

The following kong-an is number nine from the Blue Cliff Records:

When you have a clear mirror, the beautiful and the ugly reveal themselves. When you hold the legendary sword, you can kill or grant life, as the moment dictates. Chinese come, foreigners go: foreigners come, Chinese go. In death there is already life: in life there is already death.

Now tell me, what can you do? Unless your eye can penetrate all barriers and your body is free to make any turn, you can't do a thing. But what is this eye that can penetrate all barriers? What is this body that is free to make any turn? Read this kong-an and see:

A monk asked Jo-ju, "What is Jo-ju?" Jo Ju answered, " East Gate, West Gate, South Gate, North Gate."

Strange language. We usually think that when a man dies he is dead, and when he lives he is alive. But in this language, life is death, death is life. Where does life come from? Where does death go?

Life and death are only thinking. You must go beyond life and death. That is infinite life. It is "like this."

"Like this" is Jo-Ju's original face. Mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers: yellow is yellow, red is red.

Jo-Ju's teacher, Nam Chan, said that everyday mind is the Way. Everyday mind is the mind that cuts off all thinking. It is the same as a mirror: when the beautiful comes, it is beautiful:

When the ugly comes, it is ugly. Only "like this."

Zen Master Po De had a large round face and a belly like a balloon. He laughed all the time. Whatever people gave him he would put into a sack which he carried over his shoulder. Whatever people wanted he would take out of the sack and give them. He slept anywhere: indoors, outdoors, beside rivers, on top of mountains. When he slept indoors, he snored and the windows shook. When he slept outdoors, he snored and the branches trembled.

Sometimes his actions were peculiar. Under a cloudless sky, he would walk with wooden shoes and an umbrella. People laughed. But soon it would begin to rain, and people understood. "Ah, that must have been Po De." So when they saw him with wooden shoes and an umbrella, all the people would take their wooden shoes and umbrellas. And in the summer, if he wore grass shoes during a thunderstorm, all the people would put on their grass shoes because they knew that the sky would be clear soon.

Po De always lived with earth and sky, with Buddha and all people.

People live in nature, but they don't understand nature. Po De lived outside nature, but he understood nature.

So what is natural?

One Saturday evening at the Boston Dharmadhatu, Seung Sahn Soen Sa explained the Zen circle. After his talk one student asked, “Where is devotion on the circle?”

Soen Sa: That is between 90° and 180°, where God exists. Name and form exist here, but the substance of all things is the same. God’s substance and my substance are the same. Ultimately, God and I are one. This is the goal of Hinayana meditation, as well as yoga and Christian and most other kinds of meditation. It does not pass 180°.

Student: But if there is a Supreme Being—and I believe there is—how can there be anything beyond unity with Him?

A student of Soen Sa’s: Maybe the question to ask is, is there a Supreme Being? Is that what you’re asking?

Student: No, I’ve made up my mind. What I want to ask is, how can there be anything beyond a Supreme Being? I mean, maybe there’s no circle!

Soen Sa: O.K., you don’t believe in the circle. That’s good, very good. I am the same. If I believe in the circle, I form an attachment to the circle. So I don’t believe in it. You and I are the same. It’s only a Zen teaching circle. An attachment to it would be very bad.

Student: Would an attachment to God also be bad?

Soen Sa: All attachments are bad.

Student: How can it be bad? There is no bad.

Soen Sa: Ah, you are a freedom man. You make bad, you make good. In original mind, there is no bad and no good. Bad and good are thinking.

Student: So before thinking, there is no good or bad?

Soen Sa: Yes.

Thirteen hundred years ago, in an ancient province of Korea, there was a great Zen Master named Won Hyo. As a young man he fought in a bloody civil war and saw many friends slaughtered and homes destroyed. He was overcome by the emptiness of this life, so he shaved his head and went to the mountains to live the life of a monk.

In the mountains he read many Sutras and kept his precepts well, but still he didn't understand the true meaning of Buddhism. Finally, since he knew that in China he might find a Zen master who could help him become enlightened, he put on his backpack and headed for the great dry Northern plains.

He went on foot. He would walk all day long and rest at night. One evening, after months of walking, he stopped at a small patch of green, where there were a few trees and some water and went to sleep. Toward midnight he woke up very thirsty. It was pitch dark. He groped along on all fours searching for water. At last his hand touched a cup on the ground. He picked it up and drank. Ah, how delicious! Then he bowed deeply in gratitude to Buddha for the gift of water.

The next morning he woke up and saw beside him what he had taken for a cup. It was a shattered skull, blood-caked and still with shreds of flesh stuck to the cheekbones. Strange insects crawled or floated on the surface of the filthy rain water inside it. Won Hyo looked at the skull and felt a great wave of nausea. He opened his mouth. As soon as the vomit poured out, his mind opened and he understood. Last night, since he hadn't seen and hadn't thought, the water was delicious. This morning, seeing and thinking had made him vomit. Ah, he said to himself, thinking makes good and bad, life and death. It creates the whole universe. It is the universal master. And without thinking, there is no universe, no Buddha, no Dharma. All is one, and this one is empty.

There was no need now to find a master. Won Hyo already understood life and death. What more was there to learn? So he turned and started back across the desert to Korea.

Twenty years passed. During this time Won Hyo became the most famous monk in the land. He was the trusted advisor to the great king of Silla and preceptor to the noblest and most powerful families. Whenever he gave a public lecture, the hall was packed. He lived in a beautiful temple, taught the best students, ate the best food, and slept the dreamless sleep of the just.

Now at this time, in Silla, there was a very great Zen master—a little old man, with a wisp of a beard and skin like a crumpled paper bag. Barefoot and in tattered clothes he would walk through the towns ringing his bell. De an, de an, de an, de an, *don't think*, de an, *like this*, de an, *rest mind*, de an, de an. Won hyo heard of him and one day hiked to the mountain cave where he lived. From a distance he could hear the sound of extraordinarily lovely chanting echoing through the valleys. But when he arrived at the cave he found the master sitting beside a dead fawn, weeping bitterly. Won Ho was dumbfounded. How

could an enlightened being be either happy or sad, since in the state of nirvana there is nothing to be happy or sad about and no one to be happy or sad? He stood speechless for a while, and then asked the master why he was weeping.

The master explained. He had come upon the fawn after its mother had been killed by hunters. It was very hungry. so he had gone into town and begged for milk. Since he knew that no one would give milk for an animal, he had said it was for his son. "A monk with a son? Dirty old man!" people thought. But some gave him a little milk. He had continued this way for a month, begging enough to keep the animal alive. Then the scandal became too great, and no one would help. He had been wandering for three days now, in search of milk. At last he had found some, but when he had returned to the cave, his fawn was already dead. "You don't understand," said the master. "My mind and the fawn's mind are the same. It was very hungry. I want milk, I want milk. Now it is dead. Its mind is my mind. That's why I am weeping. I want milk."

Won Hyo began to understand how great a Bodhisattva the master was. When all creatures were happy, he was happy. When all creatures were sad, he was sad. he said to him, "Please teach me." The master said, "All right. Come along with me."

They went to the red-light district of town. The master took Won Hyo's arm and walked up to the door of a whorehouse. De an, de an, he rang. A beautiful woman opened the door. "Today I've brought the great monk Won Hyo to visit you." "Oh! Won Hyo!" she cried out. Won Hyo blushed. The woman blushed, and her eyes grew large. She led them upstairs to her room, in great happiness, fear, and exhilaration that the famous, handsome monk had come to her. As she prepared meat and wine for her visitors, the master said to Won Hyo, "For twenty years you've kept company with kings and princes and monks. It's not good for a monk to live in heaven all the time. He must also visit hell and save the people there who are wallowing in their desires. Hell too is "like this." So tonight you will ride this wine straight to hell. "But I've never broken a single Precept before," Won Hyo said. "Have a good trip," said the master.

He then turned to the woman and said, "Don't you know that it's a sin to give wine to a monk? Aren't you afraid of going to hell?" "No," the woman said; "Won Hyo will come and save me." "A very good answer!" said the master.

So Won Hyo stayed the night, and broke more than one Precept. The next morning he took off his elegant robes and went dancing through the streets, barefoot and in tatters. De-an, de-an, de-an! The whole universe is empty! What are you?!

Providence

Jan. 14, 1974

Dear Soen-Sa-Nim,

I hope you had a good trip to Chicago. Were the eggs good? Did Bobby eat all the cookies?

Things here are very quiet without you. Outside, the ice-covered branches sparkle all day long, like jewels. Inside, Roger cleaned out and re-arranged all the closets. But perhaps the truth is that Roger re-arranged the trees, and the branches are sparkling in the closet.

In one week, George and I will begin our 21-day retreat. Do you have any special instructions for us?

Here is a short poem for you:

Sweet ladies of the calendar,  
Purring among plastic flowers,  
I prostrate myself reverently  
At your non-existent Bodhisattva feet.

Katz is sleeping beside me on the red blanket. Poor Katz! He is due for some changes. So are we all.

With love,

Stephen

Sambosa

Feb. 4, 1974

Dear Stephen,

Thank you very much for your letter. I think you are now hard training on 21-day retreat. I hope your hard training brings you victory. I wanted to write much sooner than this, but I have had many things to do here. I am sorry.

First we went to Chicago and visited many friends, including two Tae Kwan Do masters. Then we went to Los Angeles and visited a beautiful natural-style zoo with no cages. And

now we are at Sambosa. Sambosa had its first birthday. I delivered a Dharma speech which I am sending to you. This was a very big ceremony. Many people came. American, Vietnamese, and Korean monks all gave short speeches. Afterwards, there was a BIG lunch.

The San Francisco Zen Center called Sambosa about a week ago and asked me to come there and give a lecture. We will go there on Feb. 9th. We will have a dinner and then I will give a Dharma talk.

Jacob started a 100-day mantra retreat on Feb. 1st. Jim is driving back to Providence. Bobby is coming to San Francisco with me, going to her sister's house, and then returning to Providence. Becky is staying at Sambosa. I am going to Los Angeles soon to celebrate the end of Tahl Mah Sa's 100-day Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal retreat. I will be returning to Providence around Feb. 27th.

In your letter, you asked me if the eggs I took on the plane were good. I ate them and then some baby chickens hatched in my stomach and began to sing "Peep, peep, cheep, cheep, cheep!" And Bobby ate all the cookies and wheat started growing from her mouth. It grew until it covered the whole sky and ground. If you hadn't asked me about the eggs and cookies, I would never have known about the singing chickens and the prolific wheat. So thank you very much for asking.

In your letter, you told me that Roger had cleaned out and re-arranged all of the closets and outside the ice-covered branches were sparkling all day long like jewels. Then you said, perhaps the truth is that Roger re-arranged the trees, and the branches were sparkling in the closet. I think the former is true. Tell me, tell me, Stephen, What is true?

A dog sees some birds fly out of the tall grass and begins to bark. The spring wind comes and a flower quivers.

I read your poem. It is very wonderful. So you like these pretty calendar ladies and plastic flowers? Now I am worried that you will keep dreaming about them.

The sculptor has been working on the same statue for 31 years. You must not wait for the rabbit to grow horns. The icicle falls and shatters on the ground. Why?

See you later.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Providence

Feb. 15, 1974

Dear Soen-Sa-Nim,

Thank you for your letter, which was delivered to me during my retreat. I read it and laughed out loud.

Upending the universe with a flick  
of mind, he draws out  
our well-  
digested realities, sows them  
in clouds, fields, in concrete,  
in the void itself until  
heaven and earth are  
one great  
thicket of gold stalks.  
Who said you could sit there  
on your ass as things  
flash by end  
over end, memories, smells,  
the ticking of an alarm clock,  
fern-shadows on the refrigerator door  
Try what you can:  
ask him whatever you want:  
there is nowhere  
to stop.

Nevertheless, I took chickens in your stomach and stuffed them back into their shells, and I harvested the sky-wheat, baked it with chocolate chips, and put it back in Bobby's mouth. What can you do?

I dream about the calendar ladies every night. They come to me and whisper, "If you reject us, we will never leave you alone." Then they sit around me in a circle and wait.

The retreat was difficult, and I'm glad it's over. But it was good practice—clearing the field, cutting down brush, hauling rocks. I may do another one in the spring, together with George.

I have a question: Is "Mu" really the same as "What am I?" Are there people for whom "Mu" would be a better koan? Sometimes when I couldn't get into "What am I?". I tried "Mu", and the doubt was very strong. This is all thinking, I know, but please answer anyway.

I will be in Cambridge this weekend. There seems to be quite a few people there who heard your talk at the Dharmadhatu and want us to open a Cambridge center so they can study with you. There is a lot of interest. I will also try to arrange talks at Harvard and Boston University, probably for April.

We are all looking forward to having you back with us.

Yours respectfully,

Stephen



Sambosa

Feb. 4, 1974

Dear Suzie, George, Roger, Alban, and Louise,

Thank you very much for your postcard. Are you all having a good time? Many eat, many sleep, many hard training?

Your postcard said, "I hope you are having a good time." Thank you for helping us. We are having a good time. Many eat, many visit, many talk. This world is very funny. In the universe, all things neither appear nor disappear. But people say that things have life and death. This is funny. Things are neither tainted nor pure, but people think that some things are good and some things are bad, some things are clean and some things are dirty. They make circles and squares; they think that some things are short and some things are long. This is funny. In true nature, things do not increase and do not decrease. People are attached to good and bad karma. They get happiness and suffering. They have past, present, and future; coming, going, and staying; East, West, North, and South. This is funny.

An eminent teacher once said, "Original nature is true emptiness." But you want to attain enlightenment. This is funny.

Put it down! Put it down! This is funny. What is "put it down?"

GATE, GATE, PARAGATE, PARASAMGATE, BODHI SWAHA!

A hungry child cries to its mother for food. A dog sniffs all around in search of something to eat. As the sun sets behind the western mountain, the shadow of the pine tree becomes longer and longer and touches a distant wall.

See you soon.

Sincerely,

S.S.

The following Dharma speech was given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at Sambosa (no date)

Have you seen the Three Precious Gems?

Have you heard the Three Precious Gems?

Have you attained the Three Precious Gems?

If you have already seen, heard, and attained the Three Precious Gems, then when you meet the Buddha you kill him, and when you meet an eminent teacher you kill him. You have the freedom to live or to die.

Then tell me, tell me—what are the Three Precious Gems?

If you open your mouth and say, “I have seen, heard, and attained the Three Precious Gems,” without pity I will hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

Today is the first anniversary of Sambosa’s opening.

I am very happy and thankful to be here. It has been one year since the beginning of Sambosa. Tok Sahn Wong Jang Nim, through his faith, has filled this valley with the sound of moktak and the fragrance of incense. That sound demolishes heaven and hell, and that fragrance pulls all beings from the six realms into Nirvana. Indeed, they are the original face of the Three Precious Gems.

What are the Three Precious Gems?

They are Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

What is Buddha?

Buddha is Mind. Your mind. To let go of your passions is to enter the world of beauty. Eliminate suffering and you will obtain happiness. Cut off all thoughts and anger, and return to the pure mind before all thinking. Thus you will become one with Buddha and the whole universe.

What is Dharma?

Dharma is the sayings of the Buddha, the language of his knowledge. The Buddha’s knowledge is the true I. Let go of your thinking and stupidity, and the world of truth will

appear. All delusions will fall away, and you will enter into enlightenment. Then you will see the Great Light inside your mind.

What is Sangha?

Sangha is the Great Path. If you cut off all attachment and all desire, you will enter the world of goodness. Immediately you will overcome all evil and you will be a great Bodhisattva. You will lead all mankind and will accomplish the great Bodhisattva way. The great Bodhisattva way means overcoming the opposites, reaching the Absolute, transcending life and death, and attaining true freedom. This is the Great Path.

These therefore are the Three Precious Gems:

Clear mind is Buddha.

The Great Light of mind is Dharma.

The mind without hindrance is Sangha.

If you return to the no-thinking mind, that is the purity, the Great Light, the path of no hindrance, the Three Precious Gems.

Today is the first anniversary of Sambosa's opening.

What is the original face of Sambosa? If you think that this land and these buildings are Sambosa, you have an attachment to name and form. But if you say they are not Sambosa, you have an attachment to emptiness. Then what is Sambosa's original face? If you answer, I will hit you thirty times; if you do not answer, I will still hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

The clear water of the Three Precious Gems flows from the East to the West.

The following speech was given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the San Francisco Zen Center on Feb. 9, 1974.

(Hitting the floor with his stick) Do you understand this? If you do, you understand One. If you don't, you divide things into ten thousand classes and one thousand levels.

(Hitting the floor) Do you understand this? If you do, you understand the ten thousand classes and one thousand levels. If you don't, you have an attachment to One.

(Hitting the floor) Do you understand this? If you open your mouth and say you understand, I will hit you thirty times. If you say you don't understand, I will still hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

Spring air fills the universe, and flowers are blossoming everywhere.

If you proclaim this, you shut the mouths of all Buddhas and eminent teachers. So how can you hear what they say? To hear what they say, you must understand what sitting Zen is.

When you are able to stay perfectly clear by cutting off all thinking and yet not fall into a trance-like sleep, this is sitting. When inside and outside become one, and no circumstances can hinder you, this is Zen.

When you understand sitting Zen, you understand yourself. In your mind, there is a diamond sword. If you want to understand yourself, take it and cut off good and bad, long and short, coming and going, high and low, God and Buddha. Cut off all things.

You must proceed as if walking on thin ice, concentrating totally on each of your steps. If you make one wrong move, you will die and go to hell like an arrow.

Passing beyond this realm of not-thinking, you reach the land of true emptiness. True emptiness is before thinking. This before-thinking realm contains no words, so there are no mountains, no rivers, no East, West, North, or South, no God and no Buddha.

But if you stay there, you succumb to an emptiness attachment, and even Buddha himself cannot save you.

When you are hanging by your hands from a cliff and can let go, not thinking of life or death, then you will have true freedom. You can see the wooden dog eating steel and

shitting fire. You make friends with the hairy-shelled turtle and the rabbit with horns. You learn to play the flute with no holes. But where does the flute's sound come from?

Leave this place behind and you understand that birds sing, hills are green, and the sky is blue. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—"like this" is truth and the language of Buddha and eminent teachers. The sound of rivers and birds are the Sutras; earth and sky are the very body of the Buddha.

(Holding up his stick) Then do you see this?

(Hitting the floor with his stick) Do you hear this?

Are the stick, the sound, and your mind the same or different?

If you say the same, that is not permitted, and the stick will hit you. If you say different, that is not permitted, and the stick will hit you. If you say they are both the same and different, that too is not permitted, and the stick will hit you even harder.

Why?

KATZ!!!

If you don't enter the lion's den, you will never capture the lion.

The following speech was given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the Harvard Divinity School on March 12, 1974.

(Hitting the floor with his stick) Are you alive? Are you dead?

(Hitting the floor) Where does life come from? Where does death go?

(Hitting the floor) If you think life, you go to hell like an arrow. If you think death, your body has no place.

Why?

KATZ!!!

The blue mountain does not move;  
the white cloud floats back and forth.

Life is like a floating cloud appearing in the sky. Death is like a cloud disappearing in the sky. Originally the cloud does not exist. It is the same with life and death. But there is one thing that is present forever, forever clear and luminous. It is untouched by life and death.

What is this one thing?

If you want to understand, listen to these four sentences:

1. Under the sea, the running mud cow eats the moon.
2. In front of the rock, the stone tiger sleeps, holding a baby in its arms.
3. The steel snake drills into the eye of a diamond.
4. Mount Kun-Lun rides on the back of an elephant, pulled by a little bird.

Of these four sentences, there is one that will give you freedom from life and death. Which one is it?

When you can see the horned rabbit sleeping under the tree with no roots, then you will first attain.

What is enlightenment? If you want to understand, you must let your mind become clear like vast space. All thinking and all desire fall away, and you have no hindrance anywhere.

To let your mind become clear like vast space—what does this mean? Do you understand? This is true enlightenment.

All Buddhas and all six realms of existence return to it. All things have it, one by one. It is happening in everything.

So even if you have never meditated, you already understand.

(Holding up his stick) Do you see this?

(Hitting the floor with his stick) Do you hear this?

Already you clearly see and hear.

Then this stick, this sound, and your mind—are they the same or different?

If you say the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say different, I will still hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

The willow is green, the flower is red.

Dear Bobby and Soen-Sa-Nim,

How are you two doing? I hope you like this high-class card. For two days it was warm and muddy. Yesterday it snowed. Not much hard training with school and work. I think of you often and hope to see you soon.

Love,

Roger

Dear Roger,

How are you? How are Alban, Louise, Stephen, George, Suzie, Jeff, and Jim? Thank you for your postcard. We came back to Los Angeles on February 10, and Bobby went to San Diego. Becky is here at Tahl Mah Sah with me. We gave a lecture last Saturday at the San Francisco Zen Center. About fifty students came. I talked, Becky translated, and Bobby told the Mang Gong story and gave the circle talk. Afterwards, there were questions and answers. The students there are all Soto-style and have an attachment to quietness, so there were not many questions, and they did not have the Great Question, only little questions. But still they were glad. I am enclosing a copy of my speech for you.

How are we going to buy a new zendo? We have been trying for a long time, but Tahl Mah Sah just bought a new house in short time and will move in on February 25th. It is a very good house; the garden, trees, and house itself are all beautiful. I hope in Providence we can soon become the number one zendo in America.

I will come back to Providence around the last day of this month, and will sit together with you in the March sesshin.

Here is a poem for you:

A valley filled with thick fog;  
A bird flies in and can't find her nest.  
If you open your eyes, you lose your way;  
If you close your eyes, you lose your home.

See you soon.

S.S.



The following dialogue took place at the Pawtucket (RI) High School on March 8, 1974.

Student: What is Zen all about?

Soen-Sa-Nim: Where do you come from?

Student: From down the street.

Soen-Sa-Nim: This hand is your hand, this head is your head, this body is your body. Your *body* is from down the street. I am asking you where your true self comes from.

Student: From my experience and my beliefs.

Soen-Sa-Nim: All right. Tell me now: what is one plus two?

Student: Three.

Soen-Sa-Nim: One plus two equals zero. Is that wrong?

Student: From what I've been taught, it's wrong.

Soen-Sa-Nim: Before you were born, you were zero. Now you are one. In the future, you will die and again become zero. So one equals zero, zero equals one. Okay?

Student: But *something* has to exist. There has to be one at all times.

Soen-Sa-Nim: Who makes this one?

Student: I believe that God does.

Soen-Sa-Nim: God? God is not God. *You* make God. God is a name. Mountain, river, house, car—all these are names, all of them are made by your thinking. When you are thinking, all minds are different. When you are not thinking, your mind, my mind, all people's minds are the same. The mind that is not thinking is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking, there is no speech, no word. So there is no God, no Buddha, no mountain, no river, nothing at all. So everything is made by thinking. Things don't say, "My name is Mountain," "My name is River," "My name is God." The original mountain, original river, original God have no name or form. As the Heart Sutra says, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." So one plus two equals three, one plus two equals zero—which one is right?

Student: From what we've been taught, one plus two equals zero is wrong.

Soen-Sa-Nim: You have been taught that one plus two equals three. But now I am teaching you that one plus two equals zero. (Laughter) If I have one apple and you give me two apples, I have three apples. So one plus two equals three. But if I eat one apple and then I eat two apples, I have no apples. So one plus two equals zero. (Laughter) The two answers are both good and both no good. If you think one plus two equals three is good, then it is good. If you think one plus two equals zero is no good, then it's no good. The whole universe is the same. Life, death, happiness, suffering, God—all these are made by your thinking. Zen is understanding this truth. When you understand yourself, you and the universe become one. So when you understand yourself, you understand the whole universe. I hope that you all will begin to ask yourselves the great question and that you will soon understand.

Dear Soen-Sa-Nim,

How are you? I hope you are not too tired after staying in Los Angeles. Did you help Tahl Mah Sah move into its beautiful new house?

Bo Sal Nim is very sick. Her stomach is no good. Sometimes it hurts very much and she has a headache. Sometimes she cannot eat. Sometimes it is okay. There is a lot of gas in her stomach. She does not know why it is sick. Is it energy?

Sometimes I miss you very much. I want to have interviews with you.

Nowadays I am working in the garden, helping Won Jang Nim learn English every day, and taking care of Hoon and Kwon. Sometimes I look at Zen books like you told me to. Sometimes I have many, many thinking, sometimes a headache or stomach ache, but Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal helps. At first I was tired from standing up so long, but now I only need to sleep about five hours, and don't feel tired. But sometimes I think, "Many desires: many suffering!" Then sometimes just Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal—KATZ!

How is Providence? Is it still very cold? How are all the people?

See you later,

Becky

PS Please send chanting. Thank you.

Dear Becky,

How is your 100-day retreat? Thank you for your letter. Did you receive the pictures I sent and my letter? We were having our Yong Maeng Jong Jin, so I couldn't make the chanting tape. Now we are finished, so I made it for you yesterday. I am sorry you had to wait so long. Now that you have it, I want you to become my number one chanting student.

In your letter, you said that Bo Sal Nim is very sick. That is Bo Sal Nim's karma, but we will do a lot of chanting and sit a lot of Zen for her. I hope she will soon get well.

You are helping Won Jang Nim with his English. That is very good.

Standing up for a long time is difficult at first, but it will soon be easy. Only try Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal, and you and Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal will become one. So you are Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal. So your desire will be a great desire. The great desire is to save all people. Also your

suffering will be Bodhisattva suffering. So all people's suffering will be your suffering. Your mind is a very big mind. It covers all the universe and all the Buddhas and everything. You must not let it become small.

I ask you, Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?

Do you understand this?

Put it all down! Only Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal.

See you soon,

S.S.

PS We are speaking at Harvard tomorrow. Here is the speech I am giving.

## A Dharma Speech

given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at Brown University on March 18, 1974

(Holds up Zen stick and hits the table three times.)

The Mahaparinirvana Sutra says, “All things are impermanent. This is the law of appearing and disappearing. When appearing and disappearing disappear, then this stillness is bliss.”

The Diamond Sutra says, “All things that appear are transient. If we view all appearance as non-appearance, then we will see the true nature of all things.”

The Heart Sutra says, “Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. That which is form is emptiness; that which is emptiness, form.”

What is appearing and disappearing? What is impermanence and permanence? What is form and emptiness? In true stillness, in true nature, in true emptiness, there is no appearing or disappearing, no impermanence or permanence, no form or emptiness. Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch, said, “Originally, there is nothing at all.”

The Sutra says, “When appearing and disappearing disappear, then this stillness is bliss.” But there is no stillness and no bliss.

The Sutra says, “If we view all appearance as non-appearance, then we will see the true nature of all things.” But there is no true nature and no things.

The Sutra says, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” But there is no emptiness and no form.

So when there is no thinking and no speech, already there is no appearing or disappearing, no impermanence or permanence, no form or emptiness. But to say that these things do not exist is incorrect. If you open your mouth, you are wrong.

Can you see colors, can you hear sounds, can you touch things? Is this form or emptiness? Tell me, tell me! If you say even one word, you are wrong. And if you say nothing, you are wrong. What can you do?

KATZ!!!

Appearing, disappearing—put it down! Impermanence, permanence—put it down! Form, emptiness—put it down.

Spring comes and the snow melts: appearing and disappearing are just like this. The east wind blows the rain clouds west: impermanence and permanence are just like this. When

you turn on the lamp, the whole room becomes bright: all truth is just like this. Form is form; emptiness is emptiness.

Then what is your original face?

(Holds up Zen stick and hits table)

KATZ!!!

One,two,three,four,four,three,two,one.

Dear Master Lee,

I wish to thank you for the interview with you at the Kingsley St. Temple, when I came with Hui Kong Bomer.

Your talking, and demonstration with the teacup, seemed to dissolve a block. Prior to that, I was attached to emptiness, in the sense of pursuing a koan, I'd look deep into emptiness, but no answer came. So I was as attached to emptiness, blocked by emptiness, as if I had been thinking.

Since that demonstration, my sitting has become much stronger, and Maezumi Roshi says my answers to "Who am I?" are now right on the head. Yet still, he says, I have not integrated body and mind.

So I continue to sit.

Your approach, of pointing the way, of telling what is the answer, of demonstrating, seems to be a very good one for me.

I hope that I can see you again, and fairly often if possible, when you return to L.A. in April. I would sincerely appreciate it.

In Gassho,

Ed

Dear Ed,

How are you? Thank you for your good letter.

An eminent teacher once said, "Original consciousness is always clear. Beyond the six roots and six consciousnesses and six dusts, it is not hindered by speech or words. True nature is not dyed. It is already round and clear. Put down all thinking: right now is your true self."

You say that you were attached to emptiness. But a true attachment to emptiness is without words or speech. Only understanding emptiness is different from being attached to emptiness.

I am glad that your sitting is getting stronger. You say that your body and mind are still not integrated. This is thinking. If you cut off all thinking, your mind becomes true emptiness. True emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking there are no words and no

speech, no mountains, no rivers, no God, no Buddha, nothing at all. So where is there a body to be integrated? Where is there a mind to be integrated?

You must always keep “What am I?” At first, this great question is very small. Then it grows and grows and grows until it fills the whole universe. And then, when it bursts, the great question itself becomes enlightenment.

Here is a poem for you:

Buddha said all things have Buddha-nature.  
Jo-ju said the dog has no Buddha-nature.  
But Buddha and Jo-ju don't know Buddha-nature.  
The dog runs away with the bone.

I will be arriving in Los Angeles on March 28th and will be at Tahl Mah Sah for the opening ceremonies in its new house on the 30th. I hope to see you then.

Yours sincerely,

Seung Sahn



One day during breakfast, a visitor to the Providence Zen Center said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I have just read a book that says that one’s personality and problems are like manure that can help the crop of enlightenment to grow. What do you think of this?”

Soen-sa said, “Who makes this personality and these problems? Who makes manure? Who makes enlightenment? Personality is the small I. Small I, Karma I, Nothing I, Freedom I, Big I—all these are only names and are made by thinking. The true Big I has no name or form. It is only “like this.” What the book said is good, as a test for your mind. But it is only thinking. You should not become attached to it.”

The visitor said, “When I want to reach out and touch you, is this thinking too?”

Soen-sa said, “There are two kinds of thinking: attachment thinking and no-attachment thinking. Attachment thinking is clinging to opposites—self and other, form and emptiness, inside and outside. No-attachment thinking is absolute mind. There is no inside or outside. Touching is only touching, without any thought of touching. When I see this picture, I do not say, “Oh, what a beautiful picture!” I only become one with the picture. I am the picture, the picture is me. There is only one thinking, one mind. (Points to a block of butter) What color is this?”

“Yellow.”

“This is no-attachment thinking. Only intuitive action. You become yellow. Original thinking is no thinking. It is becoming one mind. If I exist, all things exist; if I do not exist, all things do not exist.”

“So what stands between me and this picture, or between me and you, is my own attachment thinking?”

“Yes. Only put it down. What are you?”

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? Thank you very much for your letter and chanting tapes.

I am very happy to hear that you will speak at Harvard University. Thank you for sending your speech. Soon many people will be learning about Zen.

Many people have been coming to Sambosa. Most only want to look. A Soto-style student came and stayed overnight. He said, "I want a quiet place to live. I don't want any questions. I don't want to study Zen. I only want to do zazen." In California, many Soto students.

Tomorrow, Won Jang Nim, Son He, and I will go to a hearing about the Use Permit.

Bo Sal Nim is a little better. I am glad to hear that you do chanting and sit Zen for her. Me too, every morning and night I do chanting, bowing, and sitting with Bo Sal Nim in mind.

Today we had a letter from Jacob. It says, "Dear Sambosa family, Many demons come and go; I stay. Still in fine condition, though there seems to be a bit less of me. Love, Jacob."

Now it is garden time in California. Today I will plant edible pod peas and nasturtiums to keep insects out. Two days ago, I planted lettuce and spinach.

Thank you for telling me about Big Mind and Small Mind. I'm very happy.

It is now very easy to stand up. After the first day, it was not difficult, but now it is even easier than sitting. When chanting, sometimes Kwanseum Bosal and I are not different, and sometimes my mind comes and goes, thinking of things I have to do. But the coming and going is becoming less, and Kwanseum Bosal is becoming more. Now there is no more energy up. Or just a little.

You asked, "Why didn't Bodhidharma have a beard?" It is not that he was clean-shaven; only he *did not* have a beard. Why? KATZ!

See you later,

Love, Becky

P.S. We went to the hearing. They said, "No." Now we have 10 days to hire a lawyer and appeal. We made some mistakes. In January we missed an important meeting. It's so sad!

Dear Becky,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

You said that some Soto-style students came to Sambosa and that they had an attachment to quiet. This is very bad. A good Zen student has no hindrance. If my Zen is good only in quiet and is bad in noise, this is bad Zen. Quiet is noisy, noise is quiet. If I am thinking, both noise and quiet are noisy. So what is important is how I keep my mind. Where I stay is not important. An eminent teacher once said, "If you always keep a clear mind, you will attain enlightenment everywhere."

Nowadays, many students are learning Soto Zen. Many of them become attached to quiet and come down with Zen sickness. Not even Buddha can cure this sickness. So I am very sad. So nowadays, I am teaching what was before Soto Zen or Rinzai Zen. "What am I?" This is the Sixth Patriarch's great question. I think Hui-neng-style Zen is very good for American students. In Japan, Zen is split into Rinzai and Soto, and the two schools are always fighting. I think that fighting is the wrong way. In China, Soto and Rinzai fought a little at first, but afterwards, they didn't. Soto and Rinzai are really both the same way. Very few Americans know the true Soto teaching or the true Rinzai teaching. They are only attached to style. The true Soto and Rinzai teachings are beyond noise and quiet. I hope that all American students will understand this.

What you said about your practice of Kwanseum Bosal is all good. If thinking comes and goes, this is not bad and not good. Don't worry. Only let Kwanseum Bosal and you become one. This is very important. Kwanseum Bosal is your true self. The sound of your moktak goes to heaven and to hell and fills the whole universe. This sound is the true Dharma and the great light and will save all people.

Here is a poem for you:

I question. You only KATZ!  
This KATZ is very expensive.  
You've never given me money.  
How much will you pay?

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. It is too bad about the Use Permit. I hope you will try again and soon get it.

P.P.S. I arrive in Los Angeles on March 27 and will go to Sambosa on maybe April 18. See you then.

One day a student came to tea at the Providence Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa about the relationship between Zen and the arts.

Soen-sa said, "Zen is understanding life and death. Why are you alive?"

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

Soen-sa said, "Why will you have to die?"

The student shrugged his shoulders.

Soen-sa said, "People live and die on the earth without understanding what life and death are. When you were born, you were only born. You didn't say, as you were coming out of your mother's womb, 'Now I am going into the world. Help me.' You just came, without wanting to be born or knowing why you were being born. It is the same with death. When you die, you only die. You are not free to choose.

"Zen is the Great Work of Life and Death. Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am.' I think, therefore I have life and death; I do not think, therefore I do not have life and death. So life and death are created by our own thinking. They exist because we think them into existence, and they cease to exist when we cease to think.

"If you are thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are different. If you are not thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are the same..."

The student interrupted and said, "They're not different and not the same. These words are only thinking."

Soen-sa said, "Yes. If you cut off all thinking, this mind is before thinking. If you keep the before-thinking mind and I keep the before-thinking mind, we become one mind. Okay?"

The student said, "If we cut off all thinking, there's no mind."

Soen-sa laughed and said, "Very good. There is no mind. But its *name* is One Mind. Before thinking, there are no words or no speech, no life and no death. Then what is your true self?"

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, "Zen is understanding your true self. You must ask yourself, 'What am I?' You must keep this great question and cut off all your thinking. When you understand the great question, you will understand yourself.

“Socrates used to walk around Athens telling his students, ‘You must know yourselves.’ Someone once asked him, ‘Do you know yourself?’ Socrates said, ‘No, but I understand this not-knowing.’ Zen is the same. It is not-knowing, not-thinking. ‘What am I?’ This is your true self.

“When you understand yourself, it is very easy to paint or write poems or do calligraphy or tea ceremony or karate. You paint effortlessly; you write effortlessly. Why? When you are painting or writing or doing any action, you become totally absorbed in that action. You are *only* painting; you are *only* writing. No thinking gets between you and the action. There is only not-thinking action. This is freedom.

“If you are thinking, your mind wanders away from your action and the flow of painting or writing will be blocked, your tea ceremony will be stiff and clumsy. If you are not thinking, you are one with the action. You are the tea that you are drinking. You are the brush that you are painting with. Not-thinking is before thinking. You are the whole universe, the universe is you. This is Zen mind, absolute mind. It is beyond space and time, beyond the dualities of self and other, good and bad, life and death. The truth is just like this. So when a Zen person is painting, the whole universe is present in the tip of his brush.

“There was once a great Japanese poet named Basho. He was a very bright young man and as a serious Buddhist, he had studied many sutras. He thought he understood Buddhism. One day he paid a visit to Zen Master Takuan. They talked for a long time. The Master would say something and Basho would respond at length, quoting from the most profound and difficult sutras. Finally the Master said, ‘You are a great Buddhist, a great man. You understand everything. But in all the time we have been talking, you have only used the words of the Buddha or of eminent teachers. I do not want to hear other people’s words. I want to hear your own words, the words of your true self. Quickly now—give me one sentence of your own!’ Basho was speechless. His mind raced. ‘What can I say My own words—what can they be?’ One minute passed, then two, then ten. Then the Master said, ‘I thought you understood Buddhism. Why can’t you answer me?’ Basho’s face turned red. His mind stopped short. It could not move left or right, forward or back. It was up against an impenetrable wall. Then, only vast emptiness.

“Suddenly, there was a sound in the monastery garden. Basho turned to the Master and said,

Still pond—  
a frog jumps in—  
the splash.

The Master laughed out loud and said, ‘Well now! These are the words of your true self.’ Basho laughed out loud too. He had attained enlightenment.

“Later on, he went to Matsushima, one of the most beautiful places in all of Japan, where a poetry contest was being held. Poets from all over the country were there. Everyone wrote in praise of the extraordinary loveliness of the countryside, the majestic snow-capped peak of Mt. Fuji, the brilliant mirror surface of the lake, the sailboats flying across water like great white birds, etc. Basho wrote only three lines:

O Matsushima!  
O Matsushima!  
O Matsushima!

His poem won the contest.

“This is a true Zen poem. It does not use poetic language or images. There is no thinking in it. I am Matsushima, Matsushima is me.

“So in Zen there is no outside and no inside. There is only the One Mind, which is just like this. This is the life of all the arts and it is the life of Zen.”

May 10, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

To the man who blows smoke in the Buddha's face I say, "The sun shines by itself. Why do you light a candle?"

Dan

P.S. I do not think I'll be able to come this June. Good luck in your new home.

May 28, 1974

Dear Dan,

How are you? Thank you for your letter with the answer to the koan.

Your answer is good. But it is bad. So I will hit you thirty times.

The sun only shines outside. But the candle shines in all people's minds. It is brighter than the sun. It can open your mind.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. But form is form, emptiness is emptiness.

When your right foot itches, don't scratch your left one.

The gull is white; the crow is black.

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. Please come to our opening ceremony if you have time.

P.P.S. Our Cambridge Zen Center will open in June. The address is 31 Fayerweather St., Cambridge, MA 02138, tel. 864-1156. I will be living there July and August.

May 21, 1974

How are you and how does your work progress?

I am writing to ask when would be the best time to come for six months or so? Will you be here in California before October? Or do you plan on conducting a 100-day sesshin anywhere? Would it be inconvenient for me to come at any special time?

I've enjoyed the March and April bulletins from Providence and just recently got a copy of your Koan books which I look forward to studying. Almost every few pages there is something that clears up some doubt.

I wish that I could stay for more than six months, but finances, work here and other things seem to prevent it at this time—although I could probably wait until next year to come and finish all my work here, then I'd be free to stay.

Satam probably will not be coming, his practice is going well here, and there are probably financial reasons, but he would like to translate your book.

Although working zazen and sitting zazen are essentially the same, there is still a difference and I can hardly wait to get to Providence to participate in some sesshins and do some more concerted sitting than is possible now.

Our library recently was donated a copy of the Chinese Tripitaka, and if I am very careful, I can manage to put them on the shelf without putting any upside down. (Ho, ho) I mention this because I'm supposed to be the head librarian.

Please take care. Hoping to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ed

May 28, 1974

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. Nowadays, how are you doing?

You are welcome to come live with us at the Providence Zen Center whenever you want. We have a large house with many rooms.



I don't know when I will go to Los Angeles. We are very busy with our new house in Providence and with our new Zen center in Cambridge. But I am always with you in Los Angeles.

As for the 100-day sesshin—hopefully, Sambosa will soon get a use permit, which will allow it to become a Zen center. If many students come there, we will have a schedule of alternating three-month periods: three months of sesshin, three months of regular sitting.

Working Zen and sitting Zen: The Third Patriarch, in his poem on Faith in the Mind, said,

“The Great Way is not difficult  
for those who make no distinctions.  
Have no likes and dislikes,  
and everything becomes clear.”

You mustn't divide sitting and working. If you prefer sitting Zen, working Zen will be difficult. So you must cut off all your likes and dislikes. Then your mind will be clear, and sitting and working will not be two. Sitting is sitting, working is working. How are they different? When you are thirsty, you drink.

The description of your difficulty in cataloguing the Tripitaka was very interesting. Originally, there is no top and no bottom. When you don't know up from down, you are a free man. But if you understood Chinese, you would have to think. So language is a hindrance. Put it down! Put it down! only like this.

You can see that the mountain is green and the cloud is white.

See you soon,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Here are some questions for you:

How do you teach the Dharma? What do you teach? If you don't understand, what can you say about what Zen is?

Does a person learn things? Does a person understand more?

I hope you are enjoying sunny California—only cold rain in Providence, but we have money now for our new house.

See you soon,

Louise

Dear Louise,

How are you? Thank you for your beautiful postcard. How are Alban, Roger, Bobby, Stephen, George, Suzie, and Nick?

In your letter, there are many questions. If you have questions, all things are questions. Why do you live? Why do you die? How can you see, smell, and taste? Why does the sun rise in the East? Why does the moon only shine at night? Why does the earth revolve around the sun? And so on and so forth.

But the 10,000 questions are only one question. The one question is, "What am I?"

In the picture you sent me, someone is holding a sword. This is a king's diamond sword. If you cut off all thinking with it, the 10,000 questions disappear. Then tell me: what is this diamond sword? If you can find it, your life is absolutely free and your actions have no hindrance. If you don't find it, the question demon will kill you, and you will fall into hell. So put it all down!

It is better to keep your mouth shut as spring passes.

Here is a koan: "When the bell is rung, you put on your kasa." What does this mean?

Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind all deceive you. The true you is without the six roots. but the six roots use you, so you ask 10,000 questions. You must return to your true self. Then you will understand.

The butterfly alights on the flower and drinks its nectar.

Here is a poem for you:

What is Buddha?  
Three pounds of flax.  
Dry shit on a stick.  
I don't understand these words.  
The infant is sucking on his toes.

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. I am staying at Sambosa for one week. Then I will go to Tahl Mah Sa and will speak on Buddha's Birthday. Next I will go to New York and be back in Providence about May 5.

April 10, 1974

Dear Stephen,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I signed the paper from Harvard Summer School and mailed it back.

The Cambridge house sounds like a good one. We will have hard training there. Thank you for finding it. It is very kind of Kevin to help us as he has been; he is a Bodhisattva. I hope we will soon be able to buy this house and make it into a great Zen center, teaching many students and opening many minds. Thank Professor Jay very much for signing the lease. Making zafus is a very good idea. Lynn must be a great Bodhisattva. I think that many students will come to Cambridge to learn Zen, and I will teach them.

The opening ceremony at Tahl Mah Sa was on March 30. About 350 people came, including 50 Americans. I spoke in Korean, and Hui-Kong, an American student, translated. Afterwards, Wan Jang Nim from Sambosa, Dr. Thien-An from the International Buddhist Meditation Center, Zen Master Song Ryong, and Lawyer Rev. Michael Hannon all gave good speeches. I am enclosing my Dharma speech. On April 7, I also gave a Dharma speech at the International Buddhist Meditation Center for Buddha's Birthday celebration. About 200 people were there. Today is Buddha's Birthday, but Buddha said that Buddha does not appear or disappear. When Buddha was born, he took seven steps, lotuses springing up at each step, and pointed to the sky and to the earth, saying, "Above the earth and below the earth, I alone am the honored one." But the great Chinese Zen Master Un-mun said, "If I had been there, I would have killed him and fed him to a hungry dog, thus putting the whole world at peace." What does this mean? What Buddha said is no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What Un-mun said is no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What I say is also no good, so I will hit myself thirty times. Where is the mistake? KATZ!

Today is a fine day.

Many people here are very happy. At Tahl Mah Sa, many American students come and we talk Zen. Every Sunday at 7:30 p.m., we have a Zen lecture and sit Zen, with questions afterwards. About twenty people come. The teacher is Zen Master Song Ryong—good teaching.

I will go to Sambosa on the 15th and come back here after one week for Buddha's Birthday. I will return to Providence on May 5. How was your special 21-day Zen retreat? I hope you will soon attain enlightenment and become master of the universe.

See you soon,

S.S.

May 3, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I hope you are fine. I am very sorry I made you late for your plane to Los Angeles.

You helped me very much when you were here. Thank you for talking about clear mind. Thank you for asking, "What is Buddha?"

How was Buddha's Birthday in Los Angeles? Many, many, many people came to Buddha's Birthday here. About 30 or 50 Americans came. About four people come to sit Zen every night now. The eighteen-year-old boy you talked to and his mother come. The boy (young man) says he understands, "What am I?" now. Won Jang Nim says if he understands, he does not understand. He said to leave him alone. I told him to just continue doing "What am I?"

Your big lanterns were very beautiful lit up in front of the temple. We had a long candle-lantern procession on Robinson Canyon Road. We chanted "So-ga-muni-bul." Everyone had a very good time.

The use permit looks good now.

Many newspapers and radio stations have been calling. Won Jang Nim, Mr. Chang, and I did a one-hour radio interview last Saturday. I think soon many people will come here.

In her last letter, my mother said this: "I realized the other day when I was sitting, that I am a point in space and immediately I saw that there is no such thing as time, that they were the same. It was delightful to see this with my own eyes. Also there is no 'I'—it is not there! My mind seems to keep working on Zen even when I don't think it is." She also told me about some high-class Dharma play that happened to her. She was very happy to hear that there will be a Boston zendo. She wants to bring her high school students next year to hear some Dharma talks and to meet you.

I hope you are strong (your body). I don't have questions but I want to see you. It helps me.

See you later,

Love, Becky

May 28, 1974

Dear Becky,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

You must be finished with your Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal retreat by now. How was it? Can you see Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal? Can you see your true self? Can you see true emptiness? Which one can you see? I hope you will soon become Mu Soeng Bodhisattva.

What is Buddha? What is clear mind? You already understand. If you don't understand, please ask the Sambosa Buddha. He is a good teacher. He is yellow.

I am glad that so many people came to Buddha's Birthday celebration, and also that there are some people who come to sit Zen regularly. And the news about the radio interview and the use permit is very good.

The 18-year-old boy you talked about—maybe he does understand. But understanding myself is different from attaining my true self. You are a great Dharma Teacher; so when he says he understands, you must ask him, "What are you?" See how he answers. If he says, "I am Buddha," this is a 90' answer. If he hits the floor, this is 180', and you can say, "You understand one but not two." And so forth. This is a test course. Ask him and see.

I was very happy to read your mother's letter. It is *extremely important* for her to see a Zen Master as soon as possible. A person in that realm is like a mute who has had a dream: he understands it himself, but he's not able to say a word about it. But a Zen Master will soon open his mouth. So it is very important for her to have an interview. Without an interview, that good mind will soon disappear. An interview is like pouring water into concrete: with water, the concrete is strong; without water, it soon crumbles. In the meantime, please ask your mother the Jo-ju koan. A monk asked Jo-ju, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" Jo-ju answered, "No!" Ask her what this means. Then you will check her answer.

I hope your mother will come to the Cambridge Zen Center and talk with us and sit Zen and soon attain enlightenment.

You say you have no questions. That's good. Then I will ask you a question: Why does the sun rise in the East?

See you soon, S.S.

P.S. I am sorry that this letter is typed. But nowadays, we are fixing the new house, so there is no time to write it out in longhand.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you very much for your letter. I copied what you said about my mother and sent it to her. I hope she will see you soon.

About three weeks ago, I asked my mother three questions: 1. If a person comes into the zendo and blows smoke on the Buddha's face and drops ashes in his lap, how can you teach him? 2. Buddha said all things have Buddha-nature. A monk asked Jo-ju, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" Jo-ju said, "No!" What does this mean? 3. Why do hairs grow on the bone of space?

This is the letter I got from my mother today:

"... Sometime in the past month with little petty end-of-the-year things at school, I stopped meditating. I wasn't concentrating well, so I thought, what's the use? And as a result, I became prey to all the flotsam and jetsam of my thoughts and desires and silly things. Fortunately, I woke up a few days ago and began sitting again. And how hard it is! It has taken me 3 to 4 days to get back to the world of silence and fullness, but I never want to leave it again! Amen!

"... You asked me some questions in your last letter which I will try to answer, though I see but dimly.

"First, what to do if someone blows smoke on Buddha's picture. I have two answers and one I like better than the other.

"1. I ask for a cigarette, tear the paper, and sprinkle tobacco and ask the person, 'Is this still a cigarette?' Then I take a lighted cigarette and hold it near the Buddha picture and ask, does the Buddha feel this? Then I step on the person's toes and ask if he feels the pain. He says, 'Yes.' Then I say, 'What are you?' Something like that.

"2. The mouse jumped into the cupboard.

"This answer came to me one day when I was sitting in the kitchen and remembered the time I had two friendly little field mice running around in here and one of them had a difficult time jumping the 4 or 5 inches into the cupboard which I had opened for them, and he made it and I felt happy. Suddenly, without thought, that seemed to me an answer to your question! So I offer it.

"I think Jo-ju said, 'No!' because the person was asking the wrong question when he asked, 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?' If Jo-ju had answered 'yes,' the person wouldn't know any more than he had known before. Buddha was right that all things have Buddha-nature, but you can't arrive at that understanding by saying it.

"Hairs grow on the bones of space because our imagination can conceive of that and all things are possible, but it shows the limits of our imagination at the same time. It is not much help to us in understanding and so the question carries us back to the true nature of things. Something like that, though I don't think that's a very good answer ... "

I hope this letter from my mother will help you understand her.

Thank you for the invitation to the Providence Zen Center's opening. I am very sorry I cannot be there. I hope you will have a good opening. I hope you are not too tired after all the work getting the new house ready.

On May 30, Sambosa's Zen Center Use Permit passed. Soon we will put advertisements in newspapers all over the country for Sambosa Zen Center. There will be an application form, like a school. It will cost \$150/month to live here. Men will have to have short hair and women will have to wear their hair up. Everybody will eat breakfast and dinner in the meditation hall with four bowls. Everyone will wear Korean monk clothes for morning and evening practice.

Your friend Matsuoka-roshi came here for a weekend and gave a lecture. His lecture was very interesting and his first Dharma Teacher is very good, but I think Providence Zen Center is number one. Matsuoka-roshi said he was interested in coming here to teach sometimes and in sending a student here sometimes to teach.

A married couple (Zen students) are going to move here tomorrow. Bo Sal Nim and I are looking for a new house for the children. The two new people are very nice.

Nowadays, I am trying to learn Korean, but I do not have a teacher, so it is difficult.

I was very tired at the end of Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal, but I was sorry to finish. Now I have a different retreat—working in the garden. I want to start Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal again in a couple of months.

Most of the time I do not feel happy or sad. Sometimes it is quiet, sometimes not quiet. During a Dharma talk or chanting or if I am reading a Zen story, sometimes the question is strong and holds me. Then it goes. Sometimes I feel very vague, soft, or cloudy. Sometimes I feel frustrated, or like I am surrounded on all sides by white cotton. This is just once in a while.

You asked, "Why does the sun rise in the East?"

First, please show me the sun rising in the East.

Becky



Dear Jacob,

Congratulations on finishing your great 100-day retreat!

How are you? You are a great man. Here is a poem for you:

A great man goes on a 100-day retreat.  
He makes many demons, many gods, many animals, and many Buddhas.  
One hundred days are the same as the time of one breath.  
You have brushed off all dust and have breathed in sky and ground.  
The Great Path is in the palm of your hand, and the great freedom is in your feet.  
Spring comes, flowers are blooming everywhere.

See you later, S.S.

P.S. Your parents miss you, so please call them and the Providence Zen Center.

A student of Soen-sa-nim's was leaving Providence to begin the Cambridge Zen Center. Soen-sa-nim shook his hand and said, "Good-bye. I hope you soon attain enlightenment."

The student said, "What is enlightenment?"

Soen-sa-nim hit him.

The student said, "Give me one word."

Soen-sa-nim said, "Come back soon."

The student smiled, bowed, and left.

During the June 1974 sesshin at the Providence Zen Center, a student walked into the interview room and bowed to Soen-sa-nim.

Soen-sa-nim said, "What is the true way?"

The student shouted.

Soen-sa-nim said, "That answer is neither good nor bad. It has cut off all thinking, so there is no speech, no Buddha, no mind, no way. Tell me then: What is the true way?"

The student said, "The sky is blue."

Soen-sa-nim said, "That's true enough, but it is not the way. (Holding up his Zen stick.) What color is this?"

"Brown."

"Yes. When I ask you what color the stick is, you don't answer, 'The bell is yellow,' even though that's perfectly true. It would be like scratching your left foot when your right foot itches. It's the same when I ask you what is the true way and you answer the sky is blue.

"Go ask a child about the true way. A child will give you a good answer. Zen mind is children's mind. Children have no past or future, they are always living in the truth, which is just like this. When they are hungry, they eat; when they are tired, they sleep. Children understand everything. So let me ask you again: What is the true way?"

The student stood up and bowed.

Soen-sa-nim said, "This is the Great Way, the Tao Way, the Buddha Way. It is not the true way. Do you hear the sounds outside the window?"

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"Cars."

"Where are these cars driving?"

"Over there."

"What is the name over there?"

The student was confused and said nothing.

Soen-sa-nim said, “It is Route 95. That is the true way. Hope Street is the true way. Doyle Avenue is the true way. The way is only the way. There is nothing beyond.”

The student bowed and said, “I understand. Thank you.”

Soen-sa-nim said, “You’re welcome. Now, what is the true way?”

The student said, “Route 95 goes from Providence to Boston.”

During the June 1974 YMJJ at the Providence Zen Center, a student walked into the interview room and bowed to Seung Sahn Soen-sa-nim.

Soen-sa-nim said, "Do you have any questions?"

The student said, "No."

Soen-sa-nim said, "Then I will ask you a question. What is the true way?"

The student said, "Through the door into the kitchen."

Soen-sa-nim said, "That is not the true way."

The student hit him.

Soen-sa-nim said, "Aie! Aie!"

The student said, "Can I help you?"

Soen-sa-nim said, "No. But I have another question for you. An eminent teacher once said. 'When the bell is rung, stand up; when the drum is hit, bow down.' What does this mean?"

The student said, "The bird flies in the sky."

Soen-sa-nim said, "You are holding a stick and trying to hit the moon. Let me give you a hint. In our service every morning and evening, after the bell chant, the moktak master hits the moktak. What does everyone do then?"

"Stand up."

"And when the moktak is hit again?"

"Bow down."

"We use the moktak. In China, they use bells and drums. The signals are different, but the actions are the same. So now you understand. 'When the bell is rung, stand up; when the drum is hit, bow down.' What does this mean?"

The student stood up and bowed to Soen-sa-nim.

Soen-sa-nim said, "That's very good. Always keep this mind. This is your true way."

During the June 1974 YMJJ at the Providence Zen Center, a student walked into the interview room and bowed to Seung Sahn Soen-sa-nim.

Soen-sa-nim said, “Do you have any questions?”

The student said, “Yes. A great Zen Master once asked his students, ‘What is Buddha nature?’ One student said, ‘Katz!!’ One student said, ‘Take the horns of the rabbit and lift the moon out of the water.’ One student said, ‘The bee goes to the flower.’ Which one of these answers is the best?”

Soen-sa-nim said, “They are all bad.”

The student said, “Why?”

Soen-sa-nim said, “The bee goes to the flower.”

The student said, “That’s a very bad answer.”

Soen-sa-nim said, “Why?”

The student said, “Outside the window, the tree is green.”

Soen-sa-nim said, “Ah, if you hadn’t told me, I would have lost my way.”

One day a visitor came to the Providence Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “If I study Zen, will I attain enlightenment?”

Soen-sa said, “Why do you want to attain enlightenment?”

The visitor said, “I’m too upset by all sorts of things. I don’t feel free.”

Soen-sa said, “Why don’t you feel free?”

“I guess I have too many attachments.”

“Why don’t you cut through these attachments?”

“They all seem very real.”

Soen-sa said, “No one knows when he will die. It could be next year, or next week, or in the next five minutes. So put it all down, now, at this very moment. Keep your mind as if you were already dead. Then all your attachments will disappear, and it won’t matter whether you study Zen or not. Right now you think, ‘I’m alive, I am strong.’ So you have many desires, many attachments. Only think, ‘I am dead.’ A dead man has no desires.

The visitor said, “How can I be alive and dead?”

Soen-sa said, “Dead is not dead. We have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. But the Heart Sutra says that in emptiness there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind. Without my six senses I have no hindrance. It is very easy. So if I am already dead, seeing is not seeing, hearing is not hearing. It is like passing in front of a restaurant, smelling the good smells, and passing on. It is not my house, so I don’t touch.”

The visitor said, “How can I practice being dead?”

Soen-sa said, “Only keep the great question, ‘What am I?’ Now let me ask you, what are you?”

“I’m one.”

“Where does the one come from?”

“From God. God is one.”

“God? Do you understand God?”

“No.”

“You say ‘one’, you say ‘God’. This is wrong. If you make one, it is one. If you make God, it is God. All this is thinking. Without thinking, what are you?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” (Hits him.) “This is pain. Can nothing feel pain?”

The visitor smiled.

Soen-sa said, “Before thinking, your mind was like a sheet of white paper. Then you wrote down one, and God, and nothing, and so on and so forth. When you cut off all thinking, you erase all these names and forms and return to your original emptiness. What am I? I don’t know. When you keep the great question, you keep the mind that doesn’t know. Don’t-know-mind is empty mind. There are no words, no speech. So there is no one, no God, no nothing, no mind, no emptiness. This don’t-know-mind is very important. I is don’t-know, don’t-know is I . Only this. This is your true self. So always keep don’t-know-mind.”

The visitor said, “My friends think I ‘m crazy because I am interested in Zen.

Soen-sa said, “Craziness is good. Crazy people are happy, free, have no hindrance. But since you have many attachments, you are only a little crazy. This is not crazy enough. You must become completely crazy. Then you will understand.”

The visitor bowed. Someone came and poured out two cups of tea.



One day a student at the Cambridge Zen Center said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I often feel great joy when I sit Zen. Is this good?”

Soen-sa said, “There are two kinds of mind-demons which attack Zen students. One is the form-demon, the other is the consciousness-demon. Sometimes you feel good feelings: joy, peace, the whole universe becomes filled with light. These are only feelings. They are the work of the form-demon. Sometimes God or Buddha appears before you and tells you great secrets. You realize that you are God, you are Buddha. This is only understanding. It is the work of the consciousness-demon.”

The student said, “But aren’t there some people who have experienced God speaking through their mouth? Isn’t it possible for God to touch me and make me understand the truth?”

Soen-sa said, “Where is God?”

The student said, “I don’t know. But he can touch me.”

Soen-sa said, “You say God can touch you. But what are you? Your body is not you. Your body is emptiness, just as trees and rocks are emptiness. Your true self has no head, no hands, no body. So what is there to be touched? The true God has no name or form, so how can he touch? All these visions and sensations are the work of the form-demon. So it is very important to cut off all names and forms. When you can keep true emptiness, you will find your true self.”

One day a student at the Cambridge Zen Center said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I am disturbed by noise when I sit Zen. What can I do about this?”

Soen-sa said, “What color is this rug?”

“Blue.”

“Is it quiet or noisy?”

“Quiet.”

“Who makes it quiet?”

The student shrugged his shoulders.

Soen-sa said, “You do. Noisy and quiet are made by your thinking. If you think something is noisy, it is noisy; if you think something is quiet, it is quiet. Noisy is not noisy, quiet is not quiet. True quiet is neither quiet nor noisy. If I listen to the traffic with a clear mind, without any concepts, it is not noisy, it is only what it is. Noisy and quiet are opposites. The absolute is only like this. What is the opposite of blue?”

The student said, “I don’t know.”

Soen-sa said, “Blue is blue. White is white. This is the truth.”

A DHARMA MESSAGE

(Striking the table)

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

(Striking the table)

No form, no emptiness.

(Striking the table)

Form is form, emptiness is emptiness.

Which one of these is correct?

If you make a choice, I will hit you thirty times.

If you do not make a choice, I will hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!

Three times three equals nine.

Thank you very much for coming to this opening ceremony. But what is it that brought your body here? Is it your mind? What is mind? Where is it? What is its shape? Mind is no mind. A mountain does not proclaim, "I am a mountain!" A river does not say, "I am a river!" All names and all forms are made by thinking. Thus, mind is no mind. All things have name and form. Names and forms come from emptiness and will return to emptiness. Thus, form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

When you are thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are different. If you cut through all thinking, your mind, my mind, all people's minds are the same. The mind that cuts through all thinking is the true empty mind. The true empty mind is before thinking. Your substance is before thinking. Your substance is universal substance. Before thinking, there is no speech and no language. There is no God, no Buddha, no mountains, no rivers, no things at all. Thus, no form, no emptiness.

But, before thinking is truly just like this. No form, no emptiness is itself a clinging to emptiness. Put it down! Then, you will have no inside and no outside; you will attain the Absolute. Everything that you see, hear, taste, and smell is the truth. God is God, Buddha

is Buddha, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers. The truth is like this. Form is form, emptiness is emptiness.

If you cut through all thinking, your mind will become clear. Just that is your true self. Thinking is desire, desire is suffering. When the mind remains clear, there is no life and no death. You will find true freedom that has no hindrance.

Your body has life and death, but your true self transcends both life and death. Today we have an opening ceremony. This is the opening of the mind's door, the attainment of one's true self, and the discovery of the Great Way.

What, then, is one's true self? Does it exist or does it not? if you say that it exists, where is it? If you say that it does not, what is hearing this speech? Both of these answers are not complete.

Why?

(Striking the table)

KATZ!

Put it down, put it all down!

The Great Way is in front of the door.

August 3, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I was inspired by our discussion last Thursday—so I decided to communicate my concept of self/universe.

I wish to ask—does this concept conform with the Zen way of believing?

Shalom,

Bruce Joffe

(picture of a large net)  
all consciousness  
is a great fish net  
and I am one knot  
in the net

as  
the net  
is formed  
of  
spaces  
and  
strands

so  
awareness  
is the  
alternation  
of  
thinking  
and  
not thinking

Dear Bruce,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You asked about your concept of self/universe. These are very good words. But tell me—what does “my concept” mean? Who made self? Who made universe? If you are thinking, the Zen way of believing, the Jewish way of

believing, the Hindu way of believing—all are different. If you cut off all thinking then the Zen way, the Jewish way, your way, my way, the true way, the false way, every way—all are the same.

Why did you make consciousness and the great fish net and the one knot that you are? What is your true self? Is there consciousness in your true self? Is there a great fish net? Is there the one knot? If you make a net, you are caught in that net. Put it all down. Put it all down. You must have no hindrance from space and time. The sun rises in the East and sets in the West.

Yours sincerely,

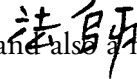
S.S.

August 15, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

안녕하십니까 ?

Maybe next year I will get to visit Korea, so I am learning to say a few simple things like hello and goodbye.

Last month I received complete ordination as and also a new name,   
(An Hanh in Vietnamese). The College is continuing to grow nicely.

Joung Dal Seu Nim got his green card. Otherwise, there is no news.

There are, however, questions: Rumors keep floating around that you will be coming to Los Angeles soon and will be staying at Tahl Mah Sah for a month or two. Are these rumors true? If so, when?

I am anxious to have an opportunity to study with you and cannot leave family and business responsibilities to come to Rhode Island in the foreseeable future. When you were here last, we were in the three month retreat preceding the Ordination, so I could not then come to Tahl Mah Sah. When you are here again I hope not to miss the opportunity.

How is your struggle with the Immigration people coming? Is there any help you need with it? Please let me know if there is anything I can do.

We look forward to seeing you.

Michael Hannon

August 21, 1974

Dear Ven. An Hanh,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. It would be a wonderful idea for you to go to Korea next year, and I hope that happens. Congratulations on your ordination as Dharma teacher. I am happy that the College is growing, and I hope it will become a great school and save all people from suffering.

It is true that I will soon be going to Los Angeles. I will arrive about Sept. 20.

Thank you for wanting to study with me. I will study with you also.

Thank you for the help you gave Joung Dal. I have not yet gotten my green card, but I think I will get it soon. The Immigrations people said that all my papers have been sent to Korea and that when they are returned they will soon give me a green card. When I am in Los Angeles I will talk with you about this. It is very kind of you to offer your help.

You said that you did a three month retreat. What kind of retreat? How are you doing? Zen retreats are very important. My students Jacob and Becky each did a 100-day retreat at Sambosa. They both said that during their retreats, their thinking was stronger than usual. When the mind is strong, demons are also strong. The struggle between demons and my true self—this is what a retreat is all about. So if you conquer your own demons, it is a good retreat.

An eminent Zen master once said, “In the mountain of the five skandhas, the demon is strong, the Dharma weak. When these two fight, the Dharma will lose. All thinking remains, but is relaxed. Grasp the diamond-sword, not thinking of appearance or killing. When only fighting, the body is not seen. Stars fly, fire explodes. Those who have merit are rewarded, those who don’t are punished. Reward and punishment are now clear.

“You will say that today I hit you. This is both a reward and a punishment. If you penetrate this hit, you will understand black and white.

“See suddenly.” Zen master Te-gak then hit the student Hung-a and Hung-a suddenly saw the reason and attained enlightenment.

I asked Jacob the following question during his retreat:

A person walks into the zendo smoking a cigarette and blows smoke in the Buddha’s face and drops ashes in his lap. You are the Zen master. What can you do to teach this person? This man has a very strong attachment to emptiness. He thinks he already understands everything. “I am Buddha, I am Dharma.” Every question you ask him he answers by hitting you. How can you cure his mind?

If you have time, check this great question and send me a good answer.

A letter from Michael Hannon, student at the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles.

Ven Seung Sanh,

Thank you for writing and especially for your Dharma words. It is wonderful that you are coming to Los Angeles in late September. We are all looking forward to seeing you and having the opportunity to study with you while you are here.

You asked about the 3 months “retreat” we had last spring. It was really more of a training period than a retreat. The ones being ordained all lived at the Center and (except for those who had to go to work) did not leave except for such special events as the celebration you had at Tal Mah Sah, and then only with Suto’s permission. We got up at 5 each morning, did 108 prostrations, then zazen for an hour, then Sutra chanting. All of us except one had



regular jobs to go to during the day and classes at the college to attend in the evenings. We closed the day with a half hour sitting and more chanting (Vietnamese Zen is mixed with Pure Land and they do a *lot* of chanting). On weekends we had a lot of special instructions from Suto on Vinaya, monk etiquette, ceremonies, etc. etc.

So, as you can see, it was really a training period rather than a real retreat. As soon as my children are grown (another 4 years until the last is an adult) I will not be so tied to my job and will be able to do a 100 day retreat in complete seclusion like those of your students at Sambosa.

You wrote: "...Those who have merit are rewarded. Those who don't are punished...."

Rewards exist because of punishment. Punishment exists because of reward. That is why, when you hit me, it is both reward and punishment. Actually it is neither.

There is no Zen in this—but no non-Zen either, I think. May I have your reaction?

Your second question involved the strong man who drops his cigarette ashes in the Buddha's lap and, thinking "I am Buddha, I am Dharma," believes he understands Zen and hits anyone who asks him a question. You asked how I would try to fix his mind.

(1) Get him off guard. (2) Wait. (3) Attack. That would be my general strategy; the tactics would depend on how the situation developed. For example: (1) Invite him to have coffee and (2) let him talk about himself until he relaxes. Then, when he does relax (3) spill his coffee on him and say "No hitting! Say something about it!"

You mentioned that the Immigration people have sent your papers to Korea. That is a very good sign. Their purpose is to have your papers verified by the American Counsel there. He will take them to officials of the Chogyo Order and ask them if the papers are genuine or not. That will be the end of your immigration troubles. The verification procedure is the final step of their investigation so you should be getting your green card soon.

I am looking forward to seeing you in Los Angeles.

Good luck with your new Zen Center in Cambridge.

See you soon,

An-Hanh (Michael)

September 1, 1974

Dear Ven. An Hanh:

How are you? Thank you for your letter. The training period you described sounds very wonderful. It is very similar to our lifestyle at the Providence Zen Center. People leave the temple for their outside jobs, but otherwise they work at the Center and participate in our morning and evening practices. I have just come back from Cambridge, and today is the

first day of our seven-day Youg Maeng Jon Jean (special training period). The daily schedule includes ten hours of sitting, and interviews every morning. Some students will be able to fully participate, and others will have to attend to their outside jobs during the day.

Since over a month ago, our regular schedule has included the study of Sim Gum Do, following the evening practice. Sim Gum Do is Korean Buddhist Swordsmanship, and its techniques include one and two swords usage, hand and foot usage (Karate), self-defense (Aikido), and short and long pole usage. Everybody likes it very much and it is an excellent vehicle for teaching Zen. My student, Sim Gum Do Master Kim Wong Kwang was taught the 100-day retreat by myself. During his retreat a Bodhisattva appeared and taught him Sim Gum Do. As a result, the approach in the teaching and practice of this martial art makes it very good for Zen students. When I see you next time, I will tell you more about this.

Now, for the great question. You gave me a three-part answer. Very good. But the person in the question is very strong. He already understands your three actions. He understands emptiness, and when you spill coffee on him, he will only laugh, “Ha! Ha! Ha!”, and then he will hit you. What can you do? He never changes his mind, for he thinks that his action is correct. How can you teach him, and thus fix his mind?

Zen Master Majo said, “What is Buddha?” He answered his own question, “Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind.” Another time he answered the same question, “No Buddha, no Mind.”

Zen Master Lin-chi only shouted, “KATZ!”

Zen Master Tok San only hit with his stick.

Zen Master Tong Sahn answered, “Three pounds of flax.”

Zen Master Un Moon answered, “Dry shit on a stick.”

All of these are different answers to the same question. Which is the best answer?

“Mind is Buddha, Buddha is Mind.” What does this mean?

Only “KATZ!” What does this mean?

“Three pounds of flax.” What does this mean?

I think you already understand. Check all of this, then again check the great question. You will understand how to fix the person’s mind.

I miss you very much. September 18th, I will go to Los Angeles. I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

S.S.

September 7, 1974

Dear Venerable Seung Sahn,

Thank you for your kindness in taking the trouble to respond to my poor attempt to solve the problem of the strong fellow attached to his idea of emptiness. I hesitate to presume upon your time further but I cannot resist another attempt at an answer.

You told me first to consider the sayings of several Zen Masters and tell what they mean.

“Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind.” A dog chasing his tail!

“No mind! No Buddha!” The dog runs headlong into a stone wall.

“KATZ!” Another stone wall.

A hit with a stick—yet another.

“Three pounds of flax.” The empty mind is full.

“Dry shit on a stick.” One taste.

Which one is the best answer? None of them.

Now for your great question. Our very strong friend has shown that he understands emptiness by replying to my spilled coffee by laughing, Ha! Ha! Ha! and hitting me.

“Good, you know the substance. Now, without anymore striking, show me the function.”

He will probably hit me again. If he does.

“Hah!! That is as mechanical as a clock ticking! Get out of here until you can show me all of Zen instead of clinging to only one side of it.”

If he does not, however, respond to my first statement by hitting me again but hesitates instead, I would still tell him to leave saying he only understands half. If he does not hit me and does not hesitate to display that he knows how to use it, then why am I wasting my time and getting hit rather than trying to teach this fellow something? Then, it would better just to clean up his cigarette ashes and duck when he swings.

If you could find the time, I would be very glad to have your reaction to this plan for fixing our strong friend’s mind and stopping his one sided attachment to voidness.

Now for your news: Having a Sim Gum Do teacher giving classes after evening practice seems like a really good idea both for teaching Zen and for attracting students. I am a little puzzled about how he learned his art during a 100 day retreat but perhaps when we see each other you can tell me. Also, I hope that when you are in Los Angeles, you will be able to resume the Dharma combat sessions you were having every morning. They were very popular with the students here and I wanted very much to be able to go to them. This time, if you can have them, I will be able to attend.

We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

An-Hanh (Michael)

September 28th

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I hope that you are enjoying your stay in California. How is the weather in Los Angeles? Nowadays in Boston it is mostly cold—the leaves have already begun to turn color.

I am well. I do my work—sitting, making zafus—and try not to attach to my feelings, desires, ideas of good and bad. I know that I am becoming stronger but sometimes I feel that I will never be free of my attachments. Sometimes I miss you very much. When you go away it is as if a certain sort of light, a warmth is missing. It is dark and cold. Yet I “thinking-understand” that this same light and warmth that you radiates from all things, and exists within me too. With much hard training perhaps I will be able to feel this presence always—in all things, in nothing, in all people, in no one.

When I wrote to you last I was very happy—nowadays I feel a little sad. These are opposites—happy/sad, sad/happy. True happiness transcends these dualities.

My mind is not too clear today—I hope I haven’t written a bad letter. I just wanted to be in touch with you—talking to you in a letter helps me to keep on with the work of learning to control my mind.

I look forward to seeing you when you return to the East coast—

Be well—

Gassho,

Lynn

Dear Lynn,

How are you? Thank you for your letters.

In your letter you said many thinking comes and goes, and you say many other things. About all this, don’t worry. This is only your previous karma. Now, to open the mouth is wrong. Only do your retreat. If you only pay attention to doing Kwanseum Bosal, you will get better and better at not thinking.

I already understand that you are a good student. You understand about yourself; you already understand your own bad karma—anger, thinking, and so on. So if you only do

Kwanseum Bosal, it is very easy for it to disappear. If you were angry and did not know it, that would be difficult. So, you are a very good student.

In your letter you say I am like light and warmth, and when I'm not there it feels dark and cold. This is true, but don't be attached to form. Your body is in Cambridge and my body is in Los Angeles, but when you do the Kwanseum Bosal retreat, your mind and my true mind become one.

An eminent teacher said, if two people's minds communicate, then though their bodies are ten thousand miles apart, their minds are still together. On the other hand, two people's bodies can be together, but if they do not communicate, their minds are as if ten thousand miles apart.

I ask you: your happy mind, unhappy mind, angry mind, thinking mind, and doing Kwanseum Bosal mind—are these the same, or different? If you open the mouth, I will hit you thirty times. If you don't open the mouth, I will also hit you thirty times. But, you already understand! What are the things in front of you right now? Only like this! Now is it clear?

I will send you something written in Korea by a famous Zen master on "Starter's Mind." Read it, and let it guide you on the True Way.

See you later.

S.S.

P.S. You must not use "Gassho". This is Japanese. If you want to sign this way, you must use "Hapchang", which is Korean.

September 20, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I hope you had an enjoyable flight, with no chickens hatching inside your stomach. I am sure you will be very busy in Los Angeles, teaching all people, eating for all people. But please try to find time to do your English homework. Jerry worked hard on it, and I think the lessons are good ones. Everyone here misses you.

Thank you very much for your kind teaching during our walk in Providence. I understand the proper technique much better now, and during the past few days I have had no hindrance teaching Dae Ja. Only action teaching. I will watch my step and be very careful.

I have a question about Zen masters who are together with women (I think Mang Gong was one of them?) I understand this as freedom action. But how is it Bodhisattva action? All women who have sex with Zen masters do not become enlightened (as in the story about the woman who lived during Buddha's lifetime and sold herself to many men.) So when a Zen master has sex, how is he teaching all people? I understand that sex also is only like this. But isn't this Zen master strengthening his women's desire?

I remember what you said about using your old karma for teaching—using your anger. Nowadays I have much karma with women: many women like me. So I think that I can use this to teach them. Is this true? Nowadays Dae Ja is thinking, "I want Stephen to be proud of me, so I will do hard training and first understand myself."

We have several new students at the Shim Gum Do school—six or seven, I think. Jerry is planning some more demonstrations in Boston. And I will write a newspaper article for the East-West Journal that will explain Shim Gum Do to many people. So we are off to a pretty good start. Please give my good wishes to Kae Jung Seu-nim and Chung Dal Seu-nim and the other people I met when I was in Los Angeles. And to Won Jang Nim and Bosal Nim at Sambosa. And Becky. And Wendy, if you see her.

Here is a poem for you:  
 The hair gets shorter and shorter.  
 The mouse grows larger and larger,  
 and utters a lion's roar.  
 Clouds still cover the moon.

See you soon.

Gassho,

Stephen

Dear Stephen,

How are you? How are Jerry, Byon Jo, Dae Ja, Lynn, Linc, Richard, Ghita, Devin, Jonnie, Trudy? Thank you for your letter.

My chickens are already full-grown and have flown away. Your chickens are still in your head. Careful! Don't keep these chickens!

In Los Angeles I am very busy. Kae Jung Seu Nim had already gone to Korea when I arrived. Many American people come and sit Zen with me. We have the same style as in Cambridge and Providence, with special Zen Saturday night and interviews Sunday morning. There are many older people who have been sitting Zen for as much as ten years at various Zen centers without understanding Zen. So now they come and have an interview and are very happy. Becky came to Tahl Mah Sah a few days ago and will be leaving for Boston Wednesday.

Everyday I do my English homework. The English tape is very good. Please say "Thank you very much" to Jerry. Please also say "Thank you very much" to Byon Jo for the medicine. I gave it to Professor Kim.

I am sending you a translation of "Starter's Mind", written by Zen master Won Hyo. Please read this carefully and check your actions. Zen master Won Hyo says if you become involved in love and sex, then you are like a porcupine who crawls easily into a rat's hold, but cannot back out no matter how he tries, and only goes further and further in. So don't keep love and sex mind! Throw away this mind!

Only after you attain enlightenment, all karma disappears, and there is freedom—only then are love and sex no hindrance. Now you must only proceed straight ahead on your path, without looking to either side.

You said in your letter, "Many women like me." This is very bad thinking! Only true Dharma teacher action is teaching. To open your mouth is wrong! Going around with women, spending time with women, is wrong! Your job is to be a Dharma teacher.

Everything you said about new students, more demonstrations, and a newspaper article for Shim Gum Do is wonderful. I hope the Shim Gum Do school becomes Number One in America. When will the yoga school begin?

Chung Dal Seu Nim will go to Korea October 1. I haven't gone to Sambosa yet.

I hope you will do hard training, become a great Dharma teacher, and save all people. Now, always keep a clear mind, keep Big I.

The third patriarch said, "The True Way is not difficult. Only throw away 'I like' and 'I don't like'.

I ask you a question for homework; The mouse eats the cat's food, but the cat's bowl is broken. What does it mean?



See you soon.

S.S.

P.S. You must not use “Gassho”. “Gassho” is Japanese. If you sign that way, you must use “Hapchang.”

A Dharma Speech by Seung Sahn Soen Sa

Tahl Mah Sah Opening - March 30, 1974

(Strikes with staff three times)

Today, we are having the opening ceremony of Tahl Mah Sah. Many of you come, and I am very happy to have this opening.

What is the Dharma? Dharma has two meanings. One is the Dharma as when we say the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The second meaning is Dharma as in the name of Bodhidharma, the first Patriarch of Zen in China (in Korean, Bodhidharma's name is just "Dharma"). Therefore, opening Tahl Mah Sah is opening the Dharma and opening the Dharma is opening mind. This means realization of your true self. Therefore, today, we are opening our Tahl Mah Sah. This has the significance of realizing the truth of the universe, finding the Great I, the true I.

"I" is divided into three: Small I, Nothing I, and Great I. The small I has many desires, thoughts, attachments, and hindrances. This small I wanders in the suffering sea. The nothing I has cut off all thinking. This is the state of no-mind, the mind before thought. In it is no Buddha, no God, no mountain, no river. Everything is empty. If we cling to this, we fall into emptiness and lose the true way. What is the Great I? Here, there is no inside or outside, and all thinking stops. Then, whatever I see, whatever I hear, everything is truth. The whole universe is I and I and the whole universe become one. When I see the mountain, the mountain and I are not two. When I hear music, music and I are not two. Such a state is called the Great I. That is the true I.

On this occasion of Tahl Mah Sah's opening, I hope you may realize the truth of the great universe and realize the true I. Then, what is the true I? Here, I will give you the key to open your true mind.

(Strikes his staff)

Is it open or not open? If you say open, I will give you thirty blows. If you say not open, I will give you thirty blows.

Why?

KATZ!!

Open the door through downtown.

Boulder, Col.

August 10, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for your most recent “hit”—my humble apologies for soiling this almost clean white paper with thinking and even thinking about thinking.

My overall state is very good. Teaching is the best it has ever been for me—the tremendous enthusiasm, hunger, and sincerity of the students helps me rise beyond myself at times. My practice continues (I bow 108 times to the Cambridge Zen Center each morning) and my health flourishes. My first real exposure to real mountains is beyond words. I try to get to my favorite spot, near a glacier lake 10,000 feet high. “What am I?” at 10,000 feet!!!! At times I am a bit lonely for you all. Rinpoche is a Tantric master—there is much drinking, sex, dancing, drugs, etc. Ten years ago this might have been exciting for me; now I just watch. I have met many people here and at least some will be sitting with us this winter. One possibly good thing happened yesterday. I was asked to join a group of people who are making a small publication of all the places to get serious meditation instruction in the USA. It is going to be rather strict; in fact one person is being paid to travel around and check to make sure that real meditation instruction and practice goes on. It is headed by Baba Ram Das (ask Stephen about him) who has a mailing list of many thousand people. So many many people will know about our work. I would like to get the address of your west coast center immediately so that it can be included in the first issue. This group also has some money and will attempt to support serious teaching; but this will not be for some time yet.

A few questions. What is the relationship between asking “What am I?” and the flow of thoughts, perceptions, etc.? For example, do you address the question to particular thoughts, pains in the knee when sitting, etc.? When a thought comes, do you ask whom this thought is coming to? Do you do it with each thought as it comes in turn? each dominant sensation? or do you simply keep the question alive and let everything else come and go? In other words, are you mindful of the thought content and ask the question with each particular event in mind, or do you not pay much attention to the content of the mind, pouring energy into the question instead? Related to this are common student problems. Many students have asked how to work with problems like fear, anger, masturbation, etc. Should they enter into the content of the fear anger, etc.? Should they acknowledge the fear and then ask to whom the fear is coming? Should they let it all happen and pour energy into the big question? Part of the problem seems to be that people can ask the question amidst the flow of ordinary thoughts, but when very dramatic states, personal problems come up, they find it hard to pay attention to the question, which seems remote.

I look forward to seeing you soon. When do you leave for California? I hope to be back in time for the August sesshin. It sounds like I won't recognize the Center—many changes.

Until then, I hope your English and health are good.

Love,

Byon Jo

P.S. Perhaps the most important lesson for me here is a negative one. Being exposed to so many different teachers and teachings has only made your approach stand out with even greater clarity. People here read, talk, and think even more than I do!!!! Can you believe that?

Cambridge

August 15, 1974

How are you, Byon Jo? Thank you for your long letter. I already understand that your teaching is very good. Before, you only understood everything; now you have attained the hit.

In your letter you say you have been practicing What am I? at 10,000 feet. That's good. But rather than saying at 10,000 feet, it would be better to say What am I? is 10,000 feet.

Drinking, sex, drugs—these actions are neither good nor bad. But people get attached to these actions very easily, and they make new karma through their attachment actions. Karma means hindrance. Hindrance is suffering. If someone is not attached to drinking, sex, etc., then there is no hindrance. No hindrance is freedom. Freedom means Big I. You must check to find out if these people are attached to drink and sex. Many people think, "I am not attached to such-and-such." But "I am not attached" is attachment thinking. "I am not attached" is the same as "I am attached."

About What am I?—The true What am I? is the complete question. Only the don't-know mind. All the questions which you asked me in your letter are thinking. If you keep the complete What am I?, then you don't know What am I? All thinking has been cut off, so how can the question appear? Asking who is thinking is not the correct way. This is opposites thinking. This is an opposites question, not the complete question, the perfect question. Pain is pain, the question is the question. Why ask the question about pain? Together thinking is no good. If you are keeping the complete question, there is no pain. These actions—anger, fear, etc. are made by before karma, so the result is anger action, etc. If a person sits Zen, he will make his karma disappear and he will no longer be caught up in these actions. So when you are angry, afraid, etc., only try Zen. If you happen to get angry, that's all right, don't worry. "I want to cut off this anger!"—this is thinking. Anger is not bad, not good. Only don't be attached to it. Only ask What am I? and the action will soon disappear. When the Buddha was alive, there was one woman who sold her body to many men. But whenever a man came together with her, he attained enlightenment. She was selling sex, but teaching Dharma. So actions are not good not bad; only the

intention is important. If you think something is good, it is good; if you think it is bad, it is bad. If you want to cut off all thinking and all karma, you must practice Zen.

Me too, I miss you. When will you come back to the Cambridge Zen Center? I will leave for California on Sept. 17 or 18. I will be in Cambridge during the August sesshin with you.

Here is a question for you: Whenever anyone asked Lin-chi Zen master a question, he would answer, "Katz!" Tok-sahn Zen master would only hit the questioner. Ku-ji Zen master would only lift up one finger. Are these three answers the same or different? If you answer me, I will hit you thirty times. And if you don't answer, I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?

See you soon.

S.S.

Dear Seung Sahn,

Hello from Cambridge! I hope you enjoy the enclosed “Zen Comics”—perhaps it is good to practice english with.

Things here are fine. “What am I?” grows and grows...

The yoga school starts Saturday. I have two classes to begin with, one on Saturday mornings, the other a special class of mostly Professors and their wives and friends during the week. Each class will be two hours—body movements, breathing, and instructions on cleansing and diet, followed by an introduction to Zen sitting. At first only 1/2 hour sitting, then longer periods of time on the cushion. Dei Ja will give a yoga class for women, Jonnie will give a yoga class too. It will be called: Cambridge Zen Center Institute of Hatha Yoga.

Stephen and I were interviewed by a newspaperman from “East-West Journal”, an important paper. He took pictures of us eating, sitting, etc and will complete the interview with you when you return.

A friend of mind will bring two very wealthy people to speak to us soon. They have been generous with their time and money for others—perhaps they will help us as well.

Yesterday I had a very good interview for a teaching job that may be very helpful for us. The job is at Boston University, a large, good school 10 minutes from Cambridge. What is unusual about the position is that I could be a University Professor which means that I would not be in any special subject (e.g. Psychology, Philosophy, etc)—it would allow me to teach whatever I want (even Dharma!). It pays much money which would make supporting the Zen Center easier. But it is hard to get—especially since most Professor’s are not ready to let someone come in at a high level to teach Zen, Yoga, etc. If they give me the job they will have to let me teach what I like.

A few questions:

1) I have heard sounds “in my head” while meditating for a few years now—but now it has become very strong and it comes within a few minutes of sitting. it sounds like many crickets (insects) or a loud sea shell—very pleasant. It comes in response to “What am I?” Do I watch it like a tiger? disappear into it? forget it Does this have anything to do with Avalokiteshvara-Bodhisattva’s method of separating hearing from outside sounds and turning inwards to hear the self-nature.

2) Regarding Re-birth. To be honest, I have no actual experience (or don’t know it) of ever having been alive before; nor do I know what happens upon death to the physical body. The Buddhist theory of rebirth is very intelligent and plausible but I have as said no direct awareness of this truth. Two very psychic people have told me that I was oriental once

before and since being a little child I have always been very comfortable with the oriental style of living. Once on LSD special medicine I felt that I had been a very wild primitive hunter type person in Mongolia; but did not take this for an actual picture of a past life.

I do feel much more “close” to the ideas of one-ness, emptiness in Buddhism but this is because of a *little* experience of such possibilities on LSD. Who is there to be reborn? It is not a constant since *everything* changes. Many people at the Zen Center and in Cambridge seem very confident about re-birth. I don’t know! It is not absolutely necessary for my practice because even if this were “my” one and only life I would sit Zen anyway. Can you help me? I certainly trust that Buddha, the Patriarchs and yourself are not liars but I need to know from within myself too.

I must also admit that my “little I” hates the Koan method—of all the spiritual methods, yoga, chanting, mantra, breathing, etc it is the only one that “little I” really dislikes. My professor-mind moves like a car on square wheels and flies like a plane with noodles for wings. It is good medicine for me! Come back soon and laugh with us again.

May your Buddha-teaching yield root-less skin-less non-fruit in America.

Love Byon Jo

October 21, 1974

Dear Byon Jo,

Thank you for your letter and book. The book is very good and I will read it and learn Zen-english words. Beginning the Yoga School is very good and I hope it grows every day and becomes the #1 Yoga school in the U.S.

The interview with the newspaper is also very good. Many people do not know true Zen so this article will be a good introduction to the Zen Center and everyday Zen action.

Now some Americans are coming to Tahl Mah Sah to sit Zen. They say that the Chogyee school (our way) is the middle way, between Soto and Rinzai schools. They like our school very much. There are several other Zen masters near here and many Zendo's but they say our school is the best way. Some of them want to become our students and will come to the Cambridge Zen Center. If they come to Cambridge, you must help them.

It is good if rich people come to the Zen center, but it is better if all people work hard on jobs and get money to buy a house that way. This way is a better way.

I hope you soon get a job and help all people. Many people are attached to name and form and if you are a Professor they will listen to you in a different way, making it easier for you to help people. So, I hope you get a job soon, help all people, and become a good Professor.

To answer your question about sound, this is original sound. If you are very quiet you will hear the sound but you should not be attached to the sound. Divine Light says this sound

is the original music. If anyone is very quiet, they will hear original sound but if attached to this sound, it will grow very big and this is not good. Only keep What am I? Then the sound will be What am I, What am I, .... sound. Then no sound is sound, sound is no sound. Then you will understand your true self. This is your true self.

Your true self has no outside, no inside  
Sound is clear mind, clear mind is sound  
Sound and hearing are not separate, there is only sound

I ask you—now you have body, does it exist or is it emptiness?  
the rainbow, how many colors are in it?

Somebody says there are 5 colors, somebody says 7, another person says 12, somebody else says 30, and another person says there are 100 separate colors. Which is correct?

The rainbow has no color originally.

Buddhism separates lives into a past, a present, and a future  
Christianity has no past, only the present and future  
Taoism has no past and no future, only the present

Which is correct?

The Heart Sutra says that name and form is emptiness, emptiness is name and form. If you are attached to name and form, then all things appear and disappear but if you cut all thinking then everything does not appear and does not disappear.

Buddhism says there is rebirth, is this correct or not correct?  
If you say correct, I will hit you thirty times.  
If you say not correct, I will also hit you thirty times. Why?  
Already you understand. The cat likes the mouse.

When you don't make "small I", and you don't make professor, and you are not attached to the Koan teaching, all thinking returns to your true self and your mind is clear. Mind is like a blackboard, you make pictures on it like small I, professor, mountain, etc. When you erase it, everything disappears. At first everything disappears, then you must make only Bodhisattva picture. Bodhisattva means—no desire for myself, only help all people. So I wish you to

PUT IT DOWN  
PUT IT DOWN  
PUT IT ALL DOWN

Here is a poem for you:

Color body and Karma (thinking) body come from where?  
Before thinking there is no name and no form  
And infinite time and infinite space  
The children chase butterflies with a net  
Wind comes and the apple falls to the ground from the tree.



I hope you will get enlightenment and soon become a great man.

See you soon,

S.S.

Sunday, October 6, 1974

Dear Soen sa nim

How are you? Thank you for your letter—it was good to hear from you. In your letter you asked me—thinking mind, happy mind, unhappy mind, angry mind, doing Kwanseum Bosal mind—are these the same or different?

I answer—KATZ! and also Tomorrow is Monday. I will sew three black zafus and a pair of meditation pants.

You say that now to open the mouth is wrong so I will not say too much. Nowadays, I am very well, working hard at this sewing business. Good feelings come and go, bad feelings come and go—I don't care—only Kwanseum Bosal. I am grateful for your teaching. Please be well.

HAPCHANG,

Lynn  
Kwang Un

Dear Lynn,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. Nowadays, what are you doing?

Your answer is KATZ. This is very good but this KATZ, does it kill all Buddhas or does it give life to all Buddhas? When you add words to KATZ, it makes your tail very long so you must be very careful when you enter a room or it will get caught in the door. A long tail is very dangerous so I do not like them.

I like your action very much; working, good feelings, bad feelings, all come and go. You just keep Kwanseum Bosal. Many people have a lot of bad Karma. Some people understand bad Karma themselves while other people do not.

Buddha said: “if you don't understand yourself during this lifetime, then even one drop of water will be difficult to digest.”

I hope always your action is done with Kwanseum Bosal.

See you soon,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? How is your pain in your mouth? I hope you are better. I hope you are not tired.

I got to Providence 2 weeks ago. The next day I got a job with Bobby as a nurse's aide. All day I help people eat, wash, dress and go to the bathroom. Some people are very sick, lonely, and in pain. It is hard work but I like it.

Don is in Pittsburg with his parents.

Nowadays I want to ask you a question. What is Zen? What is practicing?

I hope you'll come home soon. I miss you.

Love, Becky

November 2, 1974

Dear Becky,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and all the Providence family? I am very happy you have a job. Your job is very good Bodhisattva action. Every day you see, hear smell, taste, and touch. This is life!

Life is suffering, suffering is life.  
If you don't live, then you don't have death.  
So no suffering and no happiness.  
This is quiet happiness, this is Nirvana.

So, always keep Nirvana mind and your action will be great Bodhisattva action.

Now, you ask me. What is Zen?  
I will hit you thirty times!  
You ask What is practicing?

PUT IT DOWN PUT IT ALL DOWN

Here is a poem for you,

Sitting quietly in a grass house at midnight  
Quiet Quiet Silent Silent This is original nature!  
Why does the wind from the west move the field of grass?  
Only the sound of geese flying north in the cold autumn sky  
Gluck, Gluck, Gluck... .

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. I will return to Providence on November 12, (maybe).

Zen Master Ku San wrote to Ven. Duk San as follows:

“Once Zen master Ang Sang asked Zen master Wi San Yungwoo, ‘Where does the true Buddha dwell?’

“Wi San answered, ‘When origination and matter come together, they become light. This light is emptiness and this “empty” is “full”. When all phenomena, extinguished, return to the origin, then nature and form become clear. Origination is origination; matter is matter. Only like this—this is the true Buddha.’ At this remark, Ang San was suddenly enlightened.

“Now, Duk San, what is your view?”

Duk San wrote in reply as follows:

“It is said that there is no place of abode of mind. Duk San, the general of the guards keeping the gate of Sambosa on Robin mountain, has also no place of abode and no view.

“Regarding the dialogue between Ven. Ang San and Ven. Wi San, I give them both thirty blows and give the bodies to a hungry dog.”

Ven. Ku San wrote again as a reply:

“In your letter you mentioned that you are a general of the guards who keeps the gate, and so on—but in True Emptiness, there is no entry and no exit. So what do you guard?

“And, you said you hit Ang San and Wi San thirty times. Please give me an answer that is before words. You give them thirty blows. To whom do you give them?

“Ven Seung Sahn, how should I answer the question? I look forward to your kind instruction.”

S.S. Soen-sa answered to Ku San:

“The sword of the general who keeps the gate at Robin mountain kills Buddhas when it meets them, and kills patriarchs when it meets them as well. If Ven. Ku San opens his mouth here, he too shall have no way to escape from being killed by the pity-less sword.

“Regarding the second question, the thirty blows are given to Ang San and Wi San. Why do you carry these thirty blows on your own back?

“Katz!”

The sky is blue and the ground is yellow.

Oct. 4, 1974

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I think you are very busy. I like my job very much, but sometimes it is difficult to see so much suffering. All of these old people are very attached to name and form. They're bodies will soon die, and they are very unhappy.

I am sending you a letter that our lawyer sent to the immigration department. He explained that the Providence Zen Center has a tax exemption. It is a good letter.

So please have a good time in California. It is very cold in Providence this morning. I am going to work soon and all the family is chanting downstairs. It sounds very beautiful.

Bobby

Oct. 11, 1974

Dear Bobby,

How are you and all the family? Thank you for your letter.

You mentioned in your letter that you see many old people suffering in the hospital. If they understand the following principle, it will help them.

All the elements (Dharmas) are impermanent;  
There is, therefore, the law of appearance and disappearance.  
When appearance and disappearance is extinguished,  
The very quiescence is the real bliss.

It is because they do not understand the principle that they are suffering and unhappy. It may be your task to help them understand it and be free from suffering and being unhappy.

I showed the copy of the letter from our lawyer to Mr. Hannon, another lawyer here. He said it is very good to have the letter sent to the Immigration Office. I thank you that you sent me the letter.

Here the weather is so nice, warm and dry.

I think Becky and Dan have arrived there safely and with much joy during the trip. I hope Dan will get along well with all of you for his good practice.

More people are getting interested in the Zen training we have there. Mr. Lee and Mr. Muzika may come to our center.

I hope many zen masters be produced at our PZC, which would be the best in the U.S.A. Your work as the house master is the Bodhisattva way.

Yesterday evening, I gave a Dharma speech at the Los Angeles Zen center, requested by Maezumi Roshi. I felt at the center the atmosphere was quite strict and rigid. About fifty people were there. The following is what I talked:

“Form is emptiness; emptiness is form; no form; no emptiness.  
Form is form; emptiness is emptiness.

Of the three statements which is the correct one? If you choose the correct one you shall have thirty blows; if you do not choose the correct one, you shall have thirty blows as well. Why? Katz! Three times three is nine.

(Raising the stick), do you see this? (Hitting the floor with the stick), do you hear this? Then what is it that sees and hears it? Are the three, the zen stick, sound, and the mind, the same one or different from one another? If you say they are the same, you can not avoid being a corpse; if you say they are different, you can not yet avoid being a corpse. Why? Katz! You have to enter into the tiger den in order to catch a tiger.”

This is roughly what I spoke. Then I asked for questions. One person asked the following question:

“You mentioned,” he asked after a bow, “form, emptiness, and no-form, no emptiness. Which of the three are you dwelling in?”

“Don’t you know?” I replied.

“I like being here with you,” he answered.

“I hit you,” I said.

“Thank you,” he said.

Then there were no questions. So I talked a little more, this time, about Man Kong and Kyung Heo zen masters. The story of Kyung Heo zen master is that he got enlightenment at the question, “What is the cow that has no nose-holes?”

As a conclusion, I said,

“I hope that all of you ride very soon on a cow that has no nose-holes and enter into the village where flowers bloom in the spring and snow falls in the winter.”

I think they liked my speech very much. Mr. Lee translated it into English.

Bobby, I write a poem for you.

Autumn leaves fall by the cold wind.  
Is it right or wrong?  
Here is a scripture  
Which is not made of paper  
And no letters are in it.  
But is always sends forth rays  
Thus illuminating the darkness.  
Then  
Mountain is mountain; river is river;  
Red is red; white is white;  
Everything is clear, as it is.

See you very soon. I send you a gift for all of you. Bye, bye.

S.S.



Zen Dialogue with Seung Sahn Soen Sa

Cambridge Zen Center, August 29, 1974

Student A—It says in the Heart Sutra that there is no attainment, with nothing to attain. Then why are we practicing?

Soen-sa—Do you understand no attainment?

Student—I don't know.

Soen-sa—No attainment is attainment. You must attain no attainment. So what is attainment? What is there to attain?

Student—Emptiness?

Soen-sa—In true emptiness there is no name and no form. So there is no attainment. If you say, "I have attained true emptiness," you are wrong.

Student—Is there false emptiness?

Soen-sa—The universe is always true emptiness. Now you are living in a dream. Wake up! (Laughter.) Then you will understand true emptiness.

Student—How can I wake up?

Soen-sa—I hit you. Very simple. (Laughter.)

Student—What is this dream?

Soen-sa—*This* is a dream.

Student—Do I look like I'm dreaming?

Soen-sa—Yah. (Laughter.) What is not a dream? Give me one sentence of not-dream words. All is a dream.

Student—Are you dreaming?

Soen-sa—Yah! (Laughter.) You make the dream, so I am having it. It is a good dream. It is a Zen-lecture dream. (Laughter.) But how can you wake up? This is very important. Your whole past life is the same as a dream, isn't it? The future is the same as a dream. And this present moment is the same as a dream. So tell me—how can you wake up?

Student—You put me in an impossible situation. How can I wake up if I'm sleeping?

Soen-sa—O.K., let me ask you—what is good?

Student—Good is thinking.

Soen-sa—Who made good?

Student—I did.

Soen-sa—Where does I come from?

Student—I comes from I.

Soen-sa—You understand the word “I”, but you don't understand the true I. Where does I come from?

Student—From thinking.

Soen-sa—Thinking is also a word. Where does thinking come from?

Student (slowly, after a long silence)—I really don't know.

Soen-sa—Very good. This is the complete don't-know mind. Don't know means don't know. There are no words and no speech—only don't know. Only don't know means that all thinking is cut off. Cutting off all thinking is true emptiness. This is how you begin to wake up.

Student—In daily life, many people ask us for our opinions and judgments. “Do you like this? Do you like that?” Should we avoid such conversations?

Soen-sa—Why should you avoid them?

Student—Because they make me feel like an individual, a separate entity. I begin to feel my Small I more strongly.

Soen-sa—When you are walking, your hand moves back and forth, like this. (Demonstrates.) This is not-thinking action. So if you talk, don't be attached to talking. No-attachment thinking is not thinking. If you are attached to your thinking, this creates karma. If you are not attached, you don't create karma. Today my English teacher at the Harvard Summer School gave me some homework. Very difficult. (Laughter.) How can I do this? Don't know. Only this big question. I eat but there is no taste. I only keep the big homework question inside. On the way home in the bus there is only my homework, so I forget to get off at Fayerweather Street. If you keep this mind, seeing is the same as not seeing, hearing is the same as not hearing, working is the same as not working. This is no-attachment thinking. Only the big question. Then talking is no-attachment action. So talking is not talking. You use your eyes, but there are no eyes. You use your mouth, but there is no mouth. If you keep a clear mind, red is red, white is white. But you are not attached to red, not attached to white. Only red, only white. “I like this” is only “I like this”. “I don't like this” is only “I don't like this”. This mind is the same as a child's mind.

So here there is no attainment, with nothing to attain. This means that before thinking there are no words and no speech. If you keep don't know mind, there is no attainment, with nothing to attain. Attainment is a name. This is thinking mind. Attainment and no attainment are opposites. Before thinking is the Absolute. No speech, no words. So there is nothing. If you open your mouth, you are wrong. Then what is attainment? Only Katz! Only hit.

Student—It's very difficult to keep the koan while I'm working. What can I do?

Soen-sa—Yah, at the beginning it is difficult. It is the same as driving a car. When you learn to drive and a person walks in front of your car, you step on the brake hard. Jolt. This is thinking action. But after you have driven a lot, you step on the brake automatically when you want to stop. This is reflex action, not-thinking action. When you begin koan practice, the don't-know mind and your work are separate, fighting. But after much practice, don't-know mind is work mind, work mind is don't-know mind. When you do our morning chanting, there is only chanting. If you are thinking, you will forget the words or make a mistake. With don't-know mind it is very easy to remember, very easy to work. Zen mind is clear mind. When you begin "What am I?", you may become attached to the words. This is no good.

Student—I feel like I've already understood that koan, understood true emptiness. But then I forget, I'm back in the world of duality. Is what I've understood not true emptiness?

Soen-sa—If you understand emptiness, this is not emptiness. It is only a word. You understand the word emptiness. Have you ever tasted kim chee, Korean pickled cabbage? It is very hot. When guests come to dinner here I tell them that kim chee is very hot. But they don't really know what this "hot" means until they experience it for themselves. So I give them a piece of kim chee. Ow!!!Hot!!! (Laughter.) Other people understand that kim chee is hot, but they haven't tasted it. Once they taste it, then they really understand what hot means. They have attained hot. So understanding hot is not the same as attaining hot. Many young Americans understand one mind. But they don't truly understand one mind. Their understanding is only thinking. So understanding emptiness and attaining emptiness are different. If you attain emptiness one time, you have attained it forever. You don't forget. You say you understand emptiness. Then what is emptiness?

Student—This is emptiness.

Soen-sa—You say it is emptiness. I say it is not emptiness. You have your hand, your voice, your body. In emptiness there is no hand, no voice, no body. What is true emptiness? This is very important. In true emptiness there are no words. If you open your mouth, you are wrong. So... what color is this door?

Student—(Silence.)

Soen-sa—What color is this?

Student—You have eyes.

Soen-sa—Eyes? I have no eyes. These are not eyes. They are holes in my face. (Laughter.) I ask you once again—what color is this door?

Student—(Silence.)

Soen-sa—It is brown.

Student—But if I'd said brown, you would have said I'm attached to color!

Soen-sa—Brown is only brown. (Pointing to a glass of water) What is this?

Student—Water.

Soen-sa—Yah. Water is water. This is not thinking. When you said, “water”—*this* mind. This mind is very important. It is a clear mirror. Red comes, the mirror is red. Yellow comes, the mirror is yellow. Water comes, there is water. A door comes, there is a door. If you are not thinking, your mind is the same as a mirror. Only like this. So true emptiness is clear mind. In original clear mind there is no name and no form. Nothing appears or disappears. Only like this. If you are thinking, you are in a dream. Cut off all your thinking and wake up.

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Student B—I'm a bit confused about the concept of karma. Could you please explain?

Soen-sa—Karma is like a rainbow. It is very beautiful, but it doesn't exist. But if my mind is sad, it is not beautiful. If you think happy, then the whole universe is happy. If you think sad, all your friends, people, everything is no good. If you think funny, people are funny, animals are funny, Cambridge is funny, the universe is funny. If you have good thinking, you make good karma. Bad thinking, bad karma. It is like a dream. Good karma appears, then it disappears and bad karma appears. They change back and forth. Even if you keep good karma for a long time, bad karma is waiting for you. So what is true good karma? This is very important. A dream may be good or bad. It may be a dream of bliss or a nightmare. But a dream is a dream. You must wake up from all dreams. It is not important whether the dream is good or bad. Only don't be attached. If someone gives me much money, that's good, I will take it. If someone says, “Give it to me,” I will give it away. Don't be attached to anything. Then you will be free of everything. No hindrance. If you are attached to even one thing, you will suffer. Cut off all your attachments. This is waking up.

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Student C—What are you?

Soen-sa—What did you say?

Student—What are you?

Soen-sa—What did you say?

Student (very slowly)—What...are...you?

Soen-sa—Thank you very much. (Laughter.) Do you understand?

Student—No.

Soen-sa—I said, “Thank you very much.” What are you?

Student—I don’t know.

Soen-sa—I hit you. Now do you understand?

Student—No.

Soen-sa—O.K. You asked me, “What are you?” I answered, “What did you say?” You said again, “What are you?” I answered again, “What did you say?” You said one more time, “What are you?” So I said, “Thank you very much.” The dialogue was already finished. But you didn’t know that. So I asked you, “What are you?” You didn’t know. So I hit you. Do you understand? “What did you say?” was my answer to your question. Everybody understood this answer. So you were teaching everybody. So I said, “Thank you very much.” But you didn’t understand your own teaching. So I hit you.

Student—Thank you very much.

November 20, 1974

Ven. Seung Sahn  
c/o Providence Zen Center  
48 Hope Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Soen Sa,

Since you left Los Angeles, Satam and I have been conducting daily sittings every morning at the I.B.M.C., chanting in Korean style, sitting for half hour then having discussions based on your kong an book. Usually See Hoy, Katy Mann and one or two others join us. That style of practice is popular with American students and I believe that the group will grow. Lincoln must be busy at Talh ma Sa because we do not see him.

We are starting from the beginning of book 2 in the kong an book so we are not repeating directly the area you covered. Sometimes everyone understands but sometimes none of us do. For example, in the story about Hui-neng and the student who came from Seung Sahn and was sent away to ask himself "What am I?", he comes back and answers "To use this thing as a doorbell is not correct." None of us really know where that reply is pointing because we do not understand what the words mean. Would you help?

In the September '74 issue of the Providence Zen Center Newsletter there is a translation of the "Family Tradition of the Lin-chi (Yimje) School" along with your commentary. Could you send me the Chinese text to the "Family Tradition..."?

I am still doing my homework. You set me to find the one short phrase from your kong an book that will close the last escape hole for the ashes dropper.

A. (drops ashes on the Buddha)

B. Stop that!

A. Why?

B. You are getting the Zendo dirty.

A. (hit)

B. So, you understand one, do you understand two?

A. (hit)

B. Your mind and those ashes, are they the same or different?

A. (hit)

B. You only understand emptiness, you don't understand your mind.

A. (hit)

B. I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow. (walks away)

The line that is underlined in red is the one that closes the escape hole. The rest is the same scene I have given you before.

The other homework was the cat's bowl. I don't have any answer yet. It is getting unclear in my mind. Should the focus be on "Why is the bowl broken?" or on "What does this mean?"

Gossip and news: A couple of weeks ago, I went with Ven. Thien An to the Esalen Institute at Big Sur to help him conduct a weekend meditation for people at the Institute. Since that is near Carmel, Han San Lee came down and had breakfast with us. Actually, the best thing about the weekend was the hot baths—after the sitting at night was over, we went down to the hot springs and spend a couple of hours alternately boiling ourselves and cooling off in the sea breeze. Really nice!!

Weekend after this, I am going to the Tibetan Nyingmapa Meditation Center in Berkeley to give a seminar on the Diamond Sutra (I think I gave you a copy of my translation didn't I?).

If you have time for them, I would like to continue writing in place of having interviews with you. That is really missed when you are away from Los Angeles. Mostly my practice has been trying to keep my mind clear during the course of ordinary life and business: when red comes reflecting red, when idiots come, reflecting idiots...

Please send news of your centers in the East. Did Becky get her letter through to Leo Pruden with the address I sent her? I will write a more precise address for him below.

Also enclosed you will find the revision I did of the English translation of the Heart Sutra we use at IBMC.

Gassho,

An-Hanh (Michael)

Nov. 29, 1974

Dear Ven. Sa Haeng Peop-sa,

Thank you for your letter. How are all Zen students? This sitting and chanting Korean style is very good. But does Dr. Thien-an like it? If he doesn't approve, then it would be better not to continue it.

At the Cambridge and Providence Zen Centers, all students also like this style. I think you are teaching well, so in the future many people will study with you there. I hope it becomes a great zendo and saves all people.

About the Hui-neng story: this translation is not correct, and I wasn't aware of the mistake. The answer should be: "You said 'thing'—this is not correct."

I am sending you a copy of the Family Tradition of the Lin-chi School.

About your homework: Answers 1, 2, and 3 are O.K. In answer 4 you use "mind". Why do you need it? So this is a little no good. Answer 5 is also no good. You need one more sentence. How did the man become a dead cow? He is not dead; he is alive and very strong. If you were this man and the Zen master taught you in this style, would you understand? You must fix his mind. How is this possible? He must soon understand. "Ah, I am no good, my action was wrong. I am sorry."

Your focus on the kong an should be "What does it mean?" The meaning is behind the words. There are four things you must check: mouse, cat food, cat bowl, and broken.

The weekends that you describe are very good. I would like to visit Esalen one time.

Thank you for the translation of the Diamond Sutra. I think it is a very good translation. All the students at the Providence Zen Center like it.

Continuing these letter-interviews is good.

Thank you also for the translation of the Heart Sutra. It too is very fine. I have only one criticism. Why did you use the Japanese versions Kanjishi and Sarishi, rather than the Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara and Shariputra? I think Sanskrit would be better, because it is wider and not bound to any nation. Vietnamese, Koreans, and Chinese may not like these Japanese words. Otherwise, the translation is very good.

I am sending you Zen Master Won Hyo's Starter's Mind.

See you soon.

S.S.



Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thanks for your good answer.

1) The question was, "What have you attained?" My answer was, "You wear gray robes, I wear black ones." You said, "Your answer is not good and not bad. But many Zen masters would say, 'No good! You are attached to color!' If they said this, what could you do?" I would say, "Katz! Today is November 20th."

2) The koan: "The mouse eats cat food, but the cat bowl is broken. My answer was, "Mice are gray, the sun comes up in the East, my socks are red, the cat bowl lies on the floor." You said, "This is scratching your left foot when your right one itches." My new answer is, The mouse is full, the cat is hungry.

3) To the man who blows smoke in the Buddha's face—I smile and give him an ash tray!

A blank tape is coming. Please record chants without gong (I have one with gong)—so I can understand the words. Do you have a cassette player? Perhaps, if you do, we can exchange voice letters. If you don't maybe we can take up a collection here so you can buy one.

I made a copy of the koan book. Do you ever add pages? If you do, can I get new pages?

I don't know when we will find a place to start the L.B. meditation center. Dr. Thien-an will help later, perhaps. Since he will help sponsor, I will have to go thru his ordination (he ignores my Soto ordination) on Bodhi Day (Dec. 8) at the International Buddhist Meditation Center.

I will always consider you my Zen master, as I learned more in our few meetings than in 7 or 8 years under several masters. *Thank you!*

Is there some special way to understand 0, 90, 180, 270, 360 koans? and typical responses to each? I could not (due to work load) be at morning discussion-mondo's. I'm like the guy in the zendo—I understand empty, I know the sun comes up in the East, when I'm thirsty I drink. But I'm attached to desire—particularly sex and freedom. Since I consider *you* my real master, I shall follow your advice.

The sun is setting  
The clouds are beautiful

Hapchang,

Jack

Nov. 29, 1974

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter.

1) Your answer before was, "You wear gray robes, I wear black ones." This was already a correct answer. So I said it was not good and not bad.

"But many Zen masters would say, 'No good! You are attached to color!' If they said this, what could you do?" If you say "Katz!", then the Zen master says, "Your head is a dragon, your tail is a snake." Your second answer is no good. Already you gave a 360 degree answer: why do you back up to 180 degrees? The Zen master is checking your mind one more time. So you must become a dragon in your second answer too. You must find the Zen master's mistake. If you find his mistake, what do you do? This is very important. You said, "Katz! Today is November 20th!" That's O.K., but it is being attached to the Zen master's words. So it's not O.K.

2) You say, "The mouse is full, the cat is hungry." I say, "The dog runs after the bone." You must find the meaning behind the words of the koan. There are four things: mouse, cat food, cat bowl, and broken. You must ask what this mouse is, what this cat food is, etc. Check these four things and find the meaning behind them. As for your answer—how did you understand that the mouse is full and the cat is hungry? You make the mouse full; you make the cat hungry. So I hit you thirty times.

3) You smile at the man who dropped ashes on the Buddha and give him an ashtray. Does this action fix his mind? If I were this man I still wouldn't understand. I would kick the ashtray out of your hand! What can you do? So please fix his mind with a good answer.

The language of the chanting on the tapes is very clear. The bell part is important. So I need a little bell. You must learn both the words and the bell part. Tape #1 has first the morning bell chant, next the usual morning chanting, next Korean ceremonial chanting. #2 has the evening bell chant, next nembutsu (kwanseum bosal) chanting, then Zen talk. I hope you get the tape and learn and soon attain enlightenment.

Tape letters would be very difficult for me. My English is not good, so it is much easier for me to read letters and then to dictate my answers. So ordinary letters are good.

I am sending you a new kong an. There will be several more fairly soon, and I will send them to you.

Becoming a monk once is good, becoming a monk again is not so good. But if you want it, it's all right.

You said, "thank you" for what you learned in our few meetings. You're welcome. You must do hard training. Then you will understand me. If you don't understand Zen, you can't understand me. You must be a good Zen student.

On the tape, one of my students read an explanation of the Zen circle. When you hear it, all the degrees will be clearer to you.

I am also sending you the great Zen Master Won Hyo's Starter's Mind. Please read it many times. Then you will understand your true way. Many people have bad karma. But for Zen people just-now mind is very important. Just-now mind as it continues from moment to moment becomes your life. So if just-now mind is bad, your life is bad. If just-now mind is good, your life is good. If just-now mind has no desire for yourself but only for all people, then your life is the life of a Bodhisattva. So how do you keep just-now mind? This is very important. Sex and freedom are not bad, not good. But desire for myself sex is bad sex; desire for myself freedom is bad freedom. Sex that has no desire for myself, freedom with no desire for myself—this is Bodhisattva action. You must keep the thinking that neither appears nor disappears. Always keep clear mind, "like this" mind. I hope you will soon understand yourself and save all people.

You wrote:                   The sun is setting  
                                      The clouds are beautiful

I wanted to write these very words, but you took the words out of my mouth. So I have nothing left to say. But I ask you not to lose the mind that wrote these words.

See you soon,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How is the excellent Zen Master from Providence?

I have questions concerning the Heart Sutra:

- 1) Why is Nirvana *not attained*, but complete enlightenment, Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi, *is gained*?
- 2) What is the difference between Nirvana and Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi—between 180 degrees and “like this”—such that 180 degrees is not attained and 360 degrees is attained?
- 3) When the mind disappears at 180 degrees, doesn’t the “like this” mind automatically appear?
- 4) The first part of the Sutra says: Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. But the second part says, In emptiness there is no form. One sentence says they are identical, one sentence says they are not. I think I understand, but can you say something about this?

Also, can you write me whenever you have additional information about the 100-day summer retreat, such as when, where, etc.

Sincerely,

Ed Muzika

Nov. 29, 1974

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. How are you doing lately? Is it good or bad?

In answer to your questions:

- 1) “Why is Nirvana not attained?—I hit you.  
“Why is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi attained?”—The sky is blue, the tree is green. Do you understand my answer? Then you understand no attainment and attainment.
- 2) You ask about the difference between Nirvana and Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. Nirvana is like an empty mirror—no good, no bad, no color, no form, no anything. But

when yellow comes, the mirror reflects yellow; when white comes, the mirror becomes white. To dwell in Nirvana for a long time is to be attached to emptiness. This is no good, because then you cannot save all people. In Nirvana there are no people, no Buddhas, no suffering, no happiness—only quiet. So it is being attached to this quiet happiness, attached to my own peace. But past 180 degrees, you arrive at 360 degrees. Then all is clear. Suffering is suffering, happiness is happiness. So when you meet people who are suffering, you save them from their suffering. When you meet people who are happy, you are happy together. You must teach the true way. The true way is the great Bodhisattva way. If you find the great Bodhisattva way, this is 360 degrees.

3) You ask, “When the mind disappears at 180 degrees, doesn’t the ‘like this’ mind automatically appear?” 180 degrees is only true empty mind. “Like this” mind is the mind that neither appears nor disappears. But what is true empty mind? What is the mind that neither appears nor disappears. It is very necessary not to be attached to name and form. 180 degrees and “like this” are only teaching words. Don’t be attached to words.

4) Form is emptiness, emptiness is form—this is 90 degrees.

No form, no emptiness—this is 180 degrees.

But if you are not attached to words, these two are the same. So we divide: form is emptiness, emptiness is form; no form, no emptiness. Next. Gate’ gate’ paragate’ bodhi swaha. This means that form is form, emptiness is emptiness. You must understand these three kinds. But of these three, which one is correct?

If you say that any are correct, I will hit you thirty times. But if you say that none are correct, I will still hit you thirty times.

So what is the true meaning of the Heart Sutra?

About the 100-day retreat. We must first find a suitable place in the country and organize the retreat. As we are very busy nowadays at the Cambridge and Providence Zen Centers, it may not happen until the summer after this. But I will certainly keep you informed.

See you soon,

S. S.

Nov. 21, 1974

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Do you remember me? Here is a picture of myself.

I have some questions:

In the fall, there are leaves on the ground. If they are on a person's lawn, they come out of their house and sweep them together into little piles. In the afternoon, the wind comes and blows all the leaves away. Most people are very mad at the wind. Some of them go out again and sweep the new leaves into new piles. But again, the wind comes and sweeps them away. The wind always blows all the dead leaves away. Then what work must be done? Should a person always sweep leaves into piles and feel bad because he knows the wind will come soon?

If the tree has no roots, then how can it stand?

I hope to see you next summer. I look forward to that time very much. See you then,

Peter Van Aken

Nov. 29, 1974

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter. If a person goes outside and stays with leaves and wind and people, he cannot find his way back home. Why are you attached to leaves and wind and people's anger? Who is it that sees these leaves? Who?

The Sixth Patriarch, long ago in China, once passed two monks who were arguing about a flag blowing in the wind. One monk said, "It is the flag that is moving." The second monk said, "It is the wind that is moving." The Sixth Patriarch said, "You are both wrong. It is not the flag, it is not the wind: it is your mind that is moving." In the same way, with the leaves, wind, anger, etc., when your mind is moving, then actions appear. But when your mind is not moving, the truth is just like this. The falling of the leaves is truth. The sweeping is truth. The wind's blowing them away is truth. The people's anger also is truth. If your mind is moving, you don't understand the truth. You must first understand that form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Next, no form, no emptiness. Then you will understand that form is form, emptiness is emptiness. Then all these actions are truth. And then you will find your true home. If you find your true home, come to me any time and tell me. I will check whether you have found it or not.

You say, "If the tree has no roots, how can it stand?" I say, "The dog runs after the bone." You must not be attached to words. First attain true emptiness. If you do not dwell in emptiness, you will get freedom and no hindrance. Then you will understand that the tree has no roots. Thinking is no good. Put it all down. Only "What am I?" This don't-know mind is very important. If you keep it for a long time, you will understand this tree without roots.

I will try to send you the newsletters. See you soon,

S.S.

December, 1974

Dear Rev. Satam;

Homage to the three precious gems.

I thank you very much for the letter you sent me. I fold my two hands and wish that you may make greater effort and achieve the great fruit as soon as possible.

Let us now discuss the koan.

Regarding the first one about the Buddha and the ashes, the problem is that he doesn't say whether the Buddha and the ashes are the same or not, he just drops ashes on the statue. If you ask him, as you said in your letter, whether it comes out of emptiness or existence, he will just hit you. And, he will ask you "Is this an empty blow or a real blow?" If you open your mouth in reply he will hit you again. What will you do?

When we admit that the Buddha statue is the Buddha statue, and that the ash is the ash, the problem is that Buddha said the Buddha body is permeating all of the Dharma realms and everything in existence in the universe has Buddha nature. That means that the Buddha nature is filling up the whole universe and that everything in the universe has Buddha nature. Therefore, where can you drop ashes if not on the Buddha body? This is the disease of this person. How are you going to cure this disease? Furthermore, he believes that the moment you open your mouth you are wrong.

The true Buddha nature and truth become wrong when you open your mouth because the true nature is without words and the truth is without movement and the true state is where the words and the way are cut off and the mind and action are extinguished. Therefore, whatever you may try to say you shall be mercilessly hit, so what will you do?

Regarding the second koan, you said "If you are hungry take a meal and have a good rest." Your legs itch but you are scratching my legs. And you think you will relieve the itching this way? Can this be done? You are trying to hit the moon with a stick. Your answer is 18,000 miles away from the correct one.

Your answer is 100% correct when the question is What is Buddha nature? or What is the mind? or What is Dharma? but my question is "The mouse is eating the cat's food and the cat's bowl is broken. What can you do?" There is special meaning outside the words. Don't be attached to the words. Don't be attached to your thinking or fall into emptiness either, just understand the clear meaning in the words, mouse, catfood, bowl and broken.

If you had a bell in front of you, when I asked you What is this? would you answer "If you are hungry, eat a good meal and have a good rest?" This answer is not completely correct. The bell is to be rung, the watch is to tell time, the pen is to write with, and the book is for



reading. Each has its own characteristic. When we act according to the characteristics of each of them, there is the great truth as it is, the absolute truth apart from words. This is the realm of the Great I. Therefore, the question has four parts—mouse, cat, foodbowl, and broken. These four parts combine together and there is a clear meaning behind the combination. Please try to catch this meaning.

Here is a poem for you.

The candy peddler is ringing his bell  
And the child cries for money from its mother  
Money becomes candy and candy becomes money  
Money goes to the peddlers pocket  
And candy goes to the child's mouth and is sweet.

Dear Rev. Satam, what do you say? Take one step forward at the 100 ft. cliff. Make a fierce effort.

Here is another poem.

I traced the steps of the cow that has been long forgotten  
Having caught her by the reign  
I hope you will ride on the cow playing the hole-less flute merrily  
And go into your home village where flowers bloom in the spring.

I sincerely hope that by keeping “What am I?” all the time, everytime and everywhere, you will attain the great fruit very soon.

S.S. Lee

P.S. Please tell Dae Haeng to study well and I wish that you will be good to him. If you can, translate this letter into English and return it to me.

Dear Master Lee,

My name is See Hoy. I attended some of the morning and evening sittings at Tahl Mah Sah temple while you were here in Los Angeles and live at I.B.M.C. You gave me the koan “What am I?” and a couple times we talked about how to work on koans.

I was painting a building with Lincoln and Karl a few days ago and trying to work on my koan at the same time. I didn’t know if I should work on my koan at same time as painting so I called Venerable Song Ryong Hearn and asked him. He said I should only paint so I asked if I could work on koan when driving and he said “only drive”, so I said how about when I am walking? he said “then just walk.” The next night I was sitting with Rev. Satam Lee and he said I should work on it all the time to have Big Question.

I am confused. Can you tell me when I should work on “What am I?” and how? When driving? When walking? or only when sitting?

I hope you are well. Lincoln said I should tell you I was Chinese so you might remember who. I kinda look like this (small drawing).

See Hoy

Dear See Hoy,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

In your letter, you don’t know how to keep your mind. Now I ask you, what are you? Do you understand? If you don’t understand, you only don’t know. Don’t know mind cuts off all thinking. This don’t know mind, your don’t know mind, my don’t know mind, and everybody’s don’t know mind are all the same don’t know mind. So, in don’t know mind there is no you, no I, no everybody, no mind. So, true emptiness. True emptiness means before thinking. Before thinking means only like this. Your before thinking, my before thinking, and everybody’s before thinking are the same. Why? Your before thinking is your substance, my before thinking is my substance, everybody’s before thinking is their substance. The universe’s substance, everybody’s substance, and your substance become one. So don’t know mind’s name is true emptiness, or before thinking, or substance, or like this. Like this is truth.

So now I ask you: Your don’t know mind and driving, walking, painting, and sitting mind—are these the same or different? If you say they are the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, also I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?

Long ago Zen Master Jo-Ju answered all questions with “Go drink tea.” “What is Buddha?”—”Go drink tea!” “What is Dharma?”—”Go drink tea!” “What is mind?”—”Go drink tea!”

True Buddha is no Buddha, true mind is no mind, true Dharma is no Dharma. So only go drink tea. When you drink tea, tea, your body, and your mind become one mind. If you play tennis, when the ball comes and you hit, your racket, your body, and your mind become one, and you only hit. So, drinking tea, playing tennis, inside and outside become one mind.

Tong Sahn Zen Master weighing flax on a scale was asked, “What is Buddha?” The scale was balanced at exactly three pounds, so he answered, “Three pounds of flax.” So, like this is truth.

If you keep don’t know mind, this don’t know mind is painting mind, driving mind, walking mind. Only keep don’t know mind *is* only drive mind. If you keep don’t know mind and driving mind with thinking, then they are separate. You must not be attached to the words “don’t know mind”. So only keep a clear don’t know mind. In clear don’t know mind there is no inside and no outside. Clear don’t know mind is sometimes Buddha, sometimes “KATZ!”, sometimes Dharma, sometimes karma, sometimes eating, sometimes driving sometimes painting, sometimes three pounds of flax. So you must keep don’t know mind, all the time. Then inside and outside become one. Because in don’t know mind there is no name and no form. Don’t be attached to anything.

Don’t know mind, Big Question, only driving, only walking, only painting; you must not be attached to any action. Only keep become-one-mind. So put it all down. Only: What am I?

When you do a three day retreat, fasting is better than eating. If you use mantra, keep the question “Who is using mantra?” If you don’t use mantra, then only keep “What am I?” all day. In the morning begin with 108 bows and chanting as it is done at Tahl Mah Sah and also do chanting at 7 P.M. Only use one room, whether in the country or city being up to you. Only drink water. On the first day begin at 6 o’clock with 108 bows and chanting. Every hour sit 50 minutes and walk ten minutes. Rest from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. Then 1 P.M. to 5 P.M. sit Zen. 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. rest. Seven o’clock to 9 o’clock chant and sit. 9 o’clock to 11 o’clock sleep. From 11 o’clock to 2 o’clock sit Zen. Then from 2 A.M. to 5 A.M. sleep. From 5 A.M. to 6 A.M. wash and prepare for the day, and begin again at 6 A.M.

Usually a three day retreat is done this way, but if you want to eat, add a rest period from 8 to 9 in the morning. Then you have time to eat three meals a day.

Only keep one mind: What am I?

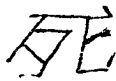
I hope you will do hard training, soon get enlightenment, and save all people.

See you later.

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Your koans are ringing in my head, waves of sound. I don't know? Who doesn't know? Know? No! Circumstances are such that I can not come to see you in the East. Katz! But I will work hard on my koans and take paper sanzen. This fellow who flicks ashes on the Buddha I must tell him this. Though gold dust is precious, in the eyes it obscures the vision. If he still doesn't understand this great powerful man will surely kill me with his hammerlike blows. My answer then is



DEATH!

As for your mouse and cat's broken bowl. When the mouth wants to speak about it, words fail; when the mind seeks affinity with it, thought vanishes.

Knew what I think.

I don't know!

Satam Lee has talked about opening a Chogyo Center in the mountains and we have also talked about perhaps having one down here in the Long Beach, Orange County area. This would be good. I hope that all is well with you and your disciples. Here is a poem for you.

Blue ink touched white paper

A faucet drips drip, drip.

If you were here I would gladly let you reign blows on my head, since you are not here I reign blows on yours. Katz!

Yours,

Steve Echard

December 21, 1974

Dear Steve,

I will hit you thirty times!! Put it all down!! Originally there is no coming or going or staying or arriving. This is infinite time and infinite space. You already have freedom, so if you come it's good and if you don't come it's good. Only this.

Your KATZ!—how many pounds does it weigh? If you open your mouth I will hit you thirty more times.

If you like letter-interviews, I like them too.

As for your homework: You like death very much. But after death, where are you going? This is very important. If you die, the man who blew smoke in the Buddha's face will only laugh. He is already beyond life and death, he understands that they are both empty, so he laughs. What can you do?

About the mouse who eats cat food: There is a meaning behind the words. If you are attached to the words, you don't know this meaning. What is mouse? What is cat food? What is cat bowl? What is broken? When these four things become one, then you will have the true meaning.

I hope you do more hard training, finish your homework soon, attain enlightenment, and become a great man.

It is very good that you and Satam will make a new temple. I congratulate you.

Your poem is very good, but Buddha doesn't understand it—and neither do I. Here is a poem for you:

Original face is clear  
on the green pine and white rocks.  
If you want to understand what this means  
you must understand that a quarter is 25 cents.

You have a freedom arm—sometimes short, sometimes long. My arm is not a freedom arm. I want to hit you but I can't reach that far. So I will say that I am sorry.

See you later,

S.S.

Dear S.S.

One day a man came to Providence Zen Center and put ashes on Buddha's image head. The head master quickly put the ashes on his own head ran to the ash tray and deposited the ashes.

The grass does not feel cool when wind blows

Carl & Susan

NO BAMBOO  
NO PLAYING  
NO NOTES  
NO PLAYER  
JUST SOUND.

Dear Carl and Susan,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your homework is very beautiful, but I don't know what it means. The man who blew smoke in the Buddha's face is very strong. He already understands no form, no emptiness. That is all he understands. If you open your mouth he will hit you. What can you do? He doesn't know that Buddha is Buddha and ashes are ashes. How can you teach him? How can you fix his mind? Send me another answer; your answer is not clear.

Your drawing and poem are very beautiful. Always keep this mind. Don't think about anything. You said, No, no, no, no... then just sound. Where does just sound come from?

Do you know East and West, South and North?

See you later,

S. S.

December 9, 1974

Ven. Seung Sahn Soen-sa  
c/o Providence Zen Center  
48 Hope Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Soen Sa,

Thank you for all your gifts: the answer to my letter, the new kong ans, the Won Yu writing, and the Chinese text to the Family Traditions of the Five Sects.

I am puzzled by something: In your Zen dialogue of 8-29-74, you told Student-B "...what is true good karma?... You must wake up from all dreams. It is not important whether the dream is good or bad. Only don't be attached... Don't be attached to anything. Then you will be free of everything. No hindrance..." Then you also send the writing by Won Yu. Won Yu seems like a very holy monk. He is very concerned about keeping the precepts, leaving home, being worthy to receive offerings, even "when such a one becomes involved with a woman, all the beneficial dieties leave him."

What would I do with a "beneficial diety" if I had one? Why do you send me this fellow's holy monk dream?

Keeping the precepts is a great convenience and helpful for practice—but such clinging!!! How could such a one ever hold down a job selling wine in a sing-song house?

*Homework:*

Still searching for the one word that will close the last hole. So:

—1—

A. (Drops ashes on the Buddha)

B. Stop that!

A. Why?

B. You are getting the Zendo dirty.

A. (hit)

B. So, you understand one, do you understand two?

A. (hit)

B. If there is only emptiness, then who is hearing these words?

A. (hit)

B. I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow?

Why is he a dead cow? Because although he thinks he is only emptiness still he knows he is hearing the words spoken to him

—2—

You said I must check: *mouse, cat-food, cat-bowl, and broken.*

"The mouse is eating cat food." Meeeeeow!!!

(The mouse is small-I. Cat food is mice. When the mouse has consumed himself, he becomes the cat.)

"The cat's bowl is broken." What is the cat bowl? I can't find it anywhere. What is broken?  
???

Thank you for your criticism of my Heart Sutra translation. Perhaps I will go back to the Sanscrit forms of the proper names. I did not consider that using any one of the various East-Asian forms would create hostile feelings in persons from other countries. I had chosen "Kanjisai" for two reasons. It is shorter by two syllables and easier to say. It is also a rather unusual form of the name of the Bodhisattva (Kanjisai rather than the more usual Kwannon or Kwanzeon) the literal meaning of which in English is "Contemplating Self Rooted-in; contemplating the basis of the self, the ground of the mind. I wanted to keep that. Dr. Thien-an agrees with you. I had no idea East-Asian ethnic animosities went so deep. (My father who was in the Army in the war against Japan used to feel that way too but he was an old man, now long dead, and I thought those kinds of hostilities were fading with his generation. Maybe not.)

The problem with Sanscrit names is that they seem awkward and clumsy to English speaking people. The first Buddhist name Ven. Thien-an gave me was "Paritrata" but people always would say "Pari . . . What? Barrytratter?" So I like to use my Vietnamese monk's name much better. By the by, it is not Sa Haeng but Un Haeng.

The first character is ~~not~~ I should ~~write~~ better.

The Vietnamese pronunciation is An-hanh.

News:

We had a very good seminar on the Diamond and Heart Sutras at the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center at Berkeley. There were 17 students for the whole weekend. We read and discussed the texts, paragraph by paragraph, and also emphasized as much as we could that this was only theoretical understanding—an attempt to say in words what words are



inherently incapable of expressing—and that the actual experience must be found through meditation.

We also had a Kargudpa lama visiting our Center, one Kalu Rinpoche, who gave three lectures and conducted a large initiation ceremony and introduced many new students to meditation on the form of Avalokites'vara: first as an external object, then as identical with our own bodies, then as light dissolving all forms leaving only the Tibetan letter HRI which in turn fades leaving nothing. This nothingness is then contemplated until the world of form suddenly reappears and is seen to be identical to the nothingness.

Very colorful. Lots of horns and cymbals and bells, hand-mudras and mantras chanted very fast until they become a hypnotic hum. I like the Zen way better but this way reaches a lot of students whose karma does not allow them to relate to us.

I also think it a good thing for all kinds of Buddhists to cooperate with each other as much as possible. The plants that many different teachers are putting into the soil of this country are all very tender and will support each other in their growth. Ven. Thien-an also feels this way and so he does not object to Satam and I following the Korean-style and using your kong an book when we conduct the morning sittings. Because he not only supports the Center but also the College and in addition works two outside teaching jobs to get money for the Center, he only sits with us on Thursdays and Sundays. Of course, when he is there, we conduct the sittings in the Vietnamese style.

Speaking of various techniques to attract different kinds of students, are your students still using Dharma Play? I never hear it mentioned any more. Maybe with the Sim Quan Do you do not need it. It would be nice if we had a martial arts teacher like that at our Center. My second son especially is interested in that sort of thing and has a brown belt in judo but I do not like the style of teaching very much. Most of the judo and karate schools around only talk of hit, kick, kill! They have no Zen and so are not so good.

Thank you for paying attention to this long letter and for letting me continue these letter-interviews.

(How do you say “gassho” in Korean?)

An-Hanh (Michael)

December 22, 1974

Dear Ven. An-hanh,

I was happy to receive your letter.

You say you are puzzled by the discrepancy between my speech and Won Hyo's. But keeping the precepts and not keeping the precepts—how are they different? Buddha said, “All things have Buddha-nature.” Jo-ju said, “No Buddha-nature.” How are these words different? My speech and Won Hyo's speech—how are they different? Already you understand. If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.

All Buddhas, all eminent teachers have no desire for themselves. Only for all people. So Won Hyo Dae-sa used this strong language only for all people. I hope you are not attached to the words of Won Hyo's speech. I hope you sometimes use it to save all people.

There are three classes of people. Low-class people cannot control themselves, so they need to live in communities with other people to control them. They must live together, eat together, do all actions together. Won Hyo's speech is very necessary for them. Middle-class people can control themselves. But although they are quiet inside, they are attached to the outside. So they are disturbed by noise, commotion, and all kinds of external stimuli. So it is best for them to go off and live by themselves. High-class people are not attached to anything. For them, there is no inside and no outside. So of course they can control themselves and it is possible for them to save all people. So they can live in the city and do not have to go the long way. I think you are a high-class person. So living in the city is good, drinking special tea is good, sometimes any action is good. Don't be attached to anything. If you find yourself hindered by anything, then it is important to keep Won Hyo's mind.

Homework: 1. Before I said you must read the koan book and find the crucial words. You say first, "So you understand one, do you understand two?" And then, "If there is only emptiness, then who is hearing these words?" These two sentences are the same. You must find another sentence in the koan book to go between "you understand one..." and "I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow." The cow is not yet dead! You must completely kill him before you can use this sentence. Then he will understand that he is a dead cow. He is very attached to emptiness. This is called "falling down in emptiness". He doesn't know how to stand up. How can you teach him to stand up?

2. With this koan, you must not be attached to the words. There is a meaning behind the words. These four things—mouse, cat food, cat bowl, broken—only become one. You must not separate them. The important things are cat bowl and broken. Mouse and cat food are only like this. So what is cat bowl, what is broken? These are only one, not two.

Here is a poem for you:

A dog barks looking at the moon.  
A man shouts at the dog and he becomes quiet.  
Light comes, use light; sound comes, use sound.  
If you understand this, you understand that four  
quarters are a dollar.

You must understand this poem.

As for Japanese names: The word Zen is in general use in America, so we do not use Soen or Ch'an. But the names of the Sutras, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas are not in general use. So it is good to use the original names. Most books on Zen nowadays use the Chinese rather than Japanese pronunciation of Zen master names. As for the pronunciation of Avalokiteshvara: it is not difficult when chanted slowly, and my students in Providence and Cambridge have had no problem with it.

I am sorry that I misread your name. I was thinking of the great Chinese Zen master Sa Haeng. But I now understand that your name is Un Haeng—a very good name, a Bodhisattva name. So in the future I will use your correct name.

I am grateful for all your news, which I enjoyed hearing. You wrote about the Tibetan ceremony and said that all kinds of Buddhists must co-operate as much as possible. In Korea, there are many styles of Buddhism. There are 15,000 monks, but only 3,000 Zen monks. Of the others, some read Sutras, some recite nembutsu or mantras, some only keep the precepts. They all do different work, as in America. But even though their work is different, they all want to see their true nature and become Buddha. So inside they are all Zen monks. But in America I think there is a strong attachment to *my* way: “My way is good, your way is not so good.” So in the future, when these different kinds of Buddhism become strong, there will be many problems. This has happened in Japan, where there has for a long time been much fighting among the sects. Nowadays they are co-operating more, because Buddhism is weak and working together is necessary. So before American Buddhism grows strong, it is necessary for a great teacher to come and unite the sects and teach the true way. I hope you do hard training in Zen and soon attain enlightenment, so that you will become a great man and do the needed great work in America.

See you later.

S.S.

P.S. “Gassho” in Korean is “hapchang”.

### Starter's Mind

by the great Zen Master Won Yu

All Buddhas dwell in the Palace of Extinction because they have cut off desire and undergone difficult practice. Sentient beings in innumerable world-systems are subject to ceaseless rounds of rebirth within the “burning house” because they do not cut off desire and craving. Since many value the three defilements of anger, greed, and ignorance as though they were family jewels, few among men reach the unguarded heavens. There is no inducement, yet many fall of themselves into wrong ways, because they make the four elements (earth, fire, water, and air) and the five desires (for food, sleep, sex, wealth, and fame) the treasure of their deluded minds.

Who, as a human being, would not like to retreat to the mountains and practice according to the Path, but, bound by the entanglements of love and desire, how many are able to do it? Though you may not be able to go to the mountains and woods to train your mind, don't neglect good action according to your capacity. If you cut off your own pleasure, you will be trusted and respected as a holy man; when you are able to perform difficult action, you will be revered like the Buddha himself. Craving for things, you are a member of the family of demons; making offerings with mercy, you are a son of the Dharma king.

High peaks and lofty crevices are the dwellings of a wise man. Green pine trees and deep valleys are the places for those who practice Buddhism. When you are hungry, eat fruits and satisfy your hunger. When you are thirsty, drink running stream water and quench your thirst. However you may nourish your body with delicacies, it will perish. However you may protect it with soft clothes, your life will come to an end. Make the echoing cave your hall for chanting Buddha's name; make the flying ducks who cry out sadly your heart's friends. Even if your knees are ice-cold as you bow, do not think of fire. Even if your intestines are cut through with hunger, do not think of seeking food.

One hundred years will soon pass; how can you afford not to study? How long do you think life is, that you idle the time away without practicing?

Being detached from love is being a wandering monk. Not desiring worldly things is leaving the home-life. If one who practices puts on beautiful clothes, it is like a dog who puts on the skin of an elephant. A student who wants love is like a porcupine who crawls into a rat's hole easily, but cannot back out no matter how hard he tries.

Though you have talent and wisdom, if you live in a house in town, then all the Buddhas feel sad and sorry for you. On the other hand, though you have no attainment, if you live in a mountain temple, then all the holy ones are delighted. Even if you have talent and knowledge, if you do not keep the precepts, it is as if you are shown the way to a treasure,

but do not go there. If you are diligent in practicing but have no wisdom, it is like trying to go east but heading west.

The action of a wise man is like boiling rice from which the sand has been sifted out. The action of one who has no wisdom is like boiling rice and sand together. All men know how to satisfy their hunger with food, but few know enough to learn Dharma as a cure for their ignorance.

Wisdom and practice are like the two wheels of one cart. Benefitting others, and also benefitting oneself, are like the two wings of a bird. Obtaining food as an offering, and reciting prayers to Buddha for the man who offered it, if you do not understand the meaning of these prayers, how can you not feel ashamed? Receiving food as an offering, and reciting the name of the Buddha for the man who offered it, if you do not understand the significance of the recitation, how can you not be ashamed before the wise and holy men?

Just as men are disgusted by worms which cannot distinguish between cleanliness and filth, so are the wise and holy men disgusted by novice monks who cannot distinguish between purity and impurity. Precepts are the ladder which allows you to leave behind the noise of the world and ascend towards heaven. Trying to pray for others while you break the precepts is like being a broken-winged bird who tries to fly with a tortoise on its back. If you are not free from your own sins, then you cannot redeem the sins of others. Not keeping the precepts, how can you receive offerings from others?

It is hardly worthwhile to support an empty body devoid of actual practice. This impermanent, transitory life cannot be maintained forever, however, much you may love it. If you wish to attain great virtue, you must be able to withstand great suffering. If you wish to sit on the lion's seat, you must abandon forever desire and pleasure. When the mind of one who practices is pure, all the heavens praise him, but when such a one becomes involved with sexuality, all the beneficial deities leave him.

The four elements soon disassociate; they cannot be long maintained. As evening draws near, you regret that you did not practice early in the morning. The worldly pleasure which you enjoy now, in the future becomes suffering. Why then are you attached to this pleasure? One moment of patience becomes lasting pleasure. Why then do you not practice?

If a man of the Way has desires, it is the shame of those who follow him. If a man who has left the home-life acquires wealth, then men of virtue laugh at him.

Words of admonition can be endless, yet craving is not extinguished. By saying, "Next time, next time," attachment is not cut off. The things that keep us busy are interminable, so why not simply throw away all worldly affairs? Plans also have no limit, so why not just cut off the thinking mind?

Today never ceases to come, but in each "today" more sins are created. Tomorrow also comes, without fail, but few "tomorrows" are given to good actions. "This year" never fails to come, but defilements are endless. Next year always arrives too, but still you do not seek Bodhi.

Moment succeeds moment, and thus day and night are soon past. One day succeeds the next; months slip away. Month follows month—soon next year is here. Years pass rapidly, and you find yourself at death's door. A broken vehicle cannot run; an old man cannot practice.

Lying down you are idle; sitting up, your mind is confused. For how many life-times will you fail to practice, and waste away your days and nights? You spend your life without practice, but do you think you will be able to make this empty body retain its life? This body will inevitably come to its end. Then what will the next body be? Is this matter not urgent? Is this not a matter of greatest immanence for your mind?

January 7, 1975

Ven. Seung Sahn  
16 Gray Gardens East  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Re the mouse koan:

I was never born.  
I will never die.  
Right now I am being born.  
Right now I am dying.



To say this is correct would be to be attached to name and form. To say it is wrong, would be to not know why the cat's bowl is broken. What do you say?

Hapchang,

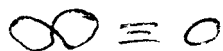
An-Hanh (Michael)

January 11, 1975

Dear An-hanh,

Thank you for your letter. Your answer to this Kong An is very good, but this speech is 84,000 miles away from the true mouse Kong An.

I hit you 30 times!  
Is this correct or is this wrong?  
I had a dream last night.



Right now I am being born, right now I am dying, but  
I was never born, I will never die.  
No time, no space, no hindrance;  
Flying in the sky I have complete freedom.  
It is wonderful! However, the bone of space abruptly appears  
And crashes with my head.

AAiiieee.....wake-up.

Moonlight shines through the window on the floor.

Is this answer enough for you or not? If you say that it is enough, then you will find the true meaning of why the cat's bowl is broken. If you say it is not enough, then you are still in this dream. You must wake-up! I will give you the key to open this Kong An:

Biok An Lok said, "When you see smoke from behind the mountain, you understand there is fire. When you see horns above the stone wall, you understand there is a cow behind.

S.S.



Jan. 7, 1975

Dear S.S. Soen sa,

How does it go in Rhode Island and Cambridge?

In April, Song-Ryong will go to Asia, and then I think I will leave here. A Ceylonese monk, Ananda (a monk for 30 years) wishes me to help him open a center in Cleveland (my home town). But I don't feel ready. There is little in any of the scriptures that this person does not understand, or in Koans; but it seems that understanding is not important at all—at least the understanding put in words. It is only important to see what is, to destroy or not allow to arise an discrimination of inner and outer, of holy or evil; then one can see clearly from the aspect of eternity, or no time. But I should be given 30 blows for this way of speaking.

Now for this problem:

Increasingly, for the last two years I've been coming out of emptiness, and more and more see that I am the world and the world is me. As I think, so is the world, and as I act, so I create the world around me. Since seeing this, more clearly, every day I see a duty to teach others: to teach how each person creates his own heaven and hell, how he/she, through hatred and anger create a world of hatred and anger.

I can no longer live for myself. I must help and show others. But I lack the *power* to help others, they do not listen—not because I don't understand, but because my understanding has not become me. But now, I've dropped off all understanding because when one acts *from a point of understanding*, that understanding is still separate. When understanding is *dropped* real understanding of there is nothing to understand comes. But even this must be dropped. So how can one tell someone who is desperate for truth, for God, for a ceasing of pain that all that must be done is to stop seeking?

Everyday I see my responsibility growing, not as an idea, but in every day I see more ways in which I should help but I lack a way to do it, for it is not clear how to help or to have people listen.

Many people listen to my teacher, but he has little understanding—he is a spiritual entertainer and he attracts people with stories and promises of happiness. He lies constantly, and is basically dishonest, yet people come (and 3 or 6 months later leave because they are so disappointed in him and his dishonesty—and many become so disappointed they may never come back to any teacher). So his way is no good, it is for children, and the children who follow him will stay children for a long time.

So, all that I can do is sit, for I am not allowed to tell people the truth. Always my teacher tried to get me to teach and people said I was a good teacher, very clear. But now he

doesn't like this way of teaching clearly, honestly, with no stories and no entertainment. But all this is beside the point. Because I see my responsibilities more clearly every day, I have become much more careful in how I act—more gentle, more involved—and not avoiding things that require activity, such as working to pay off debts, feeding homeless animals. But also, I get so very angry when I see other people avoiding their responsibilities: running out on debts, or in the name of spiritual detachment to leave their wife and children claiming it doesn't matter—its all the same, everything is one. Bullcrap! They are just lazy and running away from the world clinging to a false peace of non-action. They have no order in their lives and they think they have some deep understanding (much like your Koan of the man knocking ashes on the Buddha). And they make me so angry because they cannot see how they're way of acting, of avoiding responsibility, hurts and causes pain to others and I see no way to do anything.

Or else, I see a very ambitious person who hurts many people in order to get his dream realized, but he doesn't care about them, he cares only for his dream.

I feel frustrated for I cannot “get to these people” to show them how they create pain in the world and damage to themselves—so I continue to sit, to clear my own mind further and maybe to see a way to teach these people to stop hurting others and themselves through their ambition, or irresponsibility, or hatred, or their ideals. And my own anger at being able to do nothing makes me ill. This is no new problem, it has been with me since I was 18, about 14 years.

This leads to the second problem. When Hearn leaves in April, it is not clear what I should do, except I do not want to stay here. None of the Zen Masters in Los Angeles seem very good, and none of the centers have a strong practice—people do what they want, have little discipline, and sit very little. Being around these people is difficult, because I cannot convince them of the value of sitting.

1. Should I go on a 100 day retreat on my brother's land in the desert in Arizona?
2. Find a Zen Master in Japan at a center or monastery where they have a strong practice?
3. Establish a Center with Ananda in my home town in Cleveland before I am ready?
4. Come to Providence or Cambridge to study with you who I feel has a good understanding. But I have difficulty in understanding your Zen talk(and, I feel very attracted to you), for I find no correspondence to your words as you usually talk them in my own mind, while, for example, I find Song-Ryon easy to understand.

Can you answer in non-Zen talk, or Zen talk if necessary?

It is easy to say that when the time comes, it will be clear what I should do. But in this case it appears this is not true, for I've wanted to leave here almost since I first came, but no alternative seemed good, and none seem good now. So here I stay, constantly getting into small fights with my teacher about his dishonesty and the lack of practice here.

Slowly, there has been some increase in the practice here, but is very slow. Also, since there is no practice here, I sit by myself for 5 hours a day, and this is not too good, because

when all the effort comes from oneself, that self gets very big and strong and it becomes harder to let go, to drop things. It is all self power and little “other power”. While if practice is strong, much of the effort to sit becomes merely a matter of doing what must be done, and the self does not become stronger and stronger. Self directed practice eventually produces the same results, but it is slower, especially since there is no real Zen Master here and Song-Ryong only visits once a week (or less) for Dokusan and Teisho (often less than that).

Do you have a strong practice at Providence or Cambridge or is it weak, and relaxed with many interruptions? For 16 months now there has been at this center, practically no practice and constant interruptions—now it is time for a stronger practice.

In any event, please write soon

Ed

January 15, 1975

Dear Ed;

Thank you for your letter. Your letter is very very long. This is good but before I said that opening your mouth is wrong. Only close your mouth. You already understand. In the Heart Sutra it says—perceive that all five skandhas are empty and is saved from all suffering and distress. If you truly understand this, then in your mind there is no place, friends, temple, or teacher. How you keep your mind is important. Where you stay is not important if you keep your mind correctly. Why did you become a monk? When you became a monk, you had beginners mind and this mind is very important. Now I think that you have lost this beginner’s mind, so I hope that you return to it.

In your letter you said that you “create the world around me” and that “each person creates their own heaven and hell”. Words are very easy. Zen is not making all these things, then there is truly nothing. This is true emptiness. True emptiness is no hindrance. Why do you make world, me, other people, teaching, etc? First you must understand your true self. Then you can understand other people’s minds. How can you teach other people if you do not understand your true self? What can you teach other people?

You say that other people do not listen to you but—What do you understand? What do you say? Do they want your understanding? Since you have your opinion and other people have theirs, there are differences and people do not listen to you. First you must throw away all your opinions, all your cognition, your concern about your situation, and your explanations. Then nothing. This time you will understand other people’s minds. Your mind will be like a clear mirror, red comes and it becomes red, white comes and it becomes white. When your mind is clear then it is a reflection of the other persons—if they are sad then sad, if silent then silent, if they have desires then you understand this desire. Then it is possible to teach others how to fix their minds. If attached to name and form or desires, all this teaching is understood.

I think that Dr. Thien-an is a very great and wonderful man. If you did not meet him, how could you have ever understood good and bad. Good and bad are all your true teacher. If you cut off your “small I”, then there is no like, dislike, or good and bad. All are your good friends and your teacher. So you must kill your “self”! Then you will get freedom and no hindrance. This is how you will find your true way. If you understand this true way, then only go and watch your step! Do not be attached to what is on the side of the road, just go on the way.

One time Buddha said “one mind, clear and pure, then the universe is clear and pure.” If your mind cuts off all thinking and becomes clear, then your place, wherever it is, is pure. Do not worry about others. If you have a strong practice they will all follow you. I think your mind is very strong but your “self” is attached to your strong mind so you have strong likes and dislikes, strong anger, frustration, bad thoughts about other people, and so on. You must completely cut off this “strong mind”, this “strong I.” This is very important. When you talk about all that you understand, this is only being attached to your mind. CUT OFF THIS I!

Now I ask you—somebody asked Zen Master Joju “Does a dog have Buddha nature?” And Joju answered “mu.” Do you understand this mu? What does it mean? If you open your mouth I will hit you thirty times. If you do not open your mouth I will hit you thirty times. What can you do? Thinking is no good, so put it all down.

You want to find a great Zen Master, or a place with hard training, or have a 100 day retreat, or come to Providence. If you do not put down your mind then all these things can not help you. You must understand what sitting Zen is. WHAT IS SITTING? You are a Zen student. Sitting means cutting off all thinking, keeping not moving mind. WHAT IS ZEN? To become clear is Zen. So, you are only attached to the outside of Zen, you do not understand true Zen. If you really understand Zen, then it is not necessary to have a Zen Master, or 100 day retreat, or hard training place, or the Providence or Cambridge Zen centers.

Then you can do walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, talking, be silent, be moving, be quiet, all these things. All is practicing! Keep a clear mind. Who does these actions? Anytime, return to your true self. Then there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no ——— so no sound, no smell, no ———. Then you will understand “no attainment with nothing to attain.” You should cut off the “I want enlightenment” mind.

You must fix your mind, this is very important. If you want enlightenment, it will be even further away. If you want a good place, any place you find will not be enough. If you cut off all thinking and return to beginners mind, this is what is called enlightenment. If you keep true empty mind, then any place you are is Nirvana. So you must keep very strongly a closed mouth and you must learn from the blue sky, the white clouds, deep quiet mountains and the very noisy cities. They are like this, that is your true great teacher. I hope you first kill your strong self and find clear mind all the time. Then save all people from suffering.

Blue mountain and green woods  
This is eminent teachers clear face  
Do you understand this face?  
A quarter is twenty-five cents.

See you later,

S.S.

A Dharma Speech

given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa on Buddha's Enlightenment Day, January 19, 1975, at the Providence Zen Center

(Holding up the Zen stick, pointing to the sky, then hitting the table.)

Do you understand this? If you understand this, then you have already attained enlightenment.

If you don't understand this, then you cannot get out from the world of fire.

There are three worlds of fire: the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of no form. All these are made by thinking. Thinking is desire; desire is suffering; suffering is the mind's fire. So the whole world is on fire. If you don't understand, you cannot escape from suffering.

Long ago, Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree for six years. One morning he saw the Eastern star and attained enlightenment. How did he attain enlightenment? He only saw the Eastern star.

That star is still in the sky. If you find it, you will attain enlightenment. But in the sky there are many stars.

Which one is it?

Where is it?

Have you found it?

If you haven't found it, I will show you.

(Holding up the Zen stick, then hitting the table.)

Now can you find it? if you still can't find it, then you must enter through the sound. The name for this is first enlightenment. But enlightenment is no enlightenment. True enlightenment is before thinking. So there are no words, no speech, no star, no sound.

What is true enlightenment?

Put it all down!

(Slowly lifting up the Zen stick.)

Can you see this?

What is it? (pause)

This is a Zen stick.

(Hitting the table.)

Can you hear this?

What is it? (pause)

This is a sound.

The stick is the stick; the sound is the sound.

When you see the stick, your mind is only the stick. When you hear the sound, your mind is only the sound. Only become one.

Buddha only saw the star. Only like this. The star is the star. Red comes; red. Yellow comes; yellow. Birds fly in the sky; fish swim in the water. Honey is sweet; salt is salty. One plus two equals three.

All is like this. That is the truth.

But you must not say, “ I have attained enlightenment.” If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

Today is Buddha’s enlightenment day. The star is in the Eastern sky.

Watch your step!

## TEMPLE RULES

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

### 1. On Keeping the Bodhi Mind

You must first make a firm decision to attain enlightenment and help others. You already have the five or the ten precepts. Know when to keep them and when to break them, when they are open and when they are closed. Let go of your small self and become big I.

In original nature  
There is no this and that.

The Great Round Mirror  
Has no likes or dislikes.

### 2. On Mindfulness

Do not cling to your opinions. Do not discuss your private views with others. To cling to and defend your opinions is to destroy your practice. Put away all your opinions. This is true Buddhism.

Do not go where you have no business. Do not listen to talk which does not concern you.

Do not make the bad karma of desire, anger or ignorance.

If in this lifetime  
You do not open your mind,

You cannot digest  
Even one drop of water.

### 3. On Conduct

Always act with others. Do not put yourself above others by acting differently. Arrogance is not permitted in the temple.

Money and sex are like a spiteful snake. Put your concern with them far away.

In the Dharma Room always walk behind those seated in meditation. At talks and ceremonies, keep the proper posture and dress. Do not talk or laugh loudly in the Dharma Room.



If you have business outside the temple which causes you to miss ceremonies or meals, notify one of the temple officials before you leave.

Respect those older than you. Love those younger than you. Keep your mind large and open.

If you meet sick people, love and help them.

Be hospitable to guests. Make them welcome and attend to their needs.

When respected people visit the temple, bow to them and give them good words.

Be courteous. Always let others go before you.

Help other people.

Do not play games with other people.

Do not gossip.

Do not use other people's shoes and coats.

Do not cling to the scriptures.

Do not oversleep.

Do not be frivolous.

Let older and more respected people be seated before you.

Do not discuss petty temple matters with guests.

When visiting outside the temple, speak well of the temple to others.

Do not go to bars or whorehouses. You will only make bad karma and destroy your practice. When you pass such places, you must be strong and think correctly. Then these places cannot tempt you.

Do not delude yourself into thinking you are a great and free man. This is not true Buddhism.

Attend only to yourself. Do not judge the actions of others.

Do not make the bad karma of killing, stealing, or of lust.

Originally there is nothing.

But Buddha practiced unmoving under the  
Bodhi tree for six years.  
And for nine years Bodhidharma sat  
silently in Sorim.  
If you can break the wall of your self,  
You will become infinite in time and space.

#### 4. On Speech

Your evil tongue will lead you to ruin. You must keep the stopper in the bottle. Only open it when necessary.

Always speak well, in the manner of a Bodhisattva. Do not use vulgar language in the temple.

If you come upon two people fighting, do not provoke them by angry speech. Rather use good words to soothe their anger.

Do not make the bad karma of lying, exaggerating, making trouble between people, or cursing others.

Once a man spoke incorrectly and was reborn  
a fox for 500 generations. After he heard the  
correct speech, he lost his fox's body.

What is correct and incorrect speech?

If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.  
If you close your mouth, I will still hit you thirty times.

You must grab the word-head (kong an) and not let go.

The dog is barking. Wong wong wong!

The cat is mewling. Meow meow meow.

#### 5. On Eating

An eminent teacher said, "A day without work is a day without eating."

There are two kinds of work: inside work and outside work. Inside work is keeping clear mind. Outside work is cutting off selfish desires and helping others.

First work, then eat.

Eat in silence. Do not make unnecessary noise.

While eating, attend only to yourself. Do not be concerned with the actions of others.

Accept what is served with gratitude. Do not cling to your likes and dislikes.

Do not seek satisfaction in eating. Eat only to support yourself in your practice.

Though you may eat good food all your life, your body will die.

The Great Way is not difficult.  
Simply cut off all thought of good and bad.

Salt is salty.  
Sugar is sweet.

## 6. On Formal Practice

During formal practice act with other people.

Do not be lazy.

During chanting, follow the moktak.

During sitting, follow the chugpi.

Perceive the true meaning of chanting and sitting and act accordingly.

Understand that you have accumulated bad karma which is like a big mountain. Keep this in mind as you bow in repentance.

Our karma has no self-nature, but is created by our mind. If our mind is extinguished, our karma will be extinguished. When we see both as empty, this is true repentance. We bow to see true nature, and help others.

Shouting into a valley.  
Big shout: big echo.  
Small shout: small echo.

## 7. On the Dharma Talk

When you listen to the words of the Zen Master, keep your mind clear. Do not be attached to his words. Cut off all thought and pierce the true meaning of his speech.

Do not think, "I already have great understanding; I have no use for this speech." This is delusion.

If you have a question, put it to the Zen Master, after he is finished speaking.

If a snake drinks water, the water becomes spite. If a cow drinks water, the water becomes milk. If you cling to ignorance, you create life and death. If you keep clear, you become Buddha.

In the great work of life and death, time will not wait for you.

If you die tomorrow, what kind of body will you get?  
Is not all of this of great importance?

Hurry up! Hurry!

Blue sky and green sea,  
Are the Buddha's original face.

The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song,  
Are the great sutras.

Where are you going?  
Watch your step.

Water flows down to the sea.  
Clouds float up to the heavens.

Cambridge, December 21, 1974

One day Baba Muktananda invited Seung Sahn Soen-sa to come talk with him during his stay in Cambridge. There were several dozen students present, and a large pile of fruits, which had been brought as presents, in front of Muktananda, who was sitting in a chair on a small podium. Soen-sa was offered a seat on the floor to his left.

After Soen-sa and three of his students who had come with him sat down, Muktananda offered him a piece of candy. One of Soen-sa's students said, "No thank you, " explaining that the Zen master had diabetes.

Muktananda—Oh, that's too bad. Every day you should walk two miles. That will help.

Soen-sa—Diabetes is very good. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. This body is already emptiness. So my diabetes is emptiness. So it is very good.

Muktananda—Let us talk. Say something.

Soen-sa—How should you keep your mind during yoga?

Muktananda—We should merge with mind into the inner self. And the mind should be without any objects. Have you read Patanjali on Yoga?

Seung Sahn Soen-sa—No. Then my self and my mind—are the same or different?

Muktananda—When mind goes within, into the inner self, it becomes one with the inner self. But when it comes out, for that time it is separate.

Soen-sa—Mind has no inside or outside. So how can it become one with the self or separate from it?

Muktananda—Then who acts outside, if not mind?

Soen-sa—What is mind?

Muktananda—Mind is the tendency of the self which goes out to do actions. When it goes inside, it becomes self, and when it is outside, it does things in the world. The mind is no separate entity, it is not a modification of anything, it is nothing but the consciousness. When the universal consciousness becomes contracted and takes the form of outside objects, then we call it mind. And when the same mind goes inside and becomes the self, again it becomes the consciousness itself. It contracts and it expands.

Soen-sa—Mind and thinking are different. Mind has no inside and no outside. Thinking makes inside, outside, consciousness, mind—everything is made by thinking. So mind is no mind.

Muktananda—When mind takes the form of outside objects, it becomes the mind. But when it goes inside and forgets all objects, it again becomes the self and the consciousness.

Soen-sa—Who made inside, who made outside, who made consciousness, who made objects?

Muktananda—Do you know who made you?

Soen-sa—If you ask me, I answer you.

Muktananda—What do you think? Who made the world?

Soen-sa—In front of you there are many apples and oranges.

Muktananda—... . Is that an answer?

Soen-sa—Do you want another answer?

Muktananda—Yes.

Soen-sa—One plus two equals three.

Muktananda—And suppose you take two from three, then...?

Soen-sa—Only one.

Muktananda—Suppose we take away that one also.

Soen-sa—Then I hit you!

Muktananda—These answers don't make any sense. What knowledge do you have?

Soen-sa—O.K., I will explain. I ask you now: one plus two equals three; one plus two equals zero—which one is correct?

Muktananda—Everything is momentary change, you see. Sometimes it can be ten, or it can be five. It can be seven, it can be nine. It goes on changing. So there is nothing fixed. It is a momentary truth.

Soen-sa—If you say everything changes, then you are attached to form.

Muktananda—I'm not attached to form. But you are attached to your questions and answers.

Soen-sa— (laughing)—Yah, that's good.

Muktananda—Why should one be attached to things that are always changing? Why should one desire them?

Soen-sa—O.K., I ask you...

Muktananda—No, I have a question for you. What is the purpose of our meeting together and talking about spiritual things?

Soen-sa—Today is Saturday in the morning.

Muktananda—This is not the answer of the philosopher. It is only the answer of a child.

Soen-sa—Yes.

Muktananda—In everything there is always some purpose, from the point of view of worldly life. For example, this man (pointing to a guest) is here and if I ask him, “Why have you come here?”, he will tell me, “I have come to see you” or “I have come to ask you something”. And answers should be such that people can understand them. So a person asks me a question if he has doubts and getting an answer will remove his doubts. But your answers have no meaning and no purpose. It is just like a child playing.

Soen-sa—These other answers are children’s answers. “I came to see you”—all children understand this. But “today is Saturday in the morning”—children don’t understand this answer. So your answers are a child’s answers.

Muktananda—Only if people understand what we say, only then does it have some meaning and some purpose. If nobody understands you, then what’s the use of your questions and answers? Some meaning should come out of them.

Soen-sa—I understand you are a great man. But you don’t understand, so you are a child.

Muktananda—There is no question of great or small. But when we talk, we should use words and sentences in such a way that in our daily life, in worldly dealings, they will have some meaning. It must be explicit, from big to small. Both children and grownups should be able to understand them.

Soen-sa—I will ask you one more question. (Picks up an apple) This is an apple, O.K.? But if you say it’s an apple, you have an attachment to name and form. And if you say it’s not an apple, you have an attachment to emptiness. Is this an apple or not?

Muktananda—Both.

Soen-sa—Both? I hit you sixty times! To answer “apple” is no good, to answer “not apple” is no good, to answer “both” is very bad. Why? This apple is made by thinking. It doesn’t say, “I am an apple.” People say it is an apple. So it is made by thinking.

Muktananda—We understand that this grows on a tree.

Soen-sa—Yes! That is a good answer. A very good answer would be... (bites into the apple).

Muktananda—Even without eating it, I can understand what this apple is. Those who don't understand need to eat it. You understood it by eating it, I understood it by just looking at it.

Soen-sa—Then a good answer would have been to hand it to me and say, "Please eat."

Muktananda—That's not necessary. I can see what it is.

Soen-sa—That's right. All words are not necessary.

Muktananda—There are many kinds of understanding. Eating isn't the only way. There is another way of understanding. For the time being, leave your philosophy and go to the market. Suppose you go and tell the shopkeeper about the apple and what it is, what size it is and so on. He won't hand it to you to eat. In your daily life this philosophy of yours is useless. One's philosophy should be practical. We should be able to apply it in our daily life. Our philosophy and our daily life should not be separate; they should be one. Philosophy should be such that ordinary people are able to use it. Today the world is such that the scientists won't believe such things. They won't believe anything that does not work.

Soen-sa—I am not a philosopher. I am not a scientist. I am not a Buddhist.

Muktananda—Then what is your philosophy, and what is the use of that philosophy?

Soen-sa—I have no philosophy.

Muktananda—Then what is your purpose?

Soen-sa—You already understand.

Muktananda—I must go now. We will talk later. It's not difficult to talk to you. Since you are not a philosopher, I will give you an apple. (Laughter)

Soen-sa—(laughing—I give it back to you.

Muktananda— I am happy both ways, either to give or to receive.

Soen-sa—Thank you very much.



### The Boat Monk

Long ago, in China, the great Zen master Yak Sahn had two chief disciples—Un Am and Dok Song. Both of them received the Transmission from him and became Zen masters themselves. Un Am was a powerfully-built, tireless man, with a voice like a great bronze bell and a laugh that made the ground shake. He soon became very famous as a teacher; many hundreds of disciples came to study with him. Dok Song, on the other hand, was a small thin man, whose nature was so reserved that people rarely took notice of him. Only now and then he would say or do something that echoed in their minds for days afterwards.

When Master Yak Sahn died, Dok Song went to Un Am and said, “You are now a great Zen master. You have many students, many temples. I approve of this. But my way is different. It leads to mountains, rivers, and clouds. After I have gone, please find one good student and send him to me, so that I can pay my debt to our master.”

With these words, he left for the province of Hwa Jong. There, he put aside his monk’s clothing, let his hair grow, and bought a small boat, in which he would row people from one bank of the river to the other. So Dok Song lived the life of a simple ferryman, in perfect obscurity and freedom.

Many years passed. In the nearby province of Hon Am, there lived a young man named Son Hae. He had become a monk at the age of nine and had studied the sutras diligently since then, learning from all the foremost scholars in the area and mastering many volumes of Mahayana texts. Eventually, he acquired a reputation as one of the greatest Dharma teachers in the country, and people from all over came to hear his lectures and stay at his temple.

One day, after a particularly fine lecture, someone asked him, “Master, please explain to me—what is the Dharma body?” “The Dharma body doesn’t exist,” said Son Hae. The questioner continued, “And what is the Dharma eye?” “The Dharma eye is without flaw.”

Suddenly, from the back of the lecture hall, there was a burst of laughter, so powerful that it made the ground shake. Son Hae paused for a few moments in the shocked silence that followed, then stepped down from the podium and walked down the aisle to the back of the hall. He stopped in front of the old monk who had laughed, bowed once, and said, “Forgive me, Venerable Sir, but where is my mistake?”

The monk smiled, in deep appreciation of Son Hae’s humility. He understood that his mind was wide and comfortable, that he was unattached to his own attainments and ready at any moment to receive the truth. “Your teaching is not incorrect,” he said, “but you haven’t even glimpsed the ultimate Dharma. What you need is the kind instruction of a keen-eyed master.”

“Won’t you be kind enough to teach me?” Son Hae said.

“I’m sorry, but that’s out of the question. Why don’t you go to Hwa Jong province. There’s a certain boatman there who will show you the way.”

“A boatman? What kind of boatman can he be?”

“Above him,” said the old monk, “there is no place for a roof; below him, there is no place for a pin. He may look like an ordinary boatman, but go speak to him. You’ll see.”

So Son Hae dismissed his many students, put aside his monk’s clothing, and traveled to Hwa Jong. After several days, he found the boatman. He turned out to be a skinny old man, shabbily dressed, who indeed looked thoroughly ordinary and merely nodded as Son Hae stepped into the ferry. He rowed a few strokes, then let the boat drift and said, “Venerable Sir,” (it was obvious from Son Hae’s shaved head that he was a monk) “what temple are you staying at?”

Son Hae recognized this innocent question as a challenge to Dharma-combat. He sat up, at the edge of attention, and said, “What is like it doesn’t stay; what stays isn’t like it.”

“Then what can it be?” said Dok Song.

“Not what’s before your eyes.”

“Where did you learn this?”

“The eye can’t see; the ear can’t hear.”

Up to this point, Son Hae had put up a decent fight. But the master understood his mind perfectly, and when he suddenly shouted “KATZ!!!”, Son Hae could find nothing to say. A few moments passed. Then the master said, “Even the truest statement is a stake in the ground, which a donkey can be tethered to for ten thousand aeons.”

Son Hae was by now thoroughly at a loss. His face turned white. He could hardly breathe. Again the master spoke. “I have let down a thousand feet of fishing line; the fish is just beyond the hook. Why don’t you say something?” Son Hae opened his mouth, but no words came out. Just then, the master swung round his oar and hit Son Hae full on, with such force that he was hurled into the river. He fell down through the water, and when he came up, sputtering and gasping, he grabbed onto the side of the boat. As he was pulling himself up, the master shouted, “Tell me! Tell me!” and knocked him back into the river. But this time, as soon as Son Hae felt the sharp sting of the oar, his mind exploded, and he understood everything. When he surfaced, he trod water, smiling, and nodded three times. The master beamed with pleasure, and, extending his oar, pulled him back into the boat. For a few minutes they sat looking at each other. Then the master said, “You can play with the silken line at the end of the rod, but as long as you don’t disturb the clear water, you will be doing well.”

Son Hae said, “What are you trying to accomplish by letting down the fishing line?”

The master said, “A hungry fish swallows bait and hook together. If you think in terms of existence or non-existence, you will be caught and cooked for dinner.”

Son Hae laughed and said, “I don’t understand a word you’re saying. I can see your tongue flapping, but where is the sound?”

“I have been fishing in this river for many years,” the master said, “and only today have I caught a golden fish.”

Son Hae clapped his hands over his ears.

“That’s right. Just like this—how wonderful!” said the master. “Now you are a free man. Wherever you go, you must leave no traces. In all the years that I spent studying with Master Yak Sahn, I learned nothing but that. Now you understand, and I have paid my debt.”

All day and night the two men drifted on the river, talking and not talking. When dawn came, they rowed to shore, and Son Hae stepped out of the boat. “Good-bye,” said the master. You needn’t think of me again. Everything else is unnecessary.”

Son Hae walked away. After a short while, he turned around for one last look. The master waved at him from the middle of the river, then rocked back and forth until the boat capsized. Son Hae watched for the master’s head to surface, but it never did. he could only see the overturned boat floating downstream and out of sight.

One day Zen master Mang Gong sent a letter to all the Zen Centers in Korea. In it, he told the koan of Jo-ju's Mu. (A monk once asked Jo-ju, "Does the dog have Buddha-nature?" Jo-ju answered, "No.") Mang Gong then wrote, "There are ten Zen sicknesses in this koan. You must not get sick; so please send me one word."

Many different answers come back in the mail. After a while, the young boy who was in charge of bringing Mang Gong his mail said to him, "You have received many answers to your letters. Which ones are good answers?"

Mang Gong said, "All good answers are not good and not bad."

The boy said, "Then there is no best answer?"

Mang Gong said, "Without a hold, the big steel hammer. This is correct."

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Once Mang Gong was staying in Yang San Tong Do Sa temple with Zen master He Wol. It was time for lunch. All the monks sat down and were served. Everyone was waiting for the chuk-pi to be struck so that they could begin eating. Suddenly He Wol shouted, "KATZ!!!" Everyone was startled and confused. They looked over at He Wol. With total unconcern, he was only eating.

So everyone began to eat. But they were thinking, "Why did the master shout?" "What does this mean?" "How can I understand what just happened?" Finally, lunch was over, and the bowls were cleaned, dried, and wrapped in their covering cloths. The chuk-pi was struck, and everyone stood up. Suddenly Mang Gong shouted, "KATZ!!!" Again, everyone was startled and confused.

Afterwards, one monk came to Mang Gong and asked him what all this meant. Mang Gong said, "I can't tell you." Then another monk came; then two, then three came and bowed and said, "Please teach us."

Finally, Mang Gong said, "I don't like to open my mouth. But since you have asked me many times, and since you are all sincere in your desire to understand, I will explain." Then, suddenly, Mang Gong shouted, "KATZ!!!" and walked away.

February 4, 1975

Dear Master Seung Sahn,

Recently I read your statements in “A Dharma Message” and in the newsletters of January and November 1974 and January 1975. I thoroughly enjoyed and agreed with your comments, especially those dealing with form and emptiness. I have also read a copy of “Temple Rules”. So, I decided to respond by sharing, as well as words can indicate, this realization of the one mind or the true self.

The one mind is buddha. Mind is utterly devoid of any objectivity. People conceptualize an objective state of buddhahood or enlightenment and seek for it. But these people are using mind to seek for mind. No wonder, no matter how hard or how long they may try they will never find it. This mind, being our very self, needs no seeking. It is just who we are.

Truly, I attained nothing from complete unexcelled enlightenment. This is no thing to be attained and no one to attain it. Meditation and the vast number of similar practices are all based upon the assumption of an individual entity to practice them; and there just isn't one. If the practiser be sought and not found, therein is reached the goal of all practices, and also the end of all practices. There is nothing to be sought and no need to seek anything; for there are no two such things as practiser and practice, meditator and meditation.

Mind, the true self, is who I am. How could I ever be apart or different from who I am? Thus, there is no practice and no attainment. Although transcending all appearances, I am immanent in all of them; for all that they are, I am. No thing is outside mind, yet mind is no thing. There are no buddhas and no sentient beings, no Nirvana and no samsara, no masters and no disciples. I who am no thing am every thing.

It is not sufficient to eschew practice; it is necessary also to eschew non-practice. Both practice and non-practice are incompatible with liberation for liberation means liberation from a practiser. As for this so-called liberation, what is the use of trying to climb out of a hole that we have never been in or trying to climb into a whole that we have never been out of? Absence of an entity to be enlightened or not to be enlightened is the double negative, the double absence, and the enlightenment of all the great masters.

All refer to themselves as I, thus indicating that all (buddhas and sentient beings alike) are nothing but mind. When sought for objectively I am eternally absent; yet I am eternally present as I. I am but there is no me. “I”, sunya, void, emptiness etc.. only means that nothing can be said about this to which it refers.

I can not be seen, for I am the seeing. Thus, I can not be grasped in any experience whatsoever, whether it be of pseudo-bondage or pseudo-liberation. Mind knows no

distinctions between this and that. I am the one who has piles of bad karma, yet remains always undefiled and free from sin. I am the one who is filled with anger, though eternally peaceful. I am the one who is ignorant, though I myself am wisdom. I am the one who is arrogant; humility being the lack of anyone to have pride. I am the one who deals with money all the time.

The Great Way is not difficult.  
Simply cut off all thoughts of good and bad.

I live in whorehouses and bars and have lots of sex; yet I am desireless and sober. I am disrespectful to those older than me and am never hospitable to guests. My mind is full of thoughts, yet this mind is not other than buddha and buddha is none other than this mind.

In original nature  
There is no this and that.  
The Great Round Mirror  
Has no likes or dislikes.

I gossip all day long, yet not a word has passed my lips. I speak of petty matters with guests and ridicule the temple, though I am unattached to all that appears to occur. I am frivolous and I oversleep, though I am eternally awake. I am the one who kills, yet all have already died. I am the one who steals, though I possess everything. I am the one who is lustful, yet there is nothing to crave for. I am the one who provokes anger and arguments and who lies, exaggerates and curses.

If you open your mouth  
I will hit you thirty times.  
If you close your mouth  
I will hit you thirty times.

I am the one who has many likes and dislikes when eating, yet I eat not a grain of rice all day. I make all the noise during silence, yet the sound of silence is none other than who I am. Who discriminates between this and that? Nobody, I do. I am lazy and too undisciplined to even sit in meditation, yet no one can match my effort. I can not sit in the correct position, nor chant nor act in accord with others. I am never in accord with others. There being no self and no others, I never open my mouth. I interrupt the zen master before he even opens his mouth and cut off his words continuously through out his speech, yet I have always understood.

Have no desire for what you see.  
Desire not; desire not.  
Desire; desire.  
Have no desire for desire; have no desire for desire.  
Desire and deliverance must be simultaneous.  
Voidness; voidness.  
Non-voidness; non-voidness.  
Non-obscuration; non-obscuration.  
Obscuration; obscuration.  
Emptiness of all things; emptiness of all things.  
Desire above, below, at the center, in all directions; without differentiation!

So simple am I; devoid of mystery, majesty, divinity, or any attribute whatsoever. Being no thing, how could I have the attribute of any thing? I am neither glorious nor not glorious. I am neither anything nor nothing; neither the presence nor the absence of anything. I am this phenomenal absence, which is total intemporal presence. I am ubiquitous, both as absence and presence, since as I, I am neither present nor absent. I can never be known as an object, for I am what is knowing. I alone am (and every sentient being can know likewise).

The chinese ch'an masters of the t'ang dynasty have functioned as my masters; especially master Huang Po (The Zen Teaching of Huang Po, translated by John Blofield). The living ch'an master wei wu wei completed the transmission that is no transmission. And I myself am just an ordinary man. When the ordinary man attains knowledge, he's a sage. When the sage attains understanding (that there is no thing to understand and no one to do it) he's an ordinary man. I find perfect confirmation of my understanding in the teachings of Vimalakirti, Hui-neng, the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, Padme-Sambhava, and Ramana Maharshi.

Although I have no interest or familiarity in japanese culture, chanting or sitting meditation; your statements in the newsletters and in a "Dharma Message" indicate this same simple non-conceptual understanding which is the purpose of all these words. If you wish to do so, perhaps we might start a friendship and correspondence to share this mind which is no mind. In case you are interested, I will leave my name and address at the end of this letter.

I do not believe in the existence of any object or in the factual being of anything objective whatsoever.

I do not believe in the existence of anything that can be heard, seen, felt, smelled, tasted or cognised; which is sensorially perceived and conceptually interpreted as an object, nor in that of any dream, vision, hallucination, or other kind of living experience whether empirically suffered in an apparently sleeping, walking or drugged condition.

I do not believe that there can be a "path" because there is no where to go and no one to go anywhere.

I do not believe that there can be enlightenment at the end of a non-existent “path”, because there is no such entity as a “me” to have it; and “enlightenment” if the term means anything at all, implies all that, non-objectively, I am, have always been, and always will be. Therefore, there is no thing to be acquired and no one to acquire it.

I do not believe in the existence of an objective entity which might be supposed to be writing these lines, nor in the factual existence of the words with which they may appear to be written.

Then who is responsible for this statement? Who? Nobody, I am. I am responsible, as I am responsible for every appearance whatsoever. And every other sentient phenomenon can say that also, or know it without being able to say it: every man and monkey, bird and beetle, reptile and rose, rabbit and owl.

with a hearty laugh,

sincerely,

I.M. Nome

Posthumous Postscript

Birthless and undying  
How could I live?  
Never having lived,  
How could I die?  
Timeless and infinite  
Unliving, undying  
Unbeing, I AM.

PPS: And so are you.

February 12, 1975

Dear I.M. Nome,

Thank you for your letter. I like your letter very much. In this letter you say many “I...”, many “emptiness” and many “no... no...”. Who makes this “I”? Who makes this “emptiness”? Who makes this “no... no...”? I think that all these things are made by your thinking. You already have freedom thinking and no hindrance thinking. Freedom thinking and no hindrance thinking are very important.

You already completely understand, but in Zen this understanding is not important. In Zen it is important to attain.

Understanding is thinking.  
Attainment is before thinking.



Before thinking means no speech and no words.  
So opening the mouth is wrong.

You must return to before thinking! What is before thinking? If you open your mouth I will hit you thirty times, if you close your mouth I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

KATZ!

Never tell a dream to a crazy man.  
Never give a sharp knife to a child.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Maezumi Roshi asked me to write you and ask if it is all right for me to study with him.

Susan and I spent three days at sesshin. He is a very aware man. Full to the top and empty as the sky. He is using your koans. Sitting is becoming stronger.

See you.

Byon Mon

all pervading  
stone breathing  
zafu sat  
children play  
wind blows  
what more  
ahh....  
legs hurt

Cambridge

January 31, 1975

Dear Byon Mon,

Thank you for your letter. It is very good that you are sitting with Maezumi Roshi. I like him also.

If you study with Maezumi Roshi, you must be careful not to be attached to his words and not to be attached to outside sitting. It is very important how you keep Just Now Mind. You must understand what true sitting is, what true Zen is. True sitting means cutting off all thinking and keeping not moving mind. True Zen means becoming clear. Beautiful words, hard sitting are important. But attachment to them is very dangerous. Then you will not understand true sitting Zen.

Once Zen Master To An was visiting another temple. He was not wearing his Zen-master clothes, only the clothes that a wandering monk usually wore. He began a conversation with one of the monks at the temple, who of course didn't recognize that he was a Zen master. The monk began to talk about his master. "Every day he does one thousand prostrations. He eats only once a day. He hasn't left the temple for thirty years. He is always sitting Zen. He is the greatest Zen master in all of China."

To An said, “Well, well, he sounds like an extraordinary man. I can’t do any of these things. I can’t bow a thousand times each day; but I never have a lazy mind. I can’t eat only once a day; but I never have desire for food. I can’t stay in a temple for a long time; but thinking never appears in my mind.”

The monk said, “I don’t understand what you mean.”

To An said, “If you don’t understand, go ask your master.”

The monk went into the temple. Soon the Zen master came hurrying out to To An and bowed three times before him. “You are a great Zen master,” he said, “please let me become your disciple. I have been very attached to hard training. But now that I have heard your kind words, my mind is clear.”

To An laughed and said, “No no, I can’t be your teacher. You are already a great Zen master. All you need to do is to keep the mind you had when you just bowed to me. Already you are a free man. Before you were bowing, sitting, and eating only for yourself. Now it is for all people.

The Zen master began to weep with joy at these words. He bowed again to To An and said simply, “Thank you.”

What do you think about this?

You said in your letter that Maezumi Roshi is “full to the top and empty as the sky.” What does this mean? If you understand true emptiness, then you understand these words. If you understand these words, then you have already attained enlightenment. But if you haven’t attained enlightenment, then you don’t understand these words.

Your poem is very good. But I don’t like any words. Please send me a poem before words. What is before words, before speech?

I am enclosing a copy of our Temple Rules. Nowadays many people are living together at the Cambridge Zen Center and the Providence Zen Center. So we have made these rules and are keeping them. If you like them, you also should keep them.

See you soon.

S.S.

January 31, 1975

Seung Sahn Soen Sa  
48 Hope Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your last two letters. I am very glad to hear that you have gotten your permanent residence and also that you will now be able to make a trip back to Korea.

Thank you also for the invitation to accompany you but I fear that is not possible this year. There is much work to do in my office and with the College and no one else to attend to it if I go traveling. Perhaps next year or the year after I can visit Asia. If so, I hope you will give me some introductions to monks in Korea.

It would be wonderful if you are able to stop in Los Angeles on your way. If so, we would all look forward to seeing you.

My homework is stuck. You have been very kind in giving me directions about the mouse kong an but I am still unsure about it. Recently you wrote, "Moonlight shines through the window on the floor.—Is this enough for you or not?" I think you are telling me to live with the "like this" aspect of it and not to chase freedom mind. Yet before you sent me poems saying that I should understand that four quarters make a dollar—which I took to mean that I should not cling to any of the various aspects of it—so I don't know. Maybe I am conceptualizing too much. Certainly I feel stuck.

You also wrote that the key to the mouse kong an was in a statement by Biok An Lok about the fire in the mountains and the cow behind the wall. You have told me before to see the meaning behind this kong an but I am still too stupid to know what you are driving at. The first part (the mouse part) points at 360°. That is plain. The bowl part points behind that? What is behind 360°? ??? I don't know.

Maybe it is the final throwing away of the idea of the Zen circle or of "like this" or of any special state of mind. So now mostly I just don't know and watch. However, this business requires that I give you an answer to the kong an, "What is the meaning of 'the cat bowl is broken'?" so here is my answer:

It's nothing special.

Finally, the Temple Rules you composed are really good for Americans. I will try to circulate them because they get right at the business of playing games with other people's heads which is a major fault of most of us. We all seem to have a lot of mouth-karma and these will help to halt it.

See you,

An-hanh (Michael)

February 12, 1975

Dear An-hanh,

Thank you for your letter. How are you doing lately? I hope you are keeping this “stuck” mind strongly and that you will soon get enlightenment. You and I have the same karma. Neither of us will be able to visit Korea this spring. I must stay because now I am the Abbot of Won Gak Sa temple in New York City and we are beginning the International Zen Center of New York. In New York City there are many Korean Buddhists who want me to spend time there, so now I have much work to do between Providence, Boston and New York.

In New York there are many American young people who like Zen, so now we are preparing to open a Zen Center. Soon we will find a good place.

I like very much your “stuck” mind. Finding a good answer to the mouse kong-an is not so important, this “stuck mind” is important in Zen. Having this mind is your true treasure but if you only keep this for yourself then it becomes like any other desire. So you must share this treasure with others to help all people. This is why we use kong-ans and interviews, and why we must get enlightened.

Here is another hint for you.

$3 \times 3 = 9$

$4 + 5 = 9$

$10 - 1 = 9$

$18 / 2 = 9$

Here are many different examples but behind each one is the same answer—9. This kong-an is similar. It is a very good one because all the words—mouse, cat food, bowl and broken—all point to the same one thing. You must find this one thing. Before I gave you many hints and if you are not attached to my words you will see that they are not different from each other. They all point to this behind meaning.

Your answer is not good or bad, it is nothing special. But “it is nothing special” has a very special meaning. The meaning behind this is “just like this”.

You said in your letter that the Temple Rules are very good and I thank you very much. Enclosed you will find some new kong-ans which I hope you can use.

See you later;

S.S.

One morning, during Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the Providence Zen Center, a student walked into the interview room and bowed to Seung Sahn Soen-sa.

Soen-sa said, "Do you have any questions?"

The student said, "Yes. What is death?"

Soen-sa said, "You are already dead."

The student said, "I'm only dying. I haven't really died yet. I don't even understand what that would mean."

Soen-sa hit him.

The student became confused and couldn't answer.

After a few moments, Soen-sa said, "When you think death, you make death. When you think life, you make life. When you are not thinking, there is no life and death. In empty mind, is there a you? Is there an I?"

The student said, "No."

Soen-sa said, "You say No. You must understand No. This No is no self, no other, no body, no mind, no world. So it is no life and no death. This is true emptiness. True emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking is just like this. So life is only life, death is only death. You must not be attached to names and forms. It is like a clear mirror. In a clear mirror, all is nothing, there is only the clear mirror. Red comes, the mirror is red. Yellow comes, there is yellow. A woman comes, there is a woman. A man comes, there is a man. Death comes, there is death. Life comes, there is life. But all of these do not exist. The mirror does not hold on to anything. There is only the coming and the going. This is before thinking—all things are just as they are. The name for this mind is original pure mind. You must find your original face. Then you will not make life or death."

The student bowed, and the interview continued.

The next morning, the same student walked into the interview room and bowed.

Soen-sa said, "Do you have any questions?"

The student said, "Yes. What is death?"

Soen-sa said, "You are already dead."

The student said, "Thank you very much. Now I understand."

Soen-sa said, "You understand? Then what is death?"

The student said, "You are already dead."

Soen-sa smiled and bowed.

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Boston Dharmadhatu, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "Are you enlightened?"

Soen-sa said, "Did you have supper?"

The student said, "Yes."

Soen-sa said, "How did it taste?"

The student said, "Like supper."

Soen-sa said, "Thank you very much."

After a few moments of silence, Soen-sa said, "Okay, I will explain. Enlightenment is not enlightenment. You asked me, 'Are you enlightened?' This is the wrong way. So I answered, 'Did you have supper?' Why is enlightenment not enlightenment? Enlightenment is only a name. True enlightenment means cutting off all names and forms. If you had been near me when you asked your question, I would have hit you. But you are far away, so I asked you if you had supper."

The student said, "Thank you very much."

Soen-sa said, "Do you understand?"

The student said, "I think so."

Soen-sa said, "What do you understand?"

The student didn't answer.

Soen-sa said, "If you want to understand true enlightenment you must understand that sugar is sweet and salt is salty."

One Sunday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Providence Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "What is true emptiness?"

Soen-sa said, "Are you asking because you don't know?"

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

Soen-sa hit him.

The student said, "I don't understand why you hit me."

Soen-sa said, "The rocks in the stream and the tiles on the roof understand true emptiness. But you still don't understand true emptiness."

The student said, "What do you mean?"

Soen-sa said, "Put it all down!"



Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you very much for your letter. Dae Haeng is now typing the translation of it, and I will try to mail it tomorrow.

After reading your kind instructions, I thought about the kong-ans as follows:

1) If the man hits me and asks, "Is this hit empty or real?" I will answer, "Ah...ah...ah." And I will hit him back and ask him whether my hit is empty or real. Of course, I expect him to hit me back. That is his disease. He knows only Form is emptiness, but he doesn't know Emptiness is form. So...

2) My answer is, "The mouse eats cat food, but the cat's bowl is broken."

I look forward to your kind instruction.

After the rain, the sky is bluer, and the sunshine falls brightly.

Thank you.

Yours respectfully,

Satam Lee

Dear Rev. Satam,

Taking refuge in the Three Treasures—

Thank you for your letter and translation. I think you have been practicing hard and making great progress.

Now about the kong-ans:

1) To begin with, I will hit you thirty times. The problem is how to fix his mind and bring it to the realm of reality as it is. It is all right to hit him or ask him questions, but if you use the same words as he does, how are you different from him? You said in your letter that he understands "Form is emptiness" but doesn't understand "Emptiness is form." But these two statements are expressions of the same realm, which he has already transcended. He thinks he has reached the realm of "No form, no emptiness", and he is so strongly convinced of this that he will not listen to anyone. A statement such as "Emptiness is form" means nothing to him. If you say, "Form is form, emptiness is emptiness", that might be better.

You must realize “What is this?” as soon as possible. That is why I hit you thirty times.

2) You are still attached to this kong-an. You must not turn into an ape. The real meaning is not the words, but in what is meant by the combination of the four phrases “mouse, cat food, cat bowl, and broken”. Please try to get the meaning beyond the words.

As a man eats  
an ape imitates him.  
Acorns fall from the trees and roll down the slope.  
Squirrels run after them.

Don’t be an ape and run after acorns.

You said in your letter, “The sky is blue after the rain, and the sunshine falls brightly.” This is a very good sentence, but there is a pitfall in it. Please try to find this pitfall.

I hope you continue to do hard training and get the fruit as soon as possible and save all sentient beings.

Good-bye.

S.S.

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What is love?”

Soen-sa said, “I ask you: what is love?”

The student said, “I don’t know.”

Soen-sa said, “Now you ask me.”

“What is love?”

“*This* is love.”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “You ask me: I ask you. This is love.”

The student said, “I’m thinking about love between a man and a woman.”

Soen-sa said, “You only understand one way. You must understand two ways.”

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “You said before that the cat doesn’t say it’s a cat, it has don’t-know mind. Is the cat enlightened? But if it is, why does Buddhism teach that only humans can attain enlightenment?”

Soen-sa said, “What is enlightenment?”

“I don’t know.”

“Enlightenment is no enlightenment. If someone says, ‘I have attained enlightenment,’ this is wrong speech. Many students think, ‘I want enlightenment, I want enlightenment.’ This is very bad. They cannot attain enlightenment.

“The cat doesn’t think enlightenment or no enlightenment.”

“The cat is just a cat. I ask you, Does the cat have Buddha-nature? If it has Buddha-nature, then it can attain enlightenment. If it has no Buddha-nature, no enlightenment.”

“Hmmm... I don’t know.”

Soen-sa laughed and said, “Yah, don’t know is good. Very good.”

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Is it necessary to have a Zen master, and why?”

Soen-sa said, “Why did you come here?”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “If you are thinking, it is necessary. If you have cut off all thinking, it is not necessary. If your mind is clear, a Zen master is not necessary, Buddha is not necessary, all things are not necessary.”

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Boston Dharmadhatu, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What is Zen meditation?”

Soen-sa said, “Where are you coming from?”

The student said, “Where am I coming from? Can you specify what you mean?”

Soen-sa said, “This is Zen meditation.” There was a long silence. Soen-sa said, “Okay, I will explain.” (Laughter from the audience.) “Do you have hands?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good.” (Laughter.) “Legs?”

“Yes.”

“Body?”

“Yes.”

“I am not asking about your body. I am asking where your true self comes from.”

“From my mind, my soul.”

“No mind, no soul. Mind and soul are names. Names are no good.”

“Then where does the true self come from?”

“You ask me? I hit you!” (Laughter.) “Now do you understand?”

(Laughter.)

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “When you say you are here to save all people, does that mean only to help them get enlightened or also to save them from hunger, war, and pain?”

Soen-sa said, “Did you have supper?”

“Yes.”

“How did it taste?”

“Good.”

“Show me.”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “I have already finished saving all people.” There was a long silence. “What does this mean?” Another long silence. “Put it down. Okay?”

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Can everyone become enlightened?”

Soen-sa said, “They are already enlightened.” Then, pointing to the wall, “What color is this?”

“White.”

“*This* is enlightenment. But enlightenment is not enlightenment. If you want enlightenment, enlightenment is far away. But if you cut off your desires and your thinking, there is only clear mind. Whatever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch—all is enlightenment. Zen is not difficult. It is very easy. It is just like this. The wall is white. Three times three equals nine. When the light goes on, the whole room becomes bright.”



An article from the Korean Buddhist newspaper

“Two Americans become monks at Hong Pop Won in America”

On December 8th, the day according to the solar calendar that Buddha attained enlightenment, there was a commemorating ceremony. Following that another ceremony was held ordaining two American youths as monks who renounce worldly life and their families. With Seung Sahn Su Nim as their original teacher and Pop An Su Nim as their Precepts Master, the two newly-ordained monks are named Mu Gak (no enlightenment) and Mu Bul (no Buddha).

The ordination ceremony was held on December 8 at seven o'clock in the Dharma room of Hong Pop Won. About one hundred guests attended, and the Dharma teacher, Alban Eger, presided. The ceremony began with reciting the homage to the three treasures and continued with reciting the Heart Sutra in Korean and English, reciting the Sutra of one thousand hands, making offerings to the Buddha, giving the five precepts to laymen, and giving the ten precepts to the new monks. Then there was a talk, the four great vows were repeated, and the closing announcements were made. The ceremony was followed by a big party in behalf of the newly-ordained monks.

The ceremony and sutra-recitation was done mostly in the Korean language itself; the precepts and the Dharma talk were spoken in Korean and translated by Dr. Jong Mok Cha, who practices medicine in the city.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's Dharma talk was as follows:

“Precepts are our teacher, the Great Way, and the great Bodhisattva Way. When we go to New York from here, if we do not see and follow the signs, we may be misled and go to some other places such as Chicago or Los Angeles, instead of New York. So, if we do not keep the precepts, we may fall into an evil way or go off the track, and we may go astray from the way which a monk should follow. Thus we shall not be able to attain the Great Way. So, the precepts are our teacher, the Great Way and the Great Dharma. Next, when we think that we have attained the Great Way, we keep the precepts not for ourselves, but for others. Thus we put ourselves on a higher plain. The mind that thinks of others rather than of oneself is the wider and higher mind, and is Buddha, Bodhisattva, and the Great Way of Bodhi.

“In America today, the minds of the young people are like wild fields, and they, lost in the field without knowing the right way of life, are wandering this way and that. But you are quite fortunate to have met the Buddhist Dharma which is hard to meet with, even in hundreds and thousands of kalpas. We must say that this is a rare occasion. But it does not come by chance. We must say that it is the result of much good seed which was planted and took root in your minds in past existences. It is the result of good causes in the past. I

hope the result will be a good cause, with further good results, and so on like that until we bring great light to the darkness of the world, and attain the final result in Buddhism.”

The short histories of the two new monks are as follows:

Mu Gak is thirty-two years old. His worldly name is Stephen Mitchell. His parents live in New York, and his father is a doctor, the third generation doctor in the family. Stephen, the oldest son, studied French literature at Yale University and after his graduation became known as a young poet. But he always had doubts about life which made him turn to the study of religious philosophy. Still he was not able to resolve his doubts. Finally he came to know about Zen Buddhism, and travelled from Zen Center to Zen Center until he met Seung Sahn Su Nim one and a half years ago. He then studied Zen very hard and qualified himself as a Dharma teacher. Soon afterwards he established the Cambridge Zen Center, where he is now Director. Wanting to go a step forward, he cut off his hair and became a monk, thus renouncing family life.

Mu Bul is twenty-two years old. His worldly name is Roger Noble. His parents live in Boston, and his father manufactures an electronically-synthesized musical instrument which he invented. Mu Bul is the second son, and he attended the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. He read a great deal about religion and philosophy, studied hard in school, and tried various ways of life in the city and in the country, but still could not find satisfaction. Two years ago, he heard about Zen Master Seung Sahn, thought that he might be able to teach him, and came to hear a Dharma talk. Immediately he began his study of Zen, and qualified himself as a Dharma teacher in less than a year. He is now in charge of managing the Zen Center. Having established a great wish for himself, he became a monk and cut off his hair.

Young people these days have a stronger attachment to their hair than to women, so it is not an easy matter for them to cut off their hair and become monks.

At the ceremony six laymen also received five precepts. The total number of the laymen and laywomen who have received the five precepts at the center is more than one hundred. Among them are some well-known people: the famous professor of psychology at Harvard University, Larry Rosenberg, a doctor of chemistry at M.I.T., Prof. Lincoln Rhodes, and various musicians and artists, who, having taken the five precepts, come to the center regularly and practice Zen.

January 26, 1975

To: Ven. Seung Sahn,

You said in your last letter that there is a great place to fall down (pitfall) in the sentence I wrote you: "The sky after rain is blue, and the falling sunshine is warm." "Please find the falling place," you said.

I venture to give my answer that the falling down is the earth.

I await your kind instruction as ever.

Thank you.

Satam

at a corner, in the garden of  
the International Buddhist  
Meditation Center

To Rev. Satam,

Homage to the three treasures.

I give you thirty blows.

Where is the pitfall (the falling place) in the statement? The cat is taking a nap in the sunshine, and the hen is scratching the ground.

What is the falling place? Don't be attached to the words.

What happened to your previous homework? If you solve the homework, that is, find out how to cure the man who drops ashes on the Buddha's image, and understand the koan of the cat's bowl which is broken, then you shall be able to solve a million koans, and a million falling places. I wish you would soon come to solve them and be able to deliver all deluded sentient beings.

I give you a hint about the kong-an of the cat's bowl being broken.

$3 \times 3 = 9$ .  $5 + 4 = 9$ .  $10 - 1 = 9$ . 18 divided by 2 = 9.

Though the statements are different, the answer is the same: 9. Therefore, the answer is 9. The mouse, the cat's food, the cat's bowl, broken: these four words are different but it is the same place that they return to.

Then, so long.

S.S.

Jan. 27, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

1. Question: Your answer before was, “You wear gray robes, I wear black ones.” This was already a correct answer. So I said it was not good and not bad. But many Zen masters would say, “No good! You are attached to color!” If they said this, what could you do?

Answer: So I say, “You’re attached to good and bad!”

2. (The mouse kong-an) Answer: Only like this!

3. About the man who dropped ashes on the Buddha: what can you do? Please fix his mind with a good answer.

Answer: There is no mind to be fixed, no man, no Buddha, no ashes—only concept in your mind—so the Buddha is bronze.

I wrote to you about Dec. 12th but have had no answer. Thank you for the previous letter and for the tape—I have shared the tape with Mike Hanlan (Paratrata), Satam Nim, and Steve Ekhard. Steve and I did receive ten precepts on Bodhi Day (Dec. 8) so I am a two times monk.

Please do not apologize for your English. It is very good! You should *not* use an interpreter when addressing English-speaking groups!

I liked Won Hyo’s “Starter’s Mind”. I understand the Tao a little better now. I will try to be more than a starter, but *what is finisher’s mind?*

You explained the kong-an about the sound of one hand to me, but I did not make notes—will you explain again? Please!

So, we are looking forward to your return to Los Angeles. If possible, I would like to receive transmission from you and Bodhisattva vows.

See you soon,

Jack (Sugati)

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter. How are you doing lately?

1. Your attack answer is very good, but the Zen Master will check your mind one more time. So, he hits you. What can you do?

2. You say, "Only like this!" This is not so good. What is "only like this"? You must answer a true like this. Only language is no good. For example, the sky is blue, the trees are green. But with the mouse kong-an, if you use this style answer I say that you are scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. You must understand the meaning behind the words, a quarter is twenty-five cents. Don't be attached only to the quarter.

3. You say, "no man, no Buddha, no ashes." Then you and this man are both attached to emptiness. How can you fix his mind? You must understand Buddha is Buddha, ashes are ashes. Your answer is like the response of a small child who goes to market with his mother, when he sees chocolate he only grabs it and puts it in his pocket. The child does not understand that he must pay for the candy. He only gets mad when he cannot have it immediately. In the market we must pay for what we want. Then the child will understand. It is like this. This man is only attached to emptiness. He does not understand Buddha or ashes. You must give him a soft teaching. This gentle style of teaching is in my Kong-an Book. You must find it!

It is good that you have shared the tape that I sent you. Congratulations on being two times a monk! Long ago in China somebody became a monk nine times. This was his karma. Finally he attained enlightenment. Each time he became a monk there was a lot of fighting in his mind: "Should I become a monk or not?!" But after all of this he was finally victorious over his karma. So I wish you will soon be victorious over your karma. The Won Hyo story is also about fighting with karma. You must learn how to fight with your karma from Won Hyo. Therefore, if you lose your fight you must become a monk a third time, if you win you will get enlightenment.

You said, "What is a finisher's mind?" If you want a finisher's mind, you will not attain even if you spend infinite time, but if you put it all down, then you will get a finisher's mind. This is a finisher's mind.

You asked me to explain the Kong-an of one hand again. So, long ago in China a great Zen master had an interview with a student. He raised his hand and asked the student, "Do you hear the sound of this hand?" The student said, "I cannot hear it." The Zen Master hit him. This time, how would you answer? This is the sound of one hand kong-an.

I don't know when I will be in Los Angeles. Perhaps on my way to Korea.

I want to give you transmission so you must do hard training and attain enlightenment. I hope that by not making anything in your mind you will become clear and return to your true self.

See you later.

Seung Sahn

P.S. I am sending you our temple rules. You must keep them.

February 18, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Kong-an answers are on the other side. If we handle them like this there is a better continuity of the answer-zen mind.

1. Question: Your attack answer is very good, but the Zen Master will check your mind one more time. So, he hits you; what can you do?

Answer: Don't bother me with your Zen stick! I'm a busy person!

2. Question:... With the mouse kong-an... you must understand the meaning behind the words: a quarter is twenty-five cents. Don't be attached only to the quarter.

Answer: Squeek! Squeek! Crash!

3. Question:...this man is only attached to emptiness, he does not understand Buddha or ashes. You must give him a soft teaching. This gentle style teaching is in my Kong-an Book, you must find it!

Answer: I shall now explain the Zen circle, tell him he is attached to emptiness. Ask "Did you spill ashes?"—then clean the room!

I received your temple rules. Except that part that applies especially to your home temple where I am not, I have followed those rules for years. Good rules! Have recently completed a sesshin. Have regular interviews with Ven. Song-Ryong Hearn, sit morning and evening, and try to keep a zen mind while working and other activities.

Have (I believe) had several small Satories and can sit samadhi for long periods. Have been practicing chants, so you see I am practicing. Wish you were here to check my "zen mind" and give some close guidance just now when I really need it. You say you want to give me transmission—beside this training that I am doing, is there more training that you recommend?

Have there been any new pages to the Kong-an book recently? I would like to be on the mailing list for the news-letter, and let me know as soon as you decide to come to L.A. again. The sky is blue, the clouds move by themselves, and the sea-gulls squawk-squawk! as they search for food.

Hope you are well. See you soon.

Jack (Sugati)

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter.

1. Your first answer is neither bad nor good, but it had the head of a dragon and the tail of a snake. I will show you a good answer. First you must understand that the Zen Master's hit is no good; he is only checking your mind. So, he attacks you. So in defense you must return the attack. For example, you could hit the Zen Master and say, "Go drink tea!" or "Did you sleep well last night?" Don't explain your situation.

2. Your second answer is very good, but a little bit not clear. It is like trying to see the difference between a penny and a dime in the dark. Why do you say "Squeek, squeek Crash!"? This is not Zen talk. Please explain this to me.

3. Your answer is very long. He is very attached to emptiness and does not like a lot of words. He will only hit you. Check the Kong-an Book one more time, please. Then you will find a good answer.

If you like to write your answers in the way you do, then I like it too. All the letters that you send and I answer will go into my Kong-an Book.

Many people like the temple rules. I hope you will keep them also, become a great man, and save all people.

I think it is a very good idea for you to be sitting and having interviews with Ven. Song-Ryong Hearn. I think he has taught you well.

In Zen there are three kinds of enlightenment. 1. First enlightenment is understanding true nature, true emptiness. 2. Original enlightenment is the area of understanding the "like this" mind. 3. Final enlightenment is great enlightenment. Then you can use all kong-ans freely, and teach with no hindrance. Everything is complete.

It is like going to an apartment building where many families live. The first enlightenment is like the key to the front door. With the second enlightenment-key you gain entrance to your own apartment. The third enlightenment-key opens the door to your own room.

The first key is 180 degrees, and is understanding true emptiness. The next key is arriving at 360 degrees, and is understanding "like this". With the last key, the circle and all its degrees disappear. This is complete freedom and no hindrance. Just like this.

360 degrees is "like this". Final enlightenment is "just like this".

I will give you an example. "Is this a bell or not? If you say it is a bell, I will hit you thirty times. If you say it is not a bell, I will also hit you thirty times." Hitting the floor or shouting KATZ! is a 180 degree answer. "The sky is blue, the trees are green, the wall is white, the floor is brown," are all "like this" answers. This is 360 degrees. But this is not a complete answer. Only on the language route it is good, but on the Dharma route it is not good. The Dharma route answer is just like this: ringing the bell.



I understand your mind's situation. You must examine the above. Then you will understand your own situation, as when you drink water and know that it is hot or cold.

When you have reached great enlightenment then you must check yourself by visiting many Zen masters and talking with them. Then you must send me a copy of your dialogues, and I will look at them. Then after I check your mind, if it is complete, then I will give you transmission.

I will put you on the newsletter mailing list. Nowadays I am very busy. The abbot of Won Gak Sa in New York, Ven. Ku, went back to Korea. So now I am starting the New York Zen Center to teach there, so just now I don't know when I will go to Los Angeles, but when I go I will tell you.

Your poem-sentence at the end of your letter is wonderful. But be careful that you do not let language deceive you.

I hope that you will do more hard training, and soon get enlightenment, and save all people.

Sincerely yours,

S. S.

P.S. You don't need to send money for postage. Thank you anyway.

Dear Dr. Pruden,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am sorry it has been so long since I received your letter but these days I am very busy.

How is your study of Chinese coming along? My English is getting better very slowly. At our celebration of Buddha's enlightenment I spoke only English. I am sending you a copy of my talk. You may check my English!

Finally I have gotten my permanent visa. It has taken a long time and I am very grateful for your help. Thank you so much.

Nowadays I am busy travelling between our Zen Centers in Cambridge, Providence, and New York City. Now in Providence there are eighteen students doing hard training. The whole family says hello to you.

In the Cambridge Center there are six residents and many people come for lectures. Each week there are seventy or eighty people at the talk.

We have just begun the N.Y.C. Center and I think that in the future there will be more people than in Cambridge.

Last December 8 Stephen and Roger became monks and took the names Mu Gak and Mu Bul. They are good monks. Mu Gak is now the Dharma Teacher at the Cambridge Center. Mu Bul is the General Secretary of the Providence Center. I will send you a picture.

Now the Providence Center is growing bigger every month. Always new people arrive who want to move in and already the house is almost full. We are grateful for all your help in a time when it was so needed. It was very kind of you.

Chung Dahl has been away from L.A. visiting in Korea. Since he has been back he has been thinking of going to Harvard to learn English and study religion along with Pop An Su Nim. I think this is a very good idea. In L.A. there are not so many possibilities for Chung Dahl to grow living in the Korean community. I hope you will write him a letter encouraging him with this new possibility of going to Harvard.

Tahl Mah Sa is very good. Kae Jong Su Nim says hello to you.

I have much correspondence with Michael Hannon at the International Meditation Center. Many Zen dialogues go back and forth; he is doing very hard training in Zen. Also many people there are looking forward to your return.

I hope you will soon attain enlightenment, become a great man, save all people, and follow the great Bodhisattva Way.

Sincerely,

Seung Sahn Haeng Won

Rev. Cheong On Su Nim—

Homage to the Three Treasures. In memory of the great Zen Master, Cheon Kang Su Nim, I fold my hands before the altar of the Three Treasures.

The news that the great master has entered into Nirvana reached me through the Buddhist newspaper, and I would like to express my heartfelt grief and sadness. The original face of the great master, of course, is still there among the green mountains and the white clouds, and there is no life and death or Nirvana; but life is life, and death is death, and I feel greatly grieved. I feel all the more so because I can not go and see the image of the great master who was particularly kind and loving to me throughout his lifetime.

Far away in America, I look to the Eastern sky, with hands folded, with incense burning, in a deep meditation in behalf of him.

(We wish that you not forget your original vow, and return to the suffering world again as soon as possible, to find again enlightenment, the great work of life and death, and widely benefit all sentient beings.)

Reverend Cheong On, you shall be busy giving 49th day and 100th day memorial services for him. Please give my best regards to all those in your temple. Buddhism in the U.S.A. is developing day by day. It is my great regret that I did not have the chance to invite the great master to the U.S.A. once.

Wishing an eternal bliss to the master again, and continuous efforts for greater achievements to you,

I remain,

Yours,

Seung Sahn

To the deceased Great Master

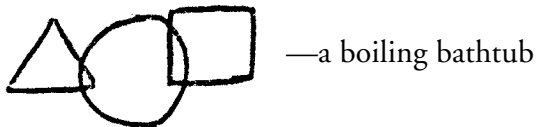
In the great enlightenment achieved by one word,  
Many blue-eyed disciples originate.  
In the hairs which grow on teeth,  
Many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas die and disappear.  
The Great Zen Master, Cheon Kang Young Shin,  
Where are you going?  
KATZ!

Aigo, aigo, aigo. (I, weeping.)

Dear S.S. Soen Sa Nim,

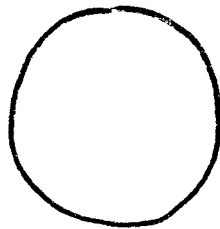
Thank you very much for your letter. It helped clear the air, which was getting dusty with too much conceptual thought. Black ink on white paper only like this. You asked me many questions but really only one. What happens after death. I don't know, before I was born I did but I forgot. Your homework is very tough. Here are my answers.

To the man who blows smoke on the Buddha, and bowl Kong-an:  
Ice, water, steam




---

Legless cat scratches  
Mouthless mouse eats  
Broken bowl with no bottom  
or sides  
When cats food is swallowed  
It does not move



Your poem was wonderful

Here is one for you

Without special purpose  
my life is complete  
In the cave at midnight  
there is still some light  
But if the mind moves one inch  
incense ash falls like thunder  
Katz  
How much does it weigh?  
You must bring the scales.

With a deep bow

Stephen

Cambridge

February 23, 1975

Dear Stephen,

How are you doing lately? Thank you for your letter. I was waiting for it and was glad to receive it.

In your letter you said, “black ink on white paper—only like this.” These are very fine words. But there are two kinds of “like this” answers: language route and Dharma route. For example, take the following kong-an.

Here is a bell. If you say it is a bell, you are attached to name and form. If you say it is not a bell, you are attached to emptiness. Is this a bell or not?

I will show you four answers. 1) Only hit the floor. 2) “The bell is laughing.” 3) “Outside it is dark, inside it is light.” Or, “The bell is on the floor.” These statements are only like this. They are good answers, but they are not complete answers. 4) Pick up the bell and ring it. This is a 100% complete answer. So it is possible to understand “like this” and yet not give the best answer. Language route answers are good, but sometimes they are not complete. The Dharma route answer is the complete answer. When a question is wide, the language route and the Dharma route become one. So to the question “What is Buddha?”, there are many complete answers: “Three pounds of flax,” “Dry shit on a stick,” “The wall is white, the rug is blue,” etc. But with a narrow question, the language route and the Dharma route are different. So to the bell question, there is only one complete answer. The same is true for the mouse kong-an. The language route is not complete; you must find the Dharma route, then you will come up with a good answer. This answer is only one point.

You drew a triangle, circle, and square. If you are thinking, this is a demon’s action. If you cut off all thinking, everything is the truth. So if you cut off all thinking, these figures are not necessary. Shit is Buddha, vomit is Buddha—they are the truth, they are just like this. If you keep discriminating mind, why stop at three figures? More are possible, and the figures you could draw are endless. These are only devices for teaching Zen; they do not really exist. You must not be attached to form. You must finish your homework. This is very important. You must understand that a quarter is twenty-five cents.

Your poem is very good. But what does “my life is complete” mean? If you use complete, you must take out “my life”. If you use “my life,” you must take out “complete”. How can you hear “the sound of incense ash falling like thunder”? You wrote, “Katz” and “How much does it weigh?” I already asked you how much it weighs. If you want to understand this weight, you need a scale without measurements.

Here is a poem for you:

The snowman Bodhidharma sweats and grows smaller, smaller.  
The sound of his heartbeat shatters heaven and hell.  
His eyebrows drop off, then his eyes, then his carrot nose.  
A child shouts, "Bodhidharma is dying!"

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

Master Seung-Sahn,

Wednesday evening I attended a discussion you presented at Yale with the assistance of two students. I was keenly interested in merely seeing you and in hearing your words and in seeing other interested people because my interest in Zen has so far developed solely through my own efforts and my knowledge of it has come only through books. And this approach has made Zen seem remote and inapplicable to this time and life. This has, in turn, generated some feelings that my interest in Zen is an unhealthy attempt to escape this world that I do not understand. Seeing other live people, functioning with ease in this world, relieves some of those feelings and encourages my interest in Zen. This direct experience with Zen also releases a flood of questions about Zen practice. And finally we arrive at the point of this letter.

Can you recommend a specific method of zazen for a beginner? I have been practicing about one month, sitting, counting exhalations to ten. Do you recommend I continue this method or change? Also, can you give advice on the way to function day-to-day prior to a final understanding? I try doing what has to be done without discursive thinking, with some success but I have not dispelled a conviction that there is or should be a more concrete guideline for action. I think particularly about certain precepts I've read, sixteen in all. Are these precepts just for those who have attained understanding, ways of acting that come only from that understanding? Or can they be applied externally to one without the final understanding, serving as a reference point for actions along the way to attaining understanding?

I have also read of an event termed "sesshin" in which lay people spend a week or so at a temple or center to practice and speak with a master. Do your centers have such events? If so, please forward specific details.

I am also encountering some confusion in the relation of actual practice to the verbal history of Zen, verbal examples and explanations of the final understanding, etc. I have read histories, examples and explanations enough to feel I agree intellectually and can comprehend with my reason. But I do not understand in my bones because there has been no direct experience. So, I agree with those who say that we can't reach understanding through words; it must come through practice. But you use words to help students understand. And I don't understand. In reading, I have thought and thought and always come to that brick wall beyond which words cannot go. So, I've pretty much stopped trying to reason out what the words may indicate and try only to practice, sitting zazen and thinking about who or what writes these words, eats, sleeps, etc. But, I wonder if I am giving up on words without truly exhausting them. I fear this is a confused accounting of confused thoughts but perhaps you can see through all my delusions.

I also discovered, through the Yale meeting, that there is a daily zendo at 7:00 A.M. at Yale. I have two small children, and a husband who works and is not interested in Zen.



These combine to make me feel it impossible to attend this local zendo yet practice with others is stressed. Am I simply not trying hard enough, being too lazy to make this zendo? What are your opinions and/or suggestions?

I have taken enough of your time and greatly appreciate your attention to my questions.

Sincerely,

Patricia

Cambridge

February 23, 1975

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

In your letter, you said that you have read many books about Zen. That's good. But if you are thinking, you can't understand Zen. Anything that can be written in a book, anything that can be said—all this is thinking. If you are thinking, then all Zen books, all Buddhist sutras, all Bibles are demons' words. But if you read with a mind that has cut off all thinking, then Zen books, sutras, and Bibles are all the truth. So is the barking of a dog or the crowing of a rooster: all things are teaching you at every moment, and these sounds are better than Zen books. So Zen is keeping the mind which is before thinking. All sciences and academic studies are after thinking. We must return to before thinking. Then we will attain our true self.

In your letter you said that your practice has been counting exhalations to ten. This method is not good, not bad. It is possible to practice in this way when you are sitting. But when you are driving, when you are talking, when you are watching television, when you are playing tennis—how is it possible to count your breaths? Sitting is only a small part of practicing Zen. The true meaning of sitting Zen is cutting off all thinking and keeping not-moving mind. So I ask you: What are you? You don't know; there is only "I don't know." Always keep this don't-know mind. When this don't-know mind becomes clear, then you will understand. So if you keep don't-know mind when you are driving, this is driving Zen. If you keep it when you are talking, this is talking Zen. If you keep it when you are watching television, this is television Zen. You must keep don't-know mind always and everywhere. This is the true practice of Zen.

The Great Way is not difficult  
for those who do not make distinctions.  
Only throw away likes and dislikes,  
and everything will be perfectly clear .

So throw away all opinions, all likes and dislikes, and only keep the mind that doesn't know. This is very important. Don't-know mind is the mind that cuts off all thinking. When all thinking has been cut off, you become empty mind. This is before thinking.

Your before thinking mind, my before thinking mind, all people's before thinking mind is the same. This is your substance. Your substance, my substance, and the substance of the whole universe become one. So the tree, the mountain, the cloud and you become one. Then I ask you: are the mountain and you the same or different? If you say "the same," I will hit you thirty times. If you say "different," I will still hit you thirty times. Why?

The mind that becomes one with the universe is before thinking. Before thinking there are no words. "Same" and "different" are opposites words, they are from the mind that separates all things. That is why I will hit you if you say either one. So what answer would be a good one? If you don't understand, only keep don't-know mind for a while, and you will soon have a good answer. If you do, please send it to me.

You asked why I use words to teach if understanding through words is not possible. Words are not necessary. But they are very necessary. If you are attached to words, you cannot return to your true self. If you are not attached to words, soon you will attain enlightenment. So if you are thinking, words are very bad. But if you are not thinking, all words and all things that you can see or hear or smell or taste or touch will help you. So it is very important for you to cut off your thinking and your attachment to words.

Here is a poem for you:

Buddha said all things have Buddha-nature.  
Jo-ju said the dog has no Buddha-nature.  
Which one is correct?  
As soon as you open your mouth, you fall into hell.  
Why?  
KATZ!!!  
Clouds float up to the sky.  
Rain falls down to the ground.

Sincerely,

S.S.

March 2, 1975

Zen Master Seung Sahn  
Providence Zen Center  
48 Hope Street  
Providence RI 02903

Dear Master Seung Sahn:

I am sad that I have not been able to come to the Zen Center since my last interview. I have had much pain in my back, and I can not sit very well even now.

In my last interview you asked me how to fix the mind of a Zen student who came to the Zen Center and blew smoke in the face of the Buddha statue and dropped ashes on the Buddha.

This is my answer: He is attached to Emptiness. He thinks he is Enlightened. He is thinking No Form; No Emptiness.

I would say, What is Buddha?—If you say Buddha is Emptiness, how could you blow smoke in his face?—If you say Buddha is not Emptiness, why did you show disrespect?... PUT IT DOWN! BUDDHA IS BUDDHA, SMOKE IS SMOKE, EMPTINESS IS EMPTINESS...JUST LIKE THIS, THAT IS ALL.

I hope my back will be well enough for me to see you soon.

Thank you very much,

Albert

March 6, 1975

Dear Albert,

Thank you for your letter.

How is your back? Sometimes pain helps you. Where does pain come from? The Heart Sutra says, "All five skandhas are empty." So, form, feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness are empty. If you keep a "don't know" mind, pain is only pain. Just like this.

True sitting Zen is not the body's sitting. Mind sitting is, at all times, everywhere, cutting off all thinking and keeping a "don't know" mind. That is true sitting Zen.

Your answer to the question is not good, not bad. But, the man is very strongly attached to emptiness. In True Emptiness, speech is not necessary. So, opening the mouth is wrong. You explain a lot to him, but he doesn't hear you. He only hits you. You say, "He is thinking No Form; No Emptiness." This is your thinking. And you say, "PUT IT DOWN!" What is "PUT IT DOWN"? So, he has already attained True Emptiness. In Emptiness, "PUT IT DOWN" is wrong. So, he will hit you.

So, he does not know that Buddha is Buddha and ashes are ashes. How can you teach him, fix his mind, correct his attachment to emptiness? He does not know "JUST LIKE THIS". He only understands the hit, and "KATZ!" He says, "I am Buddha. I am Dharma." No matter what question you ask him, he will hit you. What can you do? I hope you will soon finish this homework, and save this person and all people.

Here is a poem for you:

One sword which can revive people. One sword which kills.  
When lightening flashes, here and there become clear.  
The lion springs, and claws people.  
The dog runs away with the bone.

See you later,

S.S.

One Sunday, while Seung Sahn Soen-sa was staying at the International Zen Center of New York, there was a big ceremony marking the end of one hundred days of chanting Kwanseum Bosal. Many Korean women came, with shopping bags full of food and presents. One woman brought a large bouquet of plastic flowers, which she presented smilingly to an American student of Soen-sa's. As soon as he could, the student hid the flowers under a pile of coats. But soon, another woman found them and, with the greatest delight, walked into the Dharma Room and put them in a vase on the altar.

The student was very upset. He went to Soen-sa and said, "Those plastic flowers are awful. Can't I take them off the altar and dump them somewhere?"

Soen-sa said, "It is your mind that is plastic. The whole universe is plastic."

The student said, "What do you mean?"

Soen-sa said, "Buddha said, 'When one mind is pure, the whole universe is pure; when one mind is tainted, the whole universe is tainted.' Every day we meet people who are unhappy. When their minds are sad, everything that they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch is sad, the whole universe is sad. When the mind is happy, the whole universe is happy. If you desire something, then you are attached to it. If you reject it, you are just as attached to it. Being attached to a thing means that it becomes a hindrance in your mind. So 'I don't like plastic' is the same as 'I like plastic'—both are attachments. You don't like plastic flowers, so your mind has become plastic, and the whole universe is plastic. Put it all down. Then you won't be hindered by anything. You won't care whether the flowers are plastic or real, whether they are on the altar or in the garbage pail. This is true freedom. A plastic flower is just a plastic flower. A real flower is just a real flower. You mustn't be attached to name and form."

The student said, "But we are trying to make a beautiful Zen center here, for all people. How can I not care? Those flowers spoil the whole room."

Soen-sa said, "If somebody gives real flowers to Buddha, Buddha is happy. If somebody else likes plastic flowers and gives them to Buddha, Buddha is also happy. Buddha is not attached to name and form, he doesn't care whether the flowers are real or plastic, he only cares about the person's mind. Those women who are offering plastic flowers have very pure minds, and their action is Bodhisattva action. Your mind rejects plastic flowers, so you have separated the universe into good and bad, beautiful and ugly. So your action is not Bodhisattva action. Only keep Buddha's mind. Then you will have no hindrance. Real flowers are good; plastic flowers are good. This mind is like the great sea, into which all waters flow—the Hudson River, the Charles River, the Yellow River, Chinese water, American water, clean water, dirty water, salt water, clear water. The sea doesn't say, 'Your water is dirty, you can't flow into me.' It accepts all waters and mixes them and all

become sea. So if you keep the Buddha mind, your mind will be like the great sea. This is the great sea of enlightenment.”

The student bowed and said, “I am very grateful for your teaching.”

*[Duplicate letter removed from collection.]*

One evening, Katz, a cat who lived at the Cambridge Zen Center, died after a long illness. The seven-year-old daughter of one of Seung Sahn Soen-sa's students was troubled by the death. After the burial and chanting to Amita Buddha, she went to Soen-sa for an interview.

Soen-sa said, "Do you have any questions?"

Gita said, "Yes. What happened to Katzie? Where did he go?"

Soen-sa said, "Where do you come from?"

"From my mother's belly."

"Where does your mother come from?"

Gita was silent.

Soen-sa said, "Everything in the world comes from the same one thing. It is like in a cookie factory. Many different kinds of cookies are made—lions, tigers, elephants, houses, people. They all have different shapes and different names, but they are all made from the same dough and they all taste the same. So all the different things that you see—a cat, a person, a tree, the sun, this floor—all these things are really the same."

"What are they?"

"People give them many different names. But in themselves they have no names. When you are thinking, all things have different names and different shapes. But when you are not thinking, all things are the same. There are no words for them. People make the words. A cat does not say, 'I am a cat.' People say, 'This is a cat.' The sun does not say, 'My name is sun.' People say, 'This is the sun.' So when someone asks you, 'What is this?', how should you answer?"

"I shouldn't use words."

Soen-sa said, "Very good! You shouldn't use words. So if someone asks you, 'What is Buddha?', what would be a good answer?"

Gita was silent.

Soen-sa said, "You ask me."

"What is Buddha?"

Soen-sa hit the floor.



Gita laughed.

Soen-sa said, "Now I ask you: What is Buddha?"

Gita hit the floor.

"What is God?"

Gita hit the floor.

"What is your mother?"

Gita hit the floor.

"What are you?"

Gita hit the floor.

"Very good! This is what all things in the world are made of. You and Buddha and God and your mother and the whole world are the same."

Gita smiled.

Soen-sa said, "Do you have any more questions?"

"You still haven't told me where Katz went."

Soen-sa leaned over, looked into her eyes, and said, "You already understand."

Gita said, "Oh!" and hit the floor very hard. Then she gave Soen-sa a big smile.

Soen-sa said, "Very very good! That is how you should answer any question. That is the truth."

Gita bowed and left. As she was opening the door, she turned her head to Soen-sa and said, "But I'm not going to answer that way when I'm in school. I'm going to give regular answers!"

Soen-sa laughed.

**Big Mistake**

One Sunday evening, after a Dharma talk at the International Zen Center of New York, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Does Big I ever make a mistake?”

Soen-sa said, “A big mistake.”

The student said, “Who sees the mistake?”

Soen-sa said, “It has already appeared.”

March 4, 1975

Dear Master Lee,

Enclosed you will find an assortment of letters I have written and never mailed to you, so here they are.

My practice is I don't know what. It is neither good nor bad I guess but still I don't know what. It seems I don't know what about anything which seems different from I don't know what.

Tell me about Shakuhachi practice. It is my ego that wants to play well. How can I just play. As I watch my playing I sense today that all things are like those music notes on the page. It says move 3rd finger. How can I learn to live each moment as when each note directs me and I fulfill that request as best I can. I don't really know what I am saying but I must write you and I hope I mail these letters to you.

See Hoy

March 5, 1975

Dear Master Lee,

I am very confused. Since you are not here I go to sit with Venerable Hearn and sometimes Dr. Thien-An. Venerable Hearn is here only once a week for Dokusan and will be leaving for the Asian countries at the end of the month.

Once soon after you went to Providence I went to visit with Roshi Kozan Kimura. Here are a list of Koans given to me:

From you: "What am I?"  
"Why has Bodhidharma no beard?"

From Venerable Hearn: "What is the sound of the flute with no holes?"

One day he said to me, "now show me your understanding of this" and gave me the koan, "Can you drive a nail without a hammer?"

Dr. Thien-An: "Where do you find Buddha Nature?"

My answer: Galloping through it is all around. How could it leave a trace? He said: "Go work on it some more."

Kamura Roshi said I should decide on one Master. I told him you were not here. He told me I should follow you around and go to Providence. He said he likes me to come and sit Zen with them but would not give me Dokusan lest he interfere with another's koan.

Last night I went to sit with him and had no dokusan. Tonight I went to sit and went to dokusan. He said I should only work on one koan and asked me to meditate on "When you were born." After all others were finished with dokusan, I went back and answered with, "Since there is no trace, how should I know." We then talked and he asked me what other koans I had and which one I worked on. I told him I work most on "What am I?" He said it is too hard for beginners and I should work on, "when you were born."

Please advise me, because when I sit Zen I can only ask, rather I like only to ask what am I and even at other times only what am I. I do not know what to do.

Shall I just go and sit with Kozan but have no dokusan? Shall I come to Providence, but here I have so many attachments and even to you attachment.

Sometimes I remember you asking What am I and can even get angry with you for giving me such a thing.

Even now I am attached to What am I and the thought of "When I was born" makes me want to vomit, because all these things are puzzling my head. I will sit more Zazen tonight and only think What am I. Please help me because I think only you can take "What am I" back.

Please answer me soon, but you probably won't, huh? Anyway I'd like to tell you to go fuck yourself.

Respectfully and hope to see you soon,

See Hoy

March 22, 1975

Dear See Hoy,

Thank you for your two letters. I have been in New York since the beginning of the month, so I didn't receive them until a few days ago. That's why my answer is so late. I am sorry.

You say that you don't know what your practice is, that you don't know anything. But then you say that you are confused. If you keep a complete don't-know mind, how can confusion appear? Complete don't-know mind means cutting off all thinking. Cutting off all thinking means true emptiness. In true emptiness, there is no I to be confused and nothing to be confused about. True emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking, everything does not appear and does not disappear. So the truth is just like this. Red comes, there is red; white comes, there is white. When you close all the holes of the shakuhachi, there is no sound; when the holes are open, there is a high sound. Only like

this. The shakuhachi is a very good teacher for you. If you don't understand, just ask the shakuhachi. Just enter the sound of the shakuhachi, then the shakuhachi will explain to you what enlightenment is.

Dr. Thien An, Song Ryong Hearn, and Kimura Roshi are all good teachers. I think you can take your questions and problems to any of them and they will teach you well.

You have many kong-ans. But a kong-an is like a finger pointing at the moon. If you are attached to the finger, you don't understand the direction, so you cannot see the moon. If you are not attached to any kong-an, then you will understand the direction. The direction is the complete don't-know mind. The name for "like this" is "don't know". If you understand "don't know", you will understand all kong-ans and you will soon understand "like this".

You have many problems in your kong-an work. "What am I?"—do you understand this? Your answer is "I don't know." "When were you born?"—do you understand this? Your answer is also, "I don't know." If you are not attached to words, the don't-know mind is the same. All kong-ans become the same don't-know mind. Your don't-know mind, my don't-know mind, all people's don't-know minds, the "What am I?" don't-know mind, the "When was I born?" don't-know mind—all these are the same don't-know. So it is very easy. Only keep don't-know. Don't be attached to words. This don't-know is your true self. It is nothing at all. It is very easy, not difficult.

So you must keep only don't-know, always and everywhere. Then you will soon get enlightenment. But be very careful not to want enlightenment. Only keep don't-know mind.

Your situation, your condition, your opinions—throw them all away.

I think it would be very good for you to learn with Kimura Roshi. I hope you also listen to what your shakuhachi is teaching you and soon get enlightenment.

At the end of your letter you say, "Go fuck yourself." These are wonderful words that you have given me, and I thank you very much. If you get enlightenment, I will give them back to you.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

P.S. During April, for almost the whole month, I will be staying at the International Zen Center of New York, 40 East 20th St., New York City.

March 8, 1975

Dear Soen Sa,

How is it in Providence. Here it is beautiful—cool and rainy—very rare. I plan to leave here approximately July 15, and then return East to visit my mother, and you.

I have an open-my-mouth question:

Why is there all the practice with effort, if it is an effortless state we end at? Why sitting, koans, chanting, etc? In my sitting, for the last 10-12 months, there has been no (or little) difference between sitting and not sitting, only clarity. That is my koan sitting is the same as sitting doing nothing (shikantaza), and making effort is the same as no effort. Making effort leads to a direction, at the beginning opposite to the later state of no-effort; later it becomes no-effort, so why spend 3-5 years making effort when it leads to no effort? Why not start with no effort, just being mindful as in the Hinayana Vipassana method or as Krishnamurti. Why spend three to five years going away from no effort only to return?

Also, the Japanese Soto and Rinzai seem to put much more emphasis on effort—hard sitting, endless work, etc. than you do. You put less emphasis on sitting and effort in practice? Why?

Also, you say Kensho, enlightenment is “clear mind.” Maezumi and Hearn both disagree. From my own experience, I’ve experienced many times during the last 4 years states beyond clarity; states where “I” (mind and body) disappear and there is only the world seen, experienced with no separation, no space, no time, just this.

Is the latter state what you mean by “clear mind”?

If my sitting goes well, this state of oneness, of like this, occurs every few days, if it goes bad, it does not occur often at all. But now, I see there is no difference between good sitting and bad sitting, between clarity and crowded, anxious mind.

But is there any point in training that one may be called enlightened? I think not. All is enlightenment, is it not?

Also, why is it that it takes 20–30 years to complete training under a Japanese Roshi, but much less under a Korean? What is it about the Japanese method that takes so long? Are they more thorough and complete? better or worse or why?

You asked me “What do I understand?”

I understand that there is nothing to understand, nothing to be done or to be practiced, only clear mind, but no one wants to hear this, they want to drink, dance, make noise,

have opinions, and endlessly talk about love and compassion which is only their idea of love and compassion.

I have little interest in becoming a teacher, very few listen anyway, and even when you talk at all, you are not being a good teacher most of the time.

So my teaching is to tell other people not to worry about the millions of different practices that one can do, only to sit. The method is not important; just sit, koan, shikantaza, breath counting. Then the real "I" functions with no thinking, no talking; then, sometime, without knowing when God or Buddha comes, like this, Reality.

Nor am I interested in attaining enlightenment. Enlightenment is only a word; either I have it now, or it will come of its own accord as long as I practice. What difference does it make?

But I am interested in how to show others that thinking, ideas, etc. are blockage to clarity, at least in the beginning; to drop their opinions and emotions by whatever way they can.

Hope to see you in July or early August.

Sincerely,

Ed

P.S. You are wrong about Dr. Thien-An, he treats all people like children, and thus children they remain for a long time.

By profession and training, I am an economist and planner. Until one or two years ago I was greatly optimistic about the future of the world in terms of food and war etc, but knew it didn't matter because the world was too complicated to understand in ideas what was happening, let alone with sufficient accuracy to make any significant plans. But now I know, from a deep investigation of what is going on that the world is in deep trouble, far more so than ever before, and perhaps too late in that trouble to do anything about it.

What really must be done is to revolutionize men's minds. But it is not now merely a matter of being a good teacher. Many, many people must experience this revolution now, or all the world could die. If it does, it does, but just as a good doctor will treat all diseases as they arise, for those who are able, they must treat the diseases of mind, but quickly. There is not a hundred or a thousand years of grace period, perhaps only two or three decades before the world falls apart and there is unbelievable suffering, and when I see suffering, I suffer. This suffering must be stopped.

Ed

March 22, 1975

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. I will be glad to see you when you come to the East Coast.

In your letter, you talk a lot about effort and no effort. Put it all down. Why so much thinking? Why are you so attached to words? An eminent teacher said, "The ten thousand questions are one question. If you cut through the one question, then the ten thousand questions will disappear."

What do you want? If one person makes great effort, if another person makes no effort—don't worry. All that you need be concerned about is your own job. First finish your own great work; then you will understand everything. Sitting, walking, talking, laughing, eating—all is Zen. You must understand this.

Sitting is important. But true sitting doesn't depend on whether or not the body is sitting. You already know the story about Ma-jo doing hard sitting and Nam Ak picking up the tile and polishing it.

You say that I say that enlightenment is clear mind. What is clear mind? Clear mind is only a name. Enlightenment is also only a name. If you say clear mind, it is not clear mind. If you say enlightenment, it is not enlightenment. Red is red; white is white. Only like this. This is clear mind; this is enlightenment. It is nothing at all. If you say that clear mind is enlightenment, I will hit you thirty times. If you say that clear mind is not enlightenment, I will also hit you thirty times. Don't be attached to clear mind or enlightenment. Don't be attached to Zen words. You must be very careful. Zen masters use their tongues to trick their students.

You say that when sitting is good, a state of oneness beyond clarity occurs. What is oneness? What is good sitting or bad sitting? You must not check your mind. Checking your mind is a very bad Zen sickness. As fine as your speech is, it is only thinking. Give me one sentence before thinking.

You ask why it takes twenty or thirty years to complete training under a Japanese Zen master. Under a Korean Zen master it takes infinite time. You go around comparing Japanese and Korean Zen and other kinds of Buddhism. This is your bad karma. So you are no good. This is simply not important! Put it down!

You say that you understand there is nothing to understand. But you understand enlightenment, emptiness, everything. You haven't attained enlightenment or emptiness or everything. Understanding is thinking. Attainment is before thinking. If you open your mouth, you are wrong. I have already told you that you must keep your mouth closed. You must keep this rule!



The Third Patriarch said,

The Great Way is not difficult  
for those who do not discriminate.  
Throw away like and dislike  
and everything will become clear.

Throw away teaching, throw away everything. If you say you are not attached to methods of practice, this is being attached to method. If you cut off your attachment, then your words (“the real ‘I’ functions without thinking or talking”) are not necessary. You say, “sometimes, without knowing when, God or Buddha comes, like this, reality.” When Buddha comes, you must kill Buddha; when God comes, you must kill God. How is Buddha or God necessary? An eminent teacher said, “I go around the six realms of existence without asking for a drop of help from Buddhas or Bodhisattvas.” Another eminent teacher said, “If I kill my parents, I can repent to Buddha. But if I kill Buddha, where can I repent?” You must understand this place of true repentance.

You say, “I am not interested in attaining enlightenment.” But you are very interested; you are very attached to enlightenment. Why do you keep saying enlightenment, enlightenment, enlightenment? What is enlightenment? You must read the Heart Sutra. If you understand the true meaning of the Heart Sutra, then you will understand your true way.

Your teaching other people is like one blind man leading other blind men into a ditch. You must open your eyes. This is very necessary.

In your P.S. you said that I am wrong about Dr. Thien An. But he has been good teaching for you. You don’t understand now, but you will in the future.

You think that the whole world is suffering, and you are afraid that the world will be destroyed. You want to save all people from suffering. So you are a great Bodhisattva, a great man. But a true great man has no words or speech—only action. I want a short letter from you next time. You must go outside and ask the tree in front of the temple what the true way is. Then this tree will teach you. Don’t write me anything else. Just tell me what the tree said to you.

Yours sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. My address for the month of April is: c/o Int’l Zen Center of New York, 40 East 20th Street, New York City.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your letter. It always helps pick up my practice when I receive your letters. I know that this is not perfect practice but that is how it is right now. As Master Song Ryong would say, it is hard to reach your own back. Jack and I see Master Song Ryong once a week.

I will make this letter brief. Here are my answers to the kong ans.

To the man who flips ashes on the Buddha I say, "You understand the Buddha's body but not the Buddha."

To the mouse kong an, "When I am hungry I eat. When I am tired I sleep."

Poem

Three rings on a Dragon's staff  
Ching, ching, ching,  
The crow calls  
Caw, caw, caw?  
The snow patriarch's remains are shoveled in an old well.  
In spring we will drink cool water,  
The child grows a red beard.

With a *Deep* Bow,

Stephen

March 22, 1975

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter.

I think that you didn't read my last letter very carefully. Please check it once more. Then you will find the correct answer. Your answers are not bad, not good. But you are scratching your left foot when your right foot itches. So I ask you again: please check my letter.

Your poem is very good. But I will give you an example of a correct Zen poem:

The four elements\* disperse as in a dream.  
The six perceptions, six senses, and six consciousnesses  
are originally emptiness.  
To understand that, the Buddhas and eminent teachers return to the place of light.  
The sun is setting over the Western mountains, the moon  
is rising in the East.

Usually Zen poems begin with two lines in the area between 90° and 180°; the third line is from 180° to 270°; the fourth line is 360°, only like this. This is the usual correct style.

If this poem helps you, I will be glad. I am waiting for you to do hard training. When you find good answers, please send them to me.

Sincerely yours,

Soen Sa

S.S.

\*Earth, water, fire, air.

March 3, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your latest letter. Here are my kong an answers.

1. When the Zen master hits me to check my mind, “Hapchang!”
2. When you ask me to explain my former answer to the mouse kong an (Squeek, squeek! Crash!) “You already know!”
3. If you object to my long answer to the man who flips ashes on the Buddha, I return to my very first answer—when you were here in L.A. With a loud shout, “Hey!!!”

Ven. Hearn is leaving soon for extended visit in the Orient. He has been a good teacher. We hope he hurries back, and saves all beings!

Thank you again for the re-explanation of the Dharma circle. I think I understand this. I at least know the theory. The problem is that I do not now recognize kong ans of the different degrees (180/270/360)—only some (such as a wooden duck flying) do I know where they fit. Right now it is like a giant jigsaw puzzle, I have the frame put together, and some of the pieces, but it seems that some of the pieces are missing. So I will continue to write, and sit, and search on the table and under the chair until I find the missing pieces, and where they fit in the Big Picture.

Of course part of the problem is due to quirks of different cultures. For example, you explained that the sandals on Joshu’s head was a symbol of funerals, and that the “water bottle” was for the shit house, not the zendo—these are the types of things that throw me off, because they are completely foreign to one. It is like having to assemble a bicycle with the directions in Martian. That is why I appreciate you, Soen Sa Nim, so much, because you take the effort to clarify such matters, and there is no language barrier, as there has been with some other Zen Masters with which I have studied.

Satam Nim was going to check with the Abbot of Tahl Mah Sah about gray robes for me, but so far nothing. Robes are meaningless anyway, so don’t cling to them. Even the Buddha wore rags from a trash heap stained yellow with urine, so who wants special robes? It is enough to have a master to turn to, but even he may be like Hui-neng,

He does not see a Bodhi tree,  
He has no mirror.  
There is no dust,  
So why try to collect it?

Sincerely,

Jack

March 22, 1975

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter.

Please check my last letter one more time. I understand that you have already attained the true way; but you are like a mute who has had a dream; you understand it yourself, but you can't explain it to other people. If you do more hard training, the mute will open his mouth and be able to teach all people. The answers that you sent me this time as the same as the sound of a mute.

I agree with you about Song Ryung Hearn; he is a good teacher.

The Zen circle doesn't really exist; so it's good that you don't understand it completely. If you understood, it would only create more thinking. The circle is only to teach beginners. But it is sometimes helpful to separate answers into 180, 270, 360. 180 is only hit or KATZ!!! 270 you already understand—wooden chickens crowing, the ground is not dark or light, the tree has no roots, the valley has no echo. 360 is only like this—the sky is blue, the grass is green,  $3 \times 3 = 9$ . But sometimes 180 equals 270, and 270 equals 360. If you attain enlightenment, you will have the freedom to use each kind as you wish. KATZ is sometimes 180, sometimes 270, sometimes 360. If you attain enlightenment, there are no degrees and no circle. Only like this.

About the cultural contexts of Zen stories; you are right. Some Zen masters understand this, some don't. But in Zen talk, there can be many different expressions—before thinking, clear mind, like this Bodhisattva action—with the same meaning. You may not understand the meaning (for example, when Jo-ju put his sandals on his head), but all is like-this action. So the meaning is not important. If you don't understand, don't worry.

About robes; again, you are right. Robes are not important. You already have the true Dharma robe, which has no name and no form. This is enough.

Here are the words of an eminent teacher, which I copy for you.

The spirit remains clear and light, the six senses and six perceptions are taken off and thrown away.

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

True nature has no tint and is already a perfect sphere.

Only, without thinking, just like this is Buddha.

Sincerely yours,

Soen Sa

S.S.

### The Tathagata

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I have a very technical question. Would you discourse on the concept of the Tathagata?”

Soen-sa said, “In America, people sign cheques and documents. But in the Orient, people use a rubber stamp or a seal. The Tathagata is only this. There are three kinds of Zen: Theoretical Zen, Tathagata Zen, and Patriarchal Zen. Theoretical Zen is like stamping a piece of paper: anyone can understand the sign. Tathagata Zen is like stamping water: people can only hear the sound; the stamp disappears immediately. Patriarchal Zen is like stamping space: no-one can understand. Things come and they go, without hindrance. With water, there is a little hindrance. With paper, there is attachment. So Tathagata is the middle of these three. ‘Form is emptiness, emptiness is form’ means ‘no form, no emptiness’. If you want to understand the true meaning of Tathagata, listen to this kong an. Somebody once asked Zen master Jo-ju, ‘What is Buddha?’ Jo-ju said, ‘Go drink tea.’ This person had been sitting Zen for a while, so he understood a little. He shouted, ‘KATZ!!!’ Then Jo-ju said, ‘Did you drink tea?’ What does this dialogue mean? If you understand it, then you understand the true meaning of Tathagata.”

“I think I understand.”

Soen-sa said, “If you are thinking, you don’t understand. ‘No form, no emptiness’ is before thinking. If you are thinking, this is not Tathagata Zen.

A second student said, “What does the dialogue mean?”

Soen-sa said, “I will hit you thirty times.” (Laughter from the audience)

“But I don’t understand the story.”

“I already explained: I hit you thirty times.”

“Oh, now I understand.”

“What do you understand?” (Laughter)

“Ouch!”

Soen-sa said, “Did you have supper?”

“No.”

“You must be hungry. Go eat.”

### The Transmission of No-mind

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “In the Zen tradition, what is the teaching about grace, or the transmission of no-mind from teacher to student?”

Soen-sa said, “How can this no-mind be transmitted? What is there to transmit? Once Buddha was staying at Vulture Peak. Every day he would deliver a long sermon to his disciples. One day there were twelve hundred people assembled to hear his Dharma. He sat down in front of them and was silent. One minute passed, then five minutes, then ten minutes. Finally Buddha held up a flower. Only Mahakashyapa understood and smiled. Buddha then said, ‘I have the true Dharma, and I transmit it to you.’ But later an eminent teacher said, ‘Buddha is crazy. Everybody already has the true Dharma, so how can Buddha transmit it to him alone? This is like selling dog-meat and advertizing it as steak.’ In Zen, Transmission means only that a Zen master certifies that you have already attained enlightenment. He checks your mind to see whether you understand or not. If you have attained enlightenment, then he transmits his teaching-style to you.”

A second student said, “You say that a Zen master checks a student’s enlightenment. But if all people already have the true Dharma, if they already have Buddha-nature, how can someone not be enlightened?”

Soen-sa said, “Your hair is very dark. Why is it dark?”

“It’s dark. Just that.”

“You are attached to dark.”

“But it’s dark!”

“The Heart Sutra says that there are no eyes and no color. So where does dark come from?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? I hit you!”

“It comes from my mind.”

“Your mind? Where is your mind?” (Laughter from the audience) “You don’t know dark, yah?”

The student was silent.

“You don’t know everything.”

The student was still silent.

Soen-sa said, “This is how a Zen master checks someone’s mind.” (Loud laughter)  
“Everybody sees that your hair is dark, but they don’t understand. Everybody has Buddha-nature, but they don’t understand. So having your mind checked is very necessary.”



### What is Freedom?

One afternoon, a student came to tea at the Cambridge Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "What is freedom?"

Soen-sa said, "Freedom means no hindrance. If your parents tell you to do something and you think that you are a free person so you will not listen to them, this is not true freedom. True freedom is freedom from thinking, freedom from all attachments, freedom even from life and death. If I want life, I have life; if I want death, I have death."

The student said, "So if you wanted to die right now, you could die?"

Soen-sa said, "What is death?"

"I don't know."

"If you make death, there is death. If you make life, there is life. Do you understand? This is freedom. Freedom thinking is freedom. Attachment thinking is hindrance. Suppose your parents say, 'Your shirt is dirty; you must change it.' If you say, 'No, I won't change; I am free!', then you are attached to your dirty shirt or to your freedom itself. So you are not free. If you are really free, then dirty is good and clean is good. It doesn't matter. Not changing my shirt is good; changing my shirt is good. If my parents want me to change, then I change. I don't do it for my own sake, only for theirs. This is freedom. No desire for myself, only for all people."

The student said, "If you have no desire, why do you eat?"

Soen-sa said, "When I am hungry, I eat."

"But why do you eat, if you say you have no desire?"

"I eat for you."

"What do you mean?"

"'When I am hungry, I eat' means 'just like this'. This means that there is no attachment to food. There is no 'I like this' or 'I don't like this'. If I didn't eat, I couldn't teach you. So I eat for you."

"I don't completely understand."

Soen-sa said, "I hit you. Do you understand now?"

"I don't know."

“You must understand this don’t-know mind. Then you will not be attached to anything.  
So always keep don’t-know mind. This is true freedom.”

**You Must Cut Off “Cutting Off Thinking”**

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “When I sit Zen, should I force myself to stop thinking or should I just not care?”

Soen-sa said, “‘Stop thinking,’ ‘cut off thinking’—these are very bad expressions. They are only expedient teaching, only for beginners. If thinking never appeared, then thinking cannot disappear. If you never started thinking, how can you stop thinking? Originally there is no thinking. All things are empty. But if you think that there is thinking, then you think that thinking must be cut off. When you are sitting Zen and you want to attain clear mind—‘I must cut off thinking! I must cut off thinking!’—this is itself very bad thinking. Throw away this mind. Only don’t worry and keep don’t-know mind. ‘What am I?’ Then thinking will disappear by itself. Thinking is not bad and not good. When it appears, that is good; when it disappears, that is good. It doesn’t matter. Only keep don’t-know mind.”

### The True Way for Women

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What is the true way for women?”

Soen-sa said, “I don’t know—I am not a woman.” (Laughter from the audience) Then, after a few moments. “Okay, I ask you: what is woman?”

The student said, “I don’t know.”

Soen-sa said, “This is the true way. Only don’t-know mind. In don’t-know mind, there is no woman, no man, no old, no young, no people, no Buddhas, no self, no world, nothing at all. If you understand this don’t-know mind, you understand the true way. If you don’t understand don’t-know mind, you cannot understand the true way. Okay?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then you must keep don’t-know mind.”

“But if things are only like this, then man is man and woman is woman!”

“Yes.”

“So the true way for men and the true way for women—are they the same or different?” (Laughter)

Soen-sa said, “Ah, that is a very big question!” (Laughter) “So I ask you: man and women—are they the same or different?”

“I asked you first!”

“You have already attained the true way for women.”

“I don’t understand.”

Soen-sa said, “Then I hit you.” (Laughter) “Do you understand now?”

The student bowed.

## The Perfect Posture

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Suzuki Roshi, in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, says that when we’re sitting in the perfect posture, we’re already in the state of enlightenment. Is that true?”

Soen-sa said, “What is correct sitting?”

The student said, “I don’t know. *You* should show *me*!”

Soen-sa said, “If you don’t know this, you can’t understand enlightenment. Okay, I will teach you correct sitting. What are you?”

“What am I? I’m just a girl sitting.”

“A girl sitting? What are you?”

“I am *Buddha* sitting?”

Soen-sa said, “Many thinking!” (Laughter) “What is Buddha?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you understand don’t-know?”

“I don’t know if I do or not.”

“*This* is correct sitting. Body-sitting is not true sitting Zen. What is important is mind-sitting. Don’t-know mind is not-moving mind. Not-moving mind means cutting off all thinking. This is enlightenment. This is beginner’s mind. It is just like this.” Then, pointing to the wall, “What color is this?”

“White.”

“Correct!” (Laughter) “This is enlightenment mind.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. It is very easy, isn’t it?”

**You Must Wake Up!**

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Last Sunday, when we were driving to Providence, you fell asleep in the car. Where did you go?”

Soen-sa said, “I hit you thirty times.”

The student said, “Oh, thank you very much.”

Soen-sa said, “This question is not difficult. If you are thinking, you can’t understand. If you cut off thinking, you will understand. So I hit you thirty times. Where is ‘go’? Nowhere. Teach me.”

“I wanted to know if you were dreaming. Do you mean that you weren’t?”

“Do you dream?”

“Yes.”

“Are you dreaming now?”

“No.”

“No?!” (Laughter)

“No.”

“You are awake?”

“Now I’m only breathing.”

“You are breathing in a dream.”

“No.”

“No? Then give me one awake sentence.”

“The bamboo curtain behind you is yellow.”

“No, it is dark.”

“That’s because it’s behind you. If you turn around, you’ll see it’s yellow.”

“Your head is a dragon, your tail is a snake.”

“I said the bamboo is yellow. If you’d said, ‘No good,’ then...”

“I didn’t say, ‘No good.’ You are attached to my words.”

The student sighed.

Soen-sa said, “You must be careful not to be attached to my words. If I use wrong speech, then you should hit me and say, ‘You must wake up!’ Okay?”

The student bowed.

### What is the True Sutra?

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “In the Korean Ch’an or Zen tradition, do you use the *Suddhama-pundarika Sutra*, particularly the twenty-third chapter?”

Soen-sa said, “Do you understand what a sutra is?”

The student said, “I understand this: there are *suttas*, that are recorded discourses of the Lord Buddha as they have been handed down orally through tradition, and there are the *sutras*, which are the discourses attributed to the Lord Buddha, given to a higher order of beings.”

Soen-sa said, “These are not sutras. They are only explanations of sutras, What is a true sutra?”

“If you ask the question that way, I would say: the Dharma from the very depths of the heart.”

“What is Dharma?”

“The naked truth without thought.”

“What does without thought mean?”

The student sighed and said, “Absolutely no mind whatsoever at all.”

Soen-sa said, “What is the absolute?”

“That which is neither within limits nor without.”

“You say without thought, you say absolute. These are words. The true without thought, the true absolute has no words.” Then, holding up a cup of water, “What is this?”

The student said, “A group of Dharmas momentarily put together, which will be gone tomorrow.”

Soen-sa turned to a seven-year-old girl and said, “What is this?”

The girl said, “That’s a cup.” (Great laughter from the audience)

Soen-sa said, “This is without thought, this is the absolute. This is a true sutra. Sutra means the words that Buddha used to help people understand their minds. So all the sutras which Buddha preached for forty-nine years have the sole purpose of saving our minds. But when



we become empty mind, then all sutras are unnecessary. Many people are attached to sutras without really understanding what sutras are. Sutras are not sutras. We make the name 'sutra' by our thinking. But Buddha preached constantly that we must cut off all thinking. When we cut off all thinking, we become empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking all things neither appear nor disappear. They are only as they are, only like this. This cup neither appears nor disappears. 'What is this?' 'This is a cup.' Only this. So in your mind, nothing appears or disappears. Whatever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think—all this is the truth. It is just as it is. This is the true sutra."

### The Story of Sul

Among the students of the great Zen master Ma-jo, there was a layman named Chang. This man was a very devout Buddhist, who bowed and chanted sutras twice a day and paid frequent visits to the Zen master. He would always take along his little daughter Sul.

The little girl was even more devout than her father. She would join him every day for bowing and chanting, and looked forward with the greatest pleasure to seeing the Zen master. One day, during a visit, Ma-jo said to her, "Since you are such a good girl, I will give you a present. My present is the words Kwanseum Bosal. You must repeat the Bodhisattva's name over and over, as much as you can. Then you will find great happiness.

After they came home, Sul's father gave her a picture of the Bodhisattva to hang up on her wall. She spent many hours in front of it, chanting Kwanseum Bosal, Kwanseum Bosal. Gradually she came to chant all day long, wherever she was, while she was sewing, while she was washing clothes, cooking, eating, playing, even while she was sleeping. Her parents were very proud of her.

Several years passed, and her friends had long since concluded that Sul was a little crazy. This didn't affect her at all; she continued to chant all day long, wherever she was. One day she was washing clothes in the river, beating the dirt out of them with a stick. Suddenly the great bell from Ma-jo's temple rang. The sound of the stick and the sound of the bell became one, and her mind opened. She was overwhelmed with joy; she felt as if the whole universe were dancing along with Kwanseum Bosal, who was none other than herself. She herself was Kwanseum Bosal! And Kwanseum Bosal was the earth, the sky, the great bell from Ma-jo's temple, the dirty clothes which lay in a heap on the riverbank. She ran back home, leaping for joy, and never chanted Kwanseum Bosal again.

During the next few days, her parents noticed a great change in her. Whereas before, she had been a quiet, well-behaved little girl, now she would burst into wild laughter for no reason, have long conversations with trees or clouds, run down the road to the village at breakneck speed, like a boy. Her father became so worried that he decided to peep in at her through the keyhole of her door to see what she was doing alone in her room. He looked in, and first saw the picture of Kwanseum Bosal on the wall, and next to it her altar, where the holy Lotus Sutra should have been, surrounded by incense and flowers. But today it wasn't there. Then he saw Sul, sitting in a corner, face to the wall, sitting on... the Lotus Sutra! He could hardly believe his eyes. After a moment of shock, he burst into the room, shouting. "What do you think you're doing! are you out of your mind! this is the holy scripture! why are you sitting on it!"

Sul smiled and said, calmly, "Father, what is holy about it?"

It is Buddha's own words, it contains the greatest truths of Buddhism!"

“Can the truth be contained in language?”

At this, Chang began to realize that what had happened to his daughter was beyond his grasp. His anger turned to intense puzzlement.

“Then where do you think the truth is?”

“If I tried to explain,” Sul said, “you wouldn’t understand. Go ask Ma-jo and see what he says.”

So Chang went and told Ma-jo the story of the past few days. After he had finished, he said, “Please, Master, tell me: is my daughter crazy?”

Ma-jo said, “Your daughter isn’t crazy. *You* are crazy.”

“What should I do?”

“Don’t worry,” Ma-jo said, and handed him a large rice-paper calligraphy, with the following inscription:

When you hear the wooden chicken crow in the evening,  
you will know the country where your mind was born.  
Outside my house, in the garden,  
the willow is green, the flower is red.

“Just put this up in your daughter’s room and see what happens.”

Chang was now more confused than ever. He walked home like a man who has lost his direction. The world seemed like a movie when the sound has died. He could understand nothing.

When Sul read the calligraphy on her wall, she simply nodded her head and said to herself, “Oh, a Zen master is also like this.” She then put the Lotus Sutra back on her altar, surrounded by incense and flowers.

After more hard training, she went to see Ma-jo at his temple. Zen Master Ho Am happened to be visiting Ma-jo at the time, and the two masters invited Sul to sit down and join them for tea. After she had sat down and poured herself a cup of tea, Ho Am said to Ma-jo, “I hear that this young lady has been practicing very hard.” Ma-jo said nothing. Ho Am turned to Sul and said, “I am going to test your mind.”

“All right.”

“In the sutra it says, ‘The great Mount Sumeru fits into a mustard seed; someone enters and breaks the rocks to smithereens.’ What does this mean?”

Sul took her cup and threw it against the wall, where it smashed.

Ma-jo laughed and clapped his hands. “Very good! Very good! Now *I* will test your mind.”

“All right.”

“In Buddhism, the word ‘karma’ is used very often. You have good Buddhist karma. So I ask you: what is karma?”

Sul said, “Excuse me, but could you explain the question once more, please?”

“In all the three vehicles of Buddhism, the concept of karma is used in one sense or another. I am asking you what precisely karma means.”

Sul bowed to Ma-jo, said “Thank you,” and then was silent.

Ma-jo smiled and said, “A very good trick. You understand.”

As Sul grew up, she always kept a perfectly clear mind. Outside, her actions were ordinary actions; inside, her mind was the mind of a Bodhisattva. Eventually she married and raised a large, happy family, all of whom were devout Buddhists. Many people came to her for help and teaching. She became known as a great Zen master.

One day, when she was an old woman, her granddaughter died. She cried bitterly during the funeral and kept crying back at her home as the visitors filed past to offer their condolences. Everyone was shocked. Soon they were whispering. Finally one of them went up to her and said, “You have attained the great enlightenment, you already understand that there is neither death nor life. Why are you crying? Why is your granddaughter a hindrance to your clear mind?”

Sul immediately stopped crying and said, “Do you understand how important my tears are? They are greater than all the sutras, all the words of the Patriarchs, and all possible ceremonies. When my granddaughter hears me crying, she will enter Nirvana.” Then she shouted to all the visitors, “Do you understand this?”

No one understood. They all bowed and thanked her.

### Samadhi and Satori

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I understand that samadhi is a state that takes quite a while to attain. However, satori is a sort of instant enlightenment. How do the two differ?”

Soen-sa said, “If you are thinking, samadhi and enlightenment are different. If you cut off thinking, samadhi and enlightenment are the same. But when we explain them, they are different. Samadhi is one mind. Enlightenment is only like this. One mind; like this—these are different. But they are the same. So when we try mantra, there is only mantra. Om mane padme hum, om mane padme hum. All thinking is cut off. When I look, there is only mantra; when I hear, there is only mantra. This is samadhi. So if someone asks me, ‘What color is this wall?’, I answer, ‘Om mane padme hum.’ If someone asks me, ‘What is this?’“ (holding up his hand), “I answer, ‘Om mane padme hum.’ But enlightenment is: ‘What color is the wall?’ ‘White.’ ‘What is this?’ ‘Hand.’ So samadhi is only one mind, not-moving mind.”

“Then it’s the same as satori.”

“It is not the same. Yah, it is the same and not the same.”

“I understand.”

“Then I ask you: Once, during Buddha’s lifetime, a woman was sitting in samadhi—very deeply, deeply into samadhi. She didn’t wake up, only samadhi, as if she were dead. The Bodhisattva Manjushri, who is a tenth-class Bodhisattva, the highest class, tried to wake her, but couldn’t. Finally a first-class Bodhisattva appeared, walked around her three times, and hit her on the back. She woke up immediately. Why couldn’t this great Bodhisattva bring her out of samadhi, while the low-class Bodhisattva could? If you understand this, you will have a true understanding of samadhi and enlightenment. Do you understand?”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “You must find this. There is another kong-an with the same meaning. An eminent teacher said, ‘If I kill my parents, I can repent to Buddha. But if I kill all Buddhas and eminent teachers to whom can I repent?’“

The student said, “Myself?”

Another student called out from the back of the room, “Go drink tea!”

Soen-sa said, “Who said that?”

The student raised her hand.

Soen-sa said, “Oh, very good, very good! Wonderful! These two kong-ans are the same kong-an. If you understand this, you understand samadhi and enlightenment.”

### The Moon of Clear Mind

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 no 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 minute—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.”

### Dharma Skirmish

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “How do you prevent dead emptiness?”

“Dead emptiness?”

“Not thinking, but not Zen mind.”

Soen-sa said, “One day somebody asked Zen Master Ma-jo, ‘What is Buddha?’ He said, ‘Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind.’ Later, somebody else asked him the same question and he answered, ‘No mind, no Buddha.’ Which answer is correct?”

The student hit the floor.

Soen-sa said, “I don’t believe you.”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “You understand One, but you don’t understand Two.”

The student was still silent.

Soen-sa said, “Your answer was good. But then you began to think, which is no good. Hitting the floor is a good answer. There is no correct or incorrect, so you only hit the floor. But does this hit mean ‘no mind, no Buddha’ or ‘mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind’?”

“I can’t say.”

“Yah, yah. Both Ma-jo’s answers—‘mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind’ and ‘no mind, no Buddha’—are wrong. They are very bad speech.”

“No.”

“No? Why no?”

“Because he’s right for the person asking the question.”

“The true Buddha can’t be expressed in words. If you were a Zen master, and somebody asked you, ‘What is Buddha?’, what would you answer?”

The student was silent.



Soen-sa said, “Only sitting? Then this person won’t understand. Suppose this person is very wild and hits you, what will you do then? Will you just continue to sit?”

“I’ll hit him back.”

“Then he says, ‘Your head is a dragon, your tail is a snake.’ Your sitting is a very good answer. But your hit is not so good. His hit was only to test your mind. So he says, ‘Your head is a dragon, your tail is a snake.’“

“A dragon is a dragon, a snake is a snake.”

“Then he says, ‘The dog runs after the bone.’“

“Then I bow.”

“Then he says, ‘More hard training!’... This is Dharma combat. it is the same as fighting with swords. If you start to think, even a little, then you are dead. Understanding is no good, you must throw it all away. Only attainment. If a person only understands, then as soon as the Zen master asks him a question, he starts to think, ‘Ah, what answer is good? Is this good? Is that good?’ This is thinking. A Zen answer is the same as a ball thrown against a wall. It hits the wall, then bounces back at the same angle. It is a reflection. The question comes, then immediately the answer. If you are attached to the Zen master’s words, then this kind of answer is not possible. But after hard training, your mind will be clear and you will be able to fight with the Zen master.”