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June, 2005

# The Lion's Head Zen Master Seung Sahn

Following a kong-an reading at the Providence Zen Center, Zen Master Seung Sahn gave this informal talk.

A long time ago, Korea was divided into three countries, all of them constantly fighting. Silla was the smallest, in the Southeast; Paekche was a little bigger, in the Southwest; and the biggest was Koguryo in the North. Silla people wanted more power, so they began army training schools. Many people went to them and for over fifty years there was nothing but war, war.

In one family both the grandfather and father were famous generals, and both of them died. Then only the grandmother was left to care for her little grandson, who had a strong body but a crybaby mind. He would go out to play, and other children would hit him and he'd start to cry. So the grandmother thought, "His father and grandfather were both great generals. Why is this one such a crybaby?" He only wanted to pray to Buddha, "Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal, Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal, Kwan Sae Um Bo Sal."

One day she got an idea. She called to the crybaby to come with her. She took him in to his grandfather's room full of swords, guns, and fierce war pictures. The crybaby was always afraid of that room, so he went in trembling.

"Bow to your grandfather's picture!" He bowed.
"Today I'm going to give you a special thing -- our family treasure. Your father and grandfather had it before you and every time they went into battle with it, they won and became famous. Now you are growing up, so I am giving it to you. It will give you special energy and other boys won't be able to beat you up anymore."

"Is it true? I want it!"

"O.K. Don't worry. Soon you'll be strong!" The grandmother took a beautiful cloth off a fine wooden box in front of the grandfather's picture. She opened the wooden box and inside was a shiny silver box.

She opened that and inside was a bright gold box! Inside the gold box was a small dried-up lion's head with shining little eyes and a fierce mouth.

"This is a special energy head able to do anything. Keep it next to your body here under your clothes in this bag and then there will be no more problems. Whenever you fight, you'll win. Never open this bag. No one should ever see it. It's secret."

Soon the crybaby felt a great surge of energy and was completely unafraid. He believed in this lion's head and the special energy 100 percent. He wasn't frightened of the room anymore. He touched his grandfather's sword -- wonderful! He touched the guns -- wonderful! Then he went outside. The children yelled, "Hey, here comes crybaby! Let's go fight!". One ran over and POW! The crybaby knocked him down with his fist. Another came up and the crybaby gave him a kick in the stomach. Very strong. The crybaby became the Number One boy. "This lion's head really works," he thought.

At school he started doing very good work. A few years later, he went to army school and later he went to war. First he beat Paekche, then he beat Koguryo in the North, and all of Korea became one country, called the Silla Dynasty. He returned to the capital in triumph as a great general to a big parade. After that he went back to his village.

By this time, his grandmother was very old. She went into her altar room. "Thank you very much, Buddha. My grandson has become a great general and come home once more!" Every one in his neighborhood thought he was wonderful. They had parties, gave him presents.

One day his grandmother asked him, "Do you still have... that thing."

"If I didn't, how could I have won all those battles," he said. "The enemy was always terrified of me because I

never thought of life or death. I always pressed on, only believing in my special energy. So I always won! This treasure is fantastic! You really told me the truth. Thank you very much, Grandmother."

"Yes, yes," the grandmother said.

Then she took him into his grandfather's room. "Let me see your special energy prize."

She took the lion's head and said, "Look, this isn't any treasure. It's the head of your grandfather's walking stick. It isn't anything special."

The grandson was astonished.

"You didn't believe in yourself. The other children kicked you around the block. So I gave you this. The special energy you felt came from you, not this little thing."

This story is very interesting, about being dependent on something, attached to something. For Zen students it is the same. Maybe you think you understand, but then you see something, you hear something, you are attached to it, so your mind moves. If you cut off this mind-moving, cut off all thinking, then you are already Buddha. To do this, you must believe in your true self 100 percent. This means, don't check your mind, don't check your feelings.

But when bad karma appears, your mind moves, then what? In Oriental medicine they say, if you have hot sickness, hot medicine is necessary. So if you are attached to name and form, practicing is necessary -- chanting, bowing, wearing these robes, lighting the incense, sitting Zen. When you chant, only hear this chanting; when it is time to bow, only bow; when the incense is lit, only smell. Only practicing means cutting off all thinking. Then you can see, you can hear, you can smell, all things are just like this, already Buddha. So only go straight, keep not-moving mind, "don't know" mind. O.K.? O.K.

#### **Travelers**

Michael Zinke, SDT

There's a place that most people find scary. A place that very few people dare to go. People that go there are sometimes looked at as being odd or just plain different than the rest of the 'normal' people. A lot of people don't understand why you would want to go there and most people don't even try. But those that do go there are often more at peace with life than those that don't go there. They appear calmer and less stressed than the general population. They experience fewer worries, fewer problems, and correspondingly, less suffering than people who are afraid to go to this place. These 'travelers' are happier, more compassionate to fellow man and to all sentient beings. The people that go to this place often see the world differently than those who never travel there. The 'travelers' seem to be more aware of their surroundings, more aware of what is happening at every moment during the day; they always seem to be living in the present moment.

Nothing special happens in this place. There are no monsters, no danger, no life threatening situations to confront, no pressure to be something or somebody you aren't. It doesn't cost anything to get there and people of all ages, races, and religions are welcomed. The disabled are made comfortable, the blind can see, the deaf can hear, the paralyzed can walk. No one stares at them, no one whispers as they go by. Everyone is equal, everyone is the same — black, white, Hispanic, Asian, man, woman, old, young, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, Atheist.

Whatever. Everyone is the same; everyone stands on equal ground with all things.

Sounds like a pretty great place, doesn't it? Once you arrive, you will experience all of the things mentioned above. There is no cost, no reservations to be made, no car rentals, no hotels, no flights to catch, and definitely no crowds to fight. However, the path there is very long and very difficult to find. Most people search and search and search for this path and never find it in their lifetime. Even the search itself is very difficult because when people start searching for this particular path, they find that there are many paths that promise to take them to this special place. However, out of all the possible paths to choose from there is actually only one path that will lead you to this special place. And just because someone you know finds a path that will take them to this special place, that doesn't necessarily guarantee that the path they took will also take you to that same place. We are all different in that respect; we all have different paths to this same special place. If you are one of the lucky ones that do find the correct path you will discover that once on the path it is extremely difficult to stay on the path. The path to this marvelous place is strewn with distractions and temptations. At times it seems as though the path has a built in system that has as its main purpose; the sole duty of tempting you to leave the path. Many of the 'travelers' give in to the temptations and stray from the path; never to return. Great discipline is needed to maintain a straight course or to quickly recover and get back on the path once you are tempted to leave. And the hardest part of the journey? You have to travel it alone. You are the tour guide. You are the leader of this difficult expedition.

Travelers.....con't

You are totally alone on this journey. You have to decide when to turn right, when to turn left, when to go straight, and when to back-up and start all over. You can't stop and ask for directions because no one else knows exactly where you are going. And one final kicker – once you get there, you get nothing. No one will hand you a dozen roses, no one will hand you a warm, wet towel to refresh yourself. No one will deliver a bottle of wine to your room or offer you any food; no matter how hungry you may be or how thirsty you find yourself. There are no gifts, no rewards, no pot of gold at the end of the path.

So where is this special place and how do I get there if I ever decide to try going on this journey? This very special place has several different names; Enlightenment, Nirvana, Heaven, Samadhi, Satori. How do you get there? It's easy, just turn off all thinking and silence your mind, give up your desires and attachments to all things – material and immaterial, be compassionate and kind to all sentient beings. Forget about the past and the future, see the present moment and live in the present moment. Nothing to it, right?

Well it may be more difficult than it seems. In order to give up all thinking we have to shut off that mind of ours that is constantly working. We have to start listening more instead of talking aimlessly. We can't be afraid to be silent occasionally. And there lies a big problem. Silence is not something we can readily accept. Our lives are full of noise. We have traffic sounds, sirens, television, radios, MP3 players, portable CD players, cell phones (and if regular cell phones aren't annoying enough we now have the walkie talkie type cell phones so we can hear both sides of the conversation), laptops making tunes as they are turned on and off, watches that beep, portable electronic email receivers that click and clack and vibrate and signal us when an important message is arriving. The list is endless. Many people find that they are uncomfortable when presented with silence. Many people can't sleep when there isn't any background noise going on inside their head. We are surrounded by so much noise and we have become so accustomed to hearing noise that our minds rebel when there is a lack of noise. In order to counteract the silence some genius invented the sound machines that lull us to sleep with sounds of the wind blowing through the trees or a waterfall or a rainy summer day. Any noise to soothe our minds - our minds that can't stand the sound of silence. When alone, we sing, we hum, we whistle, we talk to ourselves and occasionally answer ourselves – anything to avoid the

silence. Most people are so accustomed to all of the noise around them that they become afraid of the silence, they are afraid to let their minds rest. And yet, people who have no fear of the silence are sometimes looked at as being different or 'weird' by those that constantly must have sound.

Our minds have become conditioned by the environment. In ancient times our minds were used to the silence. Our minds were conditioned to react to noise, like a tiger coming to attack or an enemy sneaking up on us while we slept. But we have lost that conditioning and at times people can be so numb to sound that they put themselves in harm's way because they don't hear the sounds of danger. I've heard that some of the new electric vehicles are so quiet people walk out in front of them not realizing the car is moving. For that reason some companies are now putting sound devices on them to warn pedestrians that the car is there and moving. We are surrounded by so much noise that we eventually learn to just tune it all out. Not exactly what we can call 'being in the moment'.

So in Zen meditation we try to put that thinking down. We try to not attach to the thoughts that are flying through our minds. When thoughts enter our minds, we let them pass right on through. We don't attach to them, we don't reach out and grab them and examine them thoroughly because we know that when we attempt that, we get hooked on that thought and are off on an endless trip of thinking and thinking. One thought leads to another and another and another and another and then eventually we realize what happened and try to figure out what triggered that particular thought trip. Is it possible in Zen meditation to attain a perfectly quiet mind? Sure, and that's what is called Nirvana, Satori, etc. It is a comforting feeling; it is a feeling of pure bliss, no worries, no thoughts, no desires, no anger, and correspondingly, no suffering. Now, is that what we try to attain in our meditation? Well, that's not good and it's not bad either but although we really enjoy that feeling, it doesn't help us in helping other people eliminate their suffering. So one more step is necessary, after your thinking mind disappears you have to go and help others find this special place, also. By helping others you are showing the great love and great compassion that you have found and you are helping others eliminate their suffering and find happiness in their lives.

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How shall I grasp it? Do not grasp it. That which remains when there is no more grasping is the self.

Panchadasi

### **Another Successful Rummage Sale**

The rummage sale is over for another year and the results are in, over \$600 collected selling our trinkets and excess items. Thanks to everyone who helped out with the setup, sale, and clean-up. We are currently looking at other kinds of fundraisers. If you have any suggestions, please feel free to let us know. As airfares and retreat costs increase we will need to find some way of offsetting those costs without raising the retreat fees. Some of the incidentals we are trying to fund are new, more comfortable chairs, carpeting, a new air conditioner, and the kitchen could use a host of items. Until the money appears, we have to continue roughing it!!

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## "Beginner's Mind" Retreat, Sunday, August 21, 9 AM - 2 PM

If you have ever hesitated to do a retreat, join us for this introductory "Beginner's Mind" one-day retreat. Newcomers are especially welcome. We will walk you through our retreat forms step-by-step. The retreat will include a formal meal, chanting, and sitting and walking meditation. You may register for this retreat by signing up at GLZC or email us at info@glzc.org.

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#### The Heart Sutra

We chant the Heart Sutra all the time; but do we really understand everything it contains?

The Heart Sutra is the shortest and the most popular sutra in Buddhism. The six hundred volumes of the Maha Prajna Sutra are summarized by the Diamond Sutra in around 5000 words, and the Diamond Sutra is summarized by the Heart Sutra in around 250 words. The Heart Sutra is regarded as the summation of the wisdom of Buddha. It expresses perfectly the insight attained by non-attachment, the doctrine of emptiness.

Many Buddhist around the world recite the Heart Sutra daily. However, they may not really and fully understand what it is. Some of them may have incredible response, and benefits. In Buddhism, reciting Buddha-name and sutra has great merit and virtues. And, it is one of the effective ways in cultivation of Buddhist Way. In nearly all Buddhist monasteries and many Buddhist households, the Heart Sutra is recited by the people regularly on a daily basis.

When you read Heart Sutra you should be open-minded, and think deeply and carefully. The Heart Sutra reveals the entire secret of truth of the universe and life. Don't miss it, otherwise you'll regret it.

A lot of people wonder about the ending, in the English version the last phrases are:

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.

So what does that really mean? There are several translations (all very close) one of which is: Gone, Gone, Totally Gone, Totally Completely Gone, Enlightened, So be it.

At the beginning of the Heart Sutra we see reference to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. So who is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva? Avalokitesvara is a Sanskrit word for the Bodhisattva who Hears the Sounds of the World. He rescues all beings by hearing their voices of suffering and cries for help. One of the Four Great Bodhisattva, he is the one with the greatest compassion and mercy. Looking at one other area within the Heart Sutra we see another phrase that many may wonder about......"Perceives that all Five Skandhas are empty". This is the key sentence of the Heart Sutra. By the light of the <a href="mailto:prajna">prajna</a> (wisdom) of contemplation, Buddha realized that the Five Skandhas are empty. We can see matter, yet it is fundamentally empty. Matter's own nature is emptiness. In Buddhism, all matter is formed by Four Great Elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) under certain causes and conditions. Just like our body, the Four Great Elements unite to become a body, and when they separate the body is destroyed. Each of the four elements restores its original state, which is emptiness. Most people are attached to the body as "me", which is one of the greatest ignorances of people. More on the Heart Sutra in future newsletters.

## YMJJ Retreat With Zen Master Dae Kwang

July 16 - 17

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for July 16 - 17, 2005. The retreat will be held at GLZC. Zen Master Dae Kwang will be leading the retreat and conducting interviews. The price of the retreat is \$70 for both days, or \$40 for one day. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleep space should notify Peter or Laura and should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday, July 15th. Please plan on joining us for some very strong practice. You may register for this YMJJ by signing up at GLZC or by contacting Peter or Laura.

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## **Calendar of Upcoming Events**

#### July, 2005

#### No Practice or Introduction to Zen, Monday, July 4

Friday, July 15: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

**Saturday, July 16 and Sunday July 17: YMJJ.** With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday.

#### **August, 2005**

Sunday, August 21: Beginner's Mind Retreat. GLZC, 9am - 4pm.

#### September, 2005

#### No Practice or Introduction to Zen, Monday, September 5

Friday, September 23: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

Saturday, September 24 and Sunday September 25: YMJJ. With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday. Precepts ceremony following the end of the YMJJ.

#### November, 2005

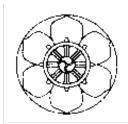
Saturday, November 12: Kido One-Day Retreat, GLZC, 10am to 4pm.

#### No Practice, Wednesday, November 23

One who can see the tip of a down hair cannot see his own eyebrow, one who can lift thirty thousand pounds cannot lift his own body. This is like the student who is bright when it comes to criticizing others but ignorant when it comes to self-knowledge.

Taken From the Collection of the Real Herdsman

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## 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.

