

Hospital Teaching

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

From a Dharma Talk at Cambridge Zen Center, July 7 1989.

Before, I had diabetes, so I went to the hospital and I stayed ten days. There, next to me, was a very old man, who would soon die; he was very smart, before had many businesses, got much money, one time had five wives... His "I am" was very strong...

I asked him, "So now, what things in your life? Only one sentence: what is life?"

He said "Nothing. Nothing. Before I understood 'nothing', maybe I could have made a good person, but now soon I shall die. Now I understand nothing. Before, I made many bad actions and now I cannot take away the bad actions; bad actions, bad actions, bad actions, bad actions. Now I have no energy, not so much money, I got sick and soon I shall die. So now, attain nothing. Soon die, attain nothing. But I think nothing, because of my many bad actions: maybe these bad actions will take me to hell."

Then I said to him, "Buddha said, 'All bad actions, bad karma comes from our mind. Mind disappears, karma disappears. Karma and mind disappear, both become empty. That is true repentance.' Return to your true self. You must try that."

Then he said, "Yes, that's a good word. How to take away mind? You say 'emptiness'. If you are complete emptiness, how do you say 'emptiness'?"

I said: "You say 'emptiness'; that is your mind. Nothing. That's your mind: nothing. If you were complete nothing, this 'nothing' would not appear. You have something, so you say 'nothing'. That's your mind. If you are complete nothing, 'Open mouth, already mistake.' Then how can you take away this nothing mind, or take away bad karma?"

"So I ask you, 'What are you?' You say 'nothing', but you are not nothing, so I hit you. Still you say 'nothing'?"

"Don't know."

"Correct! You don't know. You don't know you. You don't understand you. So you don't understand your mind; also you don't understand your karma, you don't understand if you will go to hell. You don't understand hell, you don't understand heaven. You make heaven, you make hell. You don't understand you, so don't understand hell. You make, 'Maybe I will die and go to hell', so you are already in hell.

“Completely keep don’t-know mind, then don’t-know mind becomes clear, clear like space. That’s your true self, that has no coming or going, life and death, heaven or hell.”

“Ah that is wonderful, I’ll try that!”

“Yes, try that. All the time, in the bed, you cannot move. When you die, don’t understand; only go straight, don’t know. Try that.” I’m teaching him, then he was very happy.

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