
MOON ON THE WATER

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Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February/March 2013

Understanding Human Nature

Zen Master Dae Kwang

As soon as the war was over, Korea split into south and north. What everybody thought was going to bring happiness actually brought more conflicts and more suffering. It happened like that in Iraq. The war was supposed to bring peace, but what happened? So inside, Zen Master Seung Sahn had this big question: what can I do? Why is there so much suffering? He went to a temple and took some Western philosophy books with him, because he had an idea: he would read all these books, then he would understand what human beings are all about, and then he could help them.

For months, he read philosophy books. One day, an old monk who took care of the woods around the temple walked by his small hermitage. The monk saw this young man reading a book by Plato, the Greek philosopher, and was very surprised. So the monk asked him, "What are you doing?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "I am reading these philosophy books so that I can understand what human beings are." The monk suddenly knocked the book out of Zen Master Seung

See Understanding Human Nature

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Abbot's Corner

Inner Attitude

Pete Neuwald, Abbot



Zen Master Wu Kwang writes in his book, *Don't-Know Mind – The Spirit of Korean Zen*, about Zen Master Seung Sahn's great Grand-Teacher, Kyong Ho. Kyong Ho had started a diverse "community movement" of practitioners that, not only included monks, nuns, lay people, old, young, educated and uneducated, but also included different practice styles. In this community movement, Kyong Ho emphasized a distinction between the outer, spatial aspect of practice and inner attitude. The spatial aspects of practice refer to coming together to practice in a particular physical space at a particular time. Inner attitude is not limited by time and space. According to Kyong Ho, if the inner attitude of a person is sincere it doesn't matter whether the person is in a specific place at the correct time. If we have the inner realization that we are practicing together then we are one community, unhindered by time and space.

Zen Master Wu Kwang describes a story about Zen Master Su Bong and Zen Master Ji Bong that illustrates this inner attitude. Zen Master Su Bong was a free-spirited monk and Zen Master Ji Bong (Bob Moore) was a family person with children, a job and other responsibilities. Su Bong was able to do many long retreats including long solo retreats, while Bob Moore was unable to ever do so due to his many responsibilities. In a talk once, he said, "Whenever Su Bong

See Inner Attitude

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Sahn's hands and said, "That book will not help you understand human beings."

But Zen Master Seung Sahn's mind was very strong. He looked up at the old monk and asked, "Do you understand human beings?" Very clever. It is just like a story in the book by Plato. It was five hundred years before the modern era. A philosopher, Socrates, liked to ask everybody he met: do you understand yourself? One time a person asked him right back: Do you? And Socrates said, "No, I don't. I don't understand myself. But I understand this 'don't know' very well." Very interesting.

So, when Zen Master Seung Sahn asked the old monk, "Do you understand human beings?" the old monk said, "No, I don't, but I understand that the sky is blue and the trees are green."

Then BOOM!

Zen Master Seung Sahn understood this man was not the usual style of monk. So he asked the old monk, "What should I do? What can I do to understand?" The old monk said, "You should do a hundred day solo retreat. Practice very hard and you will understand." So it is just like the Buddha. He left his good situation and looked inside. Zen Master Seung Sahn did a long retreat and looked inside. You, too, can look inside. The outside situation is not so important. What is important is to look inside.

Should

Frank Pauc

It is my understanding that Zen teaches us to look at the world as it really is; stripping away our desires, opinions, and fears in order for us to perceive reality. We sit in meditation to clear our minds and to only see the things that are there in front of us. Zen also teaches that the world is inherently perfect just as it is; we just can't see that yet. This assertion is somewhat difficult to believe when we live on a planet, blighted by war, disease, and reality TV shows. We long for a better place, a better relationship, a better society. We long for things that don't exist.

Our language itself encourages us to be in a perpetual state of longing. I would suggest that the main culprit in this situation is the word "should" – especially considering how often we use this word and how often it only makes us more dissatisfied with our lot in life. We say things like "She should have used her turn signal" or "He should get a job" or "They should ban assault rifles." The uses of the word are endless and endlessly

frustrating. Each time we say the word, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. We are basing our peace and contentment on people doing things that may never be done. We are trading the world that surrounds us for a world that might never exist.

The same thing happens when we use the word with regard to ourselves. I had a friend tell me once, "Don't 'should' on yourself." It is easy to think to myself things like "I should lose weight" or "I should meditate more often." Do these thoughts actually help me or do they just make me miserable? The word "should" often sets us up for suffering. It makes us unable to recognize our true Buddha nature. It makes us blind to who we really are.

So, does this mean that we never make changes? Does this mean that we ignore the suffering that exists? No, that is not what I mean. Once again, language plays a role here. If I see a situation clearly, I can say to myself, "I need to do this in order to help." Then I can actually do whatever needs to be done. Sitting meditation allows us to see clearly and then to act on what we see. We go from spending our time wishing and dreaming to using our time to relieve the suffering that exists everywhere.

That's what we should do. Damn it, I used the word again.

Inner Attitude

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would go to do a long solo retreat, I would say to myself, "I'm going to do the retreat with Su Bong." Whenever Su Bong would do retreats, Bob Moore would tell himself, "I'm practicing along with Su Bong in retreat." This is the inner aspect of community, which is not hindered by time and space.

As Zen Master Wu Kwang points out, this "inner attitude" is an important point for those of us in certain situations. Right now, our School's three month Winter Kyol Che is underway in Providence. Kyol Che means "tight dharma" or "coming together." For many of us in the school, we have commitments and situations— family, jobs, illness – that may prevent us from participating in Kyol Che. With Kyong Ho's sincere inner attitude we can still practice together as one community. The Providence Zen Center institutionalized this inner attitude Kyol Che as the "Heart Kyol Che" and our Center has followed suit. A number of us have already made a commitment to intensify our practice as best we are able during the three-month winter period that ends with Buddha's Birthday in April. We also have an intensive week coming up this month. From Monday, February 18th through Thursday, February 21st we will have practice from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. each day. On Friday we will have a Public Talk and Q&A with Zen Dae Kwang, our Guiding Teacher, followed by our YMJJ retreat on the weekend. This is a wonderful opportunity to stoke the practice fire and cultivate our inner attitude with other Sangha members.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 2012

- **Intensive Practice**
Monday –Thursday, February 18 - 21
7:00 – 9:00 PM
- **Public Dharma Talk**
Friday, February 22
7:30 PM
- **YMJJ Retreat**
Saturday – Sunday
February 23 – 24
- **Dharma Talk**
Wednesday, February 27
7:30 – 9:00 PM

March 2013

- **Introduction to Zen**
Monday, March 4
7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
- **Dharma Talk**
Wednesday, March 27
7:30 – 9:00 PM
- **Extended Practice**
Friday, March 29
7:00 – 10:00 PM



Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang Friday, February 22, 2013

Please join us for a Dharma Talk by Senior Dharma Teacher, Laura Otto-Salaj, followed by Q&A with Zen Master Dae Kwang, guiding teacher of the Great Lake Zen Center. This is a free talk, open to everyone. It will start at 7:30 pm at the Great Lake Zen Center, 828 Locust St. This talk is the kick-off to our Spring YMJJ Retreat.

Spring Yong Maeng Jong Jin Retreat February 22-24, 2013

Ready to put down your opinion, your condition and your situation?

Join us on our Spring Yong Maeng Jong Jin Retreat. Enjoy this opportunity for sustained periods of mindfulness and together-action practice. The retreat will include sitting, walking, chanting, bowing meditation, along with kong-an interviews, formal meals and short work periods.

Our spring YMJJ Retreat will be held at GLZC, 828 Locust St. It will run from 6:00 am Saturday, February 23 through 3:00 pm Sunday, February 24, 2013. Zen Master Dae Kwang, the guiding teacher of our center, will be leading the retreat and conducting interviews. The price of the retreat cost varies for DT/DTT, members of Kwan Um School, and non-members. See the registration form on our website for complete details. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleeping space should notify us by email and bring a sleeping bag, pillow, washcloth, and towel. For more information, email us at info@glzc.org

After so much suffering in Nirvanic castles,
What joy to sink into this world!
People wearing silk clothes,
Buddhas dressed in rags,
A wooden man walking in the evening,
A stone woman with a bonnet –
For the first time you will see,
And when you can cup your hands
And pick up the moon as it floats
In the still surface of a pond.

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Immoko

Gretchen Neuwald, DT

“What am I?” on the in-breath; “Don’t know” on the out-breath. This is the *hwadu* or Great Question that many of us in the Kwan Um School have been taught to use when sitting meditation. In Korean Zen, a *hwadu* is used as a topic of meditation. While the kong-an is the description of the situation, the *hwadu* is the “word head” or central question. The *hwadu* – *What am I? What is this?* – is called *immoko* (or alternatively, *imookoo*) in Korea. *Immoko* holds a prominent place in our Korean Zen heritage. Through Kyung Ho Sunim to Man Gong Sunim to Ko Bong Sunim to Seung Sahn Sunim, the teaching of *immoko* has been handed down to us.

Immoko is the *hwadu* traditionally given to beginning Zen students in Korea. According to Mu Soeng Sunim writing in *Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen – Tradition & Teachers*, it can be traced back to the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng. When his future successor, Hui-jang, arrived at his temple, the Sixth Patriarch asked him, “What is this thing that has come here?” Hui-jang replied, “To say that it is a thing is to miss the point entirely.” Hui-neng asked again, “Can it still be cultivated and verified?” Hui-jang answered, I would not say there is no more cultivation or verification; only it can never be contaminated.” Hui-neng was delighted with this answer, exclaiming, “Just this non-contamination is what all the Buddhas have been careful to preserve. As it is for you, so it is for me.”

One could say *immoko* goes back further than our early Korean ancestors; that, in fact, it can be traced all the way back to the Buddha himself. We all know the story of how Shakyamuni Buddha left his family, his “good situation,” and everything he knew to answer the question *What am I? What is this life?* As Zen Master Seung Sahn writes in *Compass of Zen*, “For six years he [Shakymuni Buddha] practiced very, very hard. ‘*What am I? Don’t know...*’ He courageously kept this question with one-pointed determination.” Then one morning, he saw the morning star in the eastern sky and completely attained *What am I*; he attained his true substance, the true substance of the universe.

Another example of *immoko* can be found in the story of the First Zen Patriarch Bodhidharma and his visit with the Chinese Emperor Wu of Liang. Emperor Wu had been a sponsor of Buddha’s teachings, having built many temples, supported the copying of many sutras, and given patronage to many Buddhist monks and nuns. When the Emperor proudly asked Bodhidharma, “What merit have I acquired?” Bodhidharma answered, “None.” Taken aback by this, Emperor Wu asked, “What is the first principal of sacred truth?” “Vast emptiness,” Bodhidharma replied. “Who is this facing me?” the Emperor demanded. “Don’t know,” was Bodhidharma’s reply.

In a sense, *immoko* lies at the heart of all kong-ans. In order to answer a kong-an, one must believe in oneself 100%. That means imbedded in every kong-an is the question *What am I?* This brings to mind my first kong-an interview. It was probably the most nervous moment of my life. I usually compensate for nerves by doing everything I can to prepare for the task at hand – thinking, anticipating, rehearsing. All of that kind of preparation, however, would not help in a kong-an interview, I was told. “Here one cannot rely on intellect or wit or charm.” At first I thought, “Not having any of that in great measure, maybe I will be okay.” Then I heard, “Thinking will not help. Understanding will not help. Only respond with what appears in that moment.” This made me think, “Yikes! My personality will be stripped away. What exactly will remain? I’ll be completely exposed!” I was afraid that what was going to appear in the moment was all the “crap” that I had become attached to. Then Zen Master Dae Kwang would see what a hopeless case I was. Or even worse, nothing would come to my mind and he’d see what an idiot I really am!

I went into the interview trembling, literally. I forgot to close the door; I almost tripped over my cushion; I couldn’t remember when to bow, so I just bowed all over the place. Dae Kwang Sunim smiled and invited me to sit. He began by engaging me in a little small talk to put me at ease. That helped. I think I answered the warm-up questions okay; I really was so overcome with nerves that I don’t remember. Then came the first real interview question. I could not think of an answer. He repeated the question. My mind was a complete and utter blank. I was stuck. A big fat *don’t know* appeared, my worst fear. “Ha! Now I am caught!” I thought. But it turns out being stuck was okay; not having an answer was okay. I learned that *don’t know* was, in fact, the starting point. Sunim said I must learn to trust this *before thinking mind*, just continue to do “*What am I? Don’t know.*”

So, we Zen students are constantly engaged with *immoko*. As I stated earlier, it is also a meditation topic that has played a prominent role in the history of our Korean Zen ancestors. One of my favorite *immoko* stories involves Kyung Sun Sunim, the abbess of Bok Jun Am, a nun’s temple in South Korea. I found this story in the book “*Only DOing it for Sixty Years*, compiled and edited by Diana Clark.

At that time in 1944, Kyung Sun Sunim was a young nun living in Seoul at Pom Sa temple. Many guests would come to stay at the temple and one day she heard some of them talking about going to hear Ko Bong Sunim at a nearby temple. Ko Bong, who later became Zen Master Seung Sahn’s Teacher, was a very well known and iconoclastic Zen Master. Kyung Sun had met him once

See *Immoko*

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before, briefly, during a picnic that she and her fellow nuns had attended at the temple. At the time she was struck by his unusual appearance and manner. He wore white clothes with the trousers rolled up and was smoking a cigarette in a long holder. When she and her friends greeted him, he did not answer or even look at them. She remembers asking the abbot of the temple, “Why do you put up with this strange character?” and was told that he was a “very great, enlightened man.”

So now, months later, she was immersed in her own practice, chanting the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* 100,000 times a day. She was having some confusing experiences because of this mantra practice and wanted to find someone who could help her understand them. So, when she heard Ko Bong was going to be lecturing nearby, she decided to go and try to talk about what she was experiencing

However, as a young nun, she was not permitted to mix with monks. So in order to attend the lecture, she hid her robe under her jacket and, without telling anyone, travelled to the temple and hid herself in the kitchen adjoining the lecture hall. She poked a hole in the rice paper door and in that way was able to hear KoBong’s talk. She recounts:

I will always vividly remember this lecture. It was the first time I encountered *immoko* – what am I?

Ko Bong said that our True Self is like a moon. All human beings have a moon in their minds; but this moon is hidden by worthless thoughts, like the moon in the sky hidden by clouds. The function of *immoko* is to clear away all the worthless thoughts and to make clear, bright moon appear. You can only do this work by yourself; no one can do it for you.

Ko Bong’s words about *immoko* had an immediate and profound effect on Kyung Sun. She decided right then that she must meet him and learn about *immoko*. But gaining an interview with him was not easy. After being denied permission to meet him, she decided to wait hidden by the door to his room. When the others left, she called out to him and told him she wanted to see him. She told him she had an important question to ask him. Ko Bong invited her into his room. Entering, she did ten full prostrations. Overcome with emotion, she began to cry. Then she sat and began to silently chant “Om Mani Padme Hum.” Soon she forgot where she was or why she had come to see Ko Bong Sunim.

“Your practice is “Om Mani Padme Hum.” Ko-Bong observed.

“Yes, she replied.

“Then you already know something.”

“Yes,” Kyung Sun responded.

Ko Bong put his hand in his pocket and then held out his closed fist. “What is in my hand?”

“You have five small nuts in your hand.”

“Oh, so you know how to see things. Can you see inside the earth? Can you see over the mountains to Seoul?”

“Yes,” said Kyung Sun. “I can.”

“That’s very good,” said Ko Bong. “But that is not enough to see your True Self.”

After this, Kong Bo gave Kyung Sun *immoko*, spending an hour teaching her this kong-an.

I still get nervous before kong-an interviews. I still catch myself wanting to get it right; I am still fearful of embarrassing myself. But I try to use the example of Kyung Sun Sunim’s courage and determination. She risked so much to get that interview. She was desperate to learn *What am I?* Nothing was going to turn her away from that. So I try to let go of my fear, my pride, and my attachment to attainment. I try to forget myself as Kyung Sun Sunim forgot herself. I try to trust, like Hui-jang, that my mind and the Teacher’s mind are not different; that there is no impurity or contamination in true mind. I try to do as Zen Master Seung Sahn teaches: breathe in *What am I?*; breath out *Don’t know*. When I begin to believe in myself 100%, in my *before thinking mind*, “then only go straight, help all beings” becomes possible.



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Regular Practice Schedule of the Great Lake Zen Center

Monday and Wednesday at 7:30PM;
Saturday at 8:00AM

Other special events as described elsewhere in the newsletter. Unless otherwise noted, all events are held at the Great Lake Zen Center.

Beginners Always Welcome!

Unless noted otherwise, *Introductions to Zen* are offered on the first Monday of each month. Dharma Talks are offered on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Both are at 7:30PM.



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