

# Losing It is Getting It – Part 1

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 on this night in emulation of the Buddha before his great enlightenment. (Part 1 of 2.)*

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[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits podium with stick.]

Attaining enlightenment is losing enlightenment. Losing enlightenment is attaining enlightenment.

In our world everything has name and form. Everything that has name and form follows the flow of time and space—changing, changing, always changing. Not one thing remains the same. Buddha taught us that our world is impermanent. If we completely attain impermanence then we can find the one unchanging thing, the one unmoving thing. Since everything is changing, mountain becomes water, water becomes mountain. Everything appears and disappears. We call that the law of appearing and disappearing. So, attaining enlightenment is losing enlightenment. Losing enlightenment is attaining enlightenment.

One hundred years ago all the people gathered here today were not alive. Over the last one hundred years you all were born and appeared as a Korean person or as a Western person. But a hundred years from now, will you still be alive? No! you will have to die. So we see that everything is changing, changing. Your body will soon be gone. Where is the master of this body? Where will the owner of this body go? In order to find the answer to that question you have come here to Hwa Gye Sah. You've become a member of Hwa Gye Sah. You chant and practice Zen here with other people.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits podium with stick.]

What is the meaning of this hit? 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 that it is completely empty—empty and clear like space. "Complete emptiness with 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 during Kyol Che practicing very late into the night. There are also four Russian people 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.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits podium with stick.]

What is the meaning of this?

This means that enlightenment is just enlightenment. Getting enlightenment is just getting enlightenment. Losing enlightenment is just losing enlightenment. Not so long ago, the great patriarch Song Chol Sunim said, "Mountain is mountain, water is water." First we said that mountain is water, water is mountain. Next we went to the place where there is no mountain, no water. Now we say, "mountain is mountain, water is water." This is the place of attaining my true self. So, mountain is just mountain, water is just water. Our true self is like a clear mirror — a great round mirror. In this clear mirror everything is reflected. Mountain is just mountain reflected; water comes, just water is reflected. If we completely empty our mind it's like a clear mirror. Then everything in our world is reflected in my mind: mountain is reflected, water is reflected, everything is just reflected. We call that "truth like this," the world of truth. We also say that is true form or just truth.

First, we talked about the world of impermanence. Attaining enlightenment is to lose enlightenment. Losing enlightenment is getting enlightenment. Mountain becomes water, water becomes mountain.

Next we went to the world of emptiness. Attainment is emptiness; also, no attainment is emptiness. Mountain is emptiness and water is emptiness. Complete and true emptiness.

Then, taking one more big step from the world of emptiness we come to the world of truth. Here everything is just as it is. Mountain is mountain; water is water. Attaining enlightenment is just attaining enlightenment; losing enlightenment is just losing enlightenment. We call that truth.

Now three different worlds have appeared. Of these three worlds, which one is the correct? Once again: Mountain is water, water is mountain. That's the world of impermanence. Next, no mountain, no water. That's the world of

emptiness. And lastly mountain is mountain, water is water — truth or moment world. If we have time and space, then all things exist. If we transcend time and space, then we come to the world of emptiness. Taking one more step, we come to the world of truth. In the world of truth everything we see, hear, smell, taste and touch is always teaching us. Every moment is truth. The sky is blue, the dog is barking: woof woof, sugar is sweet. This is the world of truth.

So, which of these worlds is the correct? Which is the world that we attain? Which is the world of enlightenment? If somebody says that they found which is correct then this heavy Zen stick will hit you thirty times. Yes, there is a correct world. But, if you say that you found it, this stick will hit you thirty times. If you say you cannot find it, then this stick will also hit you thirty times. Why is that? Whether you find it or not, you get hit thirty times. Why?

### **KATZ!**

Outside the snow is shining white. Inside the electric lights make it possible for us to see each other very clearly. With this my dharma speech is finished.

Here we see that one more world has appeared. We call this the world of function. Outside the snow is white, inside the electric lights shine clearly. So, we talked about impermanence world, the changing world. Then we talked about complete emptiness, the world of emptiness. Last we talked about truth world — everything is truth. Then, going from truth world through KATZ! — primary point — we arrived at moment world, function. We call that the Great Bodhisattva Way. So, first attain the truth, then attain the bodhisattva way. World after world, lifetime after lifetime, I vow to follow the bodhisattva way, until all beings become Buddha. I vow to follow the Great Bodhisattva Way until all beings are saved from suffering. That's Ji Jang Bosal's great vow, the Great Bodhisattva Vow.

Carrying this great vow, we live our lives. That's our purpose in our life. And not only this life, but lifetime after lifetime, until all beings are saved. That's how we should live. Then my purpose in life is very clear. I eat breakfast early in the morning and lunch later in the day — for what? Why do I live in this world? Consider this right now. In Dongdaemun market and Namdaemun market many people come and go every day...very busy, very greedy. Aside from the time they spend making money, they have no time. Why do you live in this world? All of you who have gathered here today on the eve of Buddha's Enlightenment Day; you are just like Buddha: you also want to attain to your true self. You gathered here to practice just as the Buddha did under the Bodhi tree. You are here to find out what you are.

So, really ask, "Who am I?" This is my head, this is my hand, this is my body. But is this me? What is the true me? What is the one thing that brought this body to Hwa Gye Sah and is now sitting in this dharma room? What is that one thing? You have to find that thing, the one thing that brought this body here. If you are just attached to some kind of material thing, if you are just emotionally moved by some kind of material thing, than how are you different from a cow or a pig? How are we different from any animal? "This is a

person," we say to ourselves. "This is not an animal." But we have to understand our human being's function before we can call ourselves a human being. We have to understand our human being's correct way before we can say that we are not just an animal. The Buddha saw the morning star and got enlightenment. When he saw the morning star, he attained his true human nature — the way of a human being. If you attain to your human nature, then you can be called a human being.

Buddhism is not really religion. Our Buddhism means attain something, attain enlightenment. Look at this world... look at our country, Korea. Look at all things in this world changing. Recently several people wanted to become President of Korea. They spent a lot of money and time but they could not become President. If we look closely we see many people in this world who are ruled by the five desires of food, sex, money, sleep and fame. Many people live just for those things. If we throw those desires away, then we can find the correct way.

We should ask: "How can I attain to the true way? How can I save all beings?" That is the important question! We need a great vow. We need a great vow and strong will to save all beings. Even though I die, if I make this great vow, this vow will bring me back again as a human being. I will again seek the bodhisattva way; again come to Hwa Gye Sah; again attain to my true self; again save all beings. We have to make a great vow to save all beings. If we don't make this great vow then, after we die, how will we be reborn? What will happen to us? Don't stay in the five desires. Leave the five desires and live in the world of the great bodhisattva vow.

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