

Sŏn Master Beopjeong



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Sŏn Master Beopjeong

“Now I live in a place with no signboard and no address. Of course, it’s nothing I can be proud, given that this living environment is in fact quite primitive and destitute. But the fact that it allows me to put precedence on allowing my pure self to exist is something good indeed. I’m only just here for a little bit, anyways. Where could the eternal dwelling place of a monk be? We’re like vagabonds, only residing for a brief spell.”

-from *Flowers Blossom in the Mountains*

Following the path of honest poverty, as he resides in an empty cabin left vacant by slash and burn farmers, searching for firewood and cultivating a patch of land in a Gangwon-do Province mountain valley, Beopjeong Sunim distinguishes himself as among the most genuine spirits of the age, through the exhaustiveness of his over 30 years of silence and freedom from possessions and his putting into practice a life both fragrant and pure.

Ordained in 1954 under the tutelage of one of the greatest monks of his age, Master Hyōbong, Beopjeong spent his time as a junior disciple with the senior disciple, Master Kusan. He went on to serve on the committee translating the Buddhist canon into Korean script, as well as the editor-in-chief of a Buddhist newspaper publishing company, and the Director of Training at Songgwang-sa Temple. In the latter half of the 1970s, he cast all these things aside and by his own hands established and lived alone at Bul-il-am, a hermitage set on the mountainside behind Songgwang-sa. However, with many people knowing his fame and searching him out, in April of 1992 he left to reside in a remote Gangwon-do mountain valley, the exact whereabouts of which remain unknown still today.

Yet at the same time, under the explanation that this was to “earn our keep as practitioners,” he inaugurated a movement of citizens called “Clean and Fragrant,” a group he leads to this day. In December 1997, Kilsang-sa was founded and he took over the leadership of the temple organization and all religious services. In December of 2003, he voluntarily conceded this role, and though he now comes down from the mountains only periodically to give dharma sermons each spring and fall, or to have Buddhist services or for other events, his voice maintains its vigor and clarity to this day.

Who are you?

Having come down with a cold, I could not properly smell or taste anything. Even though I had not eaten seaweed soup (miyeokguk) for a long time, I was completely unable to know whether it was too salty or too bland. Feeling like that one bright morning, listening to the call of the cuckoo from the forest nearby, I drank the nectar of the new tea sent from the Gwangju Tea Company, but it seemed like I could only taste the fragrance.

I set out the undergarments I had soaked yesterday in the brook to dry on the line in the backyard. Straightening up the jars of rice, I took some grains that had spilt out and set them on the windowsill for the birds to eat. In the field, I planted three rows of peppers and kale. Since frost comes here until the end of May, I purposefully planted them rather late.

Some hand has pulled down the wind chime that was hanging from the empty space in the eaves of my cabin. Since an animal would come and go without leaving a trace, this certainly had the mark of a human's work. Since this is a mountain valley far from the sea, instead of real fish, there is a fish hanging from the chime. Even so, someone must have wanted to take it down, boil it and eat it. If not, it may have turned into a dragon and taken flight. With the chimes having been missing for a while, this caused me to think about this and that. Wanting a chime like the one I had before, I searched for another but now without one, I just go on without. I am enjoying the desolation in the absence of the sound of the chimes.

Starting a few days ago the peonies bloomed. Even though in the southern regions the blooming had already long begun, in the middle of this mountain, the period for rose bushes to come into bloom is not until after June. Because of the altitude here in the mountains, the color of the blooming flowers is especially clear. Even though it is bothered by the cold and strong winds, the appearance of the blooming flowers is remarkable.

Of all the constructs that I do not like very much, one word in particular is "Buddha." This is because when words like Buddha or bodhisattva are just tossed from one's mouth. They are like needles to my ear.

Some days ago on the temple grounds, a man with a bushy beard and a strange glint in his eye approached and bluntly questioned me.

"Sunim, let me ask you something."

"What is it?"

Staring directly at me, he spoke disdainfully, "What kind of person is that called Buddha?"

I shot back immediately, with similar disdain, “Who the hell are you to ask a question in such a manner?”
Hesitating, he had nothing else to say.

Do not get distracted. Do not look for the Buddha anywhere apart from your own mind. When you are a really free person, you hesitate nowhere when you are only “you and self.” Even when living in the common world, if you do not become attached to or imbued with worldly things, you can become your true self. If the individual “you” had a total metamorphosis into the “total you,” you would be able to remove yourself from the swamp of the everyday nitpicking into how you “really are” and how I “really am.” The current that turns “you and I” into an “us” without difference is exactly our mind. If I dwell in a mind of negativity soon that place will be made into hell. If I dwell in the mind of positivity, soon that place will be made into heaven. No one makes that for me, I make that by myself. Because of this, it is said that “the mind is precisely Buddha” and that “outside of the mind there is no Buddha.”

The people who have had the greatest effect on the history of the Sōn sect are the Sixth ancestor Huìnéng and Mǎzǔ Dàyi. Mǎzǔ’s strength of absorption was incredible and under his tutelage the flowering of Sōn came to full fruition. Mǎzǔ entered the sangha at a young age and after becoming a monk he went to Nányuè Mountain (also known as Héng Shān) where he diligently practiced Sōn. At that time, Master Huáiràng was dispensing his teachings at Zhushengsi at Nányuè Mountain and at the very moment he saw Mǎzǔ, he pointed out his big mistake.

Coming closer to the his disciple, the master asked him a question.

“What are you doing there?”

The disciple Mǎzǔ answered frankly.

“I’m doing Sōn.”

“If you are doing Sōn, what will that do?”

“I’m doing Sōn in order to become a Buddha.”

The next day the master went in front of his disciple doing Sōn and polished a brick, feverishly grinding it with a stone.

“What are you trying to do, polishing a brick?”

“I’ll polish it and make it into a mirror.”

“What? Can you really polish a brick and make a mirror?”

At that time, the master took on a serious look and spoke.

“That’s right. If you are merely sitting do you think you can become a Buddha?”

These words shook the disciple’s consciousness to attention.

“Then what do I have to do?”

“When the ox cart doesn’t move do you have to hit the cart or hit the ox? In Sōn, sitting or lying down makes no difference. Buddha wasn’t always sitting motionless in the same spot. With no attachments, having nothing to take or throw away, this is Sōn!”

Hearing this teaching, the disciple’s mind ripened. After paying obeisance to his master, he then asked another question.

“How do you carry your mind such that you are able to have no attachment and dwell in the perfect state of spiritual concentration?”

“The cultivation of the mind’s wisdom is the same as sowing seeds, my giving teachings of the dharma is like rain coming from the heavens. Luckily, because you have met circumstances such that you are able to receive my correct teachings, before long you will see the true spiritual path. Listen to my poem:

In the field of the mind, there are a multitude of seeds
If there is the right amount of rain,
the seeds will all sprout
Because there is no appearance
of the flower of the mind’s samadhi
how can it be accomplished or destroyed?”

Hearing this poem, the very moment it came to his ear, he became his original self. After that, Mǎzū served his master diligently for ten years. During this period, he perfected his spiritual path. Though there were numerous eminent disciples under the tutelage of Huáiràng, history tells us that it was only Mǎzū who inherited his master’s spirit.

Mǎzū’s teachings can be summarized in a few words by saying “the mind is precisely the Buddha.” From this teaching, countless accomplished spiritual seekers have poured out.

Once when an aspirant came looking for Mǎzū, Mǎzū looked at the aspirant’s imposing figure and spoke like this.

“Good lord! The main hall is really magnificent. However, there isn’t a Buddha residing in that hall.”

After paying obeisance to Mǎzū, the aspirant courteously queried him.

“I have read many of the sutras, and even though I understand the gist of them, I can’t understand the teaching that ‘the mind is precisely is Buddha.’”

The master spoke, “The mind that is not understanding is precisely Buddha. Outside of that, there is nothing that is separate from that.”

“But then what is the secret teaching transmitted from Bodhidharma?”

“You’re just wasting your mind paying attention to that useless stuff! Just leave then and come back later.”

The aspirant rose, bowed to the master, and as soon as he started to take leave of his master, Mǎzǔ, facing the back of the aspirant’s, let out a cry.

“UH-EEEE!”

As soon as the aspirant turned his head, Mǎzǔ asked him “What is this?” This question brought the aspirant a huge awakening.

There is another story that is transmitted to us. A hunter who hated even the very sight of a monk was chasing a deer and happened to come upon Mǎzǔ’s hermitage. The hunter asked Mǎzǔ if he hadn’t seen the fleeing deer.

“Who are you?” Mǎzǔ said.

“I’m a hunter.”

“Well then, how many animals can you snare with one arrow?”

“Well of course, I can get one animal with one arrow.”

“If that’s all, then your talent is really poor.”

The hunter’s rage began to burn inside him.

“If that’s so, do you know how to shoot an arrow any better?”

“Of course I know!”

“How many animals could you get with just one arrow.”

“As for me, with one arrow I could catch a whole flock.”

“Reverend, how could you speak of doing such butchery like that?”

“Knowing well as you do then, how come you don’t shoot yourself?”

Only then did the hunter muster a response.

“I don’t know that method.”

“Oh, this guy! He has been doing nothing but suffering the accumulation of eternity’s ignorance and defilements. Luckily, his circumstances have brought him to this day where he finally finds the light!”

The hunter put down his arrow and took up the path toward becoming an aspirant. With the sound concentration of his mind, in the end he came to discover his original self. His name is one of some renown as an historical figure of the Sŏn tradition, Sŏkgong Hyejang .

Though I've written this on account of that man I met in the temple yard, I don't know if he will ever read it and receive any benefit.

Don't search outside of the mind.

Dharma Talk 2008 October

This Dharma Talk is a summary of the talk given on October 19 at Gilsangsa by Gilsangsa's former spiritual director, Ven. Beopjeong.

I hope everyone has been well. Recently, due to the clear weather, being alive feels renewed, grateful, and fortunate. Due to the continuous beautiful fall weather, my life has become joyful for many reasons. Especially, when I hang clothes out to dry, the poem called "Blue sky day" by the poet Seo Jung-joo automatically comes out of my mouth.

"On this blue sky day, the brightness which hurts my eyes, let us miss those to be missed. There, there the place where the flowers grew, the green has faded to fall colors. What will you do when the snow comes? What will you do when the spring comes again? On this blue sky day, the brightness which hurts my eyes, let us miss those to be missed."

When I quietly recite a poem like this, my mind becomes spacious and joyful, and I have new appreciation for living. When I read poems on clear autumn days, my mind becomes very quiet. The spirit of our language is alive in poems, which are like crystals for languages. Likewise, the beautiful face of our language clearly appears. Although our lives may be busy, may I suggest to be sure to read a poem from time to time.

Recently, our surroundings are filled with tiring and irritating news. The financial crisis, the exchange rate situation, slumping of funds and stocks...all the news we hear makes us very depressed. From one to ten, all the news is related to the economy. Those who have promised to save the economy have not only not saved the economy, but there is great confusion in the midst of the up and down economy.

The first thing out of people's mouths is the economy. However, we must ask ourselves, is our happiness commensurate to our possessions? Those who have a lot, are they that much happy? Moreover, those have little, are they unhappy? We must ask ourselves this kind of question. We cannot measure our happiness and unhappiness solely on external conditions. Although we may have a lot, if we do not know the way to live, we will be unhappy. Although we may have little, if we know the way to live, we will be happy.

The external situation is not everything in life.

Happiness and unhappiness does not only depend on external circumstances and conditions, but on the way we accept things inwardly. We can say that happiness and unhappiness depends on our attitude on life. If we get carried away by the current state of affairs, we will become very weak and powerless. The external situation is not everything in life. We talk a lot about the economy, but economy is not everything in life. If we look inwardly, there can always be a positive, beautiful, and fragrant realm.

However, if we pay attention only to the visible reality and the current news, our life will become listless. When we become caught by outside conditions, we are unable to awaken our potential and possibility. Like this, life becomes tiresome and difficult.

If we examine the way our forefathers lived, our children have a lot to learn about how to live. There was a man named Jang-hon who lived in Seoul over two hundred and fifty years ago. He lived in a shabby house below Inwang Mountain. There, he wrote “My life’s wish,” in which he delineates one by one the ideal life, which he dreamed of and planned. The most impressive part was the eight kinds of “great blessings,” which he said to possess.

Of Jang-hon’s eight blessings, the first was being born during peacetime. Second was living in Seoul. Third was being able to have received an education. Fourth was understanding language for the most part. Fifth was living in a beautiful natural environment. Sixth was owning one thousand plants and flowers. Seventh was having a friend with whom he got along well. Eighth was possessing a good book.

Jang-hon said his happiness was that he could read, and he had a good friend and book, and that he lived in nature. This is truly pure and plain happiness. After reading this, I reflected on my own blessings. First, I have a teacher, and a few books to keep me company. Even living in the mountains alone, I have good energy and want to renew myself every day, because of the support of these few books. Second, when I feel hungry or worn out, I have tea to drink. Tea is the white border around my life. Third, there is music, which gives suppleness to my rigid life. In addition, I am delighted and grateful for the fact there is a vegetable garden, which awaits my hands. Books, tea, music, and the vegetable garden are grateful things, which supports my life from withering away.

“The fresh air by the riverside and the bright moon above the mountain...when listened for, it is sound. When looked for, it is light. No one stops me from possessing it, nor will it exhaust from use. This is the infinite treasury of nature.” From “Jeok-byuk-bu” by So Dongpa.

Suicide Only Contributes to the Self-destroying Karma

These kind of natural wonders are all around us. However, not many of us know how to enjoy the fresh air and bright moon. Rivers and mountains originally have no owner. Those who can appreciate their sight and feel are the owners of the rivers and mountains. It is because we only look outside that we are caught by external conditions and traps, and we do not discover these things (natural wonders).

There are many who take their own life in this wonderful age. More than thirty people per day cannot overcome that day to commit suicide. It's never something to be proud of, but the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development lists with the highest per capita suicide rate.

There's nothing as precious and valuable as life. This life can only be lived once. Yet we throw aside such a life. Even at this moment, countless patients are tied to respiratory machines to live a few more minutes of life. It is a disgraceful act to cast aside this magnanimous life. To take one's life never relieves one from suffering. Death is not the end, but the beginning of another life.

Suicide creates "self-destroying karma" which chains us to Samsara. Ultimately, suicide only contributes to the self-destroying karma. Everything we see, hear, or say becomes karma. This can never finish all at once. Like the law of inertia, this becomes habit and karmic force, and then to karmic residue.

Anyone can have the impulse to commit suicide. However, as time passes we would discover the reason is that we could not free ourselves from the chains of anguish. Suffering does not last. If there are clear days, there will be cloudy days. Our lives are always changing, not static. Not only external conditions, but our thoughts also change. Even a sense of hopelessness, which seems like will never end, is only temporary.

Even those who were ready to cast aside the world by suicide, if they could have broken free from their temporary desperate trap to see widely everyday life with a clear head; they could have broken out of their extreme view to have started their life anew with a wider perspective. They could not break free from the extreme view of "only this way," to commit an unthinkable act. None of us must fall victim to temporary thoughts. To say again, nothing is fixed, everything changes. Do not try to resolve difficulties alone.

Do not try to resolve difficulties on our own. It is difficult to break free from our narrow fixed ideas. We should talk with a close friend. If not, we should find a church or temple to release our burdens. The doors to churches and temples are always open. Religion exists to resolve such problems. If we were to meet a good friend or teacher before committing suicide, we would not arrive at such an unthinkable conclusion.

After a person lives out his life, he must change his body. Whether we are a Buddha or a Buddha's grandfather, no one lives forever. By a passing extreme impulse, if we were to throw away our body, it may appear that there would be a better life. The reality is that the residue of that karma follows us into the next life. This is what is meant by karmic force. We must always know how to appreciate the fact we are alive.

We live like this to share this appreciation with the world. I hope everyone has wonderful fall season.

The Dharma Words on Peace of Mind

This Dharma meeting is really meaningful and rare. Many monks of great virtue with experienced eyes, Dharma teachers, laymen and laywomen have all gathered together. This type of meeting is not easy to have.

Sometimes I have given Dharma talks in a lecture style to my dear monks for three days or seven days. But, this is the first time I have had the chance to give a lecture to monks and nuns as well as laypeople for a whole week. It is my great honor to welcome you, ladies and gentleman of suchness, and to give this Dharma talk before you.

There are many monks of great virtue here, lecturers and abbots. They are very respectable men who have practiced Dharma for more than twenty years. And among the lay people there are several Dharma teachers and scholars of deep learning.

Accordingly, there is not much I could say that you already don't know. However, because of our usual busyness we often lose touch with the essential Buddhadharmā, only to get lost in everyday life. This meeting is about reflecting upon ourselves together in the midst of such insufficiency.

As you all know well, the world faces many kinds of difficulties at this time. While in the past, tension arose from the battle between east and west. Nowadays, more confusion has arisen from the destruction of the communist camp. How in the world can we rescue the human race? Having a sense of basic human value is very important. But where should we look for this?

In fact, the general situation of world confusion up to this point can mainly be attributed to western culture. Therefore, as great scholars predict, western ideology cannot establish a genuine guiding principle for the so-called "new civilization" of the twenty-first century. Other great people say that we cannot find the guiding principle for this new era except in eastern thought. We Buddhists are very sure of that. Other teachings, other cultural phenomena, have the tendency to examine individual parts, whereas Buddha's teachings see everything in wholeness.

Buddhism is monism, which sees not only human beings, but also the natural world, or anything at all, as being originally one life, following the "law of equality." In other words, anything can be incorporated into a single truth. Therefore, this monism of Buddhist thought that observes the law of equality; we are sure that only this teaching can for the first time peacefully unite the world.

Pure Sōn

For this reason, the theme of this Dharma meeting is: Pure Sōn: Cultivation and Peace of Mind. The copied materials, which were distributed to you, are very poor. If I had asked lecturer monks to do the copying, the condition would have been better, but because they were busy, I did it myself, so there are some wrong words. Please take this into account.

Sōn Meditation (參禪) is a very good way to meditate, not only for we Buddhists, but also for those of other religions and people in general. Sōn is a very good for our body and mind in handling distractions. Thus, these days some Christians have interest in Sōn and people in general really want to practice Sōn.

Now, we could have just used the word “Sōn” in the title, but why did we use “Pure Sōn?” You may wonder why. Because there are some people here who have not practiced Buddhist discipline formally, and would have some difficulty in understanding Buddhist jargon. I will give a full explanation. And actually I think it is important for us to correctly understand this Dharma talk on Pure Sōn.

You see there is a reason why I distinguish Pure Sōn from Sōn. So what is Pure Sōn? The period from Bodhidharma, China’s first Sōn Patriarch, to Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, we call “the Pure Sōn Period” and we call the Sōn of that period “Pure Sōn”.

After Huineng passed away, his disciples branched off into five schools, becoming hostile and quarreling with one another. Because of this, Sōn practitioners, not to mention non-practitioners lost touch with pure Sōn. As I said earlier, this Sōn from Bodhidharma to the Sixth Patriarch Huineng was the purest Sōn, which we call “Pure Sōn”.

In short, I don’t mean there are actually different Sōn’s: Huàtóu Sōn and Muk-jo Sōn and the like. What I mean is that the meditation of Pure Sōn is to purify our mind just as it is.

Peace of Mind

First of all, we all want to attain the state in which our mind is at peace and we are harmonious with others, living with a pure heart. This applies to any religion, not only Buddhism. All religions seek after peace of mind, the state in which the mind is comfortable and tranquil.

But especially all eighty four thousand Dharmas of Buddhism are about peace of mind. So the Buddha’s teaching is about peace of mind. This means to make our minds tranquil. There is nobody who dislikes their minds to be peaceful. When we feel anxious, our minds cannot be at peace.

To be anxious is that things don’t go our way, or we don’t know who we are, or we don’t know our minds, or we have great distress, or how

can we be peaceful when we sometimes hate people. In fact, there are many ways to be anxious.

As we know well, natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, storms, floods and droughts make our life difficult to live. In addition, there are man-made calamities such as political wrongdoings and the negative effects of the modern systems.

We can never shake off anxieties because of all these natural and man-made calamities. How can we truly live comfortably and without anxiety?

According to the Buddhadharmā, we can have peace of mind even when we have failed in business, become ill, our loved ones have passed away, or we have parted with someone.

Where can we access these teaching? Only from pure Sōn; only by practicing pure Sōn, can we attain such peace of mind. Accordingly, we cannot realize peace of mind apart from Pure Sōn. To say this again, whenever we practice Pure Sōn, we can obtain peace of mind and live happily. This can be said to be the key to Buddha's teachings.

Thus, the theme of this Dharma talk is Pure Sōn: Cultivation and Peace of Mind. This Dharma talk is about how to have peace of mind in all circumstances and live happily everyday through Pure Sōn meditation.

So the main idea here is Pure Sōn. Pure Sōn transcends all barriers. To use a contemporary common term, it is so-called "Wontong (holistic) Buddhism!" It is also called "Wongtong" ideology or "Whetong" (nonsectarian) ideology. The "Whetong" (nonsectarian) ideology is that one truth resolves everything.

From time immemorial, the teachings of the great saints along with those of the Buddha are based on the Whetong (nonsectarian) ideology. As far as Korea is concerned, Wonhyo, Uisang, Jajang of the Silla period and Daegak, Bojo, and Taego of the Goryo period and the great monk Seosan of the Lee dynasty, all these great monks were drawn toward a Whetong ideology (non-sectarianism).

Why did they follow the Whetong ideology (non-sectarianism)? A saint is one who knows the single truth of the cosmos. Because we sentient beings see everything by appearance, we discriminate between you and me, between good and bad. We can only think this way as far as form is concerned. However, saints see the fundamental base and fundamental nature of all beings.

Accordingly, when we see things from the fundamental nature, everything is one. Jesus and Confucius saw this. They saw the fundamental oneness. Could we not say this "oneness" is God or Buddha? Thus, I'll try to represent the most precise meaning of Pure Sōn.

Samadhi of Ease

We can call this a Dharma talk on peace of mind, and a Dharma talk on ease of body. Buddhism takes mind and body as one. Therefore, peaceful mind may well result in the ease of body.

The Dharma talk on peace of mind, the Dharma talk on ease of body or calm and precise Samadhi means the dharma talk on “enlightenment first, practice after” or “practice after realization.”

Though the copied materials contain the same contents, I extracted and put them in order again like this for you to have a deeper understanding. The old men like me who belong to the “Chinese characters generation” might not have much difficulty in understanding Chinese characters, but there are many people of the young generation, who have no knowledge of Chinese characters in spite of their Bachelor’s and Doctoral degrees.

Alas, the Dharma talk on peace of mind! Just seeing the characters makes our mind comfortable. So as I say, this dharma talk is on the relief of body. In Buddhism, we never see mind and body as two, only as one. Mind and body are one, nature and humans are also one, and to see the Cosmos as one life is the essential core of Buddha’s teachings.

Therefore if mind is comfortable, so is body. And as far as traditional Sōn is concerned, we can call this calm and clear samadhi! This idea is formed by the peaceful ‘An’ character, and the clear ‘Sang’ character. This means we don’t need to hurry at all. Hurry comes from anxiety, but in fact there is no need to be hasteful, no need to go ahead, and no need to lag behind.

If we just think of ourselves and we want only to achieve only our good, our minds will not be at ease. We will not have peace of mind. Conversely, if we can be meticulous and attentive, and flexible, this is “Ansang,” calm and clear, Ansang Samadhi. Samadhi means to be absorbed in this.

Samadhi is Sanskrit, and we are normally using ‘Sammae’ in Korean, don’t we? Being absorbed in something is samadhi. Accordingly, no matter if we are sleeping, awake, sitting, standing, moving, or speaking to somebody, our mind is always calm and not in a hurry, this is to be in the state of calm and clear samadhi.

Only in this state, is our mind at peace and our body at ease. Thus, if we are to have this peace of mind and ease of body, our mindset should be enlightenment first, practice after (practicing after realization), firstly having no theoretical conflicts. Our mind will only be at ease if we have no theoretical conflicts.

Even on an ordinary journey, if we don’t know the way well, we could become anxious and lose our way, couldn’t we? If we must know the

side roads well in order to go find our way comfortably, how much more should we know with certainty the way of our course in life.

Furthermore, this era of crisscrossed entanglement of information is called the information era. This information era is a good one to live in, but because of the flood of information, how do the people live, who don't establish their view of life and sense of values. It is confusing to know which information to choose.

Lately, a newspaper reported that three out of five Americans have symptoms of neurosis. It is because they have a troubled mind. They are always nervous and unable to get rid of stress, however much they try. This can be the cause of disease and the seed of domestic discord, national division, and so forth.

Anyhow, how do we live now? What about tomorrow, and our practice? How are those, who have practiced a lot, practicing now? There are some who cannot answer such questions with certainty.

The most important thing is by which way are we practicing? That's the most significant thing. Thus, enlightenment first, practice after (practice after realization)! We should bear this in mind, and make efforts until we can practice like this (practice after realization).

Translated by Han Chang-ho

The Titmouse's Nest

Some days ago, listening to the “ttok, ttok, ttok” sound from outside my window, I found myself as if lost in a trance. On the way out to water the tree I had been tending, I finally became aware of what had been making that noise. I saw a titmouse flying out from an opening of the stove chimney. It appeared that the titmouse was building a nest in there.

The titmouse, unlike other birds, doesn't really hide its nest very much. If a place is tolerable, the titmouse will build a nest anywhere. In a box left in the backyard or in a place like the corner of a house under the eaves, if the frame is suitable for a nest, the bird will prepare a home there, lay an egg and have a chick.

If it were like other birds, it probably wouldn't build a nest in a place like the chimney of an iron stove. I don't know how it could even find this place big enough to get in and out of, but sure enough, inside the bird had built a nest. Looking at this simple life of this titmouse who is so unconcerned about its house, many thoughts came to my mind about the place that I lived.

To the Bhikṣu, there is nothing that could be called their original home. Even though they may have constructed a temple or hermitage by the strength of their own hands, in all respects it is common property and can never be an individually owned possession. Because of this, many temples have lasted almost one thousand years, and to this day, they are considered all of ours. Quite simply, it is considered that according to your karma you stay at the temple, and according to your karma, you leave. It is probably because we know that sometime we will cast off and leave our body that we allow ourselves to be bound to that which is constructed by the combination of wood, earth, stone and metal.

In this land of mountains upon mountains, unawares, I've now lived for some 40 years. As soon as I thought about this, I suddenly smacked my forehead thinking about that word, “unawares.” Time passes, a day goes by, a month goes by, it turns into years and then forty years have totally passed by. For forty years, the places I have lived at and relied on here and there, listening to this dawn's cry of the cuckoo . . . I ponder them.

The temple I found on my way to becoming a full monk was Mirae-sa in Tong-yeong (South Kyeongsang Province). As I continuously knocked my head against the low threshold of the house there, it was a period where I was so hungry that even the bits of noodle left at the well were delicious. This was a time when, in the room for the aspirants, though I slept with my head resting on the hard wood pillow, because I was always tired sleep was like the taste of honey. Though the meditation room

was cozy then, now everything has been greatly enlarged and the mood of the temple is completely different than before.

After becoming fully ordained, the temple where I served a master for the first time was at the Tapjeon at Ssangye-sa in Jiri Mountain. This was a meditation hall with a view overlooking the far-off Baek-un Mountains, crossed by the Seomjin River. This was the kind of place where when the time for meditation came, even if the room was empty, the sound of the jukbi would come forth on its own accord. It was here that I passed my steady, so very steady, time as a green monk. Looking back now, this was such a clear, pure, and pristine time.

In the depth of winter, even though I ate only plain rice with soy sauce, every day was abundant with the heat and passion of my meditation. If I compare today to that time, I'd give that time a grade of A and today would be no better than a D or F. Even that grade would be generous. In the Huáyán Sutra, the words "with the ever fresh mind, awakening is created" stand as a model lesson to all aspirants.

There is the old saying that the voyage of one thousand li depends only on the very first step; this is a teaching that bears our rumination. According to how we take that first step, our goal point can completely change. I wonder how much my present is so thoroughly connected to that clear and cozy temple.

The next place I came to depend on for my living was Haeinsa in Hapcheon. There was the Toeseoldang meditation hall, located outside the walls of the hall where the eighty-thousand woodblocks of the Tripitaka Koreana are enshrined. Even though this is a place where because you have to live in concert with many other monks, you have the opportunity to learn a lot as you see, hear and feel many things, there is also that regret that comes with having to waste so much time on useless busy work. Nevertheless, for twelve years, living on Gaya Mountain at Haeinsa, one might say that this was the period where I earned my chops as a monk.

To this day, I still have good memories of the mind that prayed morning and night, in the main hall as the sangha gathered to pray, each separately coming forth to do our prostrations. When I speak of "prayer," this isn't the act of wanting some wish fulfilled, rather this was a period when I refined my role as a spiritual seeker, aiming for a complete opening of my mind.

At Haeinsa, my life as monk completely changed, due to the fruition of my karma that brought me to meet Unheo Seunim. Up to that point, though I had been like a "rainwater monk" with my single pack wandering from this mountain to that, from this point onward I began to understand my opportunity. A better way to say this might be that even though I would say that I was becoming more accustomed to the sociality

of the spiritual seeker's life, like the eulalia weed, there was a watershed of powerful ideas gradually coming to fruition.

from The Living Buddha

The True Meaning of a ‘Person of Wealth’

December 11, 2005, Commemorative Dharma Service for the 8th Anniversary of the Founding of Kilsangsa

I would like to thank you for coming today just for this little commemoration of the founding of Kilsangsa. There is always so much happening here, so many gatherings. As this year comes to a close, as I was coming here today, I looked back and reflected on the marks I've made, asking myself, "How have I lived this past year?" Namely, I've looked back on this year and reflected on whether I've lived well or not.

The world we live in is certainly neither a paradise nor a heaven. It is a "saba (skt. saha) segye", or saha world. "Saba segye," is not a world where one lives by giving bribes to officials (n.b.- In Korean, the verb "saba saba" hada is a colloquial term meaning "to bribe an official"), rather, this is a word that comes from India and it means a world where one can only exist by enduring and suffering. Thus, in Chinese characters, it is also referred to as the gam in world [gam withstand and endure].

There is a saying that time does not come, but rather goes. We have a very visceral sense of this. Yet, don't get carried away by such talk. In reality, 'time' is something that is neither coming nor going. It is the people, things, and images within time that are all coming and going. To use the expression of philosophers, time exists in and of itself. It is something that is, something that exists. This type of thing is not something that flows along. Within this time, it is we living beings who ourselves are coming and going, always changing. When we refer to that which is called "transient" or "ephemeral," it is not time itself that is constantly changing. We speak of "ephemeral" because we live in a world that we ourselves cannot predict, because of the changing world that is never constant.

In our one lifetime, one year fades and passes in just the same way. As one year changes, young people have another year added to their age. But for older people, that one more year of age is part of something that continues to dwindle away. This is why our lives are so regrettable and disappointing if we waste time on trivial, worthless things. Like flowing water, once time passes, we can never get it back. The reason why we must live well and without regret in each and every moment lies precisely in this fact.

If you go to certain meditation halls (Sōnwon), you'll find a sign there that says, "Life and death is a matter of great importance; Everything is fleeting and impermanent" (saengsa sadae musang sinsok). Our living, right here and right now, is exactly "life and death." The stuff of being born and dying within this one moment is present in our consciousness that

is not focused; it comes and goes, flowing, wandering without purpose. This is exactly samsara, the cycle of life and death. This kind of “life and death” is something of such great importance in our lives. Within this cycle, what is it that is always interrupting our lives? It is impermanence (musang), fleeting impermanence. No moment ever lasts longer than just that, a moment. It is ceaselessly changing. Because we are living within these circumstances, if we can’t properly control our thoughts, we skirt off on the wrong path. Similarly, if we properly concentrate our thoughts, we can enter onto the right path. We must live each moment well and without regret. Living life indifferently simply will not do, because every moment that passes is time that we can never get back.

Some time ago, somebody told me an interesting anecdote. This person had gotten into a taxi wanting to go to Kilsangsa when the driver said, “Ah! That rich peoples’ temple?” For some time now, the words “rich peoples’ temple” have become my huàtóu (key phrase of meditative absorption). When this temple was founded eight years ago, there was a lot of criticism regarding churches and temples, because they were getting so lavish, with over-consumption, over-abundance and excess. I expressed my wish that it would be a good thing if the temple were a bit poorer.

Though this was just the perception of a few people from the outside, when I heard the words “rich peoples’ temple,” it gave me a heavy heart. You all remember how the newspapers and television raised such a clamor when Daewongak, a former gisaeng house and high class restaurant, was converted into this temple eight years ago. They would talk about the market price for the size of the land, guessing how many hundreds of millions, or worse, how many billion of won it could be worth. One paper then came out with a figure of some hundreds of million won, and from this I think the perception was set that this place was a “rich persons’ temple.” It’s no wonder that for some time now I’ve been receiving so many letters from every direction. The contents of these letters all pertain to people asking me to help them out financially. When I get these requests, from people who take it that the temple is my own personal possession, I really feel hard-pressed.

What on earth does “rich person” really mean? Doesn’t everybody want to become a rich person? If you look in the dictionary, “rich person” is defined as “someone who is well off,” “someone with much wealth.” The definition comes across very clearly and concisely. That’s exactly what a dictionary is, something that defines things in just this way. As we all know, our proverbs come out of the agricultural society of the past when we lived by farming. If you look at a collection of proverbs under the heading “rich people,” you’ll see the following, “Rich people are greedier.” You often hear the same thing today. Though of course not every rich person is greedy, compared to poor people, it is saying that a large number

of them are indeed greedier. Even though they all have more than poor people, they are stingier. There is another saying, “Even if rich people go bankrupt, they can go on living at the same level for three years.” This speaks to the fact that they have accumulated so much. To put it in contemporary terms, there’s the saying that “even if a conglomerate goes bankrupt, the chairman remains completely unaffected.”

But now there is also the saying that “even the rich face bitter sorrow.” When we speak of rich people, we are not talking about those without worries and anxiety. Think of how many tears they have choked back, how many pains they’ve endured striving to become rich. In a sense, it is owing to their experiences facing poverty that they have concentrated all their energy, their entire being, without regard for anything, scraping together whatever they could such that they were able to become rich.

There is another proverb, “If a rich person gets angry, three towns are ruined.” When I first saw this, I was thunderstruck. If a rich person was angry, could three towns really be ruined? Of course, you should keep in mind that this proverb comes from our agricultural society of the past, and thus, this “rich person” must have been a huge landowner. At the end of the Josōn dynasty and during the Japanese colonial period as well, if there was a bad landowner, the tenant farmers would be exploited to no end. Indeed, these neighborhoods faced so much exploitation that, “if a rich person got angry, three towns were ruined.”

When I was looking up these proverbs about rich people, it forced me to think about what kind of relationship there was between the conglomerates of today and these rich men of old. The desire of humanity knows no end. It has no end. Thus, when we look to the sutras, we see that “desire is precisely the foundation of the endless cycle of samsara.”

This desire refers to an excessive greed, a greed that exceeds our fair share. It is that endless ambition that makes one want to accumulate more than what one needs on their own plate. How much is enough? Those greedy people don’t know how to be content. But this is not only true for those greedy people; we here today also don’t know how to be satisfied, even when we have plenty. So, is it such that we are only happy to the amount of our possessions?

Though there certainly is a correlative relationship between happiness and possessions, our happiness is not satisfied in direct proportion to them. Happiness is never something that comes from the outside. Like a fragrance, happiness issues forth from within one’s mind. Though living within exactly similar conditions, as some people live blissfully blessed with happiness, aren’t there so many others living swamped in dissatisfaction? We cannot measure our happiness by our possessions.

The whole world without distinction wants to become rich. This is a very instinctual wish. We all want to live comfortably and well. In order to become rich, aren't there people who will take any means necessary to do so? What is it that is referred to these days as 'globalization'? This is the forced marketization of our world, coming the United States and the other great powers, the intention of which is all centered on making themselves even richer. This is yet another strategy of economic invasion.

This is something that exists in our society too. Consider the nouveau riche, the parvenus who exist in every society in the world. Not acquiring wealth by means of their just effort, are they not the ones who engage in some sort of speculation and then suddenly become rich? Sudden wealth brings people misfortune. This is because it is something beyond their fair share. Though we only require enough to fill our own plates, we sometimes try to fill our cups with amounts that could fill a huge jar, and thus it overflows. Sudden wealth brings people misfortune.

For example, there is the public lottery, the Lotto. Many people buy these tickets quite often, and most of the time it all amounts to nothing. But then one morning, when they announce that somebody has won millions of dollars, everyone envies the winner. They think, "Oh, I've got to go buy myself some tickets, too." One morning that winner went out and bought a few tickets and this small act turned into a multi-million dollar prize. However, from that day forward, the winner becomes unhappy. It's a simple matter of course, that's been shown over and over no matter where or when in history. The winner becomes estranged from social relations. He or she is alienated. Moreover the winner loses the meaning of the life he or she has led so far. Because so much money had appeared so suddenly, the winner is severed from the discipline that had sustained an entire life up until now, the steadfastness, the sweat and toil of one great effort after another is now gone. The meaning of life is lost. Added to this, a distance grows between these winners and their close friends and family members. Can they ever sleep? Wondering always how to protect all this money and how to spend it, they can never get a good rest. There is nothing in this world that can be got for nothing. If you encounter a sudden windfall, without a doubt you will end up facing an unexpected misfortune. This is the karmic relationship of cause and effect. A lottery prize is just such a windfall, it is unearned income. If you come upon a windfall, you will face a sudden calamity; misfortune is so easily summoned. Material gain is just that kind of thing. Money is not something that comes to one alone. Undoubtedly, a dark shadow also follows nearby.

A long time ago, I heard another story. It was about some monk who had won the lottery after engaging in prayer. Now, when I heard this, it was some twenty years ago and supposedly it happened at some temple in South Jeolla Province. Anyways, this monk who won the lottery, though

he had always prayed so sincerely in the past, after his windfall he totally changed from how he had been in the past. It was said that he had forgotten what it was he should be doing. First, he bought his ordination master a car as a gift. Then he bought one for himself. From that point on, his thinking totally transformed. It was all because he had suddenly come upon so much money. By this point, when his eyes met with those of a comely young lady in the village near the temple, he went so far as to get married. Later, I heard that he had become a taxi driver. When money comes completely out of the blue, inevitably people come to misfortune.

Now, poverty is never a noble virtue. The pure poverty we speak of today is an honest poverty that reminds us to avoid our excessive greed and to live within our means. We talk of pure poverty in order to escape excessive waste and loose spending, to live a pure, humble and snug life where we have just as much as is necessary; it is not poverty itself that is a noble virtue. We must all live well. If at all possible, we should all live together as rich people. But in this world, the haves are greatly outnumbered by the have-nots. Moreover, from a structural point of view, there are many who are deprived of their share because of those who take it away.

Then what is it that we can call a genuine “person of wealth”? It is a person who cultivates virtue whether their possessions are great or few. What is virtue? It is consideration for one’s neighbors. It is sharing what you have with your neighbors and friends. The wealth that is given to us does not issue forth from a wellspring, nor does it originally belong to us. When I came into this world, I didn’t come carrying wealth. Moreover, when I’ve lived as much as I’m going to live and it is time to bid farewell, I won’t be able to take anything with me. It is simply that according to some karma, some of the wealth and gifts of the universe are entrusted to me for a short time. If we know how to manage this wealth correctly, we can prolong it, and it continues for a long time.

If we don’t understand this truth, if we cannot manage this situation correctly and we come to lavishly squander our wealth, before long we will face the withdrawal of these riches. What do the police or prosecutors do? They are just waiting to reclaim that wealth. This is structurally enforced in society. Thus when it passes that some riches have arisen into our lives, we must think about it very cautiously. Because, these riches are not mine. These riches are nothing more than that which is briefly entrusted to me. Even those things that I can say I’ve earned properly, these too are merely entrusted to me. This is because originally it was never mine. Thus, if I use it properly, virtue is being cultivated. If I don’t use it well, my happiness will be diminished.

We need to become people who live while cultivating virtue, whether we own a little or a lot. People who can share what they have with

troubled neighbors, these are people living well, or, if you will, “rich people.” Everything is ephemeral. This is what “impermanence” means. There is nothing that continues forever. Though you say someone is rich, there is no way that you will always be able to say this. Now you may say that someone is poor, but there is no way you can continue to say that forever. Something that is transient, something that is transforming, what kind of possibility does it hold? What it can do is this: though people can indeed accumulate wealth through their willful efforts, all the lavishness they have come to enjoy can also be cast away to ruin in a very short time. This is the cold, hard truth. There is nothing eternal. Everything is fleeting.

When we’ve lived as much as we are meant to live, and it comes time for us to depart this world, what is it that remains? Please consider this for a moment. This isn’t the work for others, this is a task for all of us. When we have lived out our lives, when the time of our lifespan is exhausted, do we not have to face the final summons? At that point, what remains with us? Does our house continue with us? Do our offspring? As there is nothing that remains with us forever, those things can never have been “mine.” In some way, they are unrelated to me. What here lives on of this solitary self of mine? Those many offspring we’ve made, the many possessions we’ve accumulated, or whatever riches we’ve acquired, we cannot take any of it with us.

What is it then that we take with us? It is the karma we’ve created through our habits. Now, this karma I speak of is not only negative karma. We’ve brought about both positive karma and negative karma. The karma we’ve created through our habits follows us just like a shadow. When we’ve lived as much as we are meant to live, and it comes time for us to depart this world, there is nothing we can take along with us. Don’t we also cast off even our bodies as well? But what is it that will be following us? It is that karma which we have cultivated in our habits while living every single day of our lives. Whether it is wholesome or unwholesome karma we’ve created, it is but karma, following us like a shadow. Thus, to use the expression of people in India, karma is nothing other than “that which is creating our future lives.”

But all of this doesn’t just come about all of a sudden. It is created as things pile up, one by one on top of another. Consider for example the case of the three or four year old child who composes and performs some exquisite piece of music. This is not something that comes about overnight. This is a capacity that has been accumulated over time in a past life, budding like a sprout when the opportunity to do so arises. As another example, the monks here today are the same. For those whom this is the first time they’ve ever shaved their heads and taken up residence in a temple, they fail to take permanent residence here and some twenty or thirty years later, many will end up as taxi drivers. But for those who have

been Monastics for many lifetimes, even when they die, they never leave the path. Karma is this type of thing.

Is there anyone who has ever seen a want ad recruiting monks or nuns? From the time of the Buddha until now, there have never been wanted ads for monks. Theology schools recruit theology students. Thus are clergymen and pastors made. But Dongguk University [a major Buddhist university in Seoul] is not a place where monks and nuns are trained. This is a regular educational institution that happens to be founded by the Jögye order of Korean Buddhism.

Even though no one is bidding them to come, when the time comes, people will voluntarily walk into a temple on their own to become a monk, motivated by some decision on their part. Even when no one is waiting for them to make that decision, they act as if there is no time to spare, no more time to speculate. Why on earth can this be? It is all the fruition of actions that have ripened in past lives.

This kind of thing is not only applicable to monks. It is true for all people. It is all due to this ripening. Thus, the mind we carry, the actions we engage in, and the things we say day in and day out, all of these things are direct influences on the type of future lives we will have. None of this is created for us by someone else. By our own efforts, as we live each moment to moment, we are making our next self.

Since some call Kilsangsa a “rich peoples’ temple,” it behooves us to reflect upon whether or not that designation is justified. The Monastics who live here and the practitioners who come here should all reflect on this together. Is this indeed the type of temple that deserves to be called a “rich peoples’ temple”? When you become a community grounded in strong faith and determination, through vibrant practice and righteous cultivation, sharing your happiness and sorrows with the most downtrodden, as you look after one another, it is only at that time that this temple will be worthy of its name (kilsang: auspicious, fortunate) and it will become an auspicious rich persons’ temple.

To everyone who has come here today, more than I hope you become rich, I sincerely hope that you become people who live well. Please live well. Without living like a rich person, please just live well.

Master and Disciple

About a month ago, I went back to the hermitage where I had lived a long time ago to rest for a couple of days. At that time, two aspirants came to me to request that I become their master. With one word, I refused.

After having received their precepts, these aspirants wished to become fully ordained monks, and having to select a master these aspirants wanted to select me. The reason I refused was because I didn't want to become a "master by name only." In addition, it was also because I had no idea what kind of people these men were, nor did they know me. Not having trod the same path together, in a situation where there was no open door for our understanding each another, you cannot develop a master/disciple relationship.

But more than anything, I didn't want to get tied down to any one place and wanted to live free from attachments, and thus I wanted to rid myself of the yoke of being a master. This "non-attachment" is also the reason why I left communal living to live on my own. More than a refusal, if I were to more accurately express myself, my reason lay in the question, "How could I fearlessly become another person's master?"

If we speak of the relationship between teacher and student, even though almost anything is acceptable, at the very least, if not spiritual echo resonates in the master/disciple relationship, then this end up being nothing more than an adornment of the mundane world. Just as if when one person trains tens of disciples and then can't even remember the names he himself has given to them, if these kinds of master/disciple relationships are produced on a mass scale, for the sake of the truth-seeker's conscience, I can never find this acceptable.

When those aspirants again came looking for me, earnestly hoping that I would become their master, I couldn't help but unleash my age-old secret method. I told them how it would be, pressing them by asking if they would be able to act according to my demands. Fine, if so then from henceforth you will sincerely live the life of an aspirant for three years, after which I will serve as the master who will give you your required precepts. They agreed with my intentions. Then, I added one more thing.

Presently, the commonly used period for an aspirant is one year, more or less. Even though at temples with lax discipline this period may be only three or four months, this method is never advisable. That which is easily created easily collapses. This is like the result of a harmful construction project that fails within a short amount of time.

As those who have gone through it know it well, during their time as aspirants, monks can't but envy the cloaks and garments of the fully

ordained. Even if they can speed up their ordination by only a day, these aspirants will flee the daily tasks given within the private quarters, such is their desire to become a fully ordained monk and wear the special robes.

In the majority of situations, even more than a year as an aspirant is considered difficult, to say nothing of a three-year period. One time, as the date for receiving precepts drew near, two aspirants came to me to request that I become their master. Given that “master” has the meaning of one who bestows benefit, how could I possibly be able to suddenly act as their beneficent master? In addition, that day being our first meeting, it was one between perfect strangers. After I told them that since I would therefore have to have some time to train them as a master, I told them to come back 6 months later to receive their precepts. As expected they never returned. Since they then received their precepts from another monk, I know nothing of their whereabouts. We clearly know the lesson that what is built easily also easily collapses.

I realize more and more as each day passes how difficult it is to be another person’s master. There’s a saying among monks that “in one disciple, there is one hell.” The number and intensity of difficulties is indeed like that. Though teachers can instruct through writing or by castigating their students, the proper leadership to bring someone towards enlightenment cannot be done through speech or writing.

Though the true master doesn’t teach by opening his or her mouth, the wise disciple at the master’s side is always learning anew. Masters give all of their passion and dedication to the training of their disciples such that they are able to awaken themselves. In order for the disciples to have their intrinsic nature bloom through their own efforts, the master does nothing but endlessly concentrate and provide help.

Even with a multitude of knowledge, having attained prestigious degrees, a scholar with an uncomfortable mind came looking to question the master.

“Master, my mind is so very uncomfortable. Can you please make my mind peaceful?” The master replied, “Really? Bring your mind here. I’ll make it peaceful.” After pausing for quite a while, the scholar then pleaded, “Even though I search all over for my mind, I can’t find it.” Then the master answered smiling, “Even if you found it, how could that be your mind? Now I have pacified your mind. Do you understand?”

As the sound of these words ended, the scholar had a grand awakening.

In the history of the Sōn sect, there is the famous “Peaceful Mind dialogue” between Buddhadharmā and Huikē. This is not a teaching of the method by which a master gives his student a peaceful mind, rather, it is the casting off of discomfort and the immediate pacification of the mind, right here and right now. This is the wise master’s skill and teaching.

From the disciple's perspective, more than anything, the disciple must first have faith in the master. Through utter devotion and dedication, the master's personality echoes through one's self. Like a starving person searching for food, when one searches sincerely for a master with all of one's heart, they will certainly meet their master. Only by sincerely and seriously searching will one's karma come to fruition and then one will find oneself face to face with their master.

If one learns as much as one can from their master, they must then leave the master. The disciple who waits in reliance on his master is like a shadow or copy of their master, never able to become an original person. It is only when one throws off the master's bridle and creates their own unique world that they can repay a master's beneficence.

The skillful disciple must be able to overcome their master. At the same time, the skillful master has to help the student such that the disciple is able to vault beyond himself. The idea of the disciple attaining an excellence beyond the master is expressed in the old sayings, "the dye that comes from the indigo plant is bluer than indigo" and "even though ice comes from water, it is colder than water."

Looking back, both before and after I entered the monkhood, my life has been shaped by the beneficence of countless teachers. Though there were many teachers who literally taught me directly, there are also many masters from the past whose beneficence has been passed down through their writings and the writings about them. I can't think that these many masters have just appeared before me by chance. It becomes clear that because I have searched and striven ardently, my masters' replies are the echo of my search.

In particular, we are encouraged by those Sōn masters who went beyond convention, tradition and established values, giving teachings that continuously awaken our souls. In addition, as we tread the truth-seeking spiritual path, their teachings open our eyes to see where on that path the never-withering soul of everlasting youth lays.

The ninth century Sōn master Línjì said as such:

"If you want to correctly attain awakening, don't become distracted by great beings. Whatever is in front or behind you, kill it. If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha; if you meet the Ancestor, kill the Ancestor; if you meet the holy one, kill the holy one; and if you meet the master, kill the master. Only then, you will get enlightened. Obstructed by nothing, you will become perfectly free."

Buddha or Patriarch, sage or master, in dependence on them one can become seized in their great worth, but then because you are seized with their great worth you won't be able to forge your own path and therefore I tell you that you must go beyond them. This lesson means that you don't become their slave and that you become your own independent

person. The assertion of the Sōn master is that you become a free person, never subordinate no matter where you are.

When we speak of master and disciple, in the end, what are we really saying? This distinction only exists when the student enters the path. To those who see with their own eyes, there is neither master nor disciple. Every person is seen only as equal.

Do you want to meet a true master? Don't look outside; scrutinize your own self. Find your master within your own spiritual self.

Not Bound Yet Paying Your Duty

Few days ago, I opened up a rice vase and found just one bag of rice. When the vase was full, it did not occur to me but when it was empty, I felt the appreciation for the rice. How precious it was and how thankful it was. The happiness is found in small things. It can easily be overlooked when everything is sufficient. But when we find the shortage, then we realize the need and the value. We realize then how happy we have been due to such existence of small things. True meaning of richness is when one can find the bliss and purity in life even though they possess less. Possessing many things is not being rich. Although you may possess less so you may suffer a little, you are a rich if you find bliss in life with purity in heart.

Known as the last teaching of Buddha, 'Yumagyung' writes that, "If you wish to be free from sufferings, know how to be content. Knowing sufficiency is being rich, joyous, and secure. But those who do not know how to be content, living in paradise would not even please them."

It teaches that one who knows how to be content for what they have may understand true happiness. We all have different measurements and situations. Being thankful for what we have and being content for what we have is the first wise step to blissful life. Those who know how to be thankful for even small things also know how to make others happy too. They are able to make themselves and others peaceful. But those who always have complaints and discontentment, they always make faces and easily get angry.

Naturally they would often make others unhappy too. Then people will slowly avoid them and it will be harder to feel any happiness no matter how circumstances turn out.

One day, a follower asked an old monk a question. "Is it right to eat meat and drink? Or is it wrong?"

A monk told him, "What to eat or drink is up to you. It is not an answer you need from a monk. But, if you can control what you eat and drink, you will be able to attain fortune."

His teaching was that fortune does not come by accidents. If you have done something good, you will receive merits. Vice versa, if you have done selfish things, the fortunes will walk far away. The Chinese character of fortune illustrates it very well. It has combinations of strokes describing cloth, one, mouth and land. It means with one cloth, and a small land to feed you, that is indeed fortune.

We need to think about our actions whether it is good or bad for my merit. When you buy a thing from the market, you need to consider if it is really necessary or not. Just because you have money, you need not buy

everything because everybody else does. It is really wasting your life. Over expenditure is indeed the cause of social decay.

We need to learn the merit of being simple. The simplicity I am talking here does not refer only to material aspects. The simplicity not by given poorness but the simplicity by choice. In another words, it can be described as honest poverty or sacred poverty. It is simplifying the surroundings by reducing what is unnecessary but live by basic. People in old days had such virtue. Now days, it is not easy to hear the word like simplicity or honest poverty. No one seems to be interested in. But we need to try to live simple life, the pure poverty.

Pure poverty is the work of emptying oneself. It is being free of various attachments. The Bible says, "Those who are poor have fortunes..." That is sacred poverty. When you are free of greed, you attain such peace. It is like clear breeze passing through our mind and body and purify. By choice, possessing only what is necessary and living simple life by having the least, the fortune will find you. You will know the emptiness, yet fulfillment, which is never understood by those who chase after possessing more things.

This attitude, or thoughts are very enthusiastic and a wise choice made. The value of human life is not decided by material you possess.

Kitchen is often a practicing location for homemakers. It is also a place of love for family. The practicing place is not only in temple, church or cathedral. It is very precious that we have family. Of course, sometimes we meet certain problems cause by each other. It could be your children or husband. When you have conflict with them, you may be discouraged for the works you put on for family. But you must realize that, those difficult times are indeed a chance to elevate your life into higher level. You must realize that, your husband, your wife, or your children who give you hard time are Buddha who is trying to teach you. Don't have preconception of Buddha. Buddha is not just a golden statue set high in the Dharma hall whom you always lit a candle or offer incense to.

Buddha is very close to us. Try to think that our family, neighbor, friends and parents are Buddha. You must not hate them because they may hurt you. It is because they are the teacher who came to teach you of the patience. Although it may not be your fault, hating someone becomes the cause for more trouble for several lives. Thinking of people who are least expected as Buddha makes the first step to patience practice.

There is one thing that mothers of today must do. It is keeping the family and not just a house. Due to modern life, there seems to be only house but not family who gather around. It is because everybody is busy. But what makes the family is sharing ideas and love face to face. Keeping the family together is not only responsibility of mothers but I would like to encourage mothers to start.

In order to do that, try to spend an hour or even thirty minutes for yourself. Have time to reflect upon your own life. You may come to understand what you need to do. It may help you find your original warm heart. A mother who is the core of the family finds warm heart and understands what her duty is, she will find the family who are also changing. In warm hearts that make up the family, a paradise is found. Paradise is not found anywhere far away. Your visiting of temple today is to reflect upon your past, and to make determination how you should live from now on. If you come to temple just on a special prayer day for the sake of your child's admission to college, it is not practice but something like a contract.

There is saying in 'Chegundam'. "There is no better fortune than to have less work, and there is no worst disaster than to have more things in mind."

The Sōn masters have said, "The one who has no engagements are truly a noble one." It means a person who has no worries is not easy to find. It is not referring to a person without work but a person who is not bound to work. Such person is rare and free.

When you start complain about heavy load of works, it means you are burdened by it. If you take the work as your duty, or an offering to Buddha, you will not be burdened by the loads of work but think about how well you will do it. But if you try to do it because it fell upon you and you feel obligation, your complain will never end. The same work may differ upon how you think of it. It may be karma or it may be fortune.

I would like to make a suggestion here for you. This is just a suggestion so you don't need to be burden by it. First is not watching television for one day. It will better if your whole family can participate but if not, you may try yourself. Second is to read books at least an hour a day. If you are raising children, reading is most essential. Children learn more everyday and you should be able to guide them. Studying does not over when you walk out of the school. And it is not just by the school text. Show your children that you read good books instead of cheap gossip magazines. Third is to fast one meal in 15 days. It is just one meal you are skipping. While you fast, think about those who starve in the world and think what you can do to help. They say there are no longer starving people in Korea. But there are many who starve to death in the world. We hear the news that North Koreans suffer from shortage of food and flood. We should at least pray for them and share their pain.

And this is my last suggestion. Let's speak softly in the public. It is quite bothersome when you speak too loud not regarding people around. There is manner in speaking, too. Think of others not to harm in any ways.

In our life, there will come the moment when we have to let go of our possessions. It is the moment of death. No matter how strongly you

hold on, this is the moment you have to let go of all your attachment including your body. In fact, at the moment of your birth, you let go of your mother's body, which have conceived you.

We have let go of the body of mother. And continuously we have let go of many things in our life. And at the final moment, we let go of our body. We have started out life from letting go, and we finish by letting go. But we must remember that letting go is not to gain something new, but it is to live life in its essence.

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