

Enlightenment Day

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

This is an excerpt from a talk given by Zen Master Seung Sahn to the members of Hwa Gye Sah, our temple in Seoul, on the evening before Buddha's Enlightenment Day. Traditionally Buddhists will stay up all night practicing meditation in emulation of the Buddha before his great enlightenment.

[Zen Master Seung Sahn hits the table with his stick.]

What is the meaning of this?

This means no enlightenment to attain, no enlightenment to lose. A long time ago an eminent Patriarch said, "Keep a mind which is clear like space." If we look ever more deeply into our true self and try to find it, then we see it is completely empty — empty and clear like space. Complete emptiness and nothing to attain is our original mind — our original substance. That's where we come from and that's where we go. For that reason there is nothing to attain; nothing to lose. All opposites are cut off: good, bad, right, wrong, holy and unholy. If all opposites are cut off we call that complete emptiness. That is our original face, primary point.

In order to attain that point we've all gathered here to stay up all night practicing until Buddha's Enlightenment Day. You see many Western people here with big noses. They have been staying up many nights practicing very late into the night. There are four Russian people also here practicing. How come our Hwa Gye Sah members don't come here and practice more? Even if you stay up this one night, is that enough? We have to do it. We have to attain where we came from and where we go. We gather here to enlighten ourselves.

If you practice hard then the true way appears in front of you very clearly. Then even though you lose your body, still your way is clear. So we must attain that. We must attain our true selves. All of us should stay up tonight and ask ourselves, "What am I?" After all, who is carrying around this body? If we always keep this great question we will attain one clear and pure thing. If we attain that, then we attain our true selves.

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