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PRIMARY POINT

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ONE PERSON'S ENERGY HELPS ALL PEOPLE

An Interview on Family and Practice with
Zen Master Seung Sahn

Primary Point (PP): In many families now, both the husband and wife have to work. They also have children and social responsibilities. How can the parents make a living, raise a family and still have time to practice?

Zen Master Seung Sahn (Dae Soen Sa Nim): If you have children and both parents are working, it can be very difficult to practice, especially if you live outside of a Zen Center. So, some kind of together action practicing with children is necessary. Simple exercises like breathe in, breathe out; hands up, hands down, like in Tai Chi; make a circle with your arms and breathe deeply. Children like doing these kinds of exercises with their parents. You can do this together action at

home every morning and evening, just for ten minutes. Then, maybe you can sit for awhile, with the children joining you for a few minutes. Husband and wife should also do one hundred and eight bows every day, together. Altogether, the practice should take one hour every day.

PP: How old should the children be?

DSSN: At least seven years old. Doing some kind of "Tanjen" practicing (i.e. breathing in and breathing out from "hara" — the area just below the navel) is very important. Then, their consciousness becomes very clear. When children are growing up, they cannot control their feelings. They often have only "I want" mind— anger mind. If you do breathing

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Altered States of Consciousness

by Lincoln Rhodes, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

Lincoln Rhodes, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim, holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from M.I.T. He has been instrumental in the formation of many Zen centers and groups around the country, and has lived and taught at the Providence Zen Center for many years. He currently owns and manages a construction and home renovation business. This article is composed of selections from dharma talks given during 1983-85 at the New Haven Zen Center.

Someone was talking about using drugs to open your consciousness. I think the evidence is overwhelming that most of this planet is in an altered state of consciousness already and our job is to find out what's it like to not be in an altered state of consciousness. I grew up and my family wasn't too much different than any other family. I had a rather set way of seeing things that was given to

me. You don't realize it but you're given and taught ways of seeing things. When you realize there are other ways of seeing things, that is, as soon as there's not just one, it opens up a whole different ball game. It is very helpful to know that there is more than one way to view things. That's a necessary step somehow. You don't have to know what all the ways are, but you do know there isn't just one way to see.

I was quite shocked because I had all this training as a scientist. I thought while I was doing it that the reason you do it is to discover some ultimate truths about the universe and the way things are. So, I went about trying to do that. Then, lo and behold, I discovered that there are all these controversies about the ultimate na-

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Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Ninth Student Receives Inka

GETTING A ZEN STICK

by Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

At a ceremony held at Providence Zen Center this past December, Robert Genthner, of Lexington, Kentucky, became the ninth student to receive formal teaching authority from Zen Master Seung Sahn. Bob is a long-time student of Zen under several teachers and a practicing psychotherapist. He and his wife, Mara, started the Lexington Zen Center in 1982. Bob and members of the Lexington sangha have purchased a large piece of land in Kentucky that Dae Soen Sa Nim has christened as a major retreat site; it is rapidly becoming an important gathering place for the sangha. This talk is excerpted from a talk at PZC after the ceremony. Excerpts from the formal Dharma Combat encounters that traditionally precede the granting of inka, or teaching authority, can be found on page 6.

The issues of giving and taking, and of generosity appear regularly in our practice. I was reading recently in the Mu Mun Kwan. Case 44 is a case called Pa Cho's Zen Stick. Pa Cho was Korean, and he went from Korea to China traveling around and then he met his teacher and later became a great Zen Master in China. The case goes like this: "If you have a Zen stick, I will give you a Zen stick. If you don't have a Zen stick, I will take it away." Some of you who came for interviews this morning worked on some kong-ans that are like this. The wonderful gift that Pa Cho gives us is Don't Know

Mind. It's very confusing— if you have a Zen stick, I'll give you a Zen stick, but if you don't have one, I'll take it away. It interrupts our thinking. It interrupts our logical analytic discursive thinking. What does that mean? That's the beginning of don't know. To give you an example of Pa Cho's mind (he was a brilliant Zen master), a monk came to him and asked him "what is the water of Pa Cho Mountain." (He was named after the mountain.) And Pa Cho said, "Warm in the winter, cool in the summer." He had an incredibly clear, non-analytic, non-logical mind. He saw the essential nature of things.

In Zen talk, the stick is symbolic of or represents our true nature, our essential nature. And, all of us who have come here today have something in common with Pa Cho, he's our ancestor. We also have in common this way seeking mind. Nobody is here by accident. All of us are here together out of some question, some wonderment, and this is our ancestor who is saying to us, if you have a Zen stick, if you have essential nature, if you have true nature, I will give you a Zen stick, I will give you a good beating. Whap! If you don't have true nature, if you have emptiness, everything is blankness, or nirvana, I'll take it away from you. So, it's not resting on either/or. Not having, not-having. Not resting in some conceptual perspective. Life simply isn't that way. Our life is

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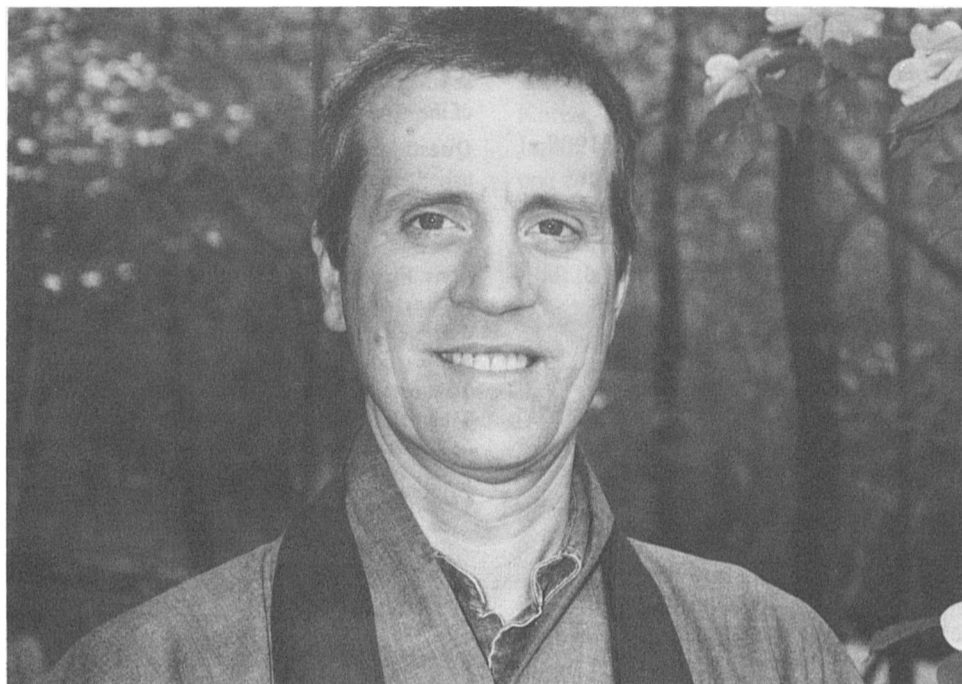
constant moment by moment by moment by moment. So if you have a Zen stick, if you have essential nature, already you have lost your life. You know, you deserve a good beating because you're stuck in that. And if you don't have it, then you're stuck in some kind of emptiness.

So, the point of this koan is to see through that, seeing through having and not having, seeing through being and not being and coming down to what Dae Soen Sa Nim calls just doing. And all of our practice, all of our Zen, can be reduced to that simple phrase, Just do it. Moment by moment by moment. Just do it. Putting aside any idea, putting aside any hope, putting aside any expectation, just do it. Our teaching goes, when you're driving, just drive, when you're eating just eat, when you're listening just listen, when you are thinking just think and when you're talking just talk. And that is our life. And a Zen Master or Ji Do Poep Sa Nim or a Dharma Teacher is no different from you. Nothing special. So having a Zen stick, already you fall into the mud. Not having a Zen stick, already you fall into the mud. What can you do? Even in this moment when I ask that question, one can feel in the group a collective kind of not knowing. What can you do? And it's almost palpable. What? This moment. Just (HIT! He hits the floor with the Zen stick). Just this moment (HIT). (laughter) (HIT) Can you find a good answer?

Question: For me, there's a feeling of specialness. And I don't know if it's because of bowing, prostrations, teachers, and masters, I think "special", and I make it special, or if there really is a certain tradition of specialness or respect for a certain reason having to do with the practice.

Genthner: I can tell you my own experience with that. The first Zen sitting I ever did was at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in the Catskills with Eido Roshi, many years ago. I was married at that time to a woman who was very strongly against Buddhism, and so my going was very much a movement away from a kind of confluence I had with her. But still there was some of that feeling that I carried with me. At Dai Bosatsu Zendo, the Buddha Hall is different from the Meditation Hall and the Zendo. The Buddha Hall is

bows a day) and if you do 500 bows for a couple or few days you realize that bowing is just bowing and that what we're bowing to is our true nature. Your true nature and my true nature are not different. So, if you bow to me, I bow to you. If I bow to you, you bow to me. It



happens at the same time. Within that, there is a certain respect for teachers that we want to communicate. Yes, this is my teacher. There's a receptivity we want to allow.

So, you walk into the room and you bow and they bow back. If you can let go of greater than or less than, of better and worse, then bowing is making love. It's only giving. It's a tremendous gift. Then it's a privilege. It's not "I bow because of their superiority." You come from your own strength—a wonderful humility, or clarity, and just bow. So, bowing is an empowerment. An expression of true self. That's the strength of the bow.

One time we had just finished the Dharma room on this special land that we have in Lexington and Dae Soen Sa Nim was getting ready to leave and I turned just in time to watch him bow. He was so completely giving himself. He was bowing to the Buddha and he was so completely in it that it startled me. To this day I can feel that image in my whole body of his just completely giving himself to that moment. That's what our bowing is—giving ourselves to that moment. A privilege.

That's all technique is, any kind of mantra technique, any kind of kong-an, any kind of shikantaza. In Japanese style Zen, Mu is the first kong-an given and you just sit with MU. All that is is don't know. That's the pure essence of not knowing. Big question, great doubt. So

Question: So, how do I practice with a kong-an?

Genthner: Sit with that question. Let yourself be a furnace, and let it burn up everything. Let the question burn off all knowing. And then... "Oh, of course!", just give ourselves to not knowing. The wall is white, the floor is brown, the cushion is blue. Just like this. When not knowing, the mind stops and there is realization of what's going on in the moment. So if you're sitting there and you have don't know mind, from whatever source, then an answer will appear. You'll be able to see through the kong-an and an answer will appear. That's the second step. The first step of the kong-an is to teach don't know. The second step is to teach correct function. So, you enter the kong-an with don't know mind, then an answer appears.

One important kong-an is "Nam Cheon Kills a Cat", Case 14 in the Mu Mun Kwan.

Once the monks of the Eastern and Western halls were disputing about a cat.

Master Nam Cheon holding up the cat said, "You! Give me one word and I will save this cat! If you cannot, I will kill it!"

No one could answer. Finally Nam Cheon killed it.

In the evening when Joju returned from outside, Nam Cheon told him of the incident. Joju took off his shoe, put it on his head and walked away. Nam Cheon said, "If you had been there, I could have saved the cat."

Nam Cheon held up the cat and said, "if any of you monks can say one word then I'll save the cat, but if you can't, I'll cut him in two". And no one could say anything, so Nam Cheon cuts the cat in

when you sit in great doubt, don't know, then mu, shikantaza, mantra, kong-an are all the same. When we are thinking about it, when we're deciding about it, they're different. So then you have mu, you have shikantaza, you have kong-an, but it's all the same. When you come in and you bow, your bowing is don't know. All coming back to that one point, just this point (HIT). Just this one point (HIT) always. Ultimately, every technique must be discarded. It's a vehicle, a raft.

Dharma Combat

The following are some excerpts from the traditional public Dharma Combat which preceded Robert Genthner's certification as Ji Do Poep Sa Nim.

Question (Q): Oftentimes in his teaching, Dae Soen Sa Nim quotes Descartes: "I think, therefore I am," then poses the question: "If you don't think, then what?" So, I ask you, If I don't think, then what?

Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim (RG): You already understand.

Q: So, I ask you.

RG: Are you thinking?

Q: Sometimes.

RG: So, what?

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: Somebody once asked an eminent teacher what the difference was between psychotherapy and Zen. His answer was "about \$75 an hour." What's your answer?

RG: You already understand.

Q: So, I ask you.

RG: Yesterday I did psychotherapy, today I sit and talk with you.

Q: Is that the difference?

RG: You want more?

Q: I want more.

RG: \$75, please.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: Dae Soen Sa Nim says Zen means becoming independent. But the Heart Sutra says "all Buddhas depend on Prajna Paramita." What do you depend on?

RG: You already understand.

Q: No, I don't understand.

RG: How can I help you?

Q: Thank you very much for your teaching.

Q (Bob's wife, Mara): Today is your Ji Do Poep Sa Nim certification ceremony. Thus you have many jobs now—teacher, father, husband... Which one is most important?

RG: You already understand. (He leans over and kisses his wife.)

Q: In one of Dae Soen Sa Nim's letters to a student he said, "Good and bad karma wind around our true self and get tight." So, I ask you: How do you get out of this good and bad karma coil?

RG: You already understand.

Q: So, I ask you.

RG: Just sitting here, talking with you.

Q: No.

RG: You want more?

Q: Not enough.

RG: Dog chases bone.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: There's a dispute in the sangha and half of your students say they'll leave if you take a certain action; the other half say they'll leave if you don't take that action. What can you do?

RG: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

RG: Bye, bye.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

"If you can let go of greater than or less than, of better and worse, then bowing is making love."

where the Roshi gives teisho. You have to go through it to get to the Zendo, and there's this huge gold-leafed wooden Buddha that you have to bow to, in order to get to the Zendo. And I remember the first time confronting it, and I had seen huge Buddhas in pictures, and there was an attendant there guiding me, and we went and he said "Bow." I could feel myself resisting the bow, out of some idea. What am I bowing to, some idol, some false god? And, of course, my checking mind was saying, "What would my wife think if she could see me bowing to this Buddha?" We don't bow much to anything in the West, we have this kind of independent spirit. "I won't bow."

As you practice Zen more and more (we do 108 bows in the morning as you know, and some people do 500 and 1,000

Question: It always sounds very contradictory to me that sometimes there is mantra, sometimes there is empty mind, sometimes there is thinking about koans.

Genthner: Which one do you like?

Question: That simple?

Genthner: Of course, if you like one, try it. In our school we teach not to hold the kong-an. For instance, if you're into this kong-an: If you have a Zen stick I'll give you one, If you don't have a Zen stick I'll take it away—not to hold that but rather to allow the doubt of that. It's called *Hwadu*, Great Doubt, or Don't Know ("Don't Know" is Dae Soen Sa Nim's name for *hwadu*). You put the doubt right in your Hara and let it permeate your every cell. What?...Don't know.

two. That's compassion. That's a kong-an that points to compassion. The question is, if you were there how would you save the cat? So, the first part is "Oh, don't know"; then out of our don't know comes some compassion, some realization—"Oh, of course". We put aside our ideas, we put aside our sense of self, we put aside our sense of separation, because that's what the kong-an is about: the monks of the east dharma, the monks of the west—that's our minds divided. So, coming together, putting aside our separation, an answer appears, and when you get that answer from your practice then the realization of correct function becomes yours. So, first don't know. Then correct situation, relationship and correct function. Always the kong-an points direction for us.

Question: I'm doing mantra and it's a heavy mantra so it takes a long time to say it, and I get headache. I'm supposed to do a certain number. I've given up that. Is it ok to do it for a while?

Genthner: My first experience doing mantra practice was that it was like chewing gum, that when you first do it there's a lot of flavor, and then it gets stale. I think the staleness arises out of the quality of attention. If you're doing your mantra and it's down here in you hara then your mantra is doing you. But if you're up in your head and you're thinking your mantra then you get headaches.

Question: But I think I do it down there.

Genthner: So, you stop doing it down there, and let it do itself down there. Then who could get a headache?

Question: What is the significance of getting hit with the stick?

Genthner: Have you ever gotten hit with the stick?

Question: No,...only once, at the end.

Genthner: What is the significance?

Question: That's what I'm asking.

Genthner: You've gotten hit with the stick, right? You bend over, and whack, whack.

Question: But what does it mean? Why?

Genthner: So, when you bend over and get hit with the stick, what's that like? What's your experience?

Question: Nothing.

Genthner: Nothing? You don't feel anything? You can't feel it at all?

Question: I feel it alright.

Genthner: You feel what? You feel the Hit, yeh. So, when somebody hits you, what can you do? What do you do? OUCH! huh? Only that.



Furnace Zen Center Dharma Room near Lexington, Kentucky.

Question: Sometimes we are taught the great round mirror has no likes or dislikes, and other times I've heard dharma teachers say stop making good and bad. But the idea has come up recently that in making this place, people had to choose the materials that they used. They had to choose better or worse materials. Somebody used his discriminating wisdom to choose what they're going to do, or decide how to put things together. Would you talk about the difference between when opinion leaps out and makes good and bad, and when it's discriminating wisdom?

Genthner: With our third child, my wife had the baby at home and I was the coach and the principal deliverer. We had no doctor. There was a midwife but she left us pretty much on our own. I had never delivered a baby before. I was present for our middle child's birth but the doctor was in charge. So here I was without any experience, without any knowledge. My

wife had been quite sick before the delivery, and we had considered strongly going to the hospital. When she started to have contractions, things started to get a little crazy, a little panicky. My mind would go: "Maybe we should have gone to the hospital", and then her mind would go: "This is killing me." And we would have this kind of tension. Then letting go of that thought, I would come back to her breathing and we would breathe together, just breathing in and breathing out, and everything seemed to settle, and absolutely what needed to be done was clear. Not by making some kind of conscious analytic choice where I was saying, "Oh, I should do this, I should do that—let's boil water." You know they always boil water. But it became abso lutely clear, and the whole process was a dance that unfolded. That's not making a choice—Ok, now push, now relax—but just being with the very process, and the unfolding happens. When you hear in Zen parlance "Don't make anything," or "Don't make good and bad,"

what that's pointing to is not imposing some kind of will on the situation, but allowing. And when you allow, then correct function appears, out of some clarity, out of some realization of primary point. Then, if somebody comes who's hungry,

what do you do? Feed them, of course. That's making a choice, and that's making a discrimination, hunger vs. not-hunger, but we know what to do out of this primary point, out of clarity, not from some idea or some opinion or some egocentric intention, for me. There is this phrase, "First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is a mountain." So, first there is good and bad, then there is no good and bad, then there is good and bad again. Let me ask you a question. This first good and bad, and the second good and bad—are they the same or different?

Question: My first response is "no", but really I don't know.

Genthner: "Don't know" is wonderful. And that's the mind to keep—don't know. What is this? So I'm giving you back your question. It's a wonderful question, it's a vital question, and I don't want to answer it in the sense of coming to a conclusion about it or solving it. I want to give it back to you. What is this: good and bad, dualism, up and down, right and left—what does this mean? It's a wonderful question. It's the bone of our practice. Maybe I can say a few things about it, but don't let me make a conclusion for you, don't let me wrap it up. Keep that question alive; it's a wonderful one.



Contributions Wanted for Next Issue

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