

Need, Desire, Vow

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From a Question-and-Answer session at Cambridge Zen Center, 19th December 1985.

Question: What is the difference between need and desire?

ZM Seung Sahn: Ah, need and desire. That's very important.

I'm hungry: I need my breakfast. I need something. It's necessary. So "need" means you need some kind of energy balance.

People have intellectual mind, emotional mind, will mind. Three kinds of mind you have. Some people are too emotional – "aa-a-ah!" – they have no center, you know? They have no center. They have no will mind. These people need will; strong center is necessary. This means practicing is very important, so they need practicing.

Then, balancing: emotion and center and intellect must balance. Too much intellect? Intellectual mind is okay, but with too much intellect, then only "I-my-me" grows, grows, grows. Only "I-my-me". People say: "I don't care!"

Also, with only strong center, you have no intellect, you have no emotion. Only because your mind is strong, then "special" mind appears. So balance is necessary – balance. With imbalance, I need something – but there's already enough, already enough!

But if someone *wants* something, that is desire. Desire means, it's not necessary, but I want something: that is desire. But need is for a necessary thing.

In Buddhism we say "vow". I want something, but a big want, not a small want. You say "desire", but a big desire. I want "Sentient beings are numberless, we vow to save them all": that's a big desire, not a small desire. We say that is a vow.

We want to help other people. We want to help this world. That, we say, is a vow: it is a want, but a big want, not a small want. "I want food", "I want wine", "I want sex", "I want power": these are small things. "I want!": that is called desire. Desire and vow are different.