

Samadhi and Zen – Zen Master Seung Sahn's Teaching in Europe

BY MU SANG SUNIM

Zen Master Seung Sahn is like a wandering mechanic — everywhere he goes he finds some engine, so to speak, which needs its valves adjusted, its screws tightened, old oil removed and fresh oil put in. On our recent teaching trip to western Europe he found that many people were confused about the relation between "samadhi" and Zen practice. So he taught over and over that while samadhi — "one-mind," "not moving mind" may appear "on the way," it is not the goal of Zen. The aim of our practice is truth or "clear mind," and the correct functioning of truth moment to moment.

Zen Master Seung Sahn at the Oslo Fjord, Norway. Behind him is a traditional grass-roofed house.

"It is possible," Zen Master Seung Sahn taught, "for people with a lot of thinking to use samadhi to cut off their thinking, cut off their desire, and get a lot of energy. The universe and you become one point. But enlightenment does not depend on energy. In enlightenment there is no concern with energy.

"Enlightenment and non-enlightenment are the same point. A long time ago, a Zen Master said, 'Before I got enlightenment, when I saw the sky, blue; after I got enlightenment, when I see the sky, also blue.' That's enlightenment — the same point — the sky is blue. Getting enlightenment or not getting enlightenment doesn't matter.

"Samadhi has no cause, no effect, no karma, no enlightenment, no I, nothing at all — only energy. No sky, no color. But it's very easy to attach to samadhi energy and lose one's way. 'I am wonderful, I have lots of energy, I can do anything!' — this kind of mind can appear: much desire, much attachment to power. Then you return — BOOM! — to small I. I-my-me again appears. So this is very dangerous."

A second major theme addressed the students' concern about the relationship between teacher and student. Zen Master Seung Sahn stressed that "Zen means not depending on God, or Buddha, or a teacher, or religion, but completely becoming independent. You must believe in your true self 100%. If you cannot believe in your true self, then you must believe in your teacher 100%. If you have no teacher, then you must believe in Buddha 100% — only keeping your own opinion is no good.

"Believing in your teacher and depending on your teacher are different. If you believe in your teacher, there is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside — inside and outside become one. Then you can believe in your true self, also

you can believe any teacher, also you can believe your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. But if you only depend on your teacher, that is making two, I am here, something is there. That is not correct. When we are children, we depend on our parents. Then if our parents go away, we cry, cry, cry. But after we grow up we no longer depend on our parents; we can take care of ourselves. So don't be like a child — you must become independent. And don't depend on your teacher, only believe in your teacher 100%."

After one of the retreats in Europe, Zen Master Seung Sahn told two stories that further illuminate the dangers of attaching to samadhi:

"A long time ago in China, during the time of Zen Master Lin Chi, there was a monk who was very famous for his samadhi practicing. This monk never wore any clothes and was known as the "naked monk." He had mastered many kinds of samadhi, had lots of energy, and didn't need to wear clothes even in winter.

"One day Lin Chi decided to test this monk. He called a student of his, gave him a set of beautiful clothes, and asked him to present them to the monk. The student went to the monk and said, 'Ah, you are wonderful. Your practicing is very strong. So my teacher wants to give you these beautiful clothes as a present.' The monk kicked away the clothes and said, 'I don't need these clothes. I have original clothes, from my parents! Your clothes can only be kept a short time, then they will wear out. But my original clothes are never broken. Also, if they become dirty, I just take a shower and they are clean again. I don't need your clothes!'

"The student went to Lin Chi and told him what happened. Lin Chi said, 'You must go to this monk once more and ask him a certain question.' So the student went to the monk and said, 'Great monk! I have one question for you. You said you got your original clothes from your parents.' 'Of course!' said the monk. 'Then I ask you, before you got these original clothes from your parents, what kind of clothes did you have?' Upon hearing this, the naked monk went deep into samadhi, then into nirvana (he died).

"Everyone was very surprised and sad. But when the monk's body was cremated, many sarira appeared, so everyone thought, 'Ah, this was a great monk.' Sitting on the high rostrum, Lin Chi hit the stand with his Zen stick and said, 'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.' He hit it again, 'No form, no emptiness.' He hit it a third time, 'Form is form, emptiness is emptiness. Which one is correct?' Nobody understood. Then the Zen Master shouted 'KATZ!' and said, 'The sky is blue, the tree is green.' If you cannot answer in one word the question about your original clothes, then, although you can get samadhi and nirvana, you cannot get freedom from life and death.

"Then the Zen Master stared at the sarira — poof! — they turned to water. This is magic! They all turned to water and disappeared. Everyone was surprised. The meaning of this is: if you do samadhi practice deeply, then when you die many sarira will appear. But, these sarira will not last long because they represent 'one mind,' not 'clear mind' which is our original nature. Our original nature has no life, no death, no coming or going. When the true

dharma appears, which means form is form, emptiness is emptiness or sky is blue, tree is green- that energy -BOOM! - will appear, all the sarira will turn to water and disappear. Our teaching is substance, truth, and correct life. Our Zen practicing means attain your true self, find the correct way, truth, and life. Any style of practice is OK — even using a mantra. But, don't be attached to samadhi — you must 'pass' samadhi. Zen means 'everyday mind,' not special states of mind. Moment to moment keeping a clear mind is what's important.

"Here is another example. Once one of my students decided to practice with an Indian guru. This guru taught samadhi practice. So my student got a mantra, tried it all the time when he wasn't working, and went deeply into samadhi. All the time he was having a very good feeling. Then one day while doing this mantra, he was crossing the street. The next thing he knew, a car screeched to a halt, almost hitting him, and loudly sounded its horn. The driver shouted at him, 'Keep clear mind!' Then my student was very afraid. The next day he came to me and said, 'Dae Soen Sa Nim, I have a problem. Last night I almost died. I was practicing samadhi, didn't pay attention and was almost hit by a car. Please teach me my mistake.'

"So I explained to him, samadhi practicing takes away your consciousness. But Zen means moment to moment keeping clear mind. What are you doing now? When you are doing something, just do it. Then this kind of accident cannot happen. So don't make samadhi. Don't make anything! Just do it, O.K.?"

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