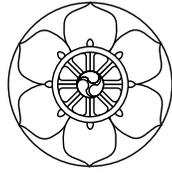


The Kwan Um



School of Zen

Meditation

Guide



Zen is Understanding Yourself

One day a student from Chicago came to the Providence Zen Center and asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What is Zen?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn held his Zen stick above his head and said, “Do you understand?”

The student said, “I don’t know.”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “This don’t know mind is you. Zen is understanding yourself.”

“What do you understand about me? Teach me.”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “In a cookie factory, different cookies are baked in the shape of animals, cars, people, and airplanes. They all have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same dough, and they all taste the same.

“In the same way, all things in the universe—the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, rivers, people, and so forth—have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same substance. The universe is organized into pairs of opposites: light and darkness, man and woman, sound and silence, good and bad. But all these opposites are mutual, because they are made from the same substance. Their names and their forms are different, but their substance is the same. Names and forms are made by your thinking. If you are not thinking and have no attachment to name and form, then all substance is one. Your don’t know mind cuts off all thinking. This is your substance. The substance of this Zen stick and your own substance are the same. You are this stick; this stick is you.

The student said, “Some philosophers say this substance is energy, or mind, or God, or matter. Which is the truth?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “Four blind men went to the zoo and visited the elephant. One blind man touched its side and said, ‘The elephant is like a wall.’ The next blind man touched its trunk and said, ‘The elephant is like a snake.’ The next blind man touched its leg and said, ‘The elephant is like a column.’ The last blind man touched its tail and said, ‘The elephant is like a broom.’ Then the four blind men started to fight, each one believing that his opinion was the right one. Each only understood the part he had touched; none of them understood the whole.

“Substance has no name and no form. Energy, mind, God, and matter are all name and form. Substance is the Absolute. Having name and form is having opposites. So the whole world is like the blind men fighting among themselves. Not understanding yourself is not understanding the truth. That is why there is fighting among ourselves. If all the people in the world understood themselves, they would attain the Absolute. Then the world would be at peace. World peace is Zen.

The student said, “How can practicing Zen make world peace?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “People desire money, fame, sex, food, and rest. All this desire is thinking. Thinking is suffering. Suffering means no world peace. Not thinking is not suffering. Not suffering means world peace. World peace is the Absolute. The Absolute is I.”

The student said, “How can I understand the Absolute?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “You must first understand yourself.”

“How can I understand myself?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn held up the Zen stick and said, “Do you see this?”

He then quickly hit the table with the stick and said, “Do you hear this? This stick, this sound, your mind—are they the same or different?”

The student said, “The same.”

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “If you say they are the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will still hit you thirty times. Why?”

The student was silent.

Zen Master Seung Sahn shouted, “KATZ!!!”^{*} Then he said, “Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.”

**This is the famous Zen belly-shout. Its transcription (KATZ in Korean and Japanese, HO in Chinese) hardly does it justice.*



“Buddha”



How to Practice

One Sunday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Providence Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “How can I get beyond just verbalizing the question “What am I?”

Soen-sa said, “You want this question to grow. This mind is not good. This is attachment thinking. You must cut off this thinking, and only do hard training. It is not important for the question to grow. What is important is one moment of clear mind. Clear mind is before thinking. If you experience this mind, you have already attained enlightenment. If you experience this for a short time—even for one moment—this is enlightenment. All the rest of the time you may be thinking, but you shouldn’t worry about this thinking. It is just your karma. You must not be attached to this thinking. You must not force it to stop or force clear mind to grow. It will grow by itself, as your karma gradually disappears.

“Clear mind is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds come and cover it, but the moon is always behind them. Clouds go away, then the moon shines brightly. So don’t worry about clear mind: it is always there. When thinking comes, behind it is clear mind. When thinking goes, there is only clear mind. Thinking comes and goes, comes and goes. You must not be attached to the coming or the going.”

Chanting Meditation

Chanting meditation means keeping a not-moving mind and perceiving the sound of your own voice. Perceiving your voice means perceiving your true self or true nature. Then you and the sound are never separate, which means that you and the whole universe are never separate. Thus, to perceive our true nature is to perceive universal substance. With regular chanting, our sense of being centered gets stronger and stronger. When we are strongly centered, we can control our feelings, and thus our condition and situation.

In our Zen centers, people live together and practice together. At first, people come with strong opinions, strong likes and dislikes. For many people, chanting meditation is not easy: much confused thinking, many likes, many dislikes and so on. However, when we do chanting meditation correctly, perceiving the sound of our own voice and the voices all around us, our minds become clear. In clear mind, there is no like or dislike, only the sound of the voice. Ultimately, we learn that chanting meditation is not for our personal pleasure, to give us good feeling, but to make our direction clear. Our direction is to become clear and get enlightened, in order to save all beings from suffering.

So when you are chanting, you must perceive the sound of your voice: you and the universe have already become one, suffering disappears, true happiness appears. This is called nirvana. If you keep nirvana, your mind is clear like space. Clear like space means clear like a mirror. Red comes, red. White comes, white. Someone is happy; I am happy. Someone is sad; I am sad. Someone is hungry; give them food. The name for this is great love, great compassion, the great Bodhisattva way. That also means great wisdom. This is chanting meditation, chanting Zen.

Perceiving sound means everything is universal sound: birds singing, thunder, dogs barking — all this is universal sound. If you have no mind, everything will be perceived just as it is. Therefore, when you are chanting with no mind it is also universal sound. If you have “I” then it is “my” sound. But with a mind clear like space, sometimes even the sound of a dog barking or a car horn honking will bring enlightenment, because at that moment you and the sound become one. When you and the sound become one, you don’t hear the sound, you are the sound.

One famous Zen master only heard the sound of a rooster crowing and was enlightened. Another Zen master was just sweeping the yard when his broom threw a rock against a piece of bamboo with a loud knock and he was enlightened. He and the sound had become one. So this matter of sound in Zen practice is really very simple. Any sound will do. What’s important is to perceive the sound and become one with it, without separation, without making “I” and “sound.” At the moment of true perceiving, there is no thought, no separation, only perceiving sound. This is the crucial point. So during chanting time, perceive your own voice and the voice of others, just perceive this bell or drum sound, and cut off all thinking. Then your wisdom-mind will grow, you will get enlightenment and thus save all beings.



Just Like This Is Buddha

The spirit remains clear and light. The six roots (senses) and the six dusts (perceptions) are taken off and thrown away.

The original body remains clear constantly.
Speech and words cannot hinder it.

True Nature has no taint, and is already a perfect sphere.

Only, without thinking, just like this is Buddha.

The four elements (earth, fire, water, air) disperse as in a dream.

The six dusts (perceptions), roots (senses), and consciousnesses are originally emptiness.

To understand that, the Buddha and the eminent teachers return to the place of light:

The sun is setting over the western mountains. The moon is rising in the east.

The Human Route

*Coming empty-handed,
going empty-handed—
that is human.*

*When you are born,
where do you come from?
When you die, where do you go?*

*Life is like a floating cloud
which appears.*

*Death is like a floating cloud
which disappears.*

*The floating cloud itself
originally does not exist.*

*Life and death, coming and going,
are also like that.*

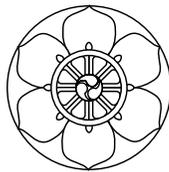
*But there is one thing
which always remains clear.*

*It is pure and clear,
not depending on life and death.*

*Then what is the one
pure and clear thing?*



"Only Go Straight"



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