

Ecology of Mind

BY ZEN MASTER WU BONG

Adapted from a dharma talk given at the Buddha's Birthday Ceremony at Providence Zen Center on April 9, 1990.

HIT!

Long ago a great man came, saved all beings, and left. His coming and his going continues to teach us to this day.

HIT!

Long ago, a great man said, "The True Way has no coming, and no going." To this day, this teaching is saving us.

HIT!

We too, have come into this world, have gathered here today, and will soon depart. Then, in our coming and going, how do we attain the great man's way of coming and going? How do we attain the great man's way of not coming and not going?

KATZ!

Winter has gone north. Spring has come in from the south.

Recently, Zen Master Seung Sahn attended an important meeting in Moscow, and I had the good fortune of joining him for this trip. The meeting was called the Global Forum of Parliamentary and Spiritual Leaders for Human Survival. Its primary subject was our relationship with this world, how we are destroying this world, and how we human beings can survive.

The key issue of this meeting was ecology. According to Webster's, ecology is that branch of biology which deals with the relationship of living things and the environment.

What is our relationship to our environment? That is a question which the Buddha's teaching addresses very clearly. In Buddha's time there were not the same kind of problems with the pollution of air, water, and ground. The Buddha, for that reason, did not talk very specifically about those kinds of pollution. He taught us a slightly different kind of ecology, a more basic and more comprehensive kind of ecology.

This teaching is so fundamental that not only is biological ecology a natural consequence of this teaching, but so is ethical ecology, spiritual ecology, and finally through the teaching of the patriarchs the ecology of moment-to-

moment correct situation, correct relationship, correct function. If we understand this way correctly, then we can understand all relationships, including our relationship to our environment, which means not only ground, water, air, sky, trees, plants, and animals, but also each other.

In view of the Buddha's teaching, a forum for human survival is a mistake. This goal already separates human beings from the rest of this world. It is not enough to love this world so that human beings can survive. That is not true love, because true love is unconditional. In fact, at the forum, many speakers talked about love. Then what is love?

In China, long ago, Zen Master Nam Cheon came into the dharma room of his temple, where several hundred monks were fighting about a cat. Nam Cheon picked up the cat, and demanded of the suddenly silent congregation, "Give me one word. If not, I will kill this cat!" Everyone was silent, so finally the Zen Master killed the cat. Later that day when he told his student Joju about this incident, Joju removed his slippers, put them on top of his head, and walked out of the room. Zen Master Nam Cheon said, "If you had been there, the cat could have been saved."

This kong-an is about love. When Nam Cheon challenged his students, he wanted to see if they loved the cat, or only desired the cat. Today, I ask you: If you had been there when the Zen Master demanded one word, how would you have saved the cat? And, what is the meaning of Joju's action? If these questions become clear to you, then love becomes clear. To attain this kong-an means to attain true love. To attain true love is to become ecologically correct in our relationship with the environment.

There is a branch of science which is relatively new. It is the study of chaos. While for us the world "chaos" implies a state of utter confusion, for the scientist the word "chaos" has a very specific meaning involving an equation with a number of possible solutions at any one moment. Equations describing turbulence, meteorological phenomena, or even stock market behavior are examples of "chaotic" equations.

What is very interesting is that scientists have found that in any kind of a chaotic system there is some order. They have also found that in many systems that up to now were thought to be very orderly and very predictable, some chaotic behavior can be found at times. That's not so much of a surprise for the followers of the Eastern sages.

The Korean flag is a good example of this. It is basically a yin/yang symbol. The yang side has a little bit of the yin color. The yin side has a little bit of the yang color. yin gives birth to yang, yang gives birth to yin. Chaos gives birth to order, and vice versa. This is because we live in a world of opposites, and if you take away one opposite, the other would not exist. If you take away man, then the word woman becomes meaningless. If you take away dark, then there can not be light. If you take away ignorance, then there can not be enlightenment.

In this world of opposites, how do we find our correct situation, correct relationship, correct function? To understand this world of opposites is to respect all of nature. It becomes foolish to dislike the night, for without it the day would not exist. To respect nature is to give up the notion of ownership of nature, of ownership of this world. To not treat this world as "my" world is to realize that it belongs to all life.

Our job then becomes more clear. Our life is not only from our parents. The ground, the water, the air, the sun and the moon, all support our life; in fact they give us our life. They are all our parents. Just as we have an obligation to our parents, this obligation extends to the whole world. That is the Buddha's teaching. That is Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching. That is our true nature's teaching. In other words, the fundamental thing is not so much polluting the environment, but polluting our mind.

Buddha taught something very simple. He taught how to deal with anger, desire and ignorance: three major pollutants. If we are able to take away this pollution, then the other kinds of pollution will also disappear. Without taking away this pollution, it is not possible to attain the true harmony with nature. Without harmony with nature it is not possible to avoid harming the environment.

In science class in elementary school, one learns what happens if we connect two containers, one full of hot water, and another one full of cold water. When the containers are joined and the water can freely mix, very soon, even without stirring, the temperature will be uniform. The hot one becomes cooler, and the cold one becomes warmer. The hot water has more thermal energy. This energy seeks a level where it is equalized, seeks a kind of balance.

We observe that everywhere in nature. At the forum some people said that this world is unbalanced. But, the world is always balanced. All of the environmental problems result in death, sickness, hunger. This is only correct. This is part of the balance equation. This is human beings' bad energy dispersing throughout our world container. That is also Buddha's teaching. Buddha taught us balance – in our life, how to make correct balance; in our mind, how to make correct balance; in our dealings with our family, with our friends, with the whole world, with the animals, the trees, the air, how to make correct balance.

At the forum, people talked about various environmental problems and suggested some solutions. Zen Master Seung Sahn also had a chance to talk. What he talked about was the teaching of karma. Every result in this world comes from a cause. Then any disease has a primary cause. It is very important to change the primary cause, then any sickness, any karma can be fixed, can be changed. To do that it is necessary for all of us to put down our opinions, our understanding, our "I, my, me." Zen Master Seung Sahn by saying this, in effect, asked everyone to keep a clear mind. This means everyone can get dharma energy. Then this dharma energy disperses throughout the whole world.

This teaching is very simple, and very clear. But practicing people know that while very simple, this teaching is not always easy to carry out. It is one of a Zen student's great sicknesses to judge one's own practice, and to question one's own ability to make the required effort.

Sometimes so many hindrances appear in our life, in our practice, that it is tempting to indulge in self-doubt and become paralyzed. The ecological problems confronting us appear to be overwhelming. The mental pollution, for those who attempt some kind of practice, is often more overwhelming still. How can we even begin to help this world? One of the most important teachings I received from Zen Master Seung Sahn is that there are two kinds of mind. There's a mind that says "I can," and there's a mind that says "I cannot." If one thinks "I cannot," then one cannot. If somebody thinks "I can," then it's possible. Best of all, just do it. Every moment of our life the Buddha continues to give us the great present, his Dharma. The best present we offer in return is to apply this teaching to our life. Then "do it" correct balance; "do it" harmony; "do it" true love; "do it" moment-to-moment correct situation, correct relationship, correct function. Then our life is no longer ours, but belongs to the whole universe. Then ecologically correct life is not something special. It is simply the correct function of our true nature. This is indeed the great person's way. Can we attain it right now?

HIT!

If this sound is clear, then the whole universe is clear. Also the Great Way is meticulously clear. Then, where is the Great Way?

KATZ!

(Pointing to the dharma room exit doors.)
Through these doors to the dining room.

Thank you very much.

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