

What Have We Got to Hold Onto in this Life?

(A Question and Answer talk given by Master Dharma Teacher Mu Deung Su Nim during a Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Providence Zen Center October 1, 1983.)

Adeline: I have a friend named Terry who is missing. She was in a small plane that crashed in the sea. So everyone assumes she died. But if she is dead, where is she?

MSDN: What are you doing now?

Adeline: Sitting here talking to you.

MDSN: So you know where your friend went.

Adeline: I don't understand.

MDSN: So where did Terry go? Where did my father go? Don't-know. Before this, Adeline talked about having some idea about our life that makes our life seem substantial. It gives us some reason for living, some direction. What am I doing here? Why am I a monk? Don't-know. But when you have no idea, only one question appears: What is this? Why do I spend my time working? Right now it's the job that has to be done. But as for some deeper meaning than that? I only have an idea. Maybe her friend Terry went to heaven. Maybe she went to hell. Does it really matter what my idea is? If I hit you, what do you say?

Adeline: Ow! Do you hear something if I say "Ouch?"

MDSN: Say "Ouch."

Adeline: Ouch. Did you hear that?

MDSN: I don't know 'anything.' Today my speech comes from where? It comes from my heart, ok? It has no Dharma, it has nothing at all. It cannot answer any question, or do anything. It has no idea. It cannot see, hear, think, taste, touch. But I am only sitting here talking to you. About what? Who knows? I have no Dharma. I have nothing at all. I can't figure out what I'm doing here. Can you? If you can, please tell me!

Q: But there is taste and touch and hearing, even if you say "I don't taste or touch or hear."

MDSN: That's only naming, made by you, by me, by all of us. That's only an idea. I say I see you: you must attain that. That has no name or form. That's not dependent on hearing, on like or dislike, correct or incorrect, good or bad. It's not dependent on anything at all. "The wall is white" is not dependent on any philosophy. My eyes seeing you is not dependent on anything. Seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, thinking, feeling, moving—are not dependent on anything. We make it dependent on something. You go to a movie and it's a bad one. Your eyes don't like it. But your eyes didn't not like that movie, either. Your eyes have no opinion. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind—are not dependent on anything. You make it dependent on something; so it is dependent on something. If it depends on anything, then you have suffering.

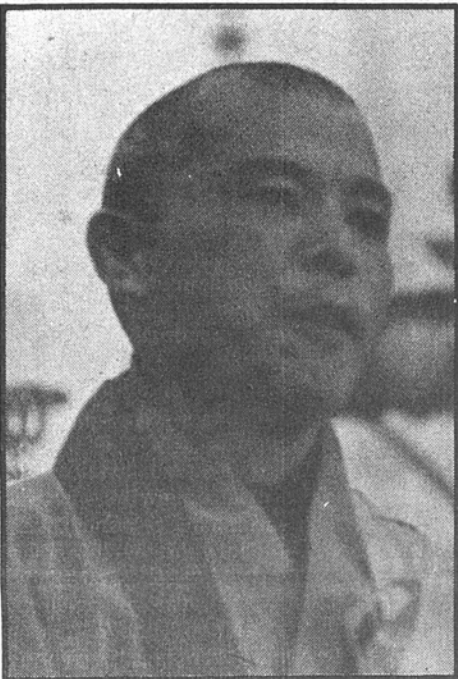
Q: Recently a lot of us have been learning about the medical consequences of a nuclear war. My question is, if you have a

friend who is drowning or if you're aware that a nuclear bomb can wipe out all your friends, what is the correct thing to do?

MSDN: You must practice very hard.

Q: But if you are sitting on the shore, practicing very hard, then your friend will drown.

MSDN: If you are practicing very hard, then you will be able to jump into the ocean and save your friend—no problem. This life is very funny. What do we want? We say we want to attain our true self. We say we want to attain freedom from life and death, to save all sentient beings. That's what we say we want as Zen students. Not only Zen students, but other people say this. But if you want to do that, then you must really do that.



Mike Olak

In China there was a government official who later became a Zen Master, during the Tung dynasty. His name was Chi Su. He was in charge of handling all the money that came into the Emperor's treasury. He was very smart, and everyone liked and trusted him. People valued his opinion. Then one day he took a huge amount of money out of the treasury and just gave it away to a lot of people. It was a great crime.

The other men in his department said, "We like Chi Su and trust him, but this is crazy! As honest men, what can we do?" So they told the Emperor what Chi Su had done. The Emperor said, "There must be some ulterior motive for this action. But it's our law that there are certain ways of appropriating money. This was a big mistake on his part. Take him to court."

Chi Su was tried and sentenced to execution. Nobody wanted to do it; but they had decided on their law, and he had broken it. The day of the execution came. The Emperor called the executioner, a great swordsman, a man who could cut off your head so cleanly and quickly that there was no suffering. The Emperor said to him, "When you raise your sword and are ready to cut off his head, first look at his face. If his face shows any signs of regret or remorse or puzzlement, cut off his head quickly. If not, don't cut."

On the appointed day, Chi Su put his head on the block. The swordsman lifted his sword, ready to cut off his head. He looked down and saw Chi Su smiling. Smiling! Chi Su, seeing the bewilderment on the swordsman's face, looked up at him and said, "I dedicate this next birth to all sentient beings"

So of course he didn't have his head cut off. A messenger ran and told the Emperor, who was very proud of Chi Su. He knew there had been some ulterior motive for Chi Su's action. So he called for Chi Su and said, "I am very happy. But we in the government want to understand why you gave all that money away."

Chi Su said, "For a long time now I've been thinking about quitting my government post, giving alms to the people, and only practicing Buddhism. So I decided that in my next life, if you killed me now, I would be reborn as a Zen student and only practice Buddhism."

At that time it was very difficult to get out of a government post, especially a high-ranking one. You couldn't just quit your job. It had to be approved by the Emperor, and Chi Su didn't think that would happen. He did this action without any concern about whether he would get a reprieve or not.

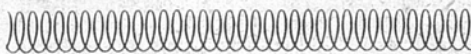
The Emperor said, "I will give you a new name, Yen Shu, which means 'prolonged life.' Yen Shu later became a Zen student, and a short time later, maybe five years, became a Zen Master.

Chi Su said, "I dedicate this next birth to all sentient beings." Because he had enough faith, he gave himself up. Because of his determination, he had faith that he would be born as a Zen student and not as a government official. He was willing to risk his life to find out: What is this? Just once you must want to give up your life. Whether you do it or not doesn't matter.

Dogen Zenji says that if in this lifetime we have not once gotten that taste, we cannot enter Buddhism completely. Just one taste. But we all hold our opinions and say we want that taste, but how much are we really willing to let go? How many of us are really willing to try for 10,000 years? So you see, it doesn't matter where Adeline's friend went. It doesn't matter what I'm doing now. All that matters is that we try completely.

At the top of a 100 foot pole Dogen Zenji says that you must even forget about saving all beings. You must walk past the place

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What is one thing?

Zen Master Ku Sahn (1910-1983)

The Ven. Ku Sahn Su Nim, Zen Master of one of Korea's most famous temples, Song Gwang Sa, died on December 16, at the age of 73.

A few days before he died, he recited the following:

"Samsara and Nirvana are originally not two;
As the sun rises in the sky
It illuminates the three thousand worlds."

Under Ku Sahn Su Nim's leadership, Song Gwang Sa (also known as Vast Pines Monastery) attracted monks and nuns from many Western countries, including America. Ku Sahn Su Nim was noted for his efforts in revitalizing Korean Buddhism; he often traveled around Korea speaking to lay Buddhist groups. He established two temples in America: in 1972, the Korean Buddhist Sambosa (Temple of the Three Treasures) in Carmel Valley, CA; and in 1980, Korea Sa, a branch temple of Song Gwang Sa, in Los Angeles. He is also the author of *Nine Mountains*, a collection of his Dharma talks.

Ku Sahn Su Nim was born in 1910 and worked as a barber until age 28, when he became a monk under Zen Master Hyo Bong, one of the celebrated Zen Masters of his era. After seven years of hard practice, Ku Sahn Su Nim was certified by Zen Master Hyo Bong, who transmitted the Dharma to him four years later. Ku Sahn Su Nim worked at National Sangha Headquarters in Seoul, and then returned to his hermitage for another three years of hard training.

On behalf of the whole sangha of the Kwan Um Zen School, Zen Master Seung Sahn offers profound condolences on the occasion of Ku Sahn Su Nim's death. He prays that the Zen Master will keep the Great Vow, return to this world again, attain the great work, and save all beings from suffering. Zen Master Seung Sahn wrote the following poem to mark Ku Sahn Su Nim's death.



Where does the great Zen Master Ku Sahn stay now?

Do you understand that?

Aigo Aigo! Aigo!

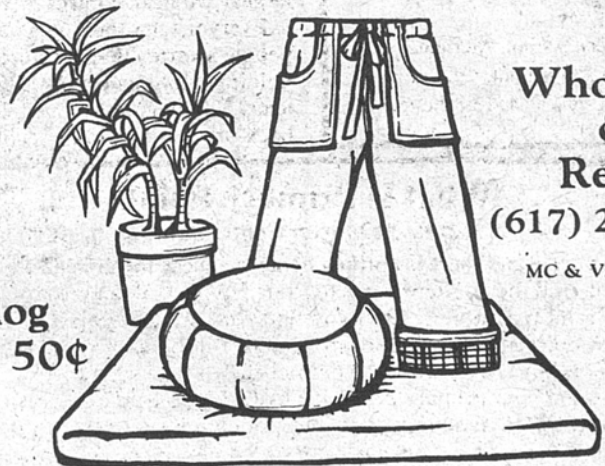
Chogy Mountain is always blue.

Chogy Stream never stops flowing.



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Monastery

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with their families live and practice together, and often hold jobs in the surrounding community, the life at this new Zen monastery will follow traditional Korean monastic rules.

Monks will be required to shave their heads and wear the grey clothes and robes traditionally worn in Korea. When they take novice precepts, they are given a Buddhist name by Soen Sa Nim, and addressed as "Su Nim" (an honorific term). In Korea, the meditation periods are 90 days in summer and winter, and are called "Kyo Che" or "tight Dharma." After each Kyo Che in the spring and fall comes a 90-day period called "Hae Jae" or "dispersing to the winds." This style of practice will also be offered at the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery beginning in December of 1984 with a winter Kyo Che. During Hae Jae the monks will leave to live and teach in the Zen Centers of the Kwan Um Zen School.

There are currently six traditional monks in the School. Soen Sa Nim has proposed that people who wish to practice Kyo Che in the monastery or to experience the life of a monk, without making a lifetime commitment, may do so for a limited time, and then return to their regular life. This style has been used in Tibet, Thailand, and other Asian countries where large portions of the populations do this at some point in their lives.

Soen Sa Nim has wanted to build such a monastery almost since he arrived in the United States in 1972, but other possible sites never worked out. He finally decided to build it on the property of the Providence Zen Center, so that the already established Zen Center and the new monastery could provide mutual support. It is interesting to note that the town of Cumberland in rural northern Rhode Island is the site of several other religious centers. The international motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy is located here, as well as the retreat centers of the Oblate Fathers and the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

The local Hayden Library was formerly St. Joseph's Trappist monastery.

Construction of the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery uses the old style of heavy timber framing, explains Larason Guthrie, a long-time friend of the Providence Zen Center who helped design the monastery. It is similar to methods used in Korean temples, but not as elaborate. The walls are framed with posts and beams, joined together and supporting heavy timbers which carry the roof. This kind of construction must be done meticulously, and so is very labor intensive, compared to standard construction methods. But if built properly, says Guthrie, the monastery should last "as long as a wooden building could possibly last. In Japan and Korea similar structures with tile roofs have lasted 500 to 600 years."

Heavy timber framing has been little used in this country according to Guthrie, since the advent of sawmills and metal hardware. In Korea, "brackets" are used which make the joints rigid, a method known as "corbelling." "We are corbelling with heavy timber instead of brackets," Guthrie explains. The beams being used in this monastery (8" x 8", 8" x 12") are hewn from 100 year old yellow pine, and were purchased from Duane's Wrecking Company in Quincy, MA. This type of wood is difficult to find nowadays. The roof of the Dharma room will be gracefully curved, and may be covered with tiles.



Mu Guak Su Nim

Traditional rice-paper lattice doors are among the decorative features planned for the interior.

The building itself will be in two parts, shaped like a T. The head of the T will be two stories, with a 46' x 20' Dharma room upstairs and monks' living quarters downstairs. In the tail of the T will be the kitchen, three bedrooms and bathrooms. The monastery will be heated by a wood-burning furnace.

Early last year Soen Sa Nim chose the site on a wooded hill behind the pond on the 50-acre tract of the Zen Center. Korean temple sites are usually selected according to the principles of geomancy, a system of divination indigenous to Korea, which takes into account the "wind water geography." As a result, most temples are located close to a body of water (mountain streams are most propitious) and on elevated ground.

The location required extensive work before the building could begin. A Zen Center crew last winter sawed down trees and cleared the site, and was later helped by the Holly Farms Construction Company of Cumberland, owned by Frank Hvizdos. Albert Desrossiers then bulldozed a supply road around the pond and up the hill to the site. He also excavated drainage ditches and a road over the hill and down to Pound Road, so that Blackstone Valley Electric Company could install an underground power line to the monastery.

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Anderson Contracting and Supply Company of North Smithfield was hired to do the necessary blasting of rock ledges to sink the foundations into the hill. J.M. Forms Company of Cumberland, owned by Frank Marszalkowski, poured the footings and forms for the cement foundation. Frank's brother from Pawtucket, Mike, poured the concrete floors, assisted by his faithful dog who never sets her feet in wet cement.

There was a warm feeling between the Zen Center construction crew and these firms, many of whom have done work previously for the Zen Center. Garden vegetables were traded, and one man regularly brought coffee and doughnuts for the Zen Center crew.

The remaining construction of the monastery will be done by the skilled Zen Center construction crew, led by Abbot Lincoln Rhodes. Bill Highsmith, a journeyman boat builder, and Master Dharma Teacher George Bowman, a skilled carpenter, are lending their expertise to the heavy timber framing process, along with Tracy Dolge, a carpenter and former resident of the Farm, and David Klinger, head of Zen Center Maintenance and a licensed electrician.

By late November the huge posts had

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What Have We Got

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where there is no Buddha, no idea. At that time form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. In Zen books we read about how we must give up our body and our mind so that we can have freedom. What have we got to hold onto in this life? What people think or don't think about me? A girlfriend? My children? My parents? The words "Dharma" or "Buddha?" Or the words "no Dharma, no Buddha?" I wish I could find out.

A lot of you saw the movie "Apocalypse Now." I saw it four times. I went to see it the fourth time because something caught me. I sat through the whole movie trying to figure out what it was. Finally at the end of the movie the executioner takes a big hatchet to Brando's headquarters and he's killing him. In all of this nightmarish scene, one word struck me. Brando says, "The horror of it all."

Some Zen students might think, "What kind of speech is that?" But look outdoors. Somebody might say, "Oh wonderful, the sky is blue, the tree is green. That's stillness and bliss." What's the difference between "stillness and bliss" and "the horror of it all?" We make that. Words are only words; they have no substance. Only what you do has substance. One second after that, what you were doing has no substance, no meaning, no choice.

Q: Why are we always more ready to believe

what's outside of us, than what's inside? Why don't we trust our immediate perceptions?

MDSN: Because we think we know something, we can't believe ourselves. We think we know the correct way, the correct life, or something, it doesn't matter what, we think we know it. Buddha said everything has Buddha nature. Why separate anything?

Q: The more I practice, it seems the more I become like litmus paper, absorbing the whole thing. A movie like "Apocalypse Now" or a martial arts movie just wipes me out.

MDSN: Well, that's correct. If you go to a kung fu movie, and feel like you got your head smashed against a wall, that's correct because that's what they're doing in that movie. That's together-action.

Q: Are all 'I wants' a mistake?

MDSN: Also, 'I don't want' is a mistake. What are we doing here now? Occupying our time. We call ourselves Zen students, other people call themselves executives. We all practice life and we feel comfortable doing it. So why not? But we must believe it. Executives have executive problems. Students have student problems. Executives think that when they reach the top and become president of the corporation, all their problems will disappear. We think

when we become Zen Masters, all our problems will disappear. Are they the same or different?

You must only find your way. There are many different schools of Zen. Some sit hard. Some don't put so much stress on sitting, and do other things. All teachers, all Zen Masters—from what I've read in books—have their own style.

A Korean man in our School told me that his grandmother used to practice Buddhism in Korea, so he learned a lot about different Korean schools. Also he had studied the history of Korean Zen, out of his own curiosity. He told me, "You know, Soen Sa Nim's mind is the craziest of them all, because his teachers—Kyong Ho Su Nim, Mang Gong Su Nim, Ko Bong Su Nim—all did some outrageous things. Schools who grew up from the same transmission line before it branched went a different way. In one school they sat and did what we would call beneficial things for society. In another school at the same time, they lived as hermits in the mountains. So there are many different ways, but they all help people.

A long time ago in Korea, a sutra master was giving a speech and said you should always keep good company. Kyong Ho Su Nim stood up in the audience and said, "Then who will save the whores? Who will save the robbers? If you only have good friends, what about all the other people?" When Mang Gong heard that, he immediately became his student. So there is no good or bad.

Q: Some people drink alcohol and say it helps them practice. Do you agree?

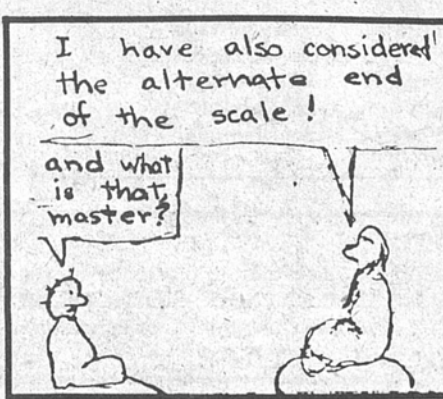
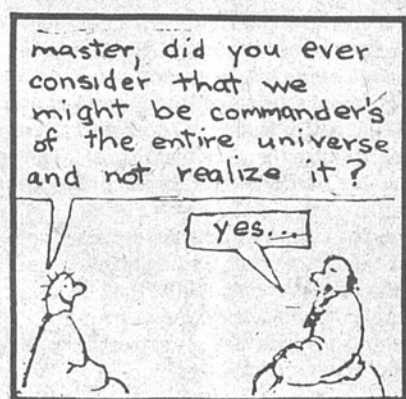
MDSN: Why not? I think sometimes it's necessary. Sometimes we must relax, or let it all hang out if it really doesn't harm anybody.

Q: I had a friend who stopped being a monk. Now he's very angry at our School. That upsets me.

MDSN: It doesn't matter, because you said this person was once a monk. That means he's conscious of "try-mind." His try-mind was sincere at that time. But some karma appeared, and his try-mind went away from his original idea. Once somebody spends that amount of time trying, they can't forget it. It will appear again, I think. More suffering is necessary before you can just give up your life.

You know, sometimes we have to take this as a joke. Sometimes it's very funny. We must still find our own way, not dependent on anything. Soen Sa Nim is here to teach us and steer us, but the end point is for us to find our own way. The point of teaching is not to have you end up what he wants you to be, but to show you how to find your way.

I don't believe anything I said today—do you know that? It's only my job. So if you don't understand, only go straight don't-know, get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering. ■



contributed by Tim Anderson, editor of a junior high school newspaper