

The Spring Geese are Flying North

BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

A Dharma Speech given by the Zen Master Seung Sahn at the opening ceremony of the International Zen Center of New York on April 20, 1975

(Holding up his Zen stick and hitting the table, slowly, three times)

Is this closed? Is this open?

If you say "closed", you fall into the hell without doors. If you say "open", you are dancing with all demons.

Why?

(Holding up the Zen stick and tracing a circle in the air; then holding the stick perpendicular on the table)

One two three four; five six seven eight.

(After a few moments) Thank you very much for coming to our ceremony even though you must be very busy. It is not an accident that we are gathered here today. It is the result of our past karma. It is very good karma that has brought us to meet here in front of the Buddha's altar.

This karma means finding our true self and attaining the Absolute. It means leaving behind the world of corruption and journeying to the pure land of true freedom and peace.

That is why we founded Won Gak Sa one year ago and are opening the International Zen Center of New York today.

But the sutra says, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." So all names and all forms are emptiness. Won Gak Sa, the International Zen Center of New York, this opening ceremony - these also are emptiness.

The sutra says, "All beings are already Buddha." So why is Yom Bul or reading sutras or sitting Zen necessary?

But we don't know ourselves. Desire, anger and ignorance cover up our clear mind. If we cut off all thinking and return to empty mind, then your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are the same. We become one with the whole universe.

Therefore an eminent teacher said, "All things in the universe return to the One."

True empty mind is before thinking. So thinking does not appear and does not disappear. This is the realm where nothing appears or disappears.

In the realm where nothing appears or disappears, there is no life and no death, no suffering and no happiness, no good and no bad, no you and no I. So it is said that all things in the universe return to the One.

But where does this One return? Once somebody came up to the great Zen Master Mang Gong and asked him, "If all things return to the One, where does this One return?" Mang Gong said, "The spring geese are flying north."

What do you think this means - "the spring geese are flying north?"

Even though you may understand enough to smash Mount Sumeru into a million pieces and swallow the ocean in one gulp, you will not understand this.

Even though you may understand enough to kill or give life to all the Buddhas of the three time-worlds and all eminent teachers and all people, you will not begin to understand this.

Then how can you understand the true meaning of "The spring geese are flying north?" Only keep don't-know mind. This don't-know mind is the mind that is stuck and cannot budge. It is like trying to break through a steel wall or trying to climb a silver mountain. All thinking is cut off. But as soon as you penetrate this condition, your mind will explode. Then you can see the stone lion run across the waves and devour the sun.

But you will still be bewildered. Go one more step. Then you will arrive at your true home, where spring comes and the flowers are blossoming everywhere. If you arrive here, not only will sutras and bibles be true, but also the sound of water and wind, the color of the mountain, the barking of a dog in the street everything that you see or sense, everything as it is will be the truth.

Therefore Zen Master Mang Gong said, "The spring geese are flying north." The truth is just like this.

All things in the universe return to the One; where does the One return? Throw away Small I and enter Empty I. Then, when you open your eyes, everything that you can see and hear will be like this.

A little while ago I hit the table three times. Mang Gong said, "The spring geese are flying north." The meaning of my action and the meaning of Mang Gong's words - are these the same or different?

If you say "the same", I will hit you thirty times. If you say "different", I will still hit you thirty times.

Why? **KATZ!!!**

Open the front door to Broadway.

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