

Ko Bong Holds a Ceremony

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

In a Dharma Talk, Zen Master Seung Sahn once told this story about his teacher, Zen Master Ko Bong.

When he was a young monk, my teacher, Ko Bong Sunim, was travelling in the mountains. He visited a small chanting temple in a beautiful spot and decided to stay there for a week. There was only one other monk there, the abbot of the temple. After a few days the abbot asked Ko Bong Sunim to stay alone in the temple while he went to visit the house of a student. Ko Bong Sunim. said, "O.K., no problem," and the abbot left.

At noon a woman came to the temple carrying a large amount of rice and fruit and asked for the abbot. "He is visiting a student," said Ko Bong Sunim.

"Oh, I wanted to have a ceremony," said the woman.

"Fine, we can have a ceremony," said Ko Bong Sunim. So she cooked the rice, got everything ready, and put the rice and fruit on the altar.

Ko Bong Sunim. did not understand the first thing about ceremonies. He had been a monk for a few years, but he had stayed in a Zen temple, where the monks only sit Zen. In Korea, ceremony monks take care of ceremonies; sutra monks study the sutras; Zen monks just sit. So Ko Bong Sunim didn't know when to bow or how to hit the moktak.

"Time to begin," said the woman.

"O.K."

Ko Bong Su Nim read the sutras a little, but he didn't have them memorized. However, he did remember some Taoist texts he had studied before he became a monk. So he began hitting the moktak and chanting a Taoist sutra. Sometimes he would bow. He just made it up as he went along, and he kept it up for about an hour, just chanting. At the end, the woman said, "Thank you very much. That was a wonderful ceremony!" Then she left.

On her way down the mountain she met the abbot of the temple coming home. "Oh," he said, "did you visit the temple?"

"Yes, and we had a wonderful ceremony."

"Ceremony? That monk knows nothing about ceremonies!"

"We had a Taoist ceremony."

The woman had been a nun, so she knew all about Buddhist ceremonies. During Ko Bong Sunim's ceremony she had sat in the back of the hall, laughing and laughing. But she said to the abbot, "It was wonderful. Throughout the whole ceremony he kept one mind. Sweat was pouring down his face. It was all wrong, but it was wonderful!"

When the abbot returned, he said to Ko Bong Sunim, "I hear you had a good ceremony today."

"It was terrible! All I could remember were some Taoist texts."

"The woman said it was wonderful." said the abbot. "She used to be a ceremony nun. She said you went straight ahead, with completely no hindrance, so she said it was a wonderful ceremony."

"Really?" Ko Bong Sunim and the abbot had a good laugh.

"She was very happy. She said you hit the moktak as if your life depended on it. Only one mind."

So this is a correct ceremony: only one mind. Whether it is a Buddhist text or a Taoist text doesn't matter. Understanding or not understanding the correct form is not important. What is important is this child's mind; we call this Buddha's mind, just going straight, without thinking, keeping try mind. So you must attain this Buddha's mind, O.K.? O.K.

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