
Falling Down, Getting Up

On July 30, 1994 Zen Master Seung Sahn gave dharma transmission to Dae Gak Sunim (Robert Genthner). Following is Zen Master Dae Gak's dharma speech and excerpts from his dharma combat with the sangha.

Zen Master Dae Gak at his transmission ceremony

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

True perception has no root.
Clear listening has no sound.
When you hear the beat of hooves
Don't say zebra, don't say horse.

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

One ear appears
all sounds appear.
One ear disappears
all sounds disappear.

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

If you have ears
I will hit you thirty times!
If you have no ears
I will hit you thirty times !

Why?

KATZ!!

The roar of the great river
transforms heaven and earth.
The bald eagle rises slowly, slowly, slowly
In the clear blue sky.
Aiee, Aiee... Aiee

I would like to talk tonight about a kong-an from Zen Master Man Gong:

“All Zen Masters say that in the sound of the bell they attain enlightenment, and at the sound of the drum they fall down. Anyone who understands the meaning of this, please give me an answer.”

A student named Song Wol stood up and said, “If the rabbit's horn is correct, the sheep's horn is false.” Man Gong smiled.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's comment:

If you cannot hear the bell or the drum, you are free. If you hear both sounds you are already in hell.

There are three points of entry into this kong-an, three doors into the kong-an. The first is, what is the meaning of “all Zen Masters say they attain enlightenment in the sound of the bell and fall down at the sound of the drum?” The second is, what is the meaning of “when the rabbit's horn is true, the sheep's horn is false?” And the third point of entry is, what is the meaning of Man Gong Sunim's smile?

Taking up the first door. Man Gong said, all Zen Masters say in the sound of the bell they attain enlightenment, and at the sound of the drum they fall down. What is the meaning of attaining enlightenment? What is the meaning of falling down? Are the meaning of attaining enlightenment and falling down the same or are they different? If you say they are the same, you are lost in oneness. If you say they are different, you miss the very point. How then do you reconcile these?

At the sound of the bell, all great Zen Masters say they attain enlightenment. Notice that they are not saying, because of the sound of the bell, but in the very sound of the bell itself, all great Zen Masters attain enlightenment. At the very sound of the drum, they fall down. What indeed is the difference between attaining and falling down? Does he fall down completely without leaving a trace? Is this the complete attainment of falling down? The falling down of falling down. The enlightenment of falling down. The sound of the bell and the sound of the drum: are they the same or are they different? From one point of view, they originate from the same source, from no sound at all. Sound arises from no sound. Emptiness. From one perspective, the sound of the bell and the sound of the drum are exactly the same. From another perspective the sound of the bell and the sound of the drum are quite different. Enlightenment and delusion. And yet, Zen Master Seung Sahn says if you hear either you fall into hell. What then can you do if you make the mistake of hearing the sound of the bell and the sound

of the drum? What can you do if you find yourself in the hell realm of having heard?

Our life is falling down, getting up. Falling down, getting up. Falling down, getting up. Falling down, getting up. Falling down, getting up. And when we see our life from a certain aspirational perspective, we see that falling down is a response to certain circumstances. Perhaps we are in psychotherapy and we want to get over our anxiety or our characterological nuances or our trauma that has happened to us early on. It is stuck in our consciousness and seems to be affecting things that we do in our daily life. If we could get over some things... we want to get over the falling down of our life, the mistakes. So we go about examining, evaluating, considering becoming a way, working through, de-conditioning, extinguishing, resolving our falling down. And yet here Man Gong says that at the sound of the drum all great Zen Masters fall down.

We have all heard an encouragement when we are talking about our own craziness. Zen Master

Seung Sahn says you must become completely crazy. Then falling down is complete. And there is no falling and getting up.

This kong-an points to how our linear mind wants to see things in a relative way. Something happens and something else occurs because of it. That somehow, the sound of the bell will bring about a state called enlightenment. It will call enlightenment to come into being. When we are in a particular state of mind that is not very becoming to us, not very satisfying, not complete, we seek something outside of ourselves, like the sound of the bell, to bring us into another state. To create something different from what we are experiencing. To enlighten us. To lighten us. And so there is hope that there will be some kind of intervention that we will be saved from our suffering in some way. We look to certain groups of people like Zen

Masters, because our karma is Zen Buddhist; it could be Desert Fathers, gurus, PhD's, whatever... teachers when we were young, elementary school teachers, parents, our mother and father, our friends. We look toward them. We tend to automatically set ourselves apart from certain groups of people and presume that they have something we don't. And sometimes this presumption, especially in regard to parents, is so

subtle and so unconscious that we don't even have a sense that we are doing it. There isn't even awe involved. It is covered by our feelings while we are growing up.

All Zen Masters say at the sound of the bell they fall down and at the sound of the drum they get up. Falling down, getting up. Attaining falling down. Losing. Having, not having. Coming and going.

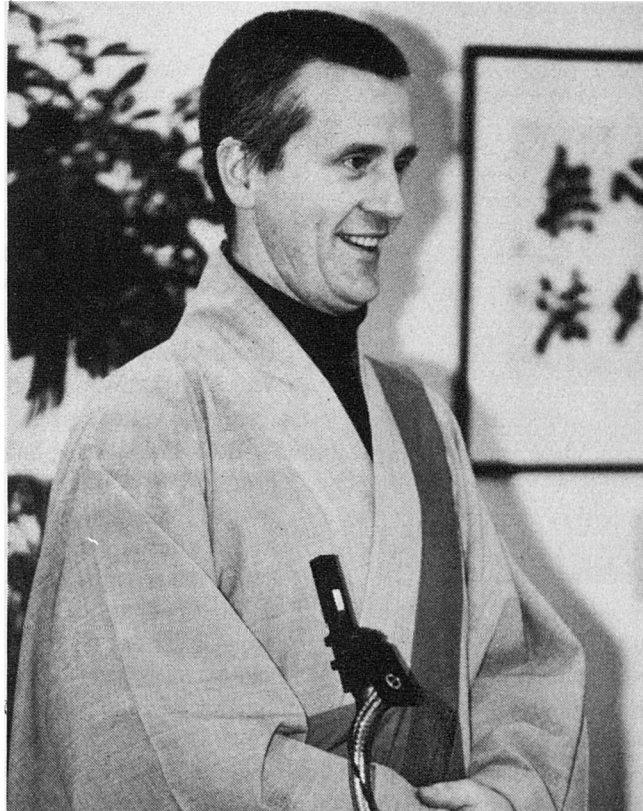
There are two mountains. Which one is the true mountain? All Zen Masters say at the sound of the bell, attain enlightenment. At the sound of the drum, fall down. Bell and drum. Which one is best? Would you rather

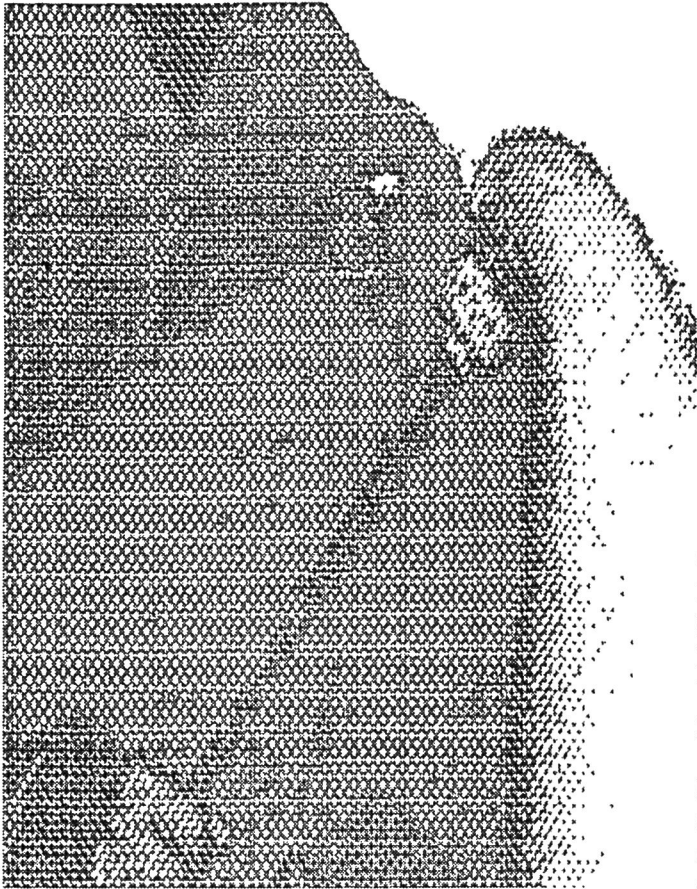
attain enlightenment or falling down? Which would you prefer? Would you choose enlightenment over falling down? Or do you choose falling down over enlightenment?

Man Gong is saying the true Zen Master both attains and falls down. And in that attainment of falling down, there is no attainment. And there is no mistake. It is only when we are worried about our particular life that a mistake is possible. When we live our big life we make only big mistakes which are only for all beings.

The second door to this kong-an is the monk's comment: if the rabbit's horn is true, then the sheep's horn is false. This means: if the turtle's hair is correct, then the lion's hair is not correct. Form is form, emptiness is emptiness. If the fist is so, the open palm is not.

continues





And the third door is, “what is the meaning of Man Gong’s smile?” Is Man Gong approving or placating? Does Man Gong approve of this monk’s statement or is he placating him? One time on Vulture Peak, the Buddha held up a flower. Only Mahakashyapa smiled. Was Mahakashyapa’s smile the same as or different from Man Gong’s smile?

Zen Master Seung Sahn’s comment: “If you cannot hear the bell or drum, you are free. If you hear both sounds you are already in hell.” When your consciousness is discriminating this from that, comparing, how could you possibly know God. It is our tendency to constantly think one thing is better than another. Is it possible for us to be free from our conceptualization and our suffering?

Master Seung Sahn’s comment: “If you don’t hear either sound, you are free; but if you hear either sound, you fall into hell.”

But what if you make the great mistake of falling into hell? What can you do? Human beings do not understand their job. Of all the animals on earth, humans don’t know what they are supposed to be doing. We have technological advancements that exceed our wildest expectations. We can walk on the moon. But, in the history of man there has never been a period without war. We live in conflict. We are attached to our opinions and ideas, the result being that our fellow beings are in a constant state of suffering. So if you fall into hell and are confronted by demons every day, what can you do?

This whole world is turning, turning, turning.
Before this world existed, there was only silence.
After this world disappears, only silence

Silence before, silence after,
Then where does sound come from?

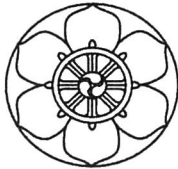
KATZ!

Thank you for listening.

Please enjoy refreshments in the
next room. ☺

Dharma Combat

Zen Master Dae Gak (Robert Gentner)



Q: Hi, thank you for your hard training. Last night you said that you liked simple questions. I think that's a good idea. But I need your help. Can you please tell me, what's the simplest question?

ZMDG: You already understand.

Q: No, please tell me.

ZMDG: You want more?

Q: That's a very simple question. Thank you.
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Q: Dae Gak Sunim, I grew up in Kentucky near your monastery. Someday I may come to your monastery looking for some good ol' down home Kentucky dharma. So please teach me the good ol' down home Kentucky dharma.

ZMDG: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

ZMDG: Y'all come back, please.
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Q: What is it in the rain that never gets wet?

ZMDG: You already understand.

Q: So I ask you.

ZMDG: *[sprinkles water on the questioner]*

Q: Not enough.

ZMDG: The dog chases after the bone.

Q: Thank you.
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Q: Lin Chi Zen Master usually has very short speech. And he said, "If you understand after one word, you are a teacher of Buddhas. If you understand after second word, you are a teacher of gods and human beings. If you understand after the third word, you won't be able even to save your own ass." What kind are you?

ZMDG: You already understand.

Q: So I ask you.

ZMDG: I don't understand. ☉