

A Time of Complete Transformation

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Everything that happens in this world is correct. Things go in cycles: spring, summer, fall, winter. Every year this cycle of seasons occurs. But there are longer cycles too, and this year is the beginning of both a 60 year and a 360 year cycle. It is a very interesting time.

There is a very large insect called the cicada, which grows very slowly inside a cocoon fastened to a tree. The transformation from cocoon to winged creature takes a long time, about seventeen years, and is very difficult. During this time in the cocoon, the cicada's internal body appears disrupted. The skin, the organs, the wings, all appear not to be working. They aren't moving. The body looks as if it were confused and broken.

Then slowly the cocoon breaks open and the new body begins to appear. A wing emerges, then a leg stretches forth. At first the cicada's movements are slow and difficult. It crawls out of the cocoon and falls to the ground. At this stage the cicada never thinks about the sky or about flying - it only thinks about how to get food, any kind of food. Sometimes it takes three or four hours between the time it leaves the cocoon and the time it is able to fly. But this is a time of complete transformation. One moment it tries to fly and it flies!

We are very worried about the future. How can we ever fly? How can our wings possibly appear? How can we get enough food? Many problems are appearing. If we buy a business, we want to know if the future will be good for sales or bad. So we have many worries. But human beings are part of nature. Like the cicada, even if we have already emerged from our cocoon, it still takes time before we understand how to stretch our wings out and fly. Finally we will fly.

There is always change, but changing means not changing. Moment to moment, everything is complete. Everything that happens is correct. If you are attached to name and form, it means that your thinking appears and disappears. If your thinking does not appear and disappear, everything is complete. If your center is not moving, you will have no difficulty even though many new conditions will appear. If you have no center, you will always have problems. Think of it like this: not much happens in the winter months, the season of cold and ice. No leaves or flowers appear from the frozen ground. When spring comes, the ground thaws. Water goes into the soil and starts working. Everything erupts. The grass grows. Leaves appear and get bigger. Flowers appear. All the colors are changing. Everything is changing, quickly changing.

It's the same in our minds, in our "inside" world as well as the "outside" world. During winter, for three or four months everything stays the same, so we experience no difficulty. In the spring there are many changes, so our minds move and we experience many doubts and problems. Just at this time of the ending of an old set of 60 years and 360 year cycles and the beginning of a new set, many things are happening "inside." A strange, complicated mind is appearing.

Just now we need to practice more strongly and make our direction clear. If you are not doing hard practice or your direction is unclear, any kind of demon might take you. When you die, you will not understand where you go. What kind of hell will you go to? There are many kinds. If in this life you have killed many animals, when you die, these animals will appear to you saying, "Give me my life!"

It is necessary to die every day, and every day to give life. If in one day you die ten thousand times, you are ten thousand times alive. This life is maybe seventy or eighty years long. Many things happen in one life. We think it is so short, but to some beings, even one second is very long.

Buddha went to heaven to save his mother. He only stayed three days, but in this world, it was ninety days. During this time the king missed the Buddha. He went to see the Buddha, expecting a dharma speech, but the Buddha was not there. The king was unhappy. His mind could not rest. So he invited a very good sculptor to make a gold Buddha, and he put it on the Buddha's seat.

Then the Buddha came back. He looked at the gold Buddha - its face and his face were the same! The king explained, "We missed you, so we made this statue just like you and put it on your seat. Is this good or bad?"

The Buddha said, "You understand form is emptiness, emptiness is form. If you think this Buddha is truth, that is me." So Buddha statues appeared at that time.

Just like that story, if your mind, your center is strong with no thinking, then you already have infinite time and infinite space. If you have thinking, then even one hour can seem like many years. Sometimes our thinking makes many years seem like only one second. So it's very important how strong your center is. In a changing time, a time of beginnings, it's very important to have a strong center. At this time, if your direction is clear, then the beginning goes this way and that way. If you are not clear, the future is not clear.

Some people say the end of the world is coming. But when an old age is finished, a new age appears. Human beings are part of the natural cycle and this is a changing time for all species. This year is the beginning of the age when women will control everything, just as men have up till now: the house, the family, politics, the economy. Soon there will be many more women leading their countries. Women will become as strong as men, as it was thousands of years ago. This change from yang to yin has already begun.

When Bodhidharma came to China, he became the first patriarch of Zen. As the result of a "marriage" between Vipassana-style Indian meditation and Chinese Taoism, Zen appeared. Now it has come to the West and what is already here? Christianity, Judaism, and so forth. When Zen "gets married" to one of these traditions, a new style of Buddhism will appear.

Perhaps there will be a woman matriarch and all dharma transmission would go only from woman to woman. Why not? So everyone, you must create American Buddhism. Get enlightenment!

In this new age time, a strong center is necessary. Are you clear, everyone? No? Then more hard training is necessary. Also, your direction must become clear. Why do you eat every day? Why do you study Zen? Why do you sit? These are important questions.

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