

Get the Gold

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Traditionally Zen uses seventeen hundred kong-ans. Korean Buddhism also uses these original kong-ans. Other Zen schools made their own special collections from these, which they felt were of special importance for teaching. For example, one collection, the *Blue Cliff Record*, uses one hundred kong-ans; the *Mu Mun Kwan* is a collection of only forty-eight cases.

But, this is still too complicated, so our school made a collection of only ten kong-ans, the *Ten Gates*. Very simple! If you pass these ten gates, then you will understand what a kong-an is.

If you understand what a kong-an is, then you will understand how to practice correctly. Then, do it! But, if you only understand kong-ans and don't practice, don't try, you will have a big problem. Some people can answer many kong-ans, but they don't try. Then the kong-an never becomes theirs. So, the purpose of the kong-an is to give us correct direction so our life can become correct. "If you go south ten miles you will find gold. Go over there and find it!"

Anyone can understand these directions, but if they don't actually walk ten miles south they will never get the gold. "I understand that ten miles south of here there is a mountain. Inside the mountain there is a cave and inside the cave there is gold. I understand that completely." Wonderful, but if you don't do it, you don't get it. So, only understanding a kong-an cannot help you; cannot help your life.

Many people can give good answers to kong-ans during an interview, but their daily life is not such a "good answer." Desire, anger and ignorance are always controlling them.

So, understanding kong-ans is not important. A good answer or a bad answer is not so important. Answer appears, answer doesn't appear is not so important. What is most important is your everyday life. If your daily life is clear moment to moment then kong-ans are not a problem. Then the kong-an and your life really connect.

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