

Desires and Aspirations

BY ZEN MASTER WU BONG

Question: Can we really help the world? Look at hunger, for example.

Zen Master Wu Bong: Yes, we can help. Consider hunger. We have hunger all over this world. Where does this hunger come from? It doesn't come from economic problems. It doesn't come because there isn't enough food in the world to feed the hungry. It comes from the mind that wants something, from the mind that is holding something. Hunger comes from that mind.

These days we often talk about ecology. Buddha didn't explicitly talk about ecology, but in a way Buddha always talked about ecology. What kind of ecology? He talked about the mind. He talked about anger, desire, and ignorance. Those are three kinds of pollution. If we take away these three kinds of pollution, then this world's hunger will disappear. Not only hunger, but any kind of problem. So this world needs you; everybody must practice and attain the true self.

Question: We all have dreams or ideals. Desires seem to come in at least two kinds. Some are low class, like "I want that cheesecake." Others are high class, such as, "I want to see peace in this world," or "I want to see my family flourish." Is there any difference between these?

Zen Master Wu Bong: We talk about desire, and we talk about aspiration. They are a little different. How can we help this world? Every morning at the Zen Center we recite the Four Great Vows. The first vow says, "Sentient beings are numberless, we vow to save them all." We call that an aspiration, or a great vow. On the other hand, desire means wanting something for me. You said, for example, "my family will thrive." That is my family. Why only my family?

That is desire mind. But, "May all families thrive" is an aspiration. Not only for human families: tree families, dog families, cat families . . . any kind of family. That has no "I, my, me."

If one says, "This enlightenment business sounds good; I want enlightenment," that is desire mind. This mind doesn't even understand enlightenment, so why does it want it? But, if one says, "I don't understand my true self; what am I?", then this question takes away desire mind. So, if you cultivate desire, then desire will grow. If you cultivate great question, then desire disappears.