

Dharma Speech at San Francisco Zen Center

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the San Francisco Zen Center on February 9 1974

(Hitting the table with his stick) Do you understand this? If you do, you understand One. If you don't, you separate things into ten thousand classes and one thousand levels.

(Hitting the table) Do you understand this? If you do, you understand the ten thousand classes and one thousand levels. If you don't, you have an attachment to One.

(Hitting the table) Do you understand this? If you open your mouth and say you understand, I will hit you thirty times. And if you say you don't understand I will still hit you thirty times.

Why?

KATZ!!!

Spring air fills the universe and flowers are blossoming everywhere.

If you proclaim this, you shut the mouths of all Buddhas and all eminent teachers. So how can you hear what they say? To hear what they say, you must understand what sitting Zen is.

When you are able to stay perfectly clear by cutting off all thinking and yet not falling into a trance-like sleep, this is sitting. When inside and outside become one, and no circumstances can hinder you, this is Zen.

When you understand sitting Zen, you understand yourself. In your mind there is a diamond sword. If you want to understand yourself, take it and cut off good and bad, long and short, coming and going, high and low, God and Buddha. Cut off all things.

You must proceed as if you were walking on thin ice, concentrating totally on each one of your steps. If you make one wrong move you will die and go to hell like an arrow.

Passing beyond this realm of not-thinking, you reach the land of true emptiness. True emptiness is before thinking. This land contains no words and no speech; so there are no mountains, no rivers, no East, West, North, or South, no God and no Buddha.

But if you stay there you will become attached to emptiness, and not even the Buddha can save you.

When you are hanging by your hands from a mountain ledge, and can let go, not thinking of life or death, then you will have true freedom. You can see the wooden dog eating steel and shitting fire. You make friends with the hairyshelled turtle and the rabbit with horns. You learn to play the flute which has no holes. But where does the sound of the flute come from?

Leave this place behind, and you understand that birds sing, hills are green and the sky is blue. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching — the truth is just like this. This is the language of Buddha and eminent teachers. The sounds of rivers and birds are the sutras, earth and sky are the very body of the Buddha.

(Holding up his stick) Then do you see this?

(Hitting the table) Do you hear this?

This stick, this sound, and your mind — are they the same or different?

If you say they are the same, that is not permitted, and the stick will hit you. If you say they are different, that is not permitted, and the stick will hit you. If you say they are both different and the same, that too is not permitted, and the stick will hit you even harder.

Why?

KATZ!!!

If you don't enter the lion's den, you will never capture the lion.

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