

Making Your Direction Clear

BY ZEN MASTER WU BONG

During the Buddha's lifetime and for many generations thereafter, winter and summer were the times for retreats. In keeping with this tradition, both our one-week Yong Maeng Jong Jins and our Kyol Ches take place during those two seasons.

Our 90-day Kyol Che is only a month away. It is a good time to decide on one's participation in this retreat. Last year we introduced a "Heart Kyol Che," which consists of a personal practice commitment during the time of the retreat.

This commitment has a two-fold purpose. It is a way to participate for those of us who are not able to come to the Zen Center to sit together with others. Secondly, it is a way to support those who do come and sit. This year I would encourage everyone who is unable to do Kyol Che to participate in the "Heart Kyol Che." Depending on one's situation, it could range from a commitment to sit five extra minutes every day to a commitment to do part of Kyol Che and/or some kind of special practice every day.

To make such a commitment and to carry it out is extremely valuable. "Special practice" is not very special. To carry it out, though, is to make one's center very strong and one's direction very clear.

In the Mu Mun Kwan, a collection of traditional Zen teaching cases, we have a very interesting example of "special practice." The twelfth case talks of Zen Master Seong Am Eon who used to call to himself every day, "Master!" and would answer, "Yes?" Then the dialogue continued: "You must keep clear!" "Yes!" "Never be deceived by others, any day, any time!" "Yes! Yes!"

The question associated with this kong-an is as follows: "Master Seong Am called to himself and answered himself; two minds. Which is the correct Master?" What is very interesting is that apparently Zen Master Seong Am carried out this performance every day for a long period of time. His "special practice" has been helping Zen students until today, and its value for our practice is likely to continue as long as there are Zen students to keep our practice alive.

It is important to understand that "special practice" is not just for us, but is for others in keeping with our vows. This "for others" may not be readily visible, but nonetheless the energy of our practice radiates throughout the world. It helps our families, our friends, our coworkers, and all beings. An eminent teacher said: "One mind is clear; the whole universe is clear."

Those words, and the words you are reading, are just expedient means to help our life, to help our practice. The next step is to leave these words behind, and simply to do "it." That which we call "special practice" is just another expedient means to help us do "it."

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