

Not Difficult, Not Easy

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standing people are important is that they show us very clearly that this practice is not dependent on our appearance. It's not dependent on our way of life. This practice simply means clarity. Our everyday clarity. What are you doing right now, this moment? If you are monk, you have monk's job; if a lay person, you have lay person's job. Keep your correct situation, whatever it is. Moment after moment, keep the great question, "What is this?"

Question: Do you have any famous layperson stories from the present day?

JP: Yes! Nowadays there is a very great story, and it is taking place even as we talk. It is the most important story of all. Everyone must attain this story, become a true Vimalakirti, or Layman P'ang, or Sul. This very moment is that story. So, everyone here is a famous lay person!

Jacob Perl, JDPSN is abbot of the international Kwan Um School of Zen, president of the Kwan Um School of Zen of Europe, and guiding teacher of Providence Zen Center. □

Dharma Mirror update

available March 1 to purchasers of that manual. The update covers requirements to take each category of precepts, plus several clarifications of practice forms. To receive the update, send \$2 to *Dharma Mirror*, Kwan Um School of Zen, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland RI 02864 U.S.A.

Condolences

to the family and friends of Leo Pruden, a respected scholar of Buddhism, who died in October in Los Angeles after a long illness. He was 53. Dr. Pruden was a friend of the Kwan Um School of Zen sangha from its earliest days. While a professor at Brown University in the 1970's, he translated many of Zen Master Seung Sahn's dharma talks from Japanese into English.

Letter to the editor

Dear Kwan Um School of Zen sangha (c/o Primary Point editor),

I am writing this open letter to the entire sangha to express something that troubles me about our school. I write in order to start a dialogue, or to extend any existing dialogue schoolwide. I initially sent this letter before Jane McLaughlin was made a Ji Do Poep Sa Nim, so that happy occasion does alleviate some of my concern, but not altogether.

What concerns me is the fact that of twelve Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, there are only two women, and during the twelve years between the inka ceremonies for Barbara Rhodes, JDPSN and McLaughlin PSN, only men have been acknowledged as able to provide the kind of teaching that is a cornerstone of this school. How can this be? In our center in Tallahassee, Florida, often more women come to practice than men, and I assume that most centers have plenty of female members. Why aren't women "making the grade" as teachers?

This whole question bubbled into my awareness in a peer counseling training class in which participants were asked to look deeply within and identify an area in which we felt blocked. What I uncovered was an internalized feeling of unworthiness as a female practitioner in a historically patriarchal religion. But while I could chalk up the invisibility of women in the Zen tradition to historical oppression, I couldn't so easily rationalize away the near-invisibility of women among the Ji Do Poep Sa Nims in our school.

What I saw in myself was a deep feeling of demoralization, a resigned despondency about the capacity of women to realize our true natures. I wondered if we are simply not up to par with men, perhaps because we focus too much on raising our children rather than sitting lots of retreats. I worked with this demoralization during the ensuing weeks, talking with others and just sitting with it. I have come to see that women are not less equipped than men—after all, raising children is practice, just as sitting retreats is, depending on the mind you bring to it. Something else is going on and I wonder if it is being looked at.

Somehow the capacities of individual women are being overlooked. (I don't know how Ji Do Poep Sa Nims are selected—whether Zen Master Seung Sahn controls the whole process or whether existing Ji Do Poep Sa Nims are integral to the process or what.) Acknowledgement of McLaughlin PSN as a teacher encourages me. Nevertheless, it is hard for me to believe that so few women in the Kwan Um School of Zen are capable of doing kong-an practice with students. And if this is so, why? Can we begin a school-wide dialogue on this?

This process of questioning has been valuable for me because it uncovered a kind of insidious self-doubt that was quietly binding me. And it seems that paying attention to it has dissolved much of it. If there are other women who experience this, I hope this letter will help bring it to your awareness so that you can let it wither away or begin to address it. I hope it is recognized that the absence of women teachers can be demoralizing to women students, and that it surely perpetuates unfair attitudes about gender among members of our school. If anyone has comments on this letter, I'd love to hear from you.

In the dharma,
Ellen B. Gwynn
Tallahassee, Florida