Sa asked, "Then this fan and you, are they different or the same?"

She said, "Same."

"Oh. Then do you understand your mind?" asked Soen Sa.

"Yes." She said.

"Then where is your mind?"

"My mind is in my soul." she answered. Then she noticed that Soen Sa had a broad smile on his face, and she quickly changed her answer.

"It is here." She said, pointing to her head.

Soen Sa said, "This paper is white, this cushion is green. Are they different or the same?"

She said, "Same."

Soen Sa said, "You only understand empty, you don't understand your mind."

The student's friend looked very confused, so Soen Sa got the rice paper with the 360° circle drawn on it and began to explain. "This circle is divided into four parts. The first part is from 0° to 90°. In this part $1 + 2 = 3$. The mind is attached to its thinking, it clings to conceptions and has much suffering. Here there is name and form attachment."

"From 90° to 180° the mind understands that all things that have appearance are transient. So form is emptiness, emptiness is form. $1=0$ $0=1$. Do you understand?"

The student said, "Maybe a little."

Soen Sa said, "Oh. I will explain more to you. Before you were born you were 0. Now you are 1. In the future you will die and you will again be 0. Therefore, form is empty, emptiness is form."

The student's friend said, "Thank you very much. I understand."

Soen Sa said, "At 180° you are nothing, there is only emptiness, so there is no Buddha, no Universe, no energy, no God, no you, no I. Many people have conceptions of oneness. For them Buddha, Universal Energy, and God are all One. So, they have an emptiness attachment. This emptiness attachment is thinking. You have an emptiness attachment. Do you understand?"

The student's friend said, "Yes, I now understand."

Soen Sa said, "You are a good student. Now I will tell you about 270°. This is freedom. If you want life you have life. If you want death you have death. You have insight into the mutual penetration of all phenomena. When you understand 270° you understand the sound of a wooden chicken crowing. Do you understand?"

She said, "I don't know."

"Your not understanding is truth. You will not understand the truth by thinking. You must do hard training sitting Zen and understand your mind. Then you will understand 270°."

She said, "Yes sir."

"Now I will tell you about 360°." Soen Sa continued, "360 is 0° They are the same point. 0° is attachment thinking, 360° is no attachment. This is the difference. Attachment to thinking causes suffering. When you are not attached to your thinking you have a compassionate mind. A mirror covered with dust is 0°. When the mirror is only itself it is clear, this is 180°. Before you told me that green and white are the same. At 360° if there is green in front of the mirror, the mirror is green. If there is white, it is white. So, white is white, green is green. Only 'like this' is truth, and $3 \times 3 = 9$. This is Zen."

The student's friend said, "Thank you very much."

Soen Sa said, "0° is small 'I'. You have life and death and attachment to your thinking. 180° is nothing 'I'. All is empty. 360° is big 'I'. No life, no death. Infinite time, infinite space is 'I'. Only save all people from suffering."

The Zen student's friend was very contented, bowed to Soen Sa and left.

Zen Master Pearl-Bon founded the Pearl-Bon Zen Temple. At all times there were at least 1,500 students studying at the Temple. Of these, 54 students received transmission of Dharma.

One day a Lin-Chi student, Sam Saeng, came and asked Zen Master Pearl-Bon, “The Kum Lin fish is very strong. No fishing net can contain it. What kind of food does it eat to become so strong?”

Sam Saeng sat Zen a long time at Lin-chi’s temple, and had already attained Satori. This question was a profound one. The Kum Lin fish in the future becomes a dragon and making clouds resides in the sky. Asking this question, Sam Saeng declared himself the same as the Kum Lin fish.

Pearl-Bon answered, “First you must break the net, then I will talk to you.”

Pearl-Bon’s answer means first one must cut all thinking of relativity - good and bad, light and dark, high and low, and then one will understand oneself. One makes one’s own net and only oneself can break the net.

Sam Saeng ignored Pearl-Bon’s answer and continued to say, “You have 1,500 students. You are a great Zen Master but you do not understand the language of my question.”

Pearl-Bon said, “I am a very old man, and this Temple is huge. I am very busy.”

Pearl-Bon was a great Zen Master. Many students questioned him, and like a great man teaching little children he would answer them.

Sam Saeng’s first question was like Sam Saeng drawing a sword and slashing Pearl-Bon.

Pearl-Bon’s first answer was like Pearl-Bon blocking this slash with his sword. However to Sam Saeng’s second blow Pearl-Bon only stepped aside and Sam Saeng slashed at the air.

Pearl-Bon attained Satori when 47 years old. He taught in the above style for 40 years and died at 87.

Presently many people studying Zen say concerning Pearl-Bon, “Great talent matures late.” Many people respect Pearl-Bon as a great Zen Master.

After the Sunday evening lecture at the Providence Zen Center a student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “What is the Koan?”

Soen Sa said, “Long ago Zen Masters would talk to their students, testing their minds to see if they had attained Satori, and to see how advanced their practice was. These Zen talks became known as Koans.”

The person asked, “Why do you now use the Koan?”

Soen Sa said, “Using the Koan is like pointing at the moon. If someone wants to see the moon it would be difficult to explain to this person with words where the moon is. However, it would be very simple just to point at the moon. The pointing hand is the Koan. The moon is the before the original mind. The hand is only showing the course to the moon. If you look at the hand you will not see the moon. If you become attached to the Koan you will not see your mind. The ‘before the original mind’ is the ‘I don’t know mind.’ The Koan cuts all thinking and makes an ‘I don’t know mind’ very to attain.”

“Then to understand my mind I should only concentrate on the Koan ‘What am I?’ and not devote myself to other things such as work?”

Soen Sa said, “When a mother sends her son to Vietnam even though she works, eats, talks to her friends, and watches television, she always keeps in her mind the question, ‘When will my son come home?’ Practicing Zen is the same. While working, while eating, while playing, while walking, and driving always keep the question, ‘What am I?’ Only sitting Zen is not Zen.”

“Thank you. There are many, many Koans, and they are all different. Why are there so many and how do you use them?”

Soen Sa said, “There are approximately 1,700 Koans. These Koans are only pointing at the student’s mind. Long ago Zen Master Dong-San when asked, ‘What is Buddha?’ would only answer, ‘Three pounds of flax.’ This answer is pointing at the student’s mind. When answering the question Dong-San was weighing three pounds of flax. If the student keeps this same mind he will keep a Zen mind. All thinking is cut and all attachments to name and form are dropped. Subsequently, the student will understand.”

The student understood, but was still a little uncertain. So, he asked Soen Sa to explain further.

Soen Sa said, “For example, a young girl lives with her parents, and her parents are strict and do not allow her to have any boyfriends. In spite of this, she has a boyfriend and they secretly meet at night. When her boyfriend comes he gives a signal by making a noise as if he were scaring birds away from the garden. If her parents are asleep she will ring a bell

three times, however, if her parents are awake she will ring only twice and will not go to meet her boyfriend.”

“These signals have no meaning in themselves, they are only transmission mind.”

“The same is true of Dong-San’s answer; ‘Three pounds of flax,’ his mind and the flax were one. His answer has no meaning. It is only the transmission of emptiness, of the ‘before the original mind’ to the student.”

The student said, “Oh, now I understand.”

Soen Sa continued, “Another example: In the Orient a rich man’s house is very large. The master’s sleeping quarters are far from the entrance gate. If someone visits and knocks on the door with his hand, the knocking will not be heard by the master. Consequently, when someone comes they bang on the door with a rock, so the master will appear. Practicing the Koan is the same. It is cutting all thinking. When all thinking is cut the ‘before the original mind’ will appear.”

“The words of the Koan are not important. Only the question, the cutting of thinking, is important. Practicing the Koan is banging on the door with a big rock. Soon the master will appear. Keeping the Koan is keeping a Zen mind. A Zen mind is a clear mind. While reading, while driving, while watching television the mind is clear. This clear mind is the ‘before the original mind.’ So I wish that you all would keep this Zen mind, this clear mind, at all times and wherever you may go.”

All the students were happy. They sat Zen, chanted, and so the lecture was concluded.

Zen Master Muck-Ju resided at his temple, which was small and only sat Zen.

The temple was surrounded by a high rock wall with one gate. People would come, knock on the gate, and Muck-Ju would open the gate and speak to them.

One day Um-Moon, before attaining Satori, went to visit Muck-Ju and knocked on his gate. Muck-Ju opened the gate and in a very deep voice asked Um-Moon, "Who are you? Why do you come here?"

Um Moon answered, "I want to understand the original nature of life and death. Teach me!"

Before Um Moon had even finished speaking, like a roaring tiger shaking the mountain with its ferocious growl, Muck-Ju grabbed Um-Moon by the shirt and roared at him, "WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS THIS?"

Um-Moon was stunned and could not answer, Muck Ju flung him back through the gate and shouted, "You're a shit bag."

Um-Moon was despondent and ashamed. He began to sit Zen with such eagerness that he forgot to eat and sleep.

After a while he felt he understood himself thoroughly and was full of confidence.

So, he once again went to visit Muck-Ju. When he arrived there he knocked on the gate. Muck-Ju opened the gate and shouted, "You've come again you shit bag!"

When Um-Moon approached Muck-Ju, his mind was open and he was full of confidence, but when he faced Muck-Ju his mind closed and he became very confused.

Once again Muck-Ju drove him out the gate.

Again he felt dejected and once again he began sitting Zen without eating or sleeping, and after a while he once more felt he understood himself and was confident.

So he returned to Muck-Ju's temple and knocked on the gate. Muck-Ju opened the gate, grabbed Um-Moon and shouted, "You lousy shit bag! Why do you come? Tell me! Tell me!"

Muck-Ju's shouting wiped away all Um-Moon's confidence and understanding.

Muck-Ju while pushing him out the gate said, "You're a Do-Rack nail." (Long ago in China, when building a big palace only big nails called Do-Rack nails were used. Later only small palaces were built and these Do-Rack nails became useless.) Muck-Ju quickly

closed the gate on Um-Moon's foot. A flash of hot pain pierced through Um-Moon's body and his mind opened up.

Um-Moon shouted at Muck-Ju, "You're a thief!"

At this Muck-Ju said, "Oh! The shit bag talks. Come in!"

Muck-Ju understood that Um-Moon's mind had been opened, so Um-Moon entered the Zen Master's room. They talked a long time. Muck-Ju advised Um-Moon to go to Seorl-Bon's temple and to ask him for teaching. So Seorl-Bon gave the transmission to Um-Moon.

Um-Moon became a great Zen Master and founded a temple on a mountain. The mountain became known as Um-Moon mountain. He gave transmission to 88 students, and so the Um-Moon school of Zen arose, and Um-Moon was the first patriarch.

Every Sunday morning at the Providence Zen Center, Seung Sahn Soen Sa has an interview with each of his students.

One Sunday morning a student came into Soen Sa's room and bowed. Soen Sa asked him, "What do you bring here?"

The student shouted "KATZ!"

Soen Sa said, "No, give me another answer."

The student again shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa said, "You only say Katz. How much does your Katz weigh?"

The student answered, "Nothing."

Soen Sa hit him thirty times.

The student bowed and left.

Another student came to Soen Sa and bowed.

Soen Sa said, "Long ago a Zen Master when asked, 'What is Buddha?' said, 'Dry shit on a stick.' Is this answer wrong or right?"

The student said, "Wrong."

Soen Sa asked, "Why wrong? If a person came and asked you 'What is Buddha?' what would your answer be?"

The student said, "Dry shit on a stick."

Soen Sa said, "Oh, good, very good. Now one more question. Another Zen Master said 'Buddha is three pounds of flax.' Are this answer and the 'dry shit on a stick' answer the same or different?"

The student hit the floor.

Soen Sa said, "I do not believe you."

The student said, "Birds fly in the sky, fish swim in the water."

Soen Sa said, "This is scratching the shoe when the foot itches."

The student bowed and left.

Another student came.

Soen Sa rang a bell and asked him, “When you hear this sound is your mind inside or outside the sound?”

The student held the bell and rang it.

Soen Sa said, “Long ago a Zen Master when asked, ‘What is Buddha?’ answered, ‘Dry shit on a stick.’ Another Zen Master answered the same question by saying, ‘Three pounds of flax.’ Which answer is good?”

The student said, “They’re both no good.”

Soen Sa asked, “Why no good?”

The student said, “Dry shit on a stick is dry shit on a stick. Three pounds of flax is three pounds of flax.”

“Oh, very good answer. I have one more question for you. A person comes to the Providence Zen Center smoking a cigarette and drops ashes on the Buddha and blows smoke in this face. If you are the Zen Master, what can you do?”

The student said, “I would clean the Buddha.”

“Oh, this is good, but this person has an emptiness attachment. He believes only he is holy. You understand his action is wrong. How can you teach him?”

The student hesitated and said, “I am not a Zen Master. I don’t know.”

Soen Sa said, “If you do hard training sitting Zen, soon you will attain Satori and become a Zen Master.”

The student bowed, said thank you, and left.

One day a person came to Zen Master Um-Moon and asked “What is it that passes over Buddha and all the eminent teachers?”

The Zen Master answered, “Cake.”

Another person asked him, “If you are not thinking, are there any mistakes?”

Um-Moon answered, “Sumi Mountain.”

Someone else asked him, “What is the original student face?”

Um-Moon said, “Sightseeing among mountains and rivers.”

This was the way Um-Moon taught Zen, always giving short answers to his students’ questions. Often he would use only one word to point to the student’s mind.

A student asked him, “What is the true Dharma of Buddhism?”

The Zen Master answered, “Wide.”

Another student asked him, “What is the keenest sword?”

Um-Moon answered, “Patriarch.”

Another student asked, “When does a chicken’s egg hatch?”

Um-Moon answered, “Echo.”

Someone else asked, “I killed my parents. I repent to Buddha. If I kill Buddha and all the eminent teachers, where will I repent?”

Um-Moon answered, “Appearance.”

A student asked, “Of the three bodies—color body, consciousness body, and Dharma body, which one speaks the truth?”

Um-Moon said, “Primary.”

Thus Um-Moon, with his short answers, opened many minds.

*When the light is on, it is bright.
When the light is off, it is dark.*

After a Sunday night lecture, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “How many kinds of Zen are there?”

Soen Sa said, “There are five kinds of Zen.”

“What are the five kinds?”

“They are: The outer path Zen, the common people’s Zen, Hinayana Zen, Mahayana Zen and The Utmost Vehicle Zen.”

The student then asked for an explanation of each of these classifications.

Soen Sa said, “Zen is meditation. Outer path Zen includes many different types of meditation. For example, Christian meditation, Divine Light meditation, Transcendental meditation, etc.”

“The Common People’s Zen is concentration meditation, Dharma play meditation, sports, the tea ceremony, ritual ceremonies, etc.”

“Hinayana meditation is insight into non-self, impurity, and impermanence.”

“Mahayana meditation is: 1. Insight into the existence and non-existence of the nature of the dharmas; 2. Insight into the fact that there are no external, tangible characteristics, and that all is emptiness; 3. Insight into existence emptiness, and the Middle Way; 4. Insight into the true aspect of all phenomena; 5. Insight into the mutual penetration of all phenomena; 6. Insight that sees that phenomena itself is the Absolute.”

“These six are equal to the following statement from the Hua-Yen Sutra, ‘If a man wishes to thoroughly understand all the Buddhas of the three time spheres, then he should view the nature of the whole Universe as being created by the mind alone.’”

“Finally there is the Utmost Vehicle Zen which is divided into three types: Theoretical Zen, Tathagata Zen, and Patriarchal Zen.”

The student then asked, “The five kinds of Zen are all very good. Which one is best?”

Soen Sa said, “Do you understand your mind?”

“I don’t know.”

“When you do not know your mind all Zen is no good. When you understand your mind, all Zen is best.”

“I want to understand my mind. What kind of Zen is the best training?”

Soen Sa said, "Understanding one's mind is the aim of the the Utmost Vehicle Zen."

"You mentioned before that this Zen is further divided into three kinds. Which of the three is the best training?"

"The three kinds are only one, not three. Thinking understanding of Zen is Theoretical Zen. The attainment of emptiness, the unity of mind and the Universe is the Tathagaya Zen. 'Like this' is Patriarchal Zen. This means a relaxed mind, the attainment of the big 'I.' Big 'I' is infinite time and infinite space."

The student asked Soen Sa, "That's all very difficult. Why all this thinking kind, empty kind, and like this kind? I don't understand."

Soen Sa said, "I will explain it to you. The Heart Sutra says, 'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.' So your substance and the substance of all things is the same. Your original mind is Buddha, Buddha is your original mind."

Then Soen Sa, holding a pencil in his hand, asked the student, "This is a pencil. Are you and the pencil same or different?"

"Same."

Soen Sa said, "That's right. This is theoretical Zen."

"Thank you very much. What then is Tathagata Zen?"

"The Mahaparinirvana Sutra says, 'All formations are impermanent, this is the law of arising and disappearing. When arising and disappearing are extinguished, then this stillness is bliss.' This means that when there is no appearance nor disappearance in your mind, that mind is bliss. This is a mind devoid of all thinking, and so I ask you again, 'this pencil and you, are they the same or different?'"

The student said, "Same."

Soen Sa said, "If you say same, you deserve thirty blows. If you say different, you still deserve thirty blows. What can you do?"

The student could not answer and became very confused.

Soen Sa hit the floor and immediately after said, "The keeping of your mind, as it is just now, is the Tathagata Zen. Do you understand?"

"I don't know."

"This 'don't know' mind has no Buddha, no Dharma, no good, no bad, no light, no dark, no sky, no ground, no same, no different, no emptiness, no form, no anything in it. This is a truly empty mind. Empty mind is a mind which does not appear nor disappear. Keeping this mind at all times is Tathagata Zen. Before you said that the pencil and you are the same. This 'same' is thinking, so you deserved thirty blows. Do you understand?"

The student said, "I have a little understanding."

"Little understanding is good. You must practice and understand your mind. To my same or different question I hit the floor. When you understand my action of hitting the floor, you will understand Tathagata Zen."

"Thank you very much. Please explain the Patriarchal Zen."

"Long ago a person asked Zen Master Man-Gong, 'What is Buddhism?'"

Man-Gong said, 'Sky is high, ground is wide.' Do you understand what this means?"

"I don't know."

Soen Sa said "That's right. 'Like this' is enlightenment. Patriarchal Zen is enlightenment Zen. An eminent teacher said:

1. Sky is ground, ground is sky. Sky and ground are constantly changing.

Water is mountain, mountain is water. Water and mountain is emptiness.

2. Sky is sky. Ground is ground. How can they ever change? Mountain is mountain. Water is water. Such is the truth.

"The first strophe is of the Tathagata Zen realm, and the second belongs to the Patriarchal Zen. Long ago, a person asked Zen Master Dong-Sun, 'What is Buddha?' He said, 'Three pounds of flax.' The person did not understand and went to another Zen Master, related his encounter with Dong-Sun and asked, 'What does three pounds of flax mean?' The Zen Master said, 'In the North, pine; In the South, bamboo.' The person still did not understand and so he went to one of his friends who had practiced Zen for some time. His friend said, 'You open your mouth, your teeth are yellow. Do you understand?' 'I don't know.' 'First understand your mind, then all of this will be clear.'"

Then Soen Sa asked the student, "Do you understand?"

The student said, "I understand, thank you."

"What do you understand?"

"'Like this' is Patriarchal Zen."

Soen Sa asked, "What is 'like this?'"

The student did not know. Soen Sa pinched his arm hard and twisted it. The student yelled, "Owwwww!"

"This is 'like this.', Soen Sa said, "Who is in pain?"

"I don't know."

“You must understand that which is in pain, then you will understand the Utmost Vehicle Zen, and see all the Universe as truth.”

“Thank you very much.” The student bowed and left.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope that all people are doing well in Providence. I hear that you will again go to California. If it is possible, I believe there are a number of people in Washington who would like to listen to your great speech.

Maybe you, and anyone else with a car or money would visit Washington for a few days during the summer and give a talk at the Vihara and or elsewhere.

Accommodations free.

Sincerely,

Alban

Dearest Alban,

We were very happy to hear from you by telephone and letter. I have thought of you often since you left.

Soen Sa Nim will come back from California at the end of August and would like to come to Washington then. His English is much better these days and I think he would be a big hit up there.

Why don't you try to set up a few talks. He will definately be able to be there the first week of September, so you could schedule things for that time.

Your Housemaster,

Bobby

Dear Alban,

Thank you very much for your letter. I think you nowadays hard training sit Zen. Bobby wrote to you about my plans on coming to Washington, you one more time read.

Now, one word for you.



This is a picture. Is 'A' point inside the circle or outside? If you answer I will hit you thirty times, if you don't answer I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?

The realm of this question is so great Buddha does not know the answer, and if the eminent teachers all had one thousand mouths, they would not be needed.

But when you hear the sound of a flute with no holes, you will for the first time, understand.

The sun sets behind the Western mountain. The moon rises over the Eastern sea.

Seung Sahn

P.S. I am sending you a great Kong-An, you keep it and save all people.

July 27, 1973

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope you had a pleasant flight and are enjoying your stay in California. Thank you again for the medallion. And thank you for your teaching. You are very generous.

On the way back from the airport, Bobby and I were chatting about Zen. At one point I said, "I guess it must take fifteen or twenty years to become a Zen Master." In response, she slammed her fist onto the dashboard. That cut all thinking, and I felt as if I had jumped into an ice-cold lake. Of course, I have since relapsed into my customary slumber.

I love being at the Zen Center. Many laughing, many thinking. A very few moments of clarity.

Here is a poem I wrote for you:

Dead fish in your eyes.

Mountain-roots in your hair—
you don't know! you don't know!

The idiot is babbling soundlessly.
What do I care?

We will sit here, together,
beside an old table in the kitchen
and watch the moon rise soundless in our fingernails.

Please give my love to Chung Dal.

Yours very respectfully,

Stephen

Dear Stephen,

How are you today and how have you been? Hoping everything is fine with you. It sure was nice to hear from you. How wonderful it was that you and Bobby were so concerned and talked about Zen on the way home from the airport. Wouldn't you say one who cares and discusses about Zen is a Buddhist saint-minded?

Although there are a billion people living on this earth, how many do you think there is who really try to understand oneself and be honest with oneself. The majority of people cling to and live by greed of material; vanity; for the sake of formality; desire of fame; desire of all sorts of comforts; and sexual desire, etc. Actually they don't even know where they are heading, so then how could they perceive a truth and find out their original natures.

Attachment is making oneself unclear at the same time he will be under many restrictions. Cut oneself from the attachment, and the mind will become clear, will obtain greater freedom and a lamentable thing it is for people to die after spending their lifetime wandering in greed and in attachment. But you, Stephen, you are putting in all your efforts to escape from all these. Indeed you are splendid! I can not resist but to call you a brave man.

In your letter, you said, 'many laughing, many thinking, and very few moments of clarity.' Isn't it an unquestionable truth? Look at the sky! Sometimes it's cloudy; sometimes thundering and lightning; sometimes it rains cats and dogs; and sometimes it's high, clear and blue. Isn't it all in nature? Your smiles and your thinking itself indeed is you, isn't it? If there is great-truth of joy and anger, then it would be you.

The poem you wrote for me was very nice. You wrote:

Dead fish in your eyes
Mountain-roots in your hair
You don't know! You don't know!

Even the Buddha wouldn't know the meaning of this, so how would I know. I would and could answer only if I had seen shadow of deep mountains in pond full of playful fish.

How marvelous Stephen! Don't you think it is also its true nature to sit around together at an old table in the kitchen and watch the August moon rising.

Here is a poem I wrote for you.

When a guest telling host what he had dreamed last night. Then the host told the guest about his. Who would tell these two that themselves are in dream.

Originally there isn't anything and it is calm. Why does the wind blow down flowers.

A dog is chasing after a bone.
The goose was frightened and runs away saying "gaw, gaw, gaw..."

Bye for now,

Seung Sahn Soen Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? How old are you? (Written in Korean)

KATZ! HAPPY BIRTHDAY

You are a great man. (Written in Korean)

Bobby

August 4, 1973

Dear Bobby,

How have you been? Thank you for your letter. I can't help surprising at your writing Zen questions and answers in Korean. You are so excellent. Jacob, Becky, Roger, Steven, Susie Chuck, George, Nick and Jim, I am anxious that all of you are well and how Zen is.

I have seven day's ceremony and lectures from seven to nine o'clock every night at Tal Mah Sa Temple, Los Angeles. The lecture is Heart Sutra. I will end the ceremony on this Sunday and go to Sam Bo Sa Temple on August 8th and stay there until August 20th, then come back Los Angeles. I will go home August 24th.

During my lectures about Heart Sutra here everyone knows that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. But they can't understand well that form is form, and emptiness is emptiness. How is it to you? Are the former and the latter same or different?

I wrote a poem for all of you here.

So much sufferings in Nirvana castles.
So joyous to sink into this world.
When you call yourself with old clothes Buddha,
What do you call yourself with silk clothes?
Wooden men went out with shoes at night
Stone woman came back with hat in the morning.
You for the first time can perceive when you take up
the moon three times which floats in a pond.

Good bye,

Seung Sahn Soen Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope you are well and are working hard to save all the people. Your students in Providence miss you, and will be happy when you return.

We ate the #1 tomato from our garden yesterday. Becky, Roger, and I shared it. It was very good. I think there will still be many tomatoes and other vegetables when you come back.

Katz(the baby cat)is getting big and strong. Your special plant in the garden is growing all over the fence. Sometimes I have to kill some of it because it is trying to become Buddha. Do you understand? It has a 160° attachment.

We are having the 7 day Sesshin (12 hours a day).

Becky and Roger are doing very well. Many sit Zen, many no talking. I am not doing so well, because I am working, and I all the time think working and meditation are different.

I know this idea comes from thinking. What can I do?

The mantra mind comes and goes.
Where did it come from and where does it go?
EEEEK!
The clouds bring rain and shadows.
The sun brings light and heat.

Bobby

August 11, 1973

Dear Bobby,

Thank you for your nice letter and for some news about your colleagues and surroundings around the center.

I am excited to hear that you tasted tomatoes from the garden. How was the taste and could you tell me soon how it was?

Right now I am staying at Sambosa Temple, located in Carmel Valley. We are also having a 7 - day Session which will terminate this weekend, and thereafter I am planning to teach Heart Sutra to some of the members of this Temple.

I'll be heading for the Dharma Temple in L.A. on the Monday of the week after.

It sounds like a wonderful idea to spread my special plant all over the fence. You will make a nice fence out of it.

You said, "It tries to become Buddha with a 160° attachment." But you also realize that all but nothing could become Buddha. Your action to kill it could be well justified, if it is right and you shall be rewarded for that. However, otherwise you shall be punished.

Tell me, tell me, tell me my beloved student, the motivation behind your action in detail.

I am deeply impressed with your endeavour to hold a 7-day session with your own initiative. Undoubtedly you will attain the State of the Great Truth if you keep constantly trying, with courage and confidence in what you are really looking for. Look at the step of your Heart all the time, by beloved students!

Truth enters in your mind, if and only if you brush off your thinking, i.e. in a state of Emptiness.

You said, "I am working, and I all the time think working and meditation are different. I know this idea comes from thinking. What can I do?" However you also said, "EEEEK!" and you went on to say, "The clouds bring rain and shadows; the sun brings light and heat." You have a certain merchandise to sell out, and yet you simultaneously purchase it on your own.

Since you express your answer implicitly in your letter, what am I supposed to do to further your idea?

Clapping my hands together, looking over the southern mountain,
White clouds densely spreading out, making all kinds of shapes, such as dog, tiger,
man and finally Buddha.
And they, they alas! scattering around,
Disappear over the mountain.

White cloud does move itself, floating around. And yet, blue mountain never does
so, standstill.

Yours in Dharma,

Seung Sahn Soen Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim.

Thank you very much for your poem which you wrote us in Bobby's letter. It is very beautiful language.

You must be very busy teaching people about the Heart Sutra.

Nowadays, all people many sit Zen. All the people's faces are very good, especially Roger. I ask him questions like, "What are you?" and "What is this?" He only hits me very hard in the stomach or gives me a kick with his foot. Then we both laugh.

During the sesshin Bobby, Jacob, and David sat a lot, Roger sat all the time, George, Suzie, Chuck, Louise, and Jim came too.

On Sunday Jacob gave a great Dharma talk. We had one new customer, and he understood. When he left he said, "Thank you very much! I want to meet the Zen Master."

Nowadays we are looking at the big house on Manning Street, the same house we looked at this spring. This is the house with many Buddha-statues in the Zen room. Now it costs \$65,000. Good house! But the roof is broken and when it rains, water comes in.

The garden is very good, Soon the tomatoes will be ready, and we have many cucumbers. Only the squash plants are dying because the ground is wet.

Today we are going to the beach.

See you soon,

Becky

Dear Becky,

My best regards to all of you! Reading your interesting letter, I feel like being with all of you at home.

I am so anxious to get back to you sooner.

I am very pleased to to hear that Roger is doing Zen so good. When I came here last, he felt like becoming dead, but this time he is doing marvelously! Very good. It appears to me that I have to come often for Roger! And you practiced Sesshin together with Bobby, Jacob, David, George, Suzie, Chuck, Louise, and Jim. That is wonderful too. Keep in

mind that this is not a simple coincidence, but a direct effect of good cause pertaining to you and to the people around you simultaneously, that has been formed before Buddha long, long time before.

Please, keep yourself up with this treasureous cause and try to save the people in despair sufferings.

You looked at the big house. The price sounds reasonable to me. However, as I understand, the house is located in a neighborhood where one house is restricted to only one family unit. So I am afraid of some sort of neighborhood effect later on, once we open it for the Zen-minded public. If there is no neighborhood problem, and you all reach a consensus on purchasing the house, how wonderful would it be? If we can manage it, it will turn out to be one of the best of its kinds in America.

However, please, be more prudent in making a final decision; see to it if we really want it so badly.

Plants grow well around the center! What and how much you get depends on how much effort you put in! Beautifully growing plants are the results of your effort made for the last few months. Again the law of Cause-and-Effect is pertinent here.

The garden will teach a great Dharma to all of you. Ask the garden what the Dharma is! It will teach you all the Dharmas. And keep me constantly informed of how the garden answers your questions!

Becky, here is a poem for you:

A fishing line, a thousand feet long,
Dropping it right down,
As one wave arises,
So follow tens of thousands of waves.
Being a quiet night, and in cold water,
Bait drawn stays so, never touched,
The boat returns empty, yet full of moonlight.

Yours in Dharma,

Seung Sahn Soen Sa

P.S. Enclosed you will find a copy of the Maxim of Faith. Do enjoy reading it together with all of your friends.

The Maxim of Faith

The extreme path is not difficult; discard the selection mind only; but for hatred and love, it is quite open and clear.

The slightest differentiation makes the difference of heaven and earth; for your true self to be manifested, do not give rise to obedience or rebellion.

Contending each other for wrong and right is the disease of the mind; if the profound meaning is not comprehended, it is of no use to have the mind sedated.

Round like the great space, without any remnants or insufficiency, due to the selecting mind, it is not like suchness.

Without seeking after the causes, nor falling into emptiness, if you hold on to one thing, all the false things will perish by themselves.

Stopping movement, if you return to stopping, stopping itself is movement—and how can you know One?

If you do not pierce through One you fall into Two, losing the merits; discarding existence, you fall into existence; following merits, you go against them.

If words and thinkings exceed, you can not get conjunction; if words and thinkings cease, there is no place which can not be pierced.

If you return to the origin, you can get the fundamental purport; if you follow the reflection, you lose the original meaning; if you reflect back even a while, you will exceed the former emptiness.

The transforming of former emptiness is due to false views.

Don't try to seek the truth, but cease all the false views.

Don't dwell in two views, and don't try to seek.

If discrimination is made between this and that, your true mind is confused and lost.

Two is caused by one; don't stick to even one.

If one mind does not arise, the myriad things are faultless. If faultless, no Dharma; without birth, there is no mind.

Action perishes according to the boundary (limitation); boundary submerges according to the action. Boundary (limitation) is due to action; action is due to limitation.

If you desire to know the two stages, know it is originally one. One emptiness is the same as the two, containing all the myriad things. If you do not see thin and thick, how can you have prejudices and sides?

The great path is firm and wide; it is neither easy nor difficult.

Small views arouse suspicion; thus hasting makes wasting. If you hold onto it, you lose the measure, and surely fall into the evil (wrong) path. If you release it, you are free, and fundamentally there is no going and no abiding.

If you follow the nature and unite with the path, you can cut off all the defilements of mind with ease. If you go against the truth with the distinguishing mind, you get turbid and it is not good.

If it is not good, you are worried; what is the use to debate on strangeness or intimacy. If you desire to proceed along the one-vehicle, don't hate the sixfold dusts. Without the hatred of the sixfold dusts, you will rather come to the right enlightenment.

The learned persons do nothing, but the ignorant bind themselves. Dharma has not two dharmas; but falsely you have attachment.

As you use the mind with mind, how can it not be a great mistake?

Your illusion gives rise to Nirvana, and birth and death; enlightenment will clear away your love or hatred. It is illusion that you stick to all the differences. Why do you endeavor to hold onto the illusionary dreams and phantoms? Release at once all the ideas of obtaining, losing, or this and that.

Without sleep in your eyes, all the ... are awakened. If your mind is not different, all the myriad laws are the same one. The oneness is profound in its body, and has forgotten all the causes; if you view the myriad things with equality, you will return to the nature as it is. All the causes have disappeared, and there is nothing to be compared to. It is the same and one whether you stop or whether you move.

Where there is no two, how can there be one?

In the utmost ultimate, there exist no norms. If the mind is matched, both activity and passiveness cease; when suspicion comes to an end, right faith comes into being.

As nothing abides, nothing is to be remembered.

The space is light by itself; you do not need to exert your mind. Thinking can not reach it; nor imagination conceive it.

The true Dharma realm of suchness has neither others nor I. If you desire to realize it, let you talk only of non-two. Non-two means the sameness of all things and enclosure of

everything in it. The wise men of ten quarters all enter this great principle. The great principle is neither quick nor slow; one thinking is ten thousand years.

There is neither existence nor non-existence; the ten quarters are before the eyes. Absolute smallness is the same as absolute bigness, for no boundary can be found with them. The infinite bigness is the same as infinite smallness and its boundary is invisible. Existence is the same as non-existence; and non-existence is the same as existence.

If not like this, you should not keep it.

One is the same as all; and all is the same as one.

If only you are able to do like this, what do you worry is unfinished...

Faith is not two, the non-two faith is.

Where words and path have stopped, and non-past, present and future.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Everyone seems to get so bummed out whenever you go away. After present excursion you should stay here for a long time.

Since Bobby and Becky write to you so much you must know quite well what we've been doing and what state of mind we are in. I have a job now which begins tomorrow. Not a good job but it's only for a month so it's o.k. Bobby, Becky, and Roger are in the process of very hard training. I admire them very much. They have much discipline and also work very hard for the center.

Today we looked at some houses for sale, but so far we have not found anything that comes very close to what we want.

We may have to wait past September before we get a house.

I was thinking of writing you some wonderful Zen language but if I understand it correctly, this letter is already wonderful Zen language. We all miss you.

Love,

Jacob

Dear Jacob,

I received your kindly letter. I'm glad to hear that everybody is doing well. Also, I'm glad to hear that you got the job.

There isn't any special way for the Zen. As Nam Chun Zen Master once told us, the way is nothing but a mind with no attachment. And if you are not drawn by your false environment, that's the start of a mind with no attachment.

Here, I'm sending you a line:

The clouds break away, the moon shines into all houses.
Spring comes and flowers appear everywhere.

S.S. Soen Sa

While visiting the Sambosa Temple in Carmel Valley, California, Seung Sahn Soen Sa gave a Dharma talk to a large gathering of visitors one Sunday afternoon.

Soen Sa walked up to the podium and held a stick up. He drew a circle in the air. He then asked, “Do you know what this is? If you say you understand, I will hit you thirty times; if you say you don’t understand, I will hit you thirty times. Why?” After a short pause, he hit the table with the end of the stick. “Today is Sunday,” he said.

He then delivered this speech:

“Buddha said, ‘Existence or non-existence depends on a series of causes and effects.’ In Buddhism, the process of conditioned life is viewed as one of continual phenomenal change. Aging and dying depend on birth, which in turn depends on becoming. Becoming depends on attachment, attachment depends on thinking, thinking depends on consciousness. This series of conditions perpetuates itself, causing suffering, the degree of which is measured by karma. The concept of karma can be defined as volition, or the act of making a choice.

“You were not born into this world because you planned or wanted to. You were born because you karma and your parents’ karma caused you to be here. According to Buddhism, nothing occurs by accident; it does so by necessity through the functioning of karma. Our gathering here at Sambosa is not an accident.”

“Some are born with silver spoons in their mouths; some in famous families, some in poor status; some as whites, some as blacks, some as yellows. All people have different physical characteristics, personalities, intelligences, attitudes, etc.”

“Who or what creates this kind of Universe where so many varieties of things are happening constantly? God? Buddha? Neither of them! The answer lies in the strict rule of cause-and-effect. Buddhism explains cause-and-effect with regard to the life continuum through the doctrine of dependent origination. It clearly shows how the cause becomes the effect and the effect becomes the cause. By the same token, the continuous recurrence of birth and death has been aptly compared to a circle. Death is not a release. As long as this process keeps on recurring, suffering is inevitable.”

“Craving, or attachment, initiates thinking, which in turn causes human suffering. Your thinking influences not only yourself but also everyone else, which causes you to accumulate karma in your storehouse consciousness. This keeps you in a state of constant suffering.”

“Thus, in order to stop suffering, you must first stop thinking. If you raise a thought or craving, that will differentiate you from everybody else.”

“When you are not thinking, you and all people are one, and there is no suffering.”

“The no-thinking, no-craving state of mind is the state of emptiness. The conceptions of emptiness in Buddhism, however, is not the total rejection of the common sense reality we experience through our senses, but rather it is the brushing off of our false views so as to see the world and things as they really are.”

“The Buddha said, ‘Men come and go with empty hands. Then where do they come from and where are they going? Life is like a cloud floating across the sky, and death is like its disappearance over the mountain. As the cloud is without substance, so is man’s life and death. It is all empty.’

“The categories of existence and non-existence are applicable only in the realm of the conditioned and phenomenal world. Nevertheless, there is a seed innate in every man that never dies, that is crystal clear and intrinsically pure.”

“Then what is it that stops craving and thinking, through which can you transcend yourself to reach the state of Nirvana? It is the very Suchness. In this realm you are identical with everything and everybody.”

“Realize that the myriad of things, alive or dead, organic or inorganic, are all identical with Suchness. This is the Buddha state, the absolute and completely independent-unconditioned world where you can be with and of the whole universe.”

“At the beginning of my talk I held up my stick and drew a circle in the air. If you were thinking for an answer to what it was, your answer would be no good. Only when you are able to cut your thinking will you understand.”

“When I hit the stick on the table all our minds became one for that instant.”

“I hope you understand this truth. When you do understand, I hope you will teach others so they too can stop their thinking, craving, and suffering.”

“Thank you.”

Once one of Seung Sahn Soen Sa's students was staying in Washington and invited his teacher for a visit to give some lectures on Zen there. At the first of the three talks, at the Yes restaurant, the student read two stories and gave a short introduction and then asked if there were any questions.

One person asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, "How can one cut through thinking?"

"Where are you coming from?"

"New York."

Soen Sa pointed at the person's hand and asked, "Whose hand is that?"

"My hand."

"And whose head is that?"

"My head."

"And whose body?"

"My body."

"Your body comes from New York. I did not ask where that came from. I asked where the real you comes from."

The student shook his head for a while and finally said, "I don't know."

"Just now, your doubt has cut through thinking. Do you understand?"

"Yes, now I understand."

"All right then, I will ask you a question. The Buddha once said, all things have Buddha-nature. Zen Master JoJu was once asked, 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?' and he answered, 'No.' The Buddha said, 'Yes.' JoJu said, 'No.' Which answer is correct?"

"Both."

"If you say they are both correct, I will hit you thirty times."

At this much of the audience broke out laughing.

“In the Heart Sutra it is written, ‘form is emptiness, emptiness is form.’ Correct and incorrect are the products of thought. So when you say both answers are correct, I will hit you.”

“Now I understand.”

“All right, I will then ask you one more question. A master once visited one student on a mountain and asked him, ‘Do you have?’ The student raised his fist. The master said, ‘That answer will not do, it is no good.’ He then went to visit another student on a second mountain and asked the same question. The second student answered also with a raised fist. The master was delighted and said, ‘very good.’”

“Why, with the same question and same answer, did the master say one student was bad and the other one good?”

Again he could give no answer from his confusion.

Soen Sa hit the bench and said, “Your confusion over good and bad is due to your attachment. If you are thinking, your answers will be bad. When you have cut through your conceptions your answers will have no words. So, I answer thus, “ Soen Sa said, and hit the wall.

Now another person asked, “How is one able to practice and cut through thought?”

Soen Sa motioned for him to come to the front. After some hesitation he came up to the front, then stopped. Soen Sa waved him forward until he was directly in front, and then had him sit down. Soen Sa hit him on the back.

“Do you understand?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s O.K. Keep this doubt at all times. In doing so, you will practice Zen.”

The student thanked Soen Sa and left.

Later Soen Sa went to a church. One of his students gave a short Dharma speech, and then asked for questions.

One person asked, “Why did you come to Washington?”

Soen Sa asked, “Why does the sun rise in the east?”

“That has no meaning.”

“Then my coming to Washington has no meaning.”

If you always keep the Bodhi-mind, you will find happiness everywhere.

You must keep the don't know mind at all times, everywhere.

With the passing of time, the mind of great doubt and questioning grows clear, and the true self appears.

The last talk in Washington was given at the Vihara.

One student asked, "How can I practice Zen?"

Soen Sa said, "Don't you know?"

"I think that the name and form of all things are different, but that their substance is the same. I think that to practice Zen I must become one with the universe."

"What is this one?"

"Everything."

"Once, when Master Tong-san was asked, 'What is Buddha?' he said, 'Three pounds of flax!' What does this mean?"

"Three pounds of flax."

"Very good, but you are holding a stick and hitting the moon."

"That is Buddha-nature."

Soen Sa said, "The head is a dragon but the tail is a snake."

The student was confused and said nothing.

Soen Sa said, "I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow."

"Mooo."

"The arrow has already passed downtown."

The student again was silent.

Soen Sa said, "Tong-san replied that Buddha was three pounds of flax. Un Moon replied to the same question, 'Dry shit on a stick!' Are these two answers the same or different?"

"You tell me."

"I don't know. Ask my student."

He asked the student, who answered with a shout.

Soen Sa said "Do you understand?"

“The first student answered with a shout.”

“Good! But your understanding is still only conceptual. Sometimes your answers show an attachment to emptiness, sometimes they are ‘like this.’ I will explain to you once more the Circle of Zen. At 90°, the paper is the pencil, the pencil is the paper. At 180°, one can only answer with a hit or a shout. At 270°, the pencil is angry, the paper laughs. At 360°, the paper is white, the pencil is yellow. Of these four answers, which one is good?”

“All of them are good.”

Soen Sa hit him and said, “Today is Saturday.”

Once a student asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “What is the value of morality and ethics?”

Soen Sa said, “Did you have breakfast today?”

After a few moments, the student said, “Yes.”

Soen Sa said, “What did you do after breakfast?”

“I went for a walk.”

“Who went for a walk?”

“I did.”

“What is this I?”

“I don’t know.”

Soen Sa said, “You don’t know yourself, so you don’t understand the value of morality. You yourself create good and evil. Morality and ethics come from the original mind. Before the original mind, there is no morality, no ethics. First you must understand yourself. Then you yourself will understand the source of all morality and ethics.”

Dear Soen Sa Nim (written in Korean),

Here is a special post card for you. Louise and I went on a four day vacation. We had a very good time.

Bye bye.

Bobby

How do you do?

Alban

I hope you are seeing many good sights and taking a lot of good pictures.

Louise

How are you? See you soon.

Roger

Thank you for your letter.

Dear Bobby,

Why does the sun rise from the east when originally there isn't a thing?

Dear Alban,

An ancient person became enlightened on hearing a wooden rooster crow. What does this mean?

Dear Roger,

Your article is very good. This time, answer without using words, letters, or actions. What is Zen?

Dear Louise,

Sugar is sweet and salt is salty. Is sweetness and saltiness the same or different?

See you soon.

Seung Sahn

One Sunday, after a lecture at Tal Mah Sah Temple in Los Angeles, Layman Bon Won came up to Seung Sahn Soen Sa and asked, “What is the realm of enlightenment?”

Soen Sa said, “Don’t you know?”

Bon Won hit the floor.

Soen Sa—I don’t believe you. Give me another answer.

Bon Won—Outside it’s very hot today.

Soen Sa—Good. Now let me ask you a question. Long ago Zen Master Se Sahn attained enlightenment and wrote this stanza:

When hair is white, mind is not white.
Men have said this for a long time.
Listen! A wooden chicken is crowing!
Hear it and finish a great man’s work.

What do these last two lines mean?

Bon Won—I ate lunch, so I’m not hungry now.

Soen Sa—I don’t care about your lunch. Only you know whether your belly is full. I’m asking you about the wooden chicken crowing. What does that mean?

Bon Won—Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Soen Sa—Are you a wooden chicken?

Bon Won—Why are you playing a flute with no holes?

Soen Sa—If you killed all the Buddhas, I wouldn’t believe you. The meaning of ‘a great man’s work’ is already in the poem. Which line contains this meaning?

Bon Won—There’s a lot of smog in the Los Angeles sky.

Soen Sa—No good. Read the poem again.

Bon Won read the poem and said, “Did you finish lunch?”

Soen Sa—No good. The meaning is in the poem. Read it again.

Bon Won read the poem once again and was silent.

Soen Sa—You don't know. Now you ask me.

Bon Won—What does it mean to finish a great man's work?

Soen Sa—When hair is white, mind is not white.

At this, Bon Won laughed heartily, and Soen Sa joined him.

There was once a great Zen Master named Pop An Mun Ik (Fa-yen Wen-i.) He founded many temples, gave the Transmission to sixty-three of his disciples, and was the first patriarch of the Pop An School of Zen.

When Mun Ik was a student under Master Na Han, he was known for his phenomenal memory. He could recite many sutras word for word. He had also meditated a great deal, and his mind had become clear. He used to say to those who asked him about the Truth, “All the three worlds, all Dharmas, and all Buddhas are made by the mind alone.”

At this time in China, there were many wandering monks, who had freed themselves from all attachments and would travel from monastery to monastery and from master to master, like clouds across the empty sky. They were without hinderance.

Mun Ik had been admiring these monks and their way of life for some time. One day he decided to do as they did. He went to Na Han and said, “I’ve come to say goodbye, Master. I’m going to live the life of no hinderance from now on. So tomorrow I’ll be leaving you.”

The Master raised his eyebrows a tiny bit and said, “Fine, if you think you’re ready.”

Mun Ik said, “Oh, I’m ready all right.”

“Well,” said the Master, “let me test you, just to make sure. You often say that the whole universe is made by the mind alone. Look over there in the garden. Do you see those large rocks? Now tell me—are they inside your mind or outside it?”

Without the slightest hesitation, Mun Ik answered, “There is no truth outside the mind; all things are inside it.”

The Master chuckled and said, “You’d better go get a good night’s sleep. It’s going to be heavy traveling tomorrow, with all those rocks inside your mind.”

Mun Ik flushed with embarrassment and confusion, and looked down at the ground.

After a few moments, the master said, “When you try to understand, you are like a man dreaming that he can see. The Truth is right in front of you. It is alive, and infinitely great. How can human words contain it?”

Realizing his mistake, Mun Ik bowed and said, “Please, Master, teach me.”

The Master said, “All right, listen. Now you don’t know what the Truth is. This not-knowing is the earth, the sun, the stars, and the whole universe.”

As soon as Mun Ik heard these words, his mind shot open. He bowed deeply and said, "Ah, Master, what else is ready now?"

Suddenly the Master shouted, "Mun Ik!"

Mun Ik shouted back, "Yes!"

"Very good," said the Master. "Now that you are ready, you may go."

This is the story of the Chinese Zen Master Ko Bong's great awakening.

When Ko Bong was twenty years old, his master gave him the following koan: "Where does birth come from, and where does death go?" As he meditated on this koan, he came to feel like a traveler who has lost his way in a dark forest. "At that time," he later wrote, "truly I was dazed by my own delusions."

Three years passed. Ko Bong struggled with his koan day and night, unable to achieve any degree of one-pointedness. Finally, in despair, he went to see the famous master Seorl Am. Seorl Am was very old. His face was wrinkled like a dried apricot, and from far back in their sockets his eyes glittered. Ko Bong told him of his failure to penetrate the koan, and asked for his help.

"We have been told," said the aged master, "that all beings have Buddha-nature. This is the teaching of all Buddhas, past, present, and future. However, when a monk came to Master Jo-ju and asked if dogs have Buddha-nature, Jo-ju said, 'No.' What does this 'No' mean?"

Ko Bong was stunned. As he struggled to come up with an answer, the Master took his staff, hit him viciously on the shoulder, and chased him out.

So, in great pain and weeping with humiliation, Ko Bong returned to his monastery. He couldn't stop thinking about the Master's question. What could it mean? What could it mean? Suddenly, like a flame in a dark room, a light was kindled inside his mind, and it spread until it filled his whole being. He understood. This original koan—"Where does birth come from, and where does death go?"—seemed obvious now.

The next day, as he was working in the monastery fields, Seorl Am came to visit. He said, "Good morning. How is your search coming along?"

Ko Bong said, "If a man kills his desire to search, he will surely find what he is searching for."

At this, the master grabbed him by the collar and shouted, "Who are you?" Although Ko Bong had understood the koan perfectly, he again was paralyzed and could only stare like a moron. The old Master pushed him away, saying, "What have I got in my hands—a corpse?"

Ko Bong was so troubled by this new failure that he couldn't sleep for days. Then, one night, his first master appeared to him in a dream and gave him another koan: "All things return to the One: where does the One return?" When he woke up, he found that all his doubts and confusion had coalesced into one mass, which weighed on his heart like a huge rock. For five days he walked about in a stupor. On the sixth day, he wandered into one of the major halls in the monastery, where the monks happened to be commemorating the

death of the fifth patriarch of the Lin Chi School. For the occasion they had hung up a portrait of the fifth patriarch, on which the patriarch himself had inscribed the following stanza:

Thirty-six thousand mornings
in one hundred years.
Don't you know by now
that you and I are the same?

As Ko Bong read the last word, an understanding burst upon him, and the doubt-mass exploded. His body felt indescribably light and free, as if at any moment it would float away.

Some time later, another master visited him and said, "Congratulations, Ko Bong, I hear you have attained the great enlightenment. As long as I'm here, let me ask you one small question. Can you maintain this state of enlightenment at all times?"

"Yes, indeed."

"While you are working, or sleeping, or dreaming?"

"Yes, even in dreams."

"How about in dreamless sleep, where there is no sight or sound or consciousness? Where is this enlightenment then?"

Seeing that Ko Bong couldn't answer, the master said, "Let me give you some advice. When you're hungry, eat; when you're tired, sleep. The minute you wake up every morning, ask yourself, 'Who is the master of this body and where does he reside?' This will lead you to understand."

So Ko Bong made up his mind to work on this question without interruption, even if it should drive him insane. Five years passed. Then he and a friend left on a pilgrimage to the north of China. On their way they stopped at an inn. Being very tired, the friend fell asleep immediately. Ko Bong sat in a corner, meditating. Suddenly the friend's wooden pillow fell to the floor. Ko Bong heard the noise and his mind burst open and the whole universe was flooded with light. He understood not only his own koan, but all the koans handed down by all the Buddhas and patriarchs. He felt like a distant traveler who has finally come home. At this moment of great awakening, he composed the following stanza:

The man who has come to this
is the man who was here from the beginning.
He does what he always did.
Nothing has changed.

After a Sunday night lecture at the Providence Zen Center, Seung Sahn Soen Sa said to his students, “If you discard all thoughts of attainment, you will then come to see the real purpose of your quest. Some of you want to reach enlightenment quickly and as soon as possible become a Zen Master. But as long as you have a thought like this, you’ll never attain anything. Just cut off all thoughts and all conceptions. Then, as you work hard on your koan, all the questions and doubts that you have will come to form one great mass. This mass will grow and grow, until you don’t care about eating or sleeping or anything but finding the answer to the great question. When you reach *this* state, you will indeed quickly attain enlightenment.

Q 1: “If we didn’t want to get enlightenment, why would we take the trouble to come here?”

Soen Sa: “Desire and aspiration are two different things. The idea that you want to achieve something in Zen meditation is basically selfish. ‘I want to get enlightened’ means ‘I want to get enlightened.’ Aspiration is not for myself, it isn’t a merely individual desire, it transcends the idea of self. It is desire without attachment. If enlightenment comes, good. If it doesn’t come, good. Only don’t touch. Actually, this *is* enlightenment.”

Q 1: “Could you explain why?”

Soen Sa: “Originally there is no enlightenment. If I attain enlightenment, it’s not enlightenment. As the Heart Sutra says, there’s ‘no attainment, with nothing to attain.’ Enlightenment isn’t enlightenment. It’s just a teaching word.”

Q 1: “What does it teach?”

Soen Sa: “When you are hungry, eat. When you are tired, sleep.”

Q 1: “Sometimes I feel that *meditating* is very selfish. I really don’t feel I’m going to help others get enlightened by sitting Zen. I don’t even know what that means.”

Soen Sa: “What are you? What is this self that is feeling selfish? If you understand this, you’ll know that there is no real difference between your self and all beings in the universe. Ultimately, they are one and the same. You include all beings. So if you’re coming here for yourself, you’re coming for all beings.”

Q 2: “I don’t understand the difference between desire and aspiration. If you have the idea ‘I want to save all beings,’ isn’t there still the duality, I and all beings?”

Soen Sa: “Before you use those words, you must understand what the self is.”

Q 2: “Okay, tell me, what is it?”

Soen Sa: “Did you have dinner?”

Q 2: “Yes.”

Soen Sa: “What did it taste like?”

Q 2: “It tasted like rice.”

Soen Sa: “I will hit you thirty times.”

Q 2: “Ouch!” [Laughter]

Q 3: “Does this cat sleeping here have Buddha-nature?”

Soen Sa: “No.”

Q 3: “Do you have Buddha-nature?”

Soen Sa: “No.”

Q 3: “Do *I* have Buddha-nature?”

Soen Sa: “About half of it. (Loud Laughter)

Q 3: “But how can you divide Buddha-nature?”

Soen Sa: “I can’t, but *you* can. (Laughter)

Q 1: “What you said before is as clear as day. But I still feel selfish when I come here and my children want me to be with them at home.”

Soen Sa: “Let me ask you this: If you could do anything your heart desired, what would you want to do most of all?”

Q 1: (Laughs) “Get enlightened.”

Soen Sa: “And after you get enlightened, what will you do then?”

Q 1: “I don’t know.” (Laughter)

Soen Sa: “You want most of all to attain enlightenment. And you don’t know what in the world you will do with it. That not knowing is your true self. As long as you keep the desire to attain enlightenment, you will not attain. But desire brings you here to sit Zen. So come and sit. That is a first step.”

Su Tung-po was one of the greatest poets of the Sung Dynasty. He was famous not only as a poet, but as an essayist, a painter, and a calligrapher as well. From an early age he had acquired great erudition in both the Confucian and the Buddhist classics. It is said that he knew the entire Buddhist canon by heart—some 84,000 volumes.

When he was twenty years old, he passed a high civil service examination and was appointed inspector of four provinces—the emperor’s official representative, whose job it was to investigate all governmental operations in these districts. In the course of his travels, he would also visit famous Buddhist monasteries and, for his own pleasure, investigate the monks and Masters there. “So you know the Diamond Sutra, hmm?” “Yes.” “Well, tell me what doctrine is expounded on page seventy-three of the editio princeps.” “Uhh...” Even the most learned monks hadn’t memorized all the texts, so they couldn’t answer his questions. Finally, he got disgusted with what he called the laziness and ineptitude of the monks, and lost interest in visiting them.

One day, however, he was told that in the Monastery of the Jade Springs there was a very learned Zen Master who would certainly be able to answer any question he could ask. So he mounted his horse and rode off to see for himself.

Traditionally, a man waited at the monastery gate for the keeper to come and escort him inside. But Su Tung-po opened the gate himself, rode in, went directly to the main lecture hall, and sat down with his back to the Buddha, waiting for someone to appear.

In a short time, the master came in. He walked up to Su Tung-po and bowed respectfully. “Welcome, sir. It is a great honor to have such a high official as yourself visit our unworthy shrine. What, may I ask, is your name?”

“My name is Ch’eng” (Ch’eng means scales.)

“Mr. Scales? What a curious name!”

“I am called that because I can weigh all the eminent teachers in the land.”

All at once the master let out an ear-splitting yell. Then, with a faint smile, he said, “How much does that weigh?”

The answer to this was in none of the sutras. Su Tung-po was speechless. His arrogance crumbled, and he bowed respectfully to the master. From this moment, he began to devote himself to Buddhism.

Eventually he was reassigned to another province, where he came to know a Zen Master named Fo Yin. The two grew very close; people said they were like brothers. One day, Su Tung-po happened to come in his official ceremonial robes. They were made of blue and

green silk, with golden stitching and a sash fastened by his great jade seal of office. They were very splendid robes.

As he entered the room, Fo Yin said, "Forgive me, great sir, for the inadequate seating in my poor room. All I can offer you, I'm afraid, is a bare cushion on the bare floor."

Su Tung-po said, "oh, that's all right. I'll just sit on you."

Fo Yin said, "I'll tell you what. Let me ask you a question. If you can give me a good answer, then you can use me as a chair. If not, you'll have to give me your jade seal."

"All right."

"It says in the Heart Sutra that matter is nothingness and nothingness is matter. Now if you use me as a chair, isn't this clinging to matter, without understanding its essential non-existence? But if all things don't really exist, what will you sit down on?"

Su Tung-po was stumped.

"You see, you're clinging even now. Do away with all discriminating thoughts. Then you'll understand."

Su Tung-po handed over his jade seal. From then on, he did Zen with great ardor. He meditated at all times, read many Zen books, and went to visit Zen scholars and masters whenever he could.

At the Temple of the Ascending Dragon there was a famous Zen master named Chang Tsung. Su Tung-po went to him and said, "Please teach me the Buddha-dharma and open up my ignorant eyes."

The master, whom he had expected to be the very soul of compassion, began to shout at him. "How dare you come here seeking the dead words of men! Why don't you open your ears to the living words of Nature? I can't talk to someone who knows so much about Zen. Go away!"

Su Tung-po staggered out of the room. What had the master meant? What was this teaching Nature could give and men couldn't? Angry, frustrated, possessed by doubt, he mounted his horse and rode off. He had lost all sense of direction, so he let his horse find the way home. It led him on a path through the mountains. Suddenly he came upon a waterfall. The sound struck his ears. He understood. So this was what the master meant! The whole world—and not only this world, but all possible worlds, all the most distant stars, the whole universe—was identical to himself. He got off his horse and bowed down to the ground in the direction of the monastery.

That evening Su Tung-po wrote the following poem:

The roaring waterfall
Is the Buddha's golden mouth.
The mountains in the distance
are his pure luminous body.
How many thousands of poems
have flowed through me tonight!
And tomorrow I won't be able
to repeat even one word.

One Sunday night at the Providence Zen Center, Seung Sahn Soen Sa told the story of Su Tung-po's enlightenment. Afterwards he said to his students:

"What do we learn from this story? That Zen teaches us to cut off all discriminating thoughts and to understand that the truth of the universe is finally our own true self. All of you should meditate very deeply on this. What is this entity that you call the self? When you understand what it is, you will have returned to an intuitive oneness with Nature and see that Nature is you and you are Nature, that Nature is the Buddha who is preaching to us at every moment. It is my wish that all of you will be able to hear what Nature is saying."

Student A (pointing to a rock in the zendo)—What is that rock saying to you right now?

Soen Sa—Why do you think it's speaking to me?

Student A—Well, I hear something, but I can't quite make out what it is.

Soen Sa—Why don't you ask the rock?

Student A—I already have, but I can't understand its language.

Soen Sa—that's because your mind is exactly like the rock. (laughter)

(Silence.)

Soen Sa—Are there any more questions?

(Silence.)

Student A—If there are no questions, can you answer?

Soen Sa—If there are no questions, then you're all Buddhas. And Buddhas don't need to be taught.

Student B—But we don't know we're Buddhas.

Soen Sa—That's true, you don't know.... Fish swim in water, but they don't know they're in water. Every moment you breathe in air, but you do it unconsciously. You'd only be conscious of air if you were without it. In the same way, we are always hearing the sounds of cars, waterfalls, rain. All these sounds are sermons, they're the voice of Buddha himself preaching to us. We hear many sermons, all the time, but we're deaf to them. If we were really alive, whenever we heard, saw, smelled, tasted, touched, we'd say, "Ah, this is a fine sermon!" We'd see that there's no scripture that teaches as well as this experience with Nature.

Student C—Why do some see and others not?

Soen Sa—Your nose sticks out and your eyes are sunken. Do you know why? It would be just as functional to have two holes in the middle of our face, and eyes on a flat plane. So why are our eyes and noses the way they are?

Student C—I don't know.

Soen Sa—Well, I'll explain it to you. It's a result of man's karma. A dog has hair growing on his nose, a man doesn't. When man is created in the womb, he's formed nose-first. (laughter) The reason for this is that the nose appears first, and then the rest of the body. Since it comes first, it has no hair. That's why in classical Chinese nose means first. Hence we say "Biso", the first patriarch. So if you understand why your nose sticks out, you'll understand the truth that underlies the whole universe.

Student C—But what does karma have to do with seeing or not seeing?

Soen Sa—All right, I'll explain in a different way. In the past you have sown certain seeds that now result in your encountering Buddhism. Not only that—some people come here only once, while others stay and practice earnestly. When you practice Zen earnestly, you're burning up the karma that binds you to ignorance. In Japanese the word for earnest means "to heat up the heart". If you heat up your heart, this karma, which is like a block of ice in your mind, melts and becomes liquid. And if you keep heating it, it becomes steam and evaporates into space. Those people who practice come to melt their hinderances. Why do they practice? Because it's their karma to do so, just as it's others' not to. Man's discriminating thoughts build up a great thought-mass in his mind, and this is what he mistakenly regards as his real self. In fact, it's merely a mental construction based on ignorance. The purpose of Zen meditation is to dissolve this thought-mass. What is finally left is the real self. You enter into the world of the selfless. And if you don't stop there, if you don't think about this realm or cling to it, you will continue in your practice until you become one with the Absolute.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope your trip back to Providence was good and hope you still feel as strong as you did at Sambosa.

After you left I began the 21-day meditation. On the sixth day I began to feel very weak and had a high fever, but I tried to keep on for three more days. Finally Won Jang Nim said I should sleep, so I did for four days. When I tried to start sitting again I got sick again so Bo Sal Nim said I should rest a week or two and start 21 days again. Can you send a good day to start about a week or two from now?

On the first days of the retreat it was hard staying inside and keeping my mind on the question all the time. Then the question began to grow more and more, and sometimes I felt completely lost. There was nothing that wasn't wrapped up in it. When I got sick I slept all the time, and dreamed, but when I was awake I felt like I was up against a big, flat wall that I could never get through. What I want to know is, what is it that holds together the seeing and the hearing and the thinking and so on?

Sometimes I feel like when I was twelve, and my mind was full of pain. My father would ask me, "What's wrong? How do you feel?" I answered, "I can't find my self anymore."

Last night I was asking Sun He, "What is the point of being alive?" She said that the point is to become enlightened, so you don't have to live, so then you can live. But I still don't know what the point of being alive is.

Stephen sent us a story about Ko Bong and a Sunday night lecture. They are both very good. Thank you very much.

In the Sunday night lecture you said that desiring enlightenment is an obstacle, but if you want enlightenment it can make you work very hard, and then the question makes you forget all about enlightenment.

If you really want to know the answer, and you know "enlightenment" means finding out, is that the same as wanting enlightenment?

Many people here have the flu. I hope people in Providence are healthy and happy. Is Bobby doing the evening bell song? Jacob and I are learning the chanting that goes with 108 bows. Jim works outside all day, and we are working on the garden. Jacob waxed the temple floor. Yesterday Bo Sal Nim made more kim chee than I have ever seen before. Sun He and I are making bread too.

Yesterday Jacob and I planted onions in the garden. The soil is so soft and dark.

Please send a new date for the 21-day meditation.

See you later.

Love,

Becky

29 November 1973

Dear Becky,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. Long ago an eminent teacher said, “Great work, many demons.” There are two kinds of body demons and two kinds of mind demons. One body demon makes a person sick, the other makes him sleepy. One mind demon causes much thinking—“why am I alive?” “What holds the senses together?” etc.—, the other causes an attachment to quietness, in which there’s neither thinking nor no thinking, but only a vague, cloudy mind.

You want enlightenment quickly, so you did a 21-day retreat. WHAT AM I!!! WHAT AM I!!! Energy up, sometimes a sick body, sometimes much thinking. And if you *don’t* push yourself, if you don’t want enlightenment, there is only a dreamy, cloudy mind. Both of these extremes are no good. It is like a guitar string. If you tighten it too much, it will snap: if you leave it too loose, it won’t play. But if you tighten it to the right point in between, you will have a fine sound.

Your string was too tight, it snapped after a few days. Now only rest is good. No more retreats for a while. Please try not to be disappointed. This is a great teaching. It is very important to learn patience, to cut off all desires, even—or especially—the desire for enlightenment.

You went very deeply with the koan, so that you felt you were up against a wall. You could go neither forward nor back. The name for this state is *Kyong Jol Mun: speech word road cut, mind action all-place disappear*, and the mind had nowhere to go. It is like a mouse who has crawled into a cow’s horn, very easy to go in, impossible to back out. This is where you have been. It’s a good state. Now you must rest all thinking. The state will be there naturally. It is there already. And eventually you will have a clear mind. It will grow until it’s as large as the universe. This is the true you!

You told the story about you and your father. Many thoughts about the past appear during meditation. Rest all that.

Your talk with Soen He is thinking, your questions are thinking. Don’t ask “Why am I alive?” but rather “Who is it that’s alive?” Understand this and you’ll understand all of life and death. Long ago an eminent teacher said, “Life is like a cloud in the sky, death is like a cloud vanishing into the sky. Originally the cloud doesn’t exist. So life and death are the same. Only one thing is always clear and doesn’t depend on life or death.”

Becky, what is this one thing?

You want to attain enlightenment. An eminent teacher said, "A person who wants enlightenment goes to hell like an arrow." Wanting to answer the question is the same. It is desire. Desire is no good. Only rest your mind. There is where you'll find enlightenment.

At first a person thinks, "I am my body," and lives only for his body. But if he thinks deeply about who he is, he will realize that he is emptiness. He will arrive at the place of no thinking. This is true emptiness, with no in or out, with no enlightenment or ignorance. If he can let go of this and let his mind rest, he will have no hindrance. There will be no wall. All will be freedom. And finally he will find his true self. He will understand that sugar is sweet and salt is salty. Truly understanding this is understanding yourself.

When you taste sugar and salt, who is tasting?

YOU MUST PUT IT DOWN! PUT IT DOWN!

S.S.

A poem for you:

If you want to understand the Buddha realm,
You must keep your mind clear like space.
Let all thinking and desire fall away.
Then your mind will have no hindrance.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your letter. Getting your letter is a great relief. It is amazing how you understand my mind so well. It is as if I have been sick without knowing it for several months, and you are the doctor, the only one in the world, because you make clear the mistakes, and know what to do.

When you say "speech word road cut, mind action all place disappear" I realize you understand exactly how I feel. Having someone who understands is better than having a mother, father and friends.

I think I understand everything you wrote in the letter, but when you say, "when you taste sugar and salt, who is tasting? You must put it down! Put it down!" I don't know. One part of me says, "He is talking about this (way of being)..." but then another time I don't know what or how to put down. What puts it down and what is there? I remember your advice to rest, but "put it down!" sometimes helps me rest, and sometimes raises a lot of mystery.

How are you nowadays? I hope you are feeling well.

Nowadays Jim is very happy. He told me that he had understood the koan, but he said it so quietly that I didn't even hear what he said until a few hours later. He has been the most agreeable person in the world for about two weeks. Sun Ae says he is happy because he thinks he has found the answer.

Bo sal Nim is now retreating for 21 days. Won Jang Nim still has a cough and Kwon got pneumonia from the same sickness I had, but he's better.

All people are hoping that you can come here in January.

See you later.

Love, Becky

Regards to all people, but especially Roger after his birthday, and Jeff for coming back.

ROGER'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

A KOAN, WITH VERSE COMMENTARY

Introduction:

One grain contains the universe
One moment—infinite time.
If birth and death are empty.
Why spend money on a cake?

Main Subject: On the second day of the December Yong Mang Joeng Jin at the Providence Zen Center, there was a birthday party for Roger. The party was held in silence, except for laughing, crunching, and less polite noises. The following items were served: A chocolate coffee cake with twenty-one candles and an inscription reading, "How old is Roger?": strawberry and coffee ice cream: sunflower seeds roasted in tamari and popcorn prepared, contrary to custom, by Louise. There was also vegetable juice, for those who preferred it.

Toward the end of the party, a page was passed around the table and everyone wrote a few words to the guest of honor.

Bobby wrote:

"Only for Roger!"

On this very *special* day
Silence is our only way.
How a party?...No noise no beer:
Don't you worry—have no fear.

Only, how old is Roger,
How old is Roger.
Keep this in mind
We'll all have a good time
You will find.

So Roger, today you are a man.
Tell us how it feels, if you can.
KATZ!
We're all having so much fun
Today you are just "21"!

Commentary:

*Plenty of noise, but no ear.
Plenty of thoughts, but no fear.
Plenty of foam, but no beer.
Plenty of space, but no here.*

George wrote: Dear Pope Corn, How long have you been popping corn. Happy Birthday!

Commentary:

*A lion sits on the topmost branch.
His mane crackles in the night.
His teeth gleam.
He has just brushed them.*

Suzie wrote: Happy birthday dear Roger—may your years be many and your feet stay forever clean.:

Commentary:

*One foot strode through high heaven,
The other stepped in a turd.
As I look down, in deep samadhi,
Help! They're coming my way!*

Louise wrote: Dear Roger, I can remember my 21st b day. And now you can remember your 21st b day. (Don't ponder this too long.)

Commentary:

*Memory crawls from corners,
Sniffing for an escape,
On the tracks of the Bodiless.
What, after all, did she mean?*

Stephen wrote: Dear Roger, Now that you understand 2 as well as 1, and that 2+1=21, and how a man hanging by his teeth from a vine can eat a bowl of popcorn please tell me: why doesn't Roger have a beard?

Commentary:

*The fool chatters along,
Taking the serious lightly.
He smiles as the noose grows tighter.
Ink drips from his nose.*

Alban wrote: Please attain happiness. Please help others.

Commentary:

*The circle is on the page,
The page is inside the circle.
How can the leaf attain greenness?
How can its withering wither?*

Jeff wrote: Much ice cream, cake, pop corn, laughter and hand signals on your birthday.
May it be so always.

Commentary:

*As Always was running down the street,
he ran smack into Never.
They fell into the gutter.
Sometimes helped them get up.*

Soen-sa wrote:

Today is Dec—2 73.
Today is Rergers Birthday
Today is Yong Maen Jong Jin, second day
We have *Only sit*
We have *Only party*
We have *Only eat*
Silence! Silence Only
Silence! Silence party
How old is Rerger
He only point a cake
Today is Rergers Birthday
Silence party.

Commentary:

*His eyes blind to the future,
His ears deaf to the past.
What was the face of happiness?
The clock strikes ten.*

Katz didn't write anything.

Commentary:

*I hear a sound and a sound.
I see things go slow, go quickly.
Which one shall I chase?
This world is mine.*

Roger wrote: Thank you all for a wonderful time!

Commentary:

*The Bodhisattva's speech is simple.
His gratitude fills the oceans.
He brings blessings to all creatures
And spells wonderful with two l's.*

Conclusion:

Tonight is December second.
It is bitter cold outside.
Roger is twenty-one.
The same age as what's-his-name.

28 December 1973

Dear Jacob, Becky, and Jim,

The old year is about to go away, the new year is coming. Where does the old year go? Where does the new year come from? Who makes a year old or new?

I'm in New York with Stephen and Bobby. Mr. Ku is here to begin a temple. So we have been helping him. We return to Providence Sunday afternoon, two days before the January Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

How are you? How are things at Sambosa?

Jacob—Thank you for your letter and pictures. In your letter you said you might come back to Providence. What does this mean? You are the Sambosa Dharma Teacher. Why come back? Originally there is no coming or going or staying. What are you going away from? Where are you going?

Becky—Thank you for your letter. You've been doing hard training. That's good. Now put away the original one hair. One drop of water slides into the sea. Everything becomes big I.

Jim—How are you doing nowadays? I heard you're doing hard training. Very good. The earth is always turning. The moon is turning around the earth. Earth and moon are turning around the sun. Where does your mind stay—on earth, moon, or sun?

You must hold the old year and the new year and throw them into space. Then you will hear the bone of space shouting. And you will understand east, west, north and south.

See you soon,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter to us. How are you?

Will you be giving talks and staying in New York? Soon you will be busy and have many students.

Sambosa is O.K. Bo Sal Nim is doing many retreats. She starts 21-days again tomorrow.

I will start 21-day meditation on January 5.

You said, “now put away the original one hair, one drop of water slides into the sea. Everything becomes Big I” What is original one hair? How is it put away? I think I know what you mean by “original one hair” but I’m asking what it is. (But also about the word “hair.”) (“Head”?)

I feel like I have something very heavy that I’m tired of carrying. When you asked us all those questions about what is the old year and what is the new year, I didn’t want to listen. But thank you for your questions anyway.

A monk came here from the International Meditation Center and stayed overnight. He liked it here and wants to come back to meet you.

See you soon,

Love,

Becky

1-8-94

Dear Becky

The new year has come, you get a new body, and you change to a new mind.

How are you? Thank you for your letter. In it you say, “What is the original one hair? How is it put away?” And “I feel like I have something very heavy that I’m tired or carrying.”

That’s all right. I thought you had many questions, that you were carrying something heavy. That’s why I told you to put it down. If you keep “How is it put away?” you are

carrying it and you won't be able to put it away. So put it down—life, death, coming, going, old year, new year, Buddha, God, the original one hair, all things. Put it down!

When you put it all down, what are you?

If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times. And if you are not clear then, you must go drink one cup of cold water.

During the January Yong Maeng Jong Jin, we all checked the following kong-an,

- 1) Cutting ignorance-grass is hoping to see your true nature. Then where is this nature now?
- 2) You already understand your true nature, so there is no life, no death. Then when your eyes are extinguished, how can you be alive?
- 3) You have attained freedom of life and death, so you understand where you are going. Then when your body is destroyed, where will you have gone?

I hope that you clean your mind.

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. How are Jacob and Jim doing? I will come to Sambosa around 25 Jan. Please tell them.

During the January 1974 Yong Maeng Jon Jin, Seung Sahn Soen-sa went for a walk with some of his students. It had been snowing the day before. Soen-sa asked one student, "What color is this snow?"

The student said, "White."

Soen-sa said, "You have an attachment to color."

The student clapped his hands.

Soen-sa said, "Your head is a dragon, but your tail is a snake."

He then asked another student, "What color is this snow?"

The student said, "You already understand."

Soen-sa said, "I don't know."

The student said, "It's white."

Soen-sa said, "Is this the truth?"

The student said, "Aren't you hungry?"

Soen-sa said, "Soon it will be time for lunch."

Another student said, "Go drink some tea."

Soen-sa said "I've already had some."

The student hit Soen-sa.

Soen-sa said. "Aie! Aie!"

Dear Sim Seon,

Thank you for your letter. You said that you're staying in a wonderful zendo and doing hard training sitting zen. That's very good. And it's good that you're doing less Dharma-play and more sitting. Dharma-play is only controlling the mind; Zen is understanding the mind. Dharma-play is like driving a car; Zen is like driving a car and also understanding its engine. So only sitting Zen is best.

Of all the kong-ans, the best are Mu and What am I. Buddha said all things have Buddha-nature, but Jo-Ju said the dog has no Buddha-nature. Which one is correct? If you cut off all thinking, there is no nature, no Mu, all is emptiness. You must attain true emptiness, Then you will understand Mu. So in true emptiness, there is no speech, no word, no Buddha, no God, no things at all. But if you don't become attached to true emptiness, then Buddha, God, and all things become one. Then Mu is you, Mu is Buddha, Mu is everything. I hope you soon understand that Mu is your own self.

I am enclosing four introductions to Zen monks in Japan and Korea. #1 is my temple in Tokyo. The address and telephone number are on the bottom. Go there and meet my student Myo Gak seu-nim (the introduction is written on the back of the card). He will take you to my friend Yanase Roshi, a Rinzai master. The introduction is on card #2. You can stay and study with him; he has a good small zendo outside of Tokyo. #3 are my students Jin Am seu-nim and Kyon Hyan seu-nim. To get there when you arrive in Seoul, take a taxi and show the driver the address written on the bottom. These two monks will introduce you to Byon Am, a great Zen master. He has a large, beautiful zendo. If you plan to stay in Japan or Korea and study Zen, write again and I will send you some more introductions. I hope you have a good time. See much, hear much, become your true self, bone and flesh.

S.S.

One evening, after a talk at the Boston Dharmadhatu, a student handed Seung Sahn Soen-sa the following note:

The kid makes one slide down the icy hill and runs away.
The hill belongs to someone else.
To whom does the hill belong?
Where is this magic hill?

The next day Soen-sa wrote the following answer:

Who makes the kid?
Who makes the hill?
Who makes the magic?
If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.
I don't tell dreams to a fool.
If you are hungry, you must eat. If you are tired,
you must sleep.

On a very snowy January Day, 1974, Seung Sahn Soen-sa visited the Boston Dharmadhatu. After a short dharma talk, the following dialogues took place.

Student A—At a recent seminar on Zen and tantra, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche compared Zen to black and white and Tantra to color. What do you think of this?

Soen-sa – Which one do you want? (Laughter)

Student A – (Shrugs his shoulders)

Soen-sa – What color is your shirt?

Student A – Red

Soen-sa – You have an attachment to color.

Student A – Maybe you have an attachment to black and white.

Soen-sa – Ah...But your eyes see only color.

Student A – Black and white *and* color.

Soen-sa – The arrow has already passed downtown (Silence) Do you understand? (Laughter) O.K., I'll explain. The dog runs away with the bone. (Silence) O.k., I'll explain *more*. (Laughter) When you're thinking, your mind and my mind are different. When you're not thinking, your mind and my mind are the same. Now tell me—when you're not thinking, is there color? Is there black or white or red? Not thinking, your mind is true empty mind. True empty mind is cutting off all speech and all words. Is there color then?

Student A—I don't know.

Soen-sa—You don't know? I hit you. Understand?... Before original mind, there is no color, no speech, no Buddha, no Zen, no Tibetan Buddhism.

Student A—Thank you.

Soen-sa—Thank you? What do you mean by thank you?

Student A—Only Thank you

Soen-sa (laughing)—Only thank you is good. I hope you will soon understand your true self.

Student A - I've begun,

Student B – Why do you all wear uniforms?

Soen-sa – Did you eat supper?

Student B – Yes.

Soen-sa – Why?

Student B – To relieve pain.

Soen-sa – I am a monk...Look at our face. The nose has two holes, the eyes have two holes, the ears have two holes. Only the mouth has one. Why only one? It would have been very easy to have another hole in back of our head. We could eat rice from in front and drink wine from in back. (Laughter) But we have only one hole. This is people karma. The cat catches the mouse: the dog barks at strangers—wong, wong, wong, wong—! It is all karma. Do you understand?

Student B—I understand that I have two holes in my nose. But I choose to wear a uniform or not.

Soen-sa – I'm not finished yet. This is only on the way. . . So life is karma. In our past lives we made karma, and the action of this karma is our life now. I like this uniform, so I wear it. It is Bodhisattva clothing. The Bodhisattva wears necklaces and bracelets and earrings and beautiful clothing. He doesn't wear them for himself, but only for other people. These robes have the same meaning as Bodhisattva clothing. Do you understand?

Student B – Are all in your party Bodhisattvas?

Soen-sa - What do you think?

Student B – I think not.

Soen-sa (pointing to one of his students) – You ask him.

Student B – Are you a Bodhisattva?

Student – (shakes his head)

Soen-sa – Very good. (Laughter)

Student B (to student) – Why do *you* wear these robes?

Student – Why do you ask?

Student B - Because I have a great deal of difficulty dealing with uniforms.

Soen Sa – You asked these clothes a question, and they are already teaching you. If I hadn't worn them, you wouldn't have asked me about them. I am wearing them, so you asked me your question. So I am teaching you. So these are Bodhisattva clothes.

Student C – When I sit Zen, I have much pain in my legs and back. Is that from straining too much? Or from sitting in a bad posture?

Soen-sa - When I first sat Zen as a young man, I had much much pain. My knees hurt, my back hurt. So whenever I sat, the Dharma teacher in my monastery used to beat me with his Zen stick. If I didn't move my legs, I was soon in great pain. And if I did move them, I was beaten. Three years passed like this. Then there was a little less pain. And after six years, there was no pain at all. I could sit for one hour, two hours, three hours. How many hours do you sit?

Student C - Not many.

Soen-sa – You sit a lot: then you won't have pain. (Laughing) O.K.?

Student D – If everything is one, what's two?

Soen-sa – Who makes everything one?

Student D – You.

Soen-sa I don't make one. *You* make one.

Student D – Then why do you call it one?

Soen-sa You have an attachment to words. (Silence) O.K., I ask you: before you were born were you zero or one?

Student D – Neither.

Soen sa – Not zero? Before you were born, this body didn't exist. So you were zero, O.K.”

Student D - Not zero.

Soen-sa – Not zero? This body existed? O.K. – before you were born, did you have this hair?

Student D – No.

Soen-sa – O.K. Now your hair is one. After you're dead, will you have hair?

Student D – No.

Soen-sa – So this is for your hair, only your hair. Before you were born, your hair was zero. Now it's one. In the future, it will be zero. O.K.?

Student D - O.K.

Soen-sa - This is the truth. So zero equals one, one equals zero. O.K.? So one times zero equals zero. Two times ten equals zero. Three times one hundred equals zero. O.K.?

Student d - Ummm...If you say so.

Soen-sa - You say one, you say two, you say three, you say many many: all equals zero. So if you want one, you have one. If you want two, you have two. If you want one hundred, you have one hundred. Descartes said, I think, therefore I am. If I think one, I have one. Before, you thought one, so you had one. I wasn't thinking one, so I didn't have one. So you say one: I don't say one.

Student D - Then why don't you say that everything's zero?

Soen-sa – Not zero. (Laughter) *You* say zero; I don't say zero.

Student D - You say one.

Soen-sa - I say zero. (Laughter) You say one, I say zero. You have an attachment to my words. I have freedom. Sometimes I say zero, sometimes not zero. So if you think one, you have one, if you think one hundred, you have one hundred. If you cut off all thinking, all is empty. If you think God, you have God. If you think Buddha, you have Buddha. If you cut off thinking, there is no Buddha, no God. That is what Buddha meant by "The whole universe is made by your thinking."

Student E - As we go through things in our daily life, thinking seems to be a very natural process. Yet in Zen practice, everyone spends a whole lot of time working to cut off thinking. Why is that necessary?

Soen-sa - There are five kinds of thinking. First, thinking that is attached to name and form. Next, thinking that is attached to thinking itself. Next, not thinking. Next, freedom thinking. Next, no-attachment thinking. Of these five, which one do you keep in your everyday work?

Student E – Probably one and two.

Soen-sa - The first kind of thinking is small I. Many attachments and desires. I want money, I want sex, I want to be a great man. It is the I of many desires, the body I, the small I. Next, I study and read many books and understand that form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Getting money is no good, hippie style is very good. This is the thinking I, karma I. Next, with much sitting, much hard training, finally...Ah! I understand! The whole universe is empty: True emptiness: This is the nothing I. This nothingness is my true self. Next, after still more hard training in Zen, I get universal energy. I ride clouds, change my body into many different forms, fly to the Buddha realm, do any kind of action with complete freedom. This is the freedom I. But there is still an attachment to freedom itself. I am freedom, I am freedom: Next, "like this" is truth. This is Big I. Big I is infinite time, infinite space. So there is no life, no death. Only "like this". Only true life. A clear mind, with no attachments. This is the truth. Red is red, green is green. Spring comes the grass grows by itself. Three times three equals nine Only "like this." *This* thinking is Zen. This thinking is Tao. This thinking is life. This thinking is

bodhisattva thinking. Do you understand? If you keep this thinking, you are a Bodhisattva, you are a Buddha.

Student E – In itself though, is there anything wrong with thinking?

Soen-sa – What do you think?

Student E – It's just there.

Soen-sa – Thinking is what makes good and bad. In original mind there is no good and no bad. So there is one mind, one thinking. One thinking is great thinking. It is the same as not thinking. Not thinking is no attachment thinking. Buddha said, "If you always keep Bodhisattva thinking, you will find happiness everywhere."

Student F – They say that you reach a point in Zen meditation where there's a cessation of thought or, alternatively, there's a cessation of the watcher, although thoughts continue. Could you comment on that?

Soen-sa – Where does thinking come from?

Student F – Well, conventionally, it comes from your head.

Soen-sa – Where in your head?

Student F (pointing to his forehead) - It's supposed to be here.

Soen-sa – Where does thinking go?

Student F – Ummmm...I don't know

Soen-sa – What is thinking?

Student F – Something that happens, I guess. An awareness

Soen-sa – Thinking is a name. People make this name. This paper (rolls up a piece a paper) – this is a name. If you ask a cat, "What is this?" the cat won't say, "This is a paper." River, mountain, sun, moon – all are names that people make. For a cat, the sun is not the sun; for a dog, the moon is not the moon. Go ask a dog, "Do you understand this moon?" (Laughter) People's thinking makes all these things. So thinking is your mind. Mind is no mind. So thinking is no thinking.

Student F – I sort of realize that. But how do you stop thinking?

Soen-sa – O.K., I will teach you. Come here. (Student F comes up front, handing him a cup of water) Drink this. Is it hot or cold?

Student F - (After several moments) – It tastes good.

Soen-sa – This is thinking. When you drank the water, you weren't thinking. When I asked you if it was hot or cold, you were thinking. "What answer is good?" This is

thinking. When you drank, you only drank. (Holds up the rolled paper.) Do you see this? What is it? (Silence) Why don't you answer?

Student F - Well, you want me to say it's a paper. (Laughter)

Soen-sa – Very late. Many thinking. (Laughter) Here, come closer. (Student F comes closer.) Bend down. (Student F bends down. Soen-sa hits him on the back.) What was that?

Student F – Well, it was a noise. (Laughter)

Soen-sa – When I hit you, you didn't know. Why did I hit you?

Student F – Umm, to shake me up a little?

Soen-sa – Do you understand what my hit means?

Student F – It felt kind of nice.

Soen-sa – Feeling good is your action. Do you understand what *my* action means?

Student F – Maybe you're trying to teach me.

Soen-sa – Once Buddha was staying at Yong Che mountain. One day many people came to hear him speak. But Buddha said nothing. One minute passed, two minutes passed, three minutes passed. Only silence. All the people only wanted Buddha to speak. All their thinking was cut off. Finally Buddha held up a flower. Nobody understood. Only Mahakashyapa saw the flower and smiled. Buddha said, "I have transmitted the true Dharma to you." Now I ask you, when Buddha held up the flower, what did this mean?

Student F - He only lifted up the flower. To show that it was his own action.

Soen-sa – If you were there and saw him lift up the flower, what would you do?

Student F - I'd pick it.

Soen-sa – Ah ha ha! (Laughter) You are Buddha, O.K.?

Student F- I'm not Buddha. (Laughter)

Soen-sa - If you pick the flower, Buddha hits you. What can you do?

Student F – Hit him back.

Soen-sa – Then the Buddha says, "You understand one, you don't understand two." What would you answer?

Student F – I don't understand three.

Soen-sa – Buddha then says, “I thought you were a keen-eyed lion, but now I know you are a blind dog.” (Silence) Buddha says, Your hit is very good. You are Buddha, I am Buddha, so you hit back. Buddha and you are the same. This is a high-class answer. So Buddha once more tests you. “You understand one, you don’t understand two.” Your answer to this was no good, so Buddha says, “I thought you were a keen-eyed lion, but now I know you are a blind dog.”

Student F - Well...(Laughter)

Soen-sa - You must open your mind’s eye. O.K.?

Student F - Thank you.

Soen-sa - You’re welcome.

Student G – Is the Bodhisattva attached to compassion?

Soen-sa – The universe is infinite, all people are infinite. So the Bodhisattva’s attachment is infinite. A Bodhisattva attachment is no attachment. No attachment is Bodhisattva attachment.

Student G – Does he have it in mind to save all people, or does this just happen wherever he is?

Soen-sa – Do you understand Bodhisattva?

Student G – No.

Soen-sa – First understand Bodhisattva. Then you will understand the bodhisattva’s attachment. Bodhisattva is the true you. The true you is Big I. Big I is all people. All people and I become one mind. So Bodhisattva action is always for all people. When people are sad, the Bodhisattva is sad. When people are happy the Bodhisattva is happy. He always acts together with all people. When people are sad, the Bodhisattva is sad. When people are happy, the Bodhisattva is happy. He always acts together with all people.

Student H - What are you doing to us all? How are you doing it?

Soen-sa - How do you feel now?

Student H - No different than I have for the last hundred thousand years.

Soen-sa – How have you been feeling for the last hundred thousand years? (Laughter)

Student H – (Silence)

Soen-sa – Cutting off feeling is good. Cutting off all feelings is infinite time. When I truly cut off feeling, I feel only when people feel. When people are not feeling, I have no feelings. I am like a mirror. When red comes, the mirror is red, when yellow comes, the mirror is yellow. But this mirror doesn’t keep the colors. It is colored only when color comes. When color doesn’t come, it has no color. Po De said, “When light comes, hit

light. When dark comes, hit dark, When direction comes, hit direction. When space comes, hit space.” When they don’t come, don’t hit. Only silence. You must understand this. . .Hit these feelings.

Student H – How can I do that?

Soen-sa – Put it down. Put it all down.

On three occasions the Buddha transmitted his enlightenment experience to his disciple Maha-kashyapa, the first patriarch of zen. These are called the Three Transmissions of Mind.

First Transmissions

There was a pagoda in Northern India named the Pagoda of Many Children. Here the Buddha would come every day to meditate and preach. One day Maha-kashyapa, who had just begun his practice under the Buddha's direction, arrived while the Buddha was preaching to an audience of a thousand people. When the Buddha saw him, he moved halfway off the mat he was sitting on and called to him, "Come sit here beside me." Everyone in the audience was shocked that the Buddha had given his place of honor to a mere novice.

What does this story mean? The disciples who couldn't understand were disciples in name only. They still clung to the idea that here was the Buddha and here were other people. By having Mahakashyapa the beginner come to share his seat, the Buddha showed them that the whole universe is similar and equal. There is ultimately no distinction between enlightened and unenlightened, between the self and other, between I and you. Buddha and beginner are the same.

In the words of a Zen poem:

Heaven is earth, earth is heaven;
heaven and earth interpenetrate.
Water is mountain, mountain is water;
both water and mountain are emptiness.

Another poem begins:

Good and evil are without self-nature:
enlightenment and ignorance are empty names.

This sphere of enlightenment is Tathagatha Zen. It is called

"the shop that sells true gold." And, because it cuts off all illusion, it is called "the sword that kills."

Second Transmission

At a later time, the Buddha used to preach every day to a large audience on Vulture Peak. One day twelve hundred disciples had gathered to hear him. They sat in great attention, waiting for his teaching. One minute passed, then two, then three. The Buddha said nothing. Finally he picked up a flower and slowly raised it above his head. Everyone was

bewildered. Only Maha-kashyapa understood and smiled. The Buddha said, “I have transmitted to you the unparalleled Dharma of the true characteristics.”

This sphere of enlightenment is Patriarchal Zen. It is called “the shop that sells miscellaneous merchandise.” “the sword that revives”. In the words of the poem:

Heaven is heaven, earth is earth:
how can they ever merge into one?
Water is water, mountain is mountain;
each is perfect in itself.

And, as the other poem continues:

In front of your door is the land of stillness and light.

Everything in the world, every last particle of dust, is itself the marvelous structure of the universe. Every person, every living being, is himself the Buddha. Present reality, as it is, is the truth. The colors of the mountains, the sound of the waters, the light from the moon, the cry of the birds – all these are the real sphere of enlightenment, the real experience of the Buddha. They are all the living, pulsating, sensed experience of truth.

Third Transmission

On the fifteenth day of the second month, between two large trees near the Naranjana River, the Buddha died. Many of his disciples gathered to lament his departure. Many of them couldn't understand how the Buddha, the teacher of the doctrine of non-arising and non-extinction, could have died.

The body was already in a coffin on the funeral pyre when Maha-kashyapa arrived. He could tell from their faces that there were some disciples who still had unresolved doubts about life and death, So he went up to the coffin, walked around it three times, and bowed. As he bowed, the Buddha stuck his feet out the end of the coffin. Everyone understood that he wasn't dead, that in fact he was eternally alive, since he wasn't the body which they were about to cremate. As the Buddha had said, there is no arising and no extinction. All things are eternal.

This third sphere of enlightenment is Absolute Zen, the Zen which sees all phenomena as identical with the Absolute. It is called “the department store, which sell all kinds of goods.” “the jeweled sword which freely kills and freely revives”. As the poem says:

Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.

Another poem says:

A water buffalo stands
staring at moon in the lake.
How clear and calm the water is:
Two horns glitter in the night.

What, then, do these three enlightenment experiences teach?

The first: You may think that you are alive: but living and dying are merely names. Before you were born you didn't exist, so non-existence now exists. In the future you will die, so existence doesn't exist. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. All things with name and form are empty.

The second: Even though they are empty, forms and shapes are in themselves the absolute truth. The state in which discursive thoughts don't arise is true emptiness. It is your essential nature. When you return to this state, everything you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch will be the truth.

The third: Every incident that occurs is identical with the Absolute. The water buffalo looks into the lake, and that event is the Absolute. The cat pounces and the mouse utters a small squeak, and that event is the Absolute.

In the first, time is space. In the second, space is in its totality the Absolute. In the third, time is the Absolute.

These then are the three transmission experiences. But was there anything transmitted, after all?

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Student - What do you mean by the Absolute?

Soen-sa – Where does that question come from?

Student - (silence)

Sone-sa – *That* is the absolute.

Stident – I don't understand.

Sone-sa – No matter how much I talk about it, you won't understand. The Absolute is precisely something you *can't* understand. If it could be understood, it wouldn't be the Absolute.

Student - Then why do you talk about it?

Soen-sa – It's because I talk about it that you ask questions. That's how I teach, and you learn.

Student – Well, maybe I understand. But I'm asking for the sake of others. So can't you give me a clearer answer?

Soen-sa – Do you really understand? If so, what do you understand?

Student - You already understand.

Soen-sa - Even the Buddha doesn't understand the Absolute. So how can I understand? If you say you understand, you don't understand that you don't understand.