

December 27, 1977
Kyoto, Japan

Dear Friend-in-Dharma, Seung Sahn Soen Sa:

I trust this letter will reach you. I have enjoyed the book *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* very much. I'm 65 years of age.

I'm sad that I did not meet you when I came to Providence in 1973 to play a piano recital at Brown University. I heard of you from a friend in the Dept. of Religion at Brown but I had to leave for further concerts.

Do you know Seo Kyung Bo — a Korean priest? I met him in Hawaii and arranged some lectures for him. I've been to Korea often and like it very much.

(My existence centers around Zen and I'm content and quiet.) I'm not writing this to ask any questions—only to express admiration and respect for your “way”.

Many years ago I sponsored the late Nyogen Senzaki in New York, and he gave me the following Gatha:

“The Bamboo Shadows Sweep the Stairs,
But not a particle of dust is stirred.
Moonlight penetrates to the Bottom of the well,
But not a trace of it remains.”

“Living is Dying”, Dr. D.T. Suzuki said in Honolulu. It is only too true.

On February 18th I will present John Stevens—an American young man—in a lecture here in Kyoto on “The Zen Poetry of Ryokan”. His translation of the poetry is *One Robe, One Bowl*—the book he translated of Ryokan's Zen Poetry—published by John Weatherhill (New York and Tokyo).

What is the address of the International Zen Institute of New York?

Thank you for your kindness—and courtesy—and keep up your priceless work.

If you can, do write to me. Thank you.

Yours in the Dharma,

Jacob (Kyo-zen)

July 19, 1978

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I got your letter just now, because Grove Press sent it to me just now, so I'm answering you very late. I am sorry.

You liked *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. That is wonderful. Also, you said you were sixty-five years old last year. Just attained Zen age!

Our school's first teaching is, "Where are you coming from?" "What is your name?" "When you die, where do you go?" Very simple questions. Many people don't understand. But this don't know is very important. So I tell them, when you are thinking, your mind and my mind and other people's minds are different. But don't know already cuts off all thinking. Cut-off-all-thinking mind is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Your before-thinking mind is your substance; my before-thinking mind is my substance. Then your substance, my substance, and universal substance are the same. When you keep don't know, you are everything, and everything is you. You and everything become one. This is called primary point.

So don't know is not don't know—don't know is primary point. Primary point's name is don't know. But somebody says primary point is mind, or Dharma, or God, or substance, or nature, or the Absolute, or energy, or everything. But primary point has no name, no form, no words, no speech. Only when you keep don't-know mind, then you are everything; everything is you.

So I ask you: The tree and you, are they the same or different? If you say the same, I will hit you thirty times; if you say different, I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do? If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. Sometime, ask the tree. The tree will teach you everything. The tree is better than me, better than Buddha or the sutras.

I know Dr. Seo very well. We are good Dharma friends. He taught in Dong Guk University when I was director of the Dong Guk University fund-raising foundation. Also, you like Korea. That is also wonderful.

You said your existence centers around Zen and you are content and quiet. Originally, all Dharmas are from stillness. But if you are attached to stillness, you cannot find your correct direction. I think you are not attached to quiet.

Here is a famous kong-an:

"Hyang Eom's Up a Tree"

Master Hyang Eom said, "It is like a man up a tree who is hanging from a branch by his teeth. His hands cannot grasp a bough; his feet cannot touch the tree. He is tied and bound. Another man under the tree asks him, 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China?' If he does not answer, he evades his duty and will be killed. If he answers, he will lose his life. If you are in the tree, how do you stay alive?"

If you attain quiet, tell me, what is quiet?

I heard about Nyogen Senzaki Roshi. He was a great Zen Master. The Gatha is a wonderful poem.

Next, you said living is dying. These are famous words. If not living, then what? One mind appears; one mind disappears. If one mind doesn't appear, one mind does not disappear. If you make something, and if you are attached to something, then you have life and death. Don't hold something; don't make something; don't attach to something. Then you are always complete and free. There is no time, no space, no life, no death. What do you see now? What do you hear now? When you are doing something, you must do it. Don't check your feelings; don't check your mind; also don't check your understanding. If you check something, you have a problem. Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know. Always, everywhere, try, try, try for 10,000 years. This is very important.

I know John Stevens. He sent me a letter and I answered him. His translation is very wonderful and will help Zen students very much.

Here is the address of the First Zen Institute of America:

113 East 30th Street
New York, New York 10016

I'm glad that you wrote to me. I hope you always keep don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 19, 1978

Dear Maureen,

How are you?

Here is Dragon Kwan Seum Bosal. Dragon is your age, Kwan Seum Bosal is your True Self. So you are Dragon Kwan Seum Bosal.

Dragon has great power. Kwan Seum Bosal has Great Love, Great Compassion, Great Bodhisattva Way. These come together, become only go straight. Better than Cloud Dragon; when Wind Tiger appears, Cloud Dragon has a problem. But with Kwan Seum Bosal Dragon, if Wind Tiger appears, no problem, because Kwan Seum Bosal has Great Love, Great Compassion, Great Bodhisattva Light—saving Wind Tiger is possible.

So you must only go straight—try, try, try for 10,000 years. This is Dragon Kwan Seum Bosal.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon attain Dragon Kwan Seum Bosal, get Enlightenment, and save all people.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Here are some chopsticks. Everyone says thank you very much, so we bought chopsticks for you.

(Note: the person who sold us the chopsticks says don't leave them soaking because the lacquer will come off.)

June 24, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for the calligraphy that you did for Judy to give to me as a birthday present.

BUDDHA
like
this

It's framed now and very beautiful... Thank you.

As you said, I was very lucky to be celebrating my birthday on the last day of a kido, chanting Kwansum Bosal, and then spending the afternoon in such a beautiful place with you and Diana and Ezra and the others. I have done 35 years in this body, and I hope I have begun the Great Work of saving all beings. I'm glad that I have met you.

You have composed many poems over years of corresponding with your students. The poems are now scattered throughout your letters, but I think they would make a very nice book if they were collected and published with an introduction. If you would like this done I would be glad to do the necessary work. Let me know what you think of this.

Here is a poem for you:

Mouse Eats Cat Food From Broken Bowl

The bowl breaks,
The food spills into space.
This mouse is enormous:
One whisker stretches to the moon,
Its silver teeth shine like stars.

I hope this letter finds you well, and I hope that all your students continue their good work.

Sincerely yours,

Stanley

July 24, 1978

Dear Stan,

Thank you for your beautiful letter. How are you and Judy?

You like Bodhidharma's picture. That is wonderful. The calligraphy is "Buddha like this". Do you know its meaning? First, what is Buddha? What is like this? An eminent teacher said, "Without thinking, just like this is Buddha." When you are not thinking, then your mind is clear like space. Clear like space means clear like a mirror. Red comes, red; white comes, white. When you see the sky, only blue; when you see a tree, only green. Just like this is Buddha. So I ask you: What is Buddha? What is just like this? If you are thinking, I hit you thirty times. Without thinking, you can see; you can hear; and a good answer is possible. So tell me! Tell me!

Also, you said, "I am lucky." Yah, you are a lucky man. Judy is a wonderful Zen student. Also, you have a very strong Zen mind. If you get married, everybody will be happy, and everybody will say that is wonderful. I'm also very, very happy. In the future, you and Judy together will help many other people.

Why do we have high-class education? Why do we sit Zen? Why do we want to understand the Truth? If you correctly attain your True Self there is nothing, which means it has everything. So if you make something, you have something. So you can do everything. So you can make Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

You asked about my poems. That is a very good idea. Nowadays, Providence Zen Center is making a second book. I don't know what is in it. You must ask Louise. We also have a Director's Meeting, where we decide about these things. I think it's a very good idea.

Next, your mouse poem is very wonderful. Here is a poem for you:

Who broke the cat bowl?
What is cat bowl?
A quarter is twenty-five cents.
Twenty-five cents is ice cream.
Ice cream already into the stomach.
Very good feeling.
Only wonderful.

If you understand this poem, you understand the mouse kong-an.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Zurich, Switzerland
July 4, 1978

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

I hope you are doing well. Your visit to Zurich has meant a great deal to me and I have written to Louise Stanton to help me for Zen practice. Unfortunately I have not been able to visit the Providence Zen Center whilst in New York; time was so short and I got a telegram there that my sister-in-law had died suddenly.

Dear Master, could I also ask you a great favor? As you know, thanks to my efforts in every respect, Zuk-Nae Lee has been able to get his Diploma at the C.G. Jung Institute. He was in a certain way my son and I—as he declared—his mother in Switzerland. However, since he has left Los Angeles, on April 9th, I have not heard from him and my letters remained unanswered. It seems impossible that Zuk-Nae should behave in such a way after accepted during two year kindness of heart, financial and practical assistance. This not understanding with heart and head renders me ill and I do not know any more how to handle this situation. I'm completely at a loss and, therefore, implore your help. Perhaps you may send him word; perhaps you can counsel me in some way or other. I'm very despaired and I see no other way than to approach you, as Zuk-Nae might take your word seriously.

Pardon me my intrusion, and accept my most sincere thanks.

Respectfully yours,

Hedda

July 24, 1978

Dear Hedda,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and all Zen students in Zurich?

I was glad to see you in Zurich. Also, you are a great Bodhisattva. You helped many students and the Zen Center. Also, you helped Dr. Zuk-Nae Lee a lot. Everybody understands this. But Zuk-Nae Lee also told me, before he left New York, "I'm sending you a letter," but he never sent me a letter. So I'm also very sad, like your mind. I also love him very much. Also, he likes Zen a lot. But I don't know why he didn't send me a letter.

Also, when I met Zuk-Nae Lee, he talked a lot about you. You are a great Bodhisattva. When he was in Zurich, you helped him a lot. So I knew about you before I met you. But I don't know why he didn't send you a letter. Maybe he's sick; maybe something is happening,

I think. Also, I want to send a letter to him, but I don't know his address. Maybe his friend in New York, Dr. Kang, understands. So you must send a letter to Dr. Kang and ask him his address. Maybe he can give it to you. Dr. Kang's address is:—————

But everything is made by karma. Your karma, Zuk-Nae Lee's karma, and my karma are very close Zen karma. But if this karma controls you, then you always have a problem. You must control your karma. Then no problem. If you want to control your karma, you must understand your True Self. Feelings which come and go—let it be. Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know, for 10,000 years, nonstop. This is very important. Then you will get everything; also, you can meet Dr. Zuk-Nae Lee.

I hope you always keep don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 8, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your kind letters and for the book, *Dento Roku*, which you so kindly sent to me. So far I have not had time to search for the koan in question, but I am sure I will find it eventually. I am very grateful to you for your thoughtfulness in sending it. We are very busy here with the training period. Four excellent students have come from the Sydney Zen group to train with us. We had a hiking zazenkai to Haleakala crater with eighteen people, which included zazen and sutras each morning and evening and lots of kinhin during the day. It was a good community-building exercise. More recently, we had a fine sesshin with thirty-six people participating.

Stephen is here for this training period, and is getting along very well. He is very helpful to me as a professional editor, and his practice is coming along very well.

I was interested to learn that your student Linc has gotten married. Please extend my warm regards to him and to his wife.

I hope that you are in good health these warm summer days and that you are not being overworked. Anne joins me in sending warm regards to you.

With gassho,

Robert Aitken

July 24, 1978

Dear Aitken Roshi,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Anne and all your family?

You like *Dento Roku*. I hope you soon find this kong-an and use the book to teach many of your students, and that many keen-eyed lions appear.

You said four students from the Sydney Zen group came to your training period, and that you had a hiking zazenkai to Haleakala crater, and that it was a good community-building exercise. That's wonderful.

Stephen is helping you a lot with editing. I'm glad to hear that. I'm so happy. I hope you also teach him and make him a great man. Also, Linc and Bobby say thank you very much.

Providence Zen Center will move to Cumberland, Rhode Island in the middle of August. We are buying a former nursing home, Cumberland Sanitarium, which is on fifty acres of land, with about three acres to farm. Also, almost twenty people will go to Korea with me. Then we will go to Korea and do a three-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at our head temple, Su Dok Sa, and a three-day Kwan Sae Um Bosal Kido at So Rak San, the number one mountain in Korea. Then we will go to Japan and come back. When we visit Japan, if I have time, I hope to visit your teacher, Yamada Koun Roshi.

I hope you take care of your body for the Dharma, and your school grows, and many keen-eyed lions appear and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Here is a picture of our Precepts Ceremony, and two pictures of Bobby and Linc's wedding.

July 9, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It was just what I needed to talk with you for a few minutes on the phone last night—and you sound so much better! It is great that you are translating the *Blue Cliff Records!*

Here are the reprints you wanted, of Venice and Bobby and Linc's wedding, plus a few of Tahl Mah Sah. There is still one 8" x 10" of you and Bobby and Linc yet to come—I am having them do it over again. The 400 ASA film, by the way, is not so good for enlargements, as you will see when you get it—too grainy.

This morning we had a "committee meeting" about moving into the new Zen Center, starting next weekend. It was necessary to list priorities of things that need doing and organize the actual move. It was very good—everyone really participated. I was happy because there were not only people who live here already but also others like Kate Corriveau and Jonathan Parkes who just wanted to be part of it, and also Patty and John who will be moving in later. Afterwards, we all went over to the place and looked (some for the first time)—with an eye to exactly what needed doing next weekend when hopefully we will have a good number of helping hands. Everyone was very enthusiastic—almost all the students who lived there have now moved out and it is a whole lot cleaner than when you saw it! There is much to be done to get it really in proper shape, but slowly we will do it. I am excited because I want to get back to doing some carpentry, which I used to do years ago and loved. Someone is loaning us a table saw so I want to learn to mitre edges and so forth. First job: build an altar!

Maggie, on her own initiative, chaired the meeting and did a fine job. Kate is going to get paint and other such things for us at less than wholesale prices from the place where she works. John, who does remodelling for a living, was a tremendous help planning what to do and of course will help. Patty is going just to work on the kitchen, tear off the old wallpaper, clean cupboards, put all the pots and pans and dishes in logical places. Ezra is lining up roof and termite work and lots of other things. Jim and all of us are going to clean and paint next weekend. Well—what all of this is intending to communicate is that suddenly it feels like all of us are really involved, which is wonderful!

It is a little hard moving from this house which has many attachments—during the past few weeks I have been my usual up and down about it, sometimes elated, sometimes depressed. The practice, however, has kept me "only going straight." In a way it is funny—all it takes most of the time now is a whiff of incense or a single bow or the sound of the bell—and all at once it doesn't matter if I am up or down, THIS IS SIMPLY THE PATH I AM ON, and it is such a wonderful feeling. The practice is like the keel of a boat—it keeps it from tipping over in heavy waves. If this new Zen Center can just help people start practicing for a long

enough time for it to begin to “work”—it will be worth-while! Also, what a fantastic opportunity we are all having to learn about “putting it all down!”

So—thank you very much for the gentle but determined PUSH to get a new place! May everyone in all the Zen Centers who are likewise PUSHED realize how lucky we all are!!

Love,

Diana

P.S. Have you started jogging again? I did today, first time—felt *great!*

July 17, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you after travelling all around? I tried to call you last week because I was afraid we might lose the new Zen Center—there was a problem with the property line and the Title Insurance people wanted us to sign three pages of waivers, which is definitely not a good idea in case you ever want to sell the place. Since I could not get you I sat (and did 400 extra bows) for most of the day instead: I think Kwan Sae Um Bosal actually did help. When the real estate agents found that we were completely serious about not signing the waivers, they eventually got the Title Insurance Company to drop the waivers entirely! Very mysterious, and at the last minute before the deadline!

So—this last weekend many people worked very hard on the new place, some who live here, others who do not, like Inso and Katie Kahn and others. Old friends dropped by to wish us well—it was quite wonderful. We all had jobs, which John lined up for us—some cleaned up the junk left by the former tenants, including rotting garbage, others prepared walls for painting, and finally we all took roller and brush and started in. Allan and Eric worked the whole weekend and brought friends to help as well. Everyone really enjoyed them and they loved being able to learn to do the work—a rare opportunity for them to get in on that kind of together action. Eric is over there right now by himself working away and Allan just came in and told me he does not want any pay for his work (I was giving them some token money since they have had a very hard time finding jobs this summer). He is coming over with the rest of us at 5:00 P.M. when we will again work, after people are off their regular jobs. Both were indispensable painting ceilings!

We ran into a few problems since the house is very old and falling apart in places—such as when the Dharma Room Ceiling began cracking and falling down when the paint went on—and when it turned out there were just too many coats of wallpaper on two of the rooms and they would have to be sanded—and when that was done, the result was awful! Ah well—someday, after much more hard work and lots of patience we will maybe have a beautiful Zen Center!

Next weekend See Hoy and Mu Bul Su Nim are coming up from Los Angeles and everyone is very happy about that. Perhaps they can build the altar and help with some of the other carpentry jobs, of which there are a great many!

Soen Sa Nim, we want to name our Zen Center EMPTY GATE. What do you think of that? It could still be called officially the Berkeley KBC Zen Center—but on the top of the letterhead would be EMPTY GATE—and maybe over to the side could be the Chinese characters for it... like this:

(Chinese characters for “Empty Gate”)

E M P T Y G A T E

Berkeley K.B.C. Zen Center
1800 Arch Street, Berkeley, Calif.

What do you think?

We need a new house master. Jeff is going to put his time in on Shim Gum Do. It may be a while before we can find a replacement, so in the meantime we will all help, etc. This is a very informal time anyway right now—meals are not regular because of working in the evenings instead of practice, etc. Maggie, who is head of the moving committee, and Jim can be interim Directors for awhile. With four of us going off to Korea, the Zen Center is going to be slow getting going—but as soon as you will be able to come and stay awhile, it will get strong quickly. We have good roots already... and the potential is certainly here for a really good place for you to be able to teach. The only serious problem is zoning... and one crazy neighbor. But maybe Kwan Sae Um Bosal will help some more!

Love to you and everyone on the East Coast!

Diana

Tuesday morning—
(*right after* the phone call)

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am having coffee at my favorite little coffee shop and thinking about how good it was to talk with you a little while ago on the phone! I hope by the time you get this letter you are feeling well again.

The enclosed letter explains what I tried to tell you on the phone, maybe a little more clearly. It was written yesterday.

I feel very sad about Jeff, first because he seems to be kind of lost and also because I got angry at him for quitting his house master job right when we are so busy moving. Also he is sick—could not work at all this weekend so missed the really wonderful together action at the new Zen Center. What can I do? “Only go straight, try, try, try—”

Love,

Diana

July 24, 1978

Dear Diana,

How are you and all the BKZC family? Thank you for your two letters and many pictures. I just came back from CZC Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

I only say to you, you are try, try, try Great Bodhisattva. Thank you very much.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You want to call your Zen Center “Empty Gate”. That is wonderful. Here is some calligraphy for you—Mu Mun (Empty Gate).

Atlanta, Georgia
July 10, 1978

Seung Sahn, Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you so much for your letter. It was very nice to hear from you and to receive your advice.

I am most puzzled by your statements regarding Satori. Isn't it true that the goal of Zen is to achieve Satori, a state of intuitive awareness? You say that true satori "is not moving, is unchanging, has no feeling, no thought." These are all negative expressions of Satori. What is it in the positive sense? Is it not a state of total happiness, a whole and complete mind?

I always thought that a person reached a state of Satori when he transcended his ego, recognized that all is illusion, and regained his Unity of Mind, which he never really lost anyway. So, it is actually a matter of self-realization or realizing that we are whole and complete and have always been, but that we got away from it somehow by forgetting that we are actually spirit, but that we spend so much time building a false delusion about ourselves that we end up identifying with this false ego but it is not our real selves. That is why a good Koan is "What am I?"

You say there is nothing to attain. Please explain this to me in terms of Satori. How do I reach a state of Satori? How will I know when I am in a state of Satori?

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

July 11, 1978

Dear Sir:

I am greatly in need of assistance since I must do my meditation in a prison cell and do not know what is the best way to go about it. I usually put ear-plugs in my ears to shut out as much noise as possible.

I understand that when I meditate, I must put everything out of my mind and transcend my ego or self-made image. I concentrate on recognizing the illusion of dualism and try to regain my unity of mind. What will result from this type of zazen? Will I end up with a new awareness of self? Will I find my true nature? If there is nothing to attain, as you have told me in your last letter, how will I know when zazen is effective for me?

I have been meditating in the tradition of Yasutani Roshi and Philip Kapleau Roshi, but I am still very confused about how I become enlightened, especially if I am not to think of “enlightenment” as something to be attained.

Could you explain all of this for me? I eagerly await your response.

Gasho.

Robert

July 14, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim:

I am awaiting your response to my previous letter. I am sure that you are very busy, but I wonder if you could make recommendations on how I can advance my Zen training while I am yet in prison?

There is a great deal of noise in prison and I am having difficulty concentrating on zazen while in my cell. Furthermore I am not sure of what I should be doing while concentrating on zazen. Can you advise me on how to go about meditating properly and what goals, if any, I should keep in mind?

Gasho.

Robert

July 24, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your three letters. This letter is a little late because I just finished Cambridge Zen Center's Yong Maeng Jong Jin and returned to Providence Zen Center.

So, in your first letter you want satori. If you want satori, this satori is far, far away. If you don't want satori, you can see, you can hear, you can smell, everything is satori. So put it all down—"I want something." If you keep I-me-my mind and do zazen in this way, for infinite time you cannot get satori. If you make I-me mind disappear, then already you have satori. O.K.? So I say to you, only go straight—don't know. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your understanding; don't check something. Only go straight—don't know; for 10,000 years try, try, try. That is very important.

In your letter, you said it is noisy in your prison cell so you have a problem when you meditate. If your mind is noisy, even if you go to a mountain, it is noisy. If your mind is not noisy, even if you are in a factory, it is very quiet. So how you keep just-now mind is very important. You check inside; you check outside—checking, checking, checking, so you have

these questions—“Will I end up with a new awareness of self? Will I find my true nature? If there is nothing to attain, how will I know when zazen is effective for me?” So you are noise, also very busy. Don’t check inside; don’t check outside. Put it all down. Then the whole universe is very quiet.

All formations are appearing and disappearing. That is the law of appearing and disappearing. If you make appearing and disappearing disappear, that stillness is bliss.

You asked for recommendations on how to advance your Zen training while yet in prison, and what goals to keep in mind. “I want to try something. I want something. I want to get something.” This “I”—if you make “I” disappear, then “I want to try something; I want something, and I want to get something” all disappear, which means already you are complete. So an eminent teacher said, “Without thinking, just like this is truth.” This “I” comes from where? Descartes said, “I think; therefore, I am.” If you are not thinking, therefore, what?

Here is a kong-an for you:

JoJu asked Nam Cheon Zen Master, “What is the true way?”

Nam Cheon answered, “Everyday mind is the true way.”

“Then should I try to keep it or not?”

Nam Cheon said, “If you try to keep it, already you are mistaken.”

“If I do not try, how can I understand the True Way?”

Nam Cheon said, “The True Way is not dependent on understanding or not understanding. Understanding is illusion; not understanding is blankness. If you completely attain the way of no thinking, it is like space, clear and void. So why do you make right and wrong?”

JoJu suddenly got enlightened.

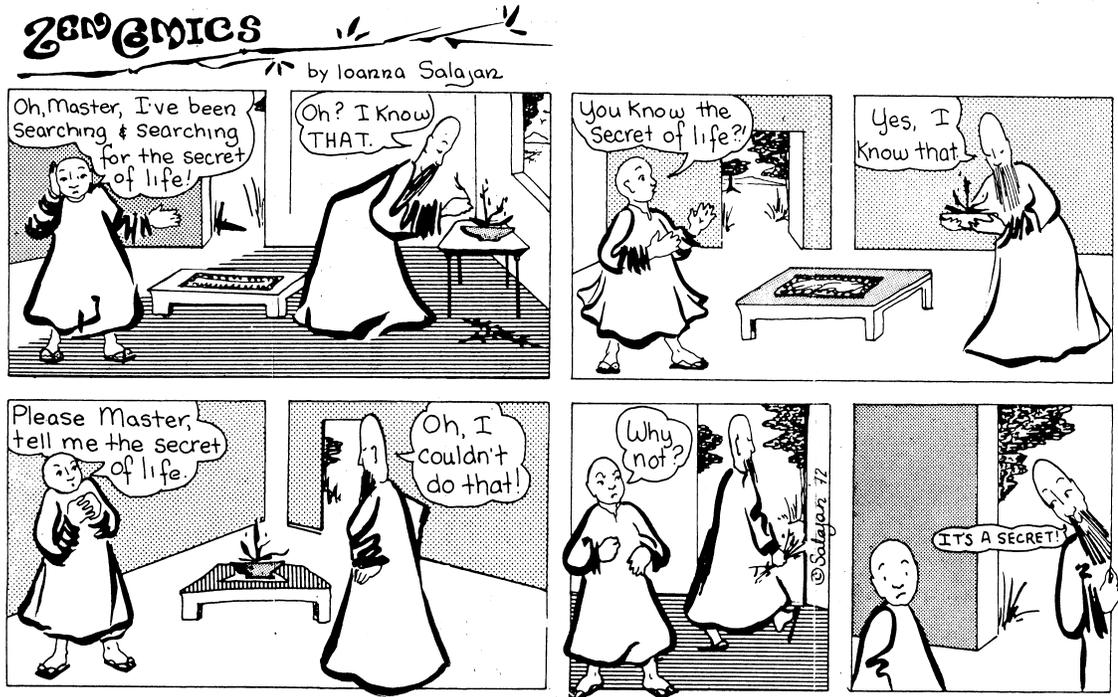
What did JoJu attain? Tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know. Don’t check your mind; don’t check your feelings; don’t check your understanding. Also, you talked about prison—a very difficult situation. But, if you make your opinion, your condition, and your situation disappear, then correct opinion, correct condition, and correct situation appear. That is Zen. So, when you are doing something, you must do it! Don’t check your opinion, your condition, your situation. Only go straight—don’t know. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

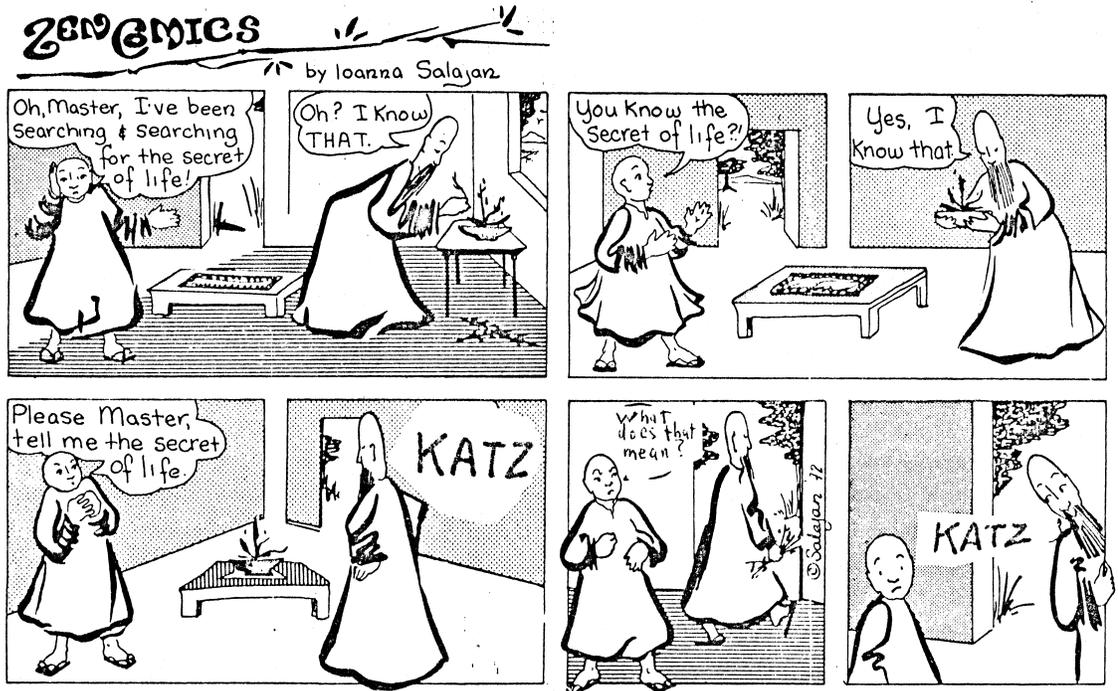
S.S.

Sent by Robert:



Sent by Soen Sa Nim:

Look at this:



July 20, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you so much for your book sent to me. Sometimes I read it with much interest.

About the mouse Kong An, I think the problem (question) is wrong, so I dare correct it as follows:

“I have a mouse in my house, who has nine heads and eats a sack of rice every day, and no cat can come near to him. What do you think? Wong, wong (a dog’s barking). Please have tea if you are bored.”

Thank you for your teaching.

Yours respectfully,

Suh Woon, Hapchang with respect.

July 25, 1978

Dear Suh Woon Su Nim,

How are you? I was glad to receive your letter.

You said *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* was very interesting to you. That is wonderful.

Next, your kong-an answer. I say to you, you are scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. Many words are not necessary—only one word. You must find it.

Zen is simple mind. Your answer is very complicated. Put it all down. Here is one hint for you:

A quarter is twenty-five cents.
Twenty-five cents buys ice cream.
Ice cream into stomach. Good feeling.
So only say “Wonderful!”

I again ask you: The mouse eats cat food. The cat’s bowl is broken. What does it mean? If you don’t know, only go straight—don’t know. Don’t make anything; don’t hold anything; don’t attach to anything. Only go straight—don’t know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. This mouse kong-an is a just-like-this kong-an. Check the four kinds of like this one more time (without like this, become-one like this, only like this, just like this). Your answer is only like this.

Robert Aitken Roshi's review of *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, from the May-June, 1977 issue of their publication, "Blind Donkey".

In T'ang China great masters such as Hsueh Feng (Seppo) had as many as 1,500 disciples. They held private interviews for their most promising monks, but it was not possible for them to meet all students personally, or even to know them by name.

The Dharma-combat ritual was developed to keep the teacher-student relationship open. At an assembly of all monks, or of all monks in a particular hall, the master would present a few words designed to evoke a response. Monks could then step forward in turn, make bows, and ask questions. Dialogues would ensue with each encounter that might bring the monk and the audience to some insight.

The modern Rinzai school of Japanese Zen formalizes this ritual at the ceremony of installing a new abbot. At one such ceremony I observed recently, the procedure was fixed exactly, and all questions and responses were printed on the program in advance.

In the Soto school, where dokusan, or personal interviews, are only occasional, Dharma combat is held, though not frequently, and not as a substitute for private encounters. Elsewhere, at the Zen Center of Los Angeles and at Diamond Sangha centers in Hawaii the Dharma combat is an adjunct to zazen and frequent dokusan.

I don't know what Korean Zen admits in the way of personal interviews. I gather there is a definite place for them. In any case, the Korean Dharma combat is a well-developed practice, and Seung Sahn Soen-sa's vigorous enlightenment fulfills its potential.

Dropping Ashes on the Buddha is a presentation of many such encounters that will fascinate the mature Zen student:

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "What is love?"

Soen-sa said, "I ask you: what is love?"

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, "This is love."

The student was still silent.

Soen-sa said, "You ask me; I ask you. This is love."

Clear as a bell! He is showing everything! And there are not only dialogues, but vigorous presentations by the Master alone, compassionate letters to students, and old stories retold. A great book!

Reading it, I felt that Japanese Zen was getting its come-uppance in several ways. For one thing, we have been assuming that the light of Sakyamuni comes down to us only through Japan. Works by the Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh dissipated this illusion, and now

Seung Sahn puts it finally to rest. This book presents a fine Zen master. Our cultural perspective is enlarged and our practice is deeply enhanced.

July 7, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Enclosed are a few pictures of the children in Sunday school. The camera is not too good and some film did not turn out. It is wonderful to see them sit and just to watch and hear what each one has to say... wonderful little Buddhas are they.

Wonderful experience to be at the Zendo. Many things appear; I observe each situation. Very important is communication, but it must be correct communication. We must sit together and work things out together without anger. The Zen Center will be strong if we are strong. Yes, our own mind makes problems. We learn little by little what true working together is. We learn how, as you say, "to put down our opinions".

Today I will take Ji Hyun Sa Nim to visit some temples.

Still waiting for surgery date. In the meantime just Kwan Seum Bosal. Kwan Seum Bosal...

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

July 12, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter.

You said "Already Kwan Sae Um Basal you, Ko Bong Su Nim, not two, not one. Then what do you say?"

So I say to you—only this!

Kwan Sae Um Bosal, Kwan Sae Um Bosal, Kwan Sae Um Bosal, Kwan Sae Um Bosal.....

Now, if you say "You attached to Kwan Sae Um Bosal!" then, I say to you.....!

"A rose is red—a violet is blue,
The sun shines in the morning,
The grass is wet with dew..."

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

July 30, 1978

Dear Sumana, Kwan Sae Um Bosal,

Thank you for your two letters and beautiful children pictures. How are you?

You are a wonderful teacher and a great Bodhisattva. I know your mind. You know Kwan Sae Um Bosal. So Kwan Sae Um Bosal and your mind already become one. So you always help children, help the Zen Center, help other people. Wonderful, wonderful Sumana Kwan Sae Um Bosal Bodhisattva! I hope you keep Kwan Sae Um Bosal moment to moment, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 27, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? California is very warm and am working everyday now with Albert Matsuoka.

Here is the book you wanted. It was not in stock when you requested it so it is late. Take care, hope your cold is better. Hello to all.

See Hoy, Hap Chang

August 1, 1978

Dear See Hoy,

Thank you for your letter and for sending me the book. How is the Los Angeles family? You are working every day with Albert Matsuoka. That is wonderful.

I heard you will go to Berkeley Zen Center and help them with making their altar, with Mu Bul Su Nim. Thank you very much.

Last Newsletter, you wrote about Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center's history. That is wonderful. Everybody liked it. You are a great Head Dharma Teacher.

I hope you only try, try, try, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 18, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am sorry I haven't written you back sooner but I have been moving from New Haven to Los Angeles. I graduated from college in New Haven and moved to L.A. to teach gymnastics to children with a friend of mine. I have moved into Tahl Mah Sah and I am very glad to be here. In New Haven I didn't live at the Zen Center, so this is a new experience.

I am hanging from the tree by my teeth; you ask me how do I stay alive? I keep my mouth closed "Just like this".

Sincerely,

Paul

August 1, 1978

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter. You said you are living at Los Angeles Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center. That is very, very wonderful.

In Los Angeles, there are See Hoy and Mu Bul Su Nim and you and everyone—a very good family. Maybe it will help your practicing and help your whole life and help your getting Enlightenment, and then you can save all people from suffering.

Your homework is Hyang Eom's kong-an. Only go straight—don't-know mind. Then this is already beyond life and death, which means already freedom from life and death. You are too attached to something, so you close your mouth and say, "Just like this". Not enough.

The question is, "If you are in the tree, how can you stay alive?" You want to stay alive. That is attachment to "alive", so you have a problem. In your True Self, there is no life, no death. Why do you make life and attachment to "alive"? Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know. Then a good answer will appear by itself. So only try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

The following is a Dharma Talk given after morning practice in New York, Tuesday morning, July 26, 1978.

Yesterday, I talked about “Don’t kill time” in practice. This is an American expression. “Don’t kill time” is a very important expression. An eminent teacher said, “The demon of impermanence kills everything.” If you don’t kill time, the demon of impermanence cannot kill you.

Also, don’t kill space. If you understand space plus time, then you understand what your situation is. What is your correct situation now?

Then next, don’t kill the air. Somebody says, “I have become independent, so I am free.” But if he has no air, then how can he be independent? Every moment you breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out, and you don’t pay money. Do you pay money? You must *pay* money—to the universe. Very important. If your mind is always “I, I, I,” then you kill the air.

Some time, you visit a good friend’s house, and this friend and his wife are fighting. At this time you think, “Oh, the air’s no good,” which means the husband and wife have already killed the air, so the air is very heavy. You are invited to another place, and you go, and “Oh, that air is very wonderful—much laughing, much talking with each other, good feeling, very good air—light air.” This is an Oriental expression.

So don’t kill time; don’t kill space; don’t kill air. This is very important. We say, “your opinion, condition, and situation.” Only keeping “my opinion, my condition, my situation,” you are killing time, space, and air. Put it all down. Then time and you, space and you, and air and you become one. Then you can use time; you can use space, and you can use air, and saving all people is possible. The name for this is Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

Also, in academic-style Buddhism, we talk about three things—substance, function, and name and form—which you can use. If you are attached to name and form, you don’t understand function and substance. So if you keep your idea, your condition, and your situation, you don’t understand the truth—your direction. So you must understand what is substance, function, and form. I often talk about H₂O as substance. The function is temperature. Ice and water are name and form. If you correctly understand function, then you can make any form. Also, if you understand function, then you can understand substance. What kind of substance? H₂O. What is our true substance? We say “complete stillness”, also, “without like this”. Complete stillness. An eminent Christian said, “Be still; know that I am God.” A famous expression. What is stillness? Stillness is complete. Complete means “has everything—*can do everything*.” “*Can do everything*” means complete stillness. So this stillness—Use it! If I say I cannot, I cannot. You killed something, so you

cannot—killed time, killed space, also killed air, so you cannot. Don't kill time; don't kill air; don't kill space.

Many young people marry, then have a baby, then separate. This child is sometimes at the mother's house, sometimes at the father's house—coming, going, coming, going. Then maybe the mother thinks, "Only I'll take care of the children." O.K. But then this mother also wants a boyfriend—"I want to get married"—like this. Then all the time she is with her boyfriend, girlfriend, at a picnic, travelling, or someplace, at a good movie. This mother doesn't want to stay home. Children's consciousness is very interesting. It's like a machine, a magnet. Plus and minus come together very quickly; minus and minus, very far away. This magnet-mind is working—"Mother is having a good time; we are not having a good time." Then they feel bad, like minus and minus, you know? The air is very bad. Children are crying. "What do you want?" But the children don't understand. They don't understand these feelings and cannot express themselves.

"What do you want?"

"I want everything! I want this; I want a cookie; I want a toy."

So the mother uses money, but the children don't want this money, don't want this cookie, don't want chocolate. Their true want is love. But they don't understand this. It's just like a magnet—they don't understand why their action is this way, why they have bad speech for their mother, why they are fighting with their mother. Many problems.

So sometimes these people are coming to me. "My children do bad action, don't listen to me. I'm suffering."

"You don't understand. What do your children want from you? You must understand this. If you become strong, your children are strong. You becoming strong means you must understand your correct situation. When you are together with your children, only help your children. Your boyfriend or husband don't need your help. They're already grown up. They see you one time and understand. But children, to give them food and take care of them is a very good thing. 'Ah, my mother is number one.'

"When you're growing up, your mother is *number one*, very big, also. Better than Buddha, better than God, better than anything. Mother's power is number-one power. But, if my mother doesn't like me, only loves somebody else, then all consciousness is broken. So you must understand this. In front of these children, don't touch your man. Don't talk with him. Good talk is not necessary, only usual talk. Then after, when you go out to the movies, to the theater, O.K., kissing is O.K.; everything is O.K., but in front of the children, it is very bad action. Try this for one week, only for the children. Don't worry about your husband."

Then the children think, "Oh, my mother's changed her mind!" After a week, everything is O.K. The mother says, "You do this," and the children say, "O.K.!"

So you must take care of your time, take care of your space, take care of your air. Very important. If you don't take care of the air, then the air won't listen to you, only kill you, any time.

Good time—next, bad times come. Good air—next, bad air comes. Also, good space, yah, good feelings—but soon, bad feelings come. So you must use air, use space, use time. That is Zen. Zen is not special. If you want special, you have special. But this special cannot help you. Very careful.

Name and form take your time. If you take your time, you kill your time. New York is the number-one place. A bad situation is the number-one teacher. Hard training. Only go straight— don't kill your time, space, and air.

July 21, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter of July 8th. You ask me, “What did the monk attain?” when JoJu told him to wash his bowls. I don’t know what the monk attained. I have never been to Paris, but I hear that it is a beautiful city.

The sky was empty before creation,
The sky is empty in creation;
Creation was not there in the Unmanifest,
Creation is not here in the manifest.
The head is painful when hit by a stick,
The stick is empty.

Will you please explain what you mean by the word “Dharma” when you use it at the end of your letters?

Respectfully with love,

Norm

August 1, 1978

Dear Norm,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You don’t understand the kong-an answer. That is correct. If you correctly understand, you are already a great Zen Master. But, you can. If you make “cannot”, you cannot. If you say, “I can”, you can. This “can” mind means try, try-mind. If you don’t understand the kong-an, you must only go straight—try, try, try, moment to moment, for 10,000 years, nonstop. Then a good answer will appear by itself. Good answers and bad answers don’t matter. Only try, try-mind is very important. I give you a hint: Zen mind is not special. Everyday mind is Zen mind. Everyday mind means, when-you-are-doing-something-you-must-do-it mind. When you are hungry, what? When you are tired, what? You already understand. That is Zen mind. Its name is don’t know; its name is try-mind.

If you understand that, you understand this kong-an. So I ask you one more time: JoJu Zen Master said, “Did you have breakfast?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Then wash your bowls.”

When he heard this, the monk got Enlightenment. What did the monk attain? Very easy. Don't think. Only just like this. If you don't understand, only go straight. O.K.?

Your poem is wonderful. You are very attached to empty. I ask you: What is empty? Tell me! Tell me! If you open your mouth, I hit you thirty times.

Then next, you ask me, “What is Dharma?” How many eyes do you have? You can answer this. That is Dharma. Do you understand that? If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. Only try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 22, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Today would have been the 30th day of my retreat. Altogether I completed 25 days of intense practice. Those days were filled and emptied as the scoops of a waterwheel are filled and emptied by the simple movement of the river. Much thinking and some clear spaces between such thought. If I have learned anything it is the nothing between everything and how to get there. My thinking sees bound up in bundles as so many packages perhaps four or five different topics which if given a period of time, say 25 days, these four or five bundles will appear and disappear and reappear... just as does my thinking. My dreams were very vivid and my world pressed in on all sides as the worlds of other people touched mine. I, me, my became very clear and strong when thoughts of family, friends, future, and fear. Also, I became well acquainted with our three friends the snake the pig and the chicken. They continue to teach me lessons I was too lazy to learn as a young virgin monk.

You understand my karma and I only float as a vessel in the fog of night with only ears for eyes. And nothing for ears. This letter is written late at night. I am spending much time with my old friend Andrea. She is the one with the 8 year old son who likes bowing and meditation. He is with his father in Oklahoma for the summer and I am keeping his mom company. She also fills my life and is a kind good woman of High Calling. She is a nurse.

The people at the Berkeley Zen Center are working very hard almost to the point of coming apart. They still don't understand that if one doesn't make anything with one's mind then there is no hindrance. Everything is complete, even the terrible walls that exist in the room that will be yours when you stay at the new place.

Right after I finished my retreat I thought to go there to work and the day I spent drained much energy. My back is still very painful and sleep, or sitting or carrying causes much suffering. Sunday was the day my back was injured. I was doing the first set of bows and when I had reached 108 a terrible pain as if some giant had picked me up and tore me in half like a paper doll. So now the wonderful back I was so proud of is so much closer to worm food. Lucky worms!

When we met last time at the airport you did not understand why I was not bowing. Neither did I. Now we both do. What is a bow? And what does it do besides make paper people? During my retreat I only had a paper Buddha for the Altar. Paper Buddha for paper people.

The energy to complete 25 days was For All People energy. No I, me, my even though thoughts of becoming famous because of this "Oakland 100" kept stealing my life.

Thank you for this For All People. Who is For All People and who is not? Please forgive my foolish questions usually there are no questions to you when you are around but letters to you in the book we read at evening are filled with foolish questions from all sorts of people.

One teacher that taught me in college used to say that “A fool can ask more questions in 5 minutes than a wise man can answer in 5 years.”

I am very hesitant to give to the Berkeley again (sic). A torn paper doll can only serve to light a stove. And then be thrown away. Who is this woman that so uses people and why is it that I must be so used?

No more questions for now it is almost 4:00 A.M. and I have much to do today. The earth travels 22 miles every second—what power it requires to halt one thought!

Yours in the Dharma,

Hae Gak / Michael

August 1, 1978

Dear Hae Gak, Michael,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. You finished a twenty-five day retreat. You are better than people who stop at four days or twenty-one days.

If you are holding your thinking, all your thoughts become ignorance. If you don't hold your thinking, your thoughts are all wisdom. So put it all down. Only go straight. Only you have no perseverance. I give you a perseverance try, try, try-mind. You must use this medicine every day, moment to moment. This is very important. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your understanding. Put it all down—“I”, “my”, “me”. Only go straight—don't know, try, try, try.

Here is Kwan Sae Um Bosal. Now, outside is Kwan Sae Um Bosal picture. You must put it into your head, and always, everywhere, keep this Kwan Sae Um Bosal and become Great Love, Great Compassion, and a Great Bodhisattva.

I hope you only go straight—try, try, try, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 25, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for the Teaching.

During the interview yesterday you gave me the “Dropping Ashes” problem for homework. Here is my answer: “Keep empty-mirror mind.” Since this person is attached to his understanding, trying to teach him by any method will only provoke him to hit. Since he is attached he will suffer, and sometime he may meet someone keeping clear mind and not suffering and then ask for teaching. Trying to change him might be an attachment to another understanding.

You also said that when I answered this problem you would give me a “big homework.” If this is the answer, or not, I see that “just keeping empty-mirror mind” is a good homework.

Yours in the Dharma,

Roger

August 1, 1978

Dear Roger,

Thank you for your note at Cambridge Zen Center.

You said your dropping ashes on the Buddha answer is “Empty mirror.” You make “Empty mirror”, so you have a problem. This man is very attached to primary point. You say, “Empty mirror”. You have already opened your mouth. This is a mistake so this man hits you thirty times. What can you do? This is because, in true Empty Mirror, there is no speech, no words. You already made speech and words.

Then, how do you check this kong-an? Example: If you went to the market with a child, this child doesn't understand anything. Then, he takes everything—chocolate, candy, everything—into his pocket. You find this and you are very angry. “Don't take that!”

“Why not?”

If you are strong, this boy will cry. You must use soft teaching. First, you must pat his head and say, “You are a good boy. First you pay money, then take this. This store's things are not your things. If you take these things, you become a thief. Do you want to become a thief?”

Then this child will say, “Oh, I don’t want to be a thief.” He understands this.

The point is “good boy” and thief. These two words will help teaching the child very much. You must check the kong-an book. There are 100 titles. When you keep don’t-know mind 100% and check the 100 titles, then one title will appear and help your answer.

Next, you said I told you when you answered your homework, I would give you a big homework. Don’t hold homework; don’t attach to homework. Only go straight—don’t know. Try, try, try, anyplace, all the time. That is most important. If you are attached to homework, you cannot find a good answer. If you only go straight—don’t know, then soon a good answer will appear by itself.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

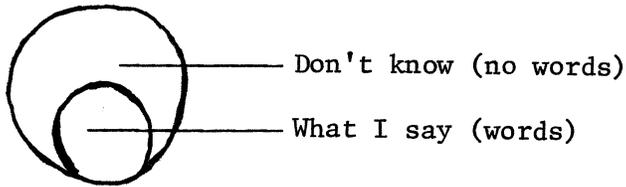
Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 26, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

You say, "What is your name?"



I say everything's last name is "don't know."

You say I have a backseat driver (2 people). I say 3 people. "A" say yes; "B" say no; and "C" watches. "I" that watches decides. "I" that decides takes action. So "I's" name is action. So I's name is: "Action Don't Know." My name is action don't know.

XXX

You say Zen Master with four bowls make mistake. Not understand last word. What is last word? I say last word is: *NOW*.

XXX

I write words. All words are thinking. What do you say?

Stay well,

Scott

August 1, 1978

Dear Scott,

Thank you for your letter. You say, "What do you say?" I hit you thirty times.

Don't make your drawing; don't make back-seat drivers; don't make XXX. When you hold something, make something, attach to something, you always have a problem. If you don't make anything, don't hold anything, don't attach to anything, already you are complete.

You like my words. Liking is O.K. Don't hold my words. If you hold my words, my words become demons and kill you. Not only my words—even Buddha's words, God's words, Christ's words—if you hold them, they become demons and kill you. Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 26, 1978

Happy Birthday Soen Sa Nim. I send you three bows.

With love,

Stephen

August 1, 1978

Dear Stephen,

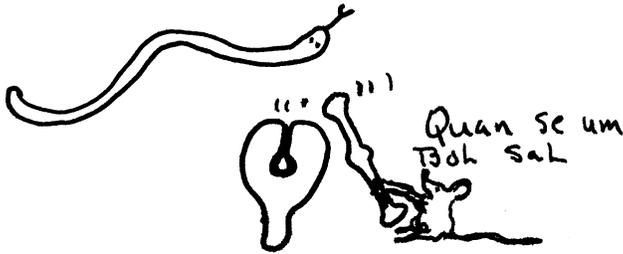
Thank you for your beautiful card. How are you?

I got a letter from Aitken Roshi. Roshi likes you very much. That is wonderful. Aitken Roshi is a very great Zen Master. Also, you are practicing with him. That is wonderful. I hope you don't check your feelings, don't check your mind, don't check your understanding, don't check anything. Only go straight—don't know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

A Happy Birthday card from the Berkeley K.B.C. Empty Gate Zen Center



Hae Gak. Happy B-Day, Beth. Diana. Katie. Jim. Loie. Jeff. Joan. Happy Birthday fatback, Mrs. S. Michael. Happy Birthday from Baby Mind, Kirsten Metta and Petey. Happy Birthday, I hug you 30 times!, Anita. Allan. For more and brighter pictures—only go straight—push, pull, click, click!, Jin Am Poep Sa. Hippo Birdie Two Ewes, Eric. Happy Birthday from the Berkeley K.B.C. Zen Center. “Empty Gate.”

August 1, 1978

Dear Berkeley Zen Center Family,

Hello everybody. Thank you very much for your beautiful card and signatures and wonderful camera. I give you a present. Here is Kwan Se Um Bosal. He has 10,000 eyes. Which one is the correct eye? Did you get it? If you cannot, only try, try, try. I hope everyone tries, tries, tries, which is clear like space, soon attains Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way, and attains True Eyes, and saves all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 21, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Answer to “dropping ashes on the Buddha” kong-an: Zen Master fetches ash tray, sweeps ashes off Buddha into ash tray. Then bows to ash tray, bows to man, bows to Buddha.

Keeping don't know or before thinking mind, how then is it possible to sit Zen, or to bow to the Buddha? I never met Buddha, know nothing of Enlightenment, so why bow? Why is Buddha special? Why wear robes?

In London you tell story of man who made a mistake answering a question and had to spend 500 lives as a fox.

There is no such thing as a mistake, there is only what happens. Is this correct understanding?

What is there to say.

Paul

August 2, 1978

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your dropping ashes on the Buddha kong-an answer is not good, not bad. But I say to you, you are scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. Not enough. This is because this man already thinks, “I got Enlightenment; I am Buddha; I am Dharma.” If you open your mouth or do any action, he will hit you, which means he is testing your mind. What can you do?

Our school has four kinds of “like this”:

1. “Without like this”. True emptiness. Silence. Complete stillness.
2. “Become-one like this”. True Nature. KATZ! Hit, etc.
3. Only “like this”. The meaning is Truth. Spring comes; the grass grows by itself. $3 \times 3 = 9$, etc.

4. “Just like this”. Just doing is Truth. “Three pounds of flax,” “Dry shit on a stick,” etc.

Example: Here is a bell. If you say it is a bell, you are attached to name and form. If you say it is not a bell, you are attached to emptiness. Is this a bell or not? What can you do? At that time, a “without like this” answer is silence. If you shout KATZ! or hit the floor, this is a “become-one like this” answer. If you say, “The sky is blue; the grass is green,” or “The bell is gold,” this is only “like this”. What is “just like this”? Pick up the bell and ring it.

This man only understands “without like this” and “become-one like this”. He doesn’t understand only “like this” and “just like this”. How do you teach him only “like this” and “just like this”? How do you fix his mind? He is very attached to primary point, which means “without like this” and “become-one like this”. This is the point.

Here is the original fox story:

“Pai-Chang’s Fox”

Whenever Pai-Chang gave a Dharma Talk, an old man sat with the monks and left with them. One day, he remained behind and the Master asked him, “Who are you?”

The old man replied, “Yes, I am not a human being. In the distant past, in the time of Mahakashyapa Buddha, I was Master of this mountain. Once a monk asked me, ‘Does an Enlightened man fall into samsara, cause and effect?’ I replied, ‘He is not subject to cause and effect.’ (He does not fall into cause and effect.) Because of this answer I was reborn a fox for five hundred generations. Now, please Master, give me one sentence to liberate me from the fox’s body.”

Finally he asked, “Does an Enlightened man fall into cause and effect?”

The Master said, “Cause and effect are clear.”

The old man, on hearing these words, got Enlightenment, and, bowing, said, “I am already free from my fox’s body, which can be found in a cave on the other side of this mountain. Could you please bury it as you would a dead monk?”

The Master then had Yuna, Temple Director, strike the gavel and announce that there would be a funeral for a dead monk, after the midday meal. The monks wondered aloud, “Everyone is healthy; no one is in the hospital. What is the matter?”

After eating, the Master led them to a cave behind the mountain, poked out a dead fox with his staff, and cremated it ceremonially. In the evening, the Master told the whole story. Hwang Beok immediately asked, “This old man made one word mistake and was reborn as a fox for five hundred generations. Suppose he had not made a mistake, what would have happened then?”

Pai-Chang replied, “Come here and I will tell you.”

Hwang Beok then stepped forward to the Master and slapped him. The Master clapped his hands, laughed, and said, “I thought that the barbarian had a red beard, but I see that the barbarian’s beard is red.”

Not falling, not darkening: Two faces, one coin.

Not darkening, not falling: A thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

The first question is, “Not falling, not darkening.” Are they the same or different?

Next question: Why did Hwang Beok hit his teacher (Pai Chang)?

Then next: The student hit him. Then he laughed and said, “I thought that the barbarian had a red beard but I see that the barbarian’s beard is red.” What does this mean?

If you understand that, tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know. Don’t check your mind; don’t check your feelings; *don’t check your understanding*. Try, try, try, any place, for 10,000 years, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 24, 1978

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa,

I am a resident of Maui Zendo, as you can see by the address, and a good friend of Stephen Mitchell's. There was a question I asked him today about "The Story of Sul" which he could not answer, and he suggested I write to you. I would be grateful if you could spare a moment of your time; the issue of women Zen Buddhists is an important one to me.

There is a story I had taken notes on, from Hakuin Zenshu, about a lay woman pupil of *Hakuin's*. Once she sat on a volume of the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra. On seeing this, her father blamed her for her impious deed, but she said, "Why is it wrong for the Saddharma-pundarika to sit on the Saddharma-pundarika?" When the father reported the incident to Hakuin, to his astonishment he was given the following poem to show to his enlightened daughter:

"On hearing in the darkness the cry of the crow which has never cawed,
How much do I miss my father before he was born."

Who then is she? And who is Sul, student of Ma-jo? Is your story partly legend? Is there a source for it? Would you know Chinese or Japanese names for Sul or other women? And finally, are there other women like Sul; stories I could seek out, in Japanese or English?

Oh, and also, my mate and I are visiting the East Coast in October and November. Joe, from Cambridge, Mass., who visited here last week, thought you would be in Korea then. What is your schedule in those two months? Would you be giving sesshin anywhere?

Enough questions! The residents here have been sharing *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* around, so glad that Stephen is with us, and feeling that we are a great family of sorts, yes.

With respect,

Susan

August 2, 1978

Dear Susan,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and the Maui Zendo family?

You said you are practicing together with Stephen. He is a good Zen student and he practices hard. Everybody likes him. Also, you like him. That is very wonderful.

You like Seol's story. In China and Korea, there were many great women Zen Masters. So at that time, women Zen Buddhists were very strong. Also, nowadays in Korea and China, there are many nuns who are very strong and who practice hard and teach many people Buddhism. Some are better than monks. But in Japan, nuns are not so strong, and there are not so many. Only, lay women Buddhists are very, very strong. That is not bad.

Before, I also read Hakuin Zenshu's story. It's the same as Ma Jo's and Seol's story. There's only a little change. Many people understand this story and think it's only a copy of Seol's story. But I don't think so. The Chinese story was in 780 A.D.; the Japanese Hakuin Zenshu's story was in 1240 A.D.—very separate. I don't know the name of Hakuin Zenshu's student. Ask your teacher.

In Japanese, Seol is Jang Seol (this is the Korean pronunciation) (張雪). Her father was Jang Deok (張德). Jang Deok is Ma Jo Do Il Zen Master's (馬祖道一) nephew, so Seol is Ma Jo's grand-niece. Who made this story? In 980, Hsueh Tou (雪竇) made the 100 cases of the "Jo Sa O Rok" (Patriarch Story) (祖師語錄). This case is #97 and #98. #97 is the story of Seol's getting Enlightenment. #98 is the story of her saving all people after getting Enlightenment. The name of these stories is "Great Sadness, Save All People".

Ask Aitken Roshi about other such stories. I gave him the *Dento Roku*. There are many stories about great women in it. Someday, if we meet, if I have time, I'll tell them to you. Also, if you read the *Blue Cliff Records*, there are some nuns' stories and other women's stories. You must find them.

But understanding many great women Zen Masters' stories is O.K. Most important is that you must become a Great Woman Master and save all people. So, what are you doing now? When you are doing something, you must do it! This is very important.

Here is a famous kong-an for you:

"Hyang Eom's Up a Tree"

Master Hyang Eom said, "It's like a man up a tree who is hanging from a branch by his teeth. His hands cannot grasp a bough; his feet cannot touch the tree. (He is tied and bound.) Another man under the tree asks him, 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China?' If he does not answer, he evades his duty (will be killed). If he answers, he will lose his life. If you are in the tree, how do you stay alive?"

Tell me! Tell me! If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. That is very important. Nobody guarantees your life, so all human life is like being up a tree, hanging by your teeth. If you get freedom from life and death, then you understand your True Way; then you can save all people from suffering. That is called Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You talked with Joe. That is wonderful. I also like him very much. I'm sending you our schedule and our Newsletter.

July 7, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Last night my husband came to see me and we had a long talk. At first I was very sad and felt terrible because he asked me to make a choice. If I love him then I must give up Buddhism, except for once a week, follow him and be a “normal” wife. Yes, I love him—he has great goodness a good and loving heart. I will always adore him and help him any way I can if he needs me. So what to do? What to do?

I made a decision sometime back that I must cultivate the Buddha Dharma 100% now and no matter what I cannot turn back.

I understand my husband’s needs and his desire for a companion. I can no longer follow his way—spend every weekend at the sea shore while he is fishing. By chance I opened *Dropping Ashes On The Buddha* page 17. There were your words saying—have “Great Faith, Great Courage and Great Question.” So, I said to myself this morning—put it all down—my husband—my desire, attachment, is this correct or not correct and so on—let it go! Just “only go straight.” Now, I really don’t understand anything at all I must admit, and sometimes hear myself say, “What is this all about?” I sure don’t know—

All I can do is only keep from moment to moment, “Kwan Sae Um Bosal”——.

I’ll be in the zendo full time by Sept. Surgery will be in Aug. It has been even more difficult to drive now and I must lie flat most of the time. So while in bed I am trying to learn the chants. I don’t want to miss Sunday school if I can help it so I save my strength for that.

We all think of you and miss you.

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

August 2, 1978

Dear Sumana,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I read your letter. Your decision is very clear and very strong. I say to you, wonderful, wonderful! But, Great Bodhisattva means, when people come, don’t cut them off; when

people go, don't cut them off. This means no hindrance, which means already, Great Bodhisattva saves these people. So, Great Bodhisattva has four kinds of action.

First is generosity—giving outside things. Next is good speech—Great Love speech. Next is good action. Only help them—helping action. Then next, if they don't listen, you must do the same action as them—together action. If you have strong Dharma Energy, then these four kinds are possible. But if your Dharma Energy is not strong, together action is not possible. So, if it is not possible, then first, it is most important to make your practicing strong, soon get Enlightenment, and make strong Dharma Energy, then try these four kinds of action. Then you can save your husband and all beings.

But, I read your letter. You already said you will be living at the Zen Center full-time in September. That means your energy has not saved your husband yet—it's not strong enough. Someday, your energy will become strong, and you can save your husband. So I say to you understand your correct way, so wonderful!

Two days ago, I played with some magnets in our library at lunch time. Plus and plus cannot come together. Minus and plus come together very strongly. All things in the universe are like that. In your husband's mind and your mind, you like some things about each other and don't like some things about each other. This means desire—like each other; True Way—don't like each other. You want the True Way, but your husband wants fishing. So it's like magnets. But if your husband truly loves you 100% he will cut his fishing action and can follow your action. But your husband only has desire, desire, I-my-me mind, so he doesn't like Buddhism, doesn't follow you, and won't cut fishing. You understand that and decided to live full-time at the Zen Center. That is called the way of Kwan Se Um Bosal. Already, you try Kwan Se Um Bosal. That is the Great Bodhisattva Way, which means you already have saved your husband. This medicine has already gone into him. You don't understand yet if it's working or not, but some day, it will work. So I say to you, only go straight—Kwan Se Um Bosal. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—Kwan Se Um Bosal, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 29, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

We've been working very hard on our new house—it's a good feeling. Many people who are not living in the Zen Center have been coming to work. Several people are moving in; the house will be full in no time at all at this rate!

Thank you for your translation of the Morning Bell Chant. But where did "48 Hope Street—all beings revolution" come from?

I have been doing Kwan Se Um Bosal every day since you left. I usually don't make it to 3,000; I just do homework as much as I can.

I'm sorry I haven't written; I haven't had time, and I don't have time now. Here is a picture for you. Have a good birthday party and I'll see you in a month.

Love,

Maggie—Do Hyang

August 4, 1978

Dear Maggie,

Thank you for your beautiful card and picture. First, congratulations on moving to the new Buddha Hall. Everybody is working together and becoming a wonderful Zen Center. Thank you very much!

You like the Morning Bell Chant translation. You asked about "48 Hope Street—All beings revolution." It is very good you found that. That is only "Using the 48 Hopes to save all beings." So this "street" is not correct; it is a mistake.

You said you are doing Kwan Se Um Bosal every day. That is wonderful. But it's very important that you do 3,000.

One more thing. This style—the snake on the Buddha—is not correct. Somebody sitting on Buddha's head—is it correct or not? So this is the same as the cigarette man. Also, many people are very afraid of snakes and don't like them. This Buddha is everybody's Buddha, not only your Buddha. This is only your idea. If you only keep your idea, someone will not like it. So put it all down—your idea. Only you like snakes. That's all. When you go to

public meetings or do things in public or public actions, don't take your snake. So you must become clear about public and private action.

Here is a Kwan Se Um Bosal picture for you. Kwan Se Um Bosal has 10,000 eyes. Which one is the correct eye? You must find it.

I hope you only go straight—Kwan Se Um Bosal, which is clear like space, save your snake, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 31, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your letter dated July 24th. I deeply appreciate your efforts on my behalf, but I must admit that I do not understand everything you are saying. Perhaps I am trying too hard to understand, or perhaps I am just plain stupid.

One of my problems is that I am over-educated: 10 years of college, 3 college degrees. Most of my life has been spent intellectualizing and rationalizing. I was raised in the traditions of Judaism, which as you may know, is a heavily intellectual type of religion, especially if one deals in Talmudic discussion groups.

Zen Buddhism has an almost unbelievable attraction for me. No other pursuit (or should I say “way of life”?) has ever appealed to me in the same way that Zen does. It is the one path that has challenged me to obtain enlightenment. No other approach to the sufferings of mankind has ever interested me. And, I have studied many different philosophies, but none has opened the door for me in quite the same way that Zen has. Now, you suddenly say to me: “there is no attainment with nothing to attain.” Of course I can understand this intellectually, but I certainly cannot understand it emotionally. If there is nothing to attain, then why am I studying Zen? Why am I reading what other great Zen Masters have had to say? Do you see why I am confused? Then, you say that Satori is unmoving and unchanging, non-feeling and non-thought. I also understand these words intellectually, but I am left with the question: What state am I in when I have Satori? As you had suggested, I want to get away from the I-me-my way of looking at things. I-me-my is small mind and I want to reach No-mind or “mushin.” Am I setting my goals too high, at this particular time? Also, have you noticed how many times I have used the pronoun “I” in this letter? I am beginning to think that I am thoroughly self-centered.

In your next letter to me, which I am deeply appreciative of, can you explain to me how I can best obtain the “way of no thinking”? For a person like myself, who has been doing so much intellectualizing and thinking all of his life, the “way of no-thinking” sounds almost impossible to reach. Yet, I will surely follow your instructions. I await your earliest reply.

Gassho!

Robert

August 4, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Before, you said you use “I” too much. You only wrote one page, but you said “I” forty-six times. Also, you said, “If there is no attainment with nothing to attain, why do I sit Zen?” You have “I”, “my”, “me”, so you must sit and make your Enlightenment disappear. If “I” disappears, sitting is not necessary; also, Enlightenment is not necessary. If you have “I”, you must sit and make your “I” disappear. Then Enlightenment disappears. That is correct Enlightenment.

Also, you said you don’t understand everything I said. Correct. You must completely not understand. If you understand some of it, then some of it is a problem. If you completely don’t understand, no problem. And, you said “stupid.” I think “stupid” is not correct. You are too clever, because you understand “I am stupid.” Completely stupid means you don’t understand stupid. You must become completely stupid, like a rock-head.

You want Satori. You want to sit Zen. You want to understand something. So you have a problem. Put it all down. Completely don’t understand; completely become stupid. This is very important.

Enclosed is a kong-an for you.* Only go straight—throw away all your understanding. This is very important.

Before, I told you “Nam Cheon’s ‘True Way’”. What did JoJu attain? Tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know, for 10,000 years. Try, try, try, nonstop. This is very important.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

* “Buddha is Grass Shoes” from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, #37.

August 5, 1978

Dear Susan,

How are you and your mother and brother? Thank you very much for the beautiful flowers. You make me so happy. Before, Buddha held up a flower at Yong Sahn; 1200 people did not understand; only Mahakashapa smiled, so Buddha said, "I transmit my Dharma to you." The flowers you sent me and Buddha's flower—are they the same or different? If you don't understand, ask your mother. Your mother will teach you. This is my present for you. I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon understand your True Self, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

(Message printed on a card with a little pink being flying a spaceship:) "The universe is a better place to live in because of you. A little weirder, maybe, but definitely better! Happy Birthday!"

Love from,

Paul, See Hoy, Don, Erica, Heesok, Terry, Bridget, James, Mu Bul

August 5, 1978

Dear See Hoy, Mu Bul, Paul, Don, Erica, Heesok, Terry, Bridget, and James,

How are you? Thank you for your card and present.

The universe is a better place to live in because of you. A little weirder, maybe, but definitely better!

But beyond this universe and you and me, this becomes Great Dharma Happiness. You already have it and sent it to me. Thank you again.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 26, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It is already over a month since you wrote me your last letter and thank you very much, you are always so generous. How are you? You are so busy, as I see by the schedule and I hope you keep well!

At this moment, my plans for returning are in a state of indecision—(It is terribly hard to be a *Libra!*). In your letter of May 31, in which you were so warm and welcoming and helpful, you also wrote me an extremely important sentence and put it all by itself—which is:

“But, most important, you must find your correct direction. Do you know your correct direction? What is this?”

Now, since I have had work, and am not harassed (for the moment!) by money problems, my zazen is going better, my mind being at ease, and I find that my attachment to life in Paris and France, to my new friends (of a different quality since returning to Paris after my Zen experience with Eido Roshi) is very strong. The fact that the move back to the U.S.A. will be a definite one, that if I enter a Zen Center I will have to give up my painting (which I was ready to do in May, but now, in July, am not sure it is the right thing for me to do) makes the decision terribly difficult. I am pulled between two very important Ways, two countries, two lives—

- 1) To go to the U.S.A.—live in a Zen Center, devote my life to other people—Renunciation
- 2) Stay in France—continue painting—Buddhist Studies and meditation—Try to find students to teach drawing and meditative drawing. This will be helping people, too.

In writing this down, number one feels better; number two seems most uncertain. Another question: Is my desire to live in a Zen Center a pure one? Or is it a desire for security, the result of a terribly difficult year and an overwhelming fatigue? I have wanted to do this three or four times before but have never quite made it because of my painting. It is so true that attachment creates the problems.

Dear Soen Sa Nim, forgive me for burdening you with all this but it seemed necessary for me to be straight-forward with you, nothing hidden and maybe with an intuitive word from you, a chord will be struck which will open my mind to clarity of decision.

As you will be gone in September and as I have some more work prospects, perhaps it is better that I wait a little until I see really clearly. The money for the voyage which I have managed to save already, I will put away and not touch so that when the time comes to move becomes (sic) imperative, I can act immediately.

Now for Soeng Am—

Soeng Am calls himself, answers himself—*two minds*. Which is the correct Master?

I would not have thought two minds—I would have thought he was calling himself to be sure he was always One Mind, right here now, being mindful at every moment to moment.

But as you say two minds, here goes—the correct Master is One Mind—the “Host”—the Mind unmoving; Clear Mind—clear like space.

But am not sure which mind calls, and which mind answers. The mind that calls must be the Master because the Mind that answers, the mind with a *name* is the discriminating mind that has different names in different bodies. If it is not right, will keep on trying!

Good-bye for now, Soen Sa Nim, with all my gratitude, devotion, and humility.

Elizabeth

August 6, 1978

Dear Elizabeth,

How are you? Thank you very much for your wonderful letter.

You said before you had a money problem. So now, you have money, so your sitting Zen is strong. Also, your friends from the U.S.A. help you be strong. That is very wonderful. When you practice, good Dharma friends are very necessary. Before, an eminent teacher said,

“If you scoop up water in your hands,
You will get the reflection of your moon.
If you touch a fragrant bush,
This smell will penetrate your clothes.”

So, this first part is, if you try, try, try, only go straight—don’t know, then you will get your True Self. The next part means, if you have good Dharma friends, also, you will get wonderful Dharma with them.

Therefore, going to a Zen Center, coming to the U.S.A., staying in Paris, painting or not painting are important, but what is most important? Why live in a Zen Center? Why go to the U.S.A.? Why stay in Paris? Why paint? *This* why. If this why is clear, your direction is clear. If this why is not clear, your direction is not clear, and you cannot attain your True Self. So you must make this WHY become clear. This is very important. If this WHY becomes clear, coming and going, staying and not staying don’t matter.

Also, an eminent teacher said, “Moment to moment, keep clear mind. You will get happiness everywhere.”

Very important is that you keep clear mind moment to moment. That means, moment to moment, keep your correct situation, which means, when you are doing something, you must do it. When you are painting, just paint. When you are sitting, just sit. When you are watching television, just watch television. When you drink coffee, just drink coffee. Don't think anything. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your understanding. Your problem is checking, checking something. Put it all down—your opinion, your condition, your situation. When you are doing something, you must do it, O.K.?

I tell you one thing. If you want to come to the U.S.A. anytime, I will help you. So no problem. I only hope your don't-know mind becomes strong and that you believe in yourself 100%.

Next—Soeng Am calls Master kong-an. First, I hit you, and I say to you, don't make one; don't make two; don't make host; don't make guest.

Again I ask you, your Master and Soeng Am's Master—are they the same or different? Tell me! Tell me! If you say the same, I hit you thirty times. If you say different, I hit you thirty times. What can you do? If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 28, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Hello. How are you? Thank you for your wonderful/wonderful/marvelous letter. Right now Stanley is in Italy. I miss him a lot but he will be back soon.

This is not a wonderful/wonderful letter. It is about my parents and it is very hard to write. There is a lot of bad karma between me and my mother, so it is very hard for me to see clearly what is going on. I talked to Louise about it and she was very helpful. She said I should write to you about it, so here is this letter.

As you know, my family is Jewish. When I was a child this didn't seem very important. Nearly everyone I knew was Jewish, so being Jewish wasn't special. My brother went to Hebrew school because he was a boy, but I was a girl so I didn't have to go, which was fine with me. My mother only went to temple when she had to and while my father was a cantor in a temple he also had his own private religion in his head. Jewish holidays were more like family occasions than specifically Jewish ones. So when I grew up and moved away I didn't practice Judaism and I certainly didn't believe in the doctrines. It was just there in my background, like having brown hair.

Now in the last few years my mother has become very religious. I think this has something to do with the fact that she has a very serious heart condition, but I am not sure. She gets angry at my father because he does not believe in God; she goes and hears rabbis talk all the time. And while my father still does not believe in God he cares a lot about the Jewish tradition. It had become very important to them their children carry on the Jewish tradition.

Both my brother and myself have chosen non-Jewish spouses. This is very hard for my parents and my mother's family to accept. Luckily they like Stan a lot so while they will not mention our marriage to their friends they are happy to visit with us. Although no visit with them can really be called happy. The whole situation is very confused by the bad karma between me and my mother and between my mother and father. My mother thinks when I do something like marry Stan it is primarily in order to hurt her. Anything that any of us do that is not exactly as she would do, is done, in her mind, primarily to hurt her. At least that is what she says a lot. So it is very difficult.

My Zen practice is very painful to them. I can never tell them about taking the Precepts. They see my involvement with Zen as turning my back on my people. Jews have been persecuted for thousands of years, and when a Jew adopts another religion it is considered the act of a traitor. I have told them that I have not taken on another God opposed to their God, but they don't really believe this. So they feel pain and shame. They feel that they have not done their job right—if they had done their job right then I would be a good Jewish woman married to a good Jewish man raising lots of good Jewish kids. So instead of taking

pleasure in Stan's being such a wonderful man, or in my having such a good job, or simply in the fact that I am far nicer and happier than I used to be, they ask themselves what they have done wrong to have a daughter who studies Zen.

The symbol for all these feelings, of course, is the wedding. They are very upset about a Buddhist ceremony. They will not come and I think it is right that they should not come since they are so upset. But also they want another ceremony, and they insist that this ceremony come before the Buddhist ceremony. This is very important to them. I have trouble understanding this until I think of how important it is to me that the Buddhist ceremony be the first one.

When I am alone I am very angry about their attitude, and their insistence. But when I talk to them their pain is so great that I cannot argue with them. So Stan and I have agreed to a justice of the peace ceremony with only my parents present in late September. Then my mother will be able to say that she was present at her daughter's wedding. She sees this as part of my duty to her. Since my brother married secretly she feels cheated by him of what she sees as her right to the happiness of being at a child's wedding. To me this is a hollow ceremony. It is not Stan and me getting married, but a play put on for a screaming child. Maybe I make too much of this, I don't know. But it is like being asked to lie. It is putting a lie at the beginning of my life with Stanley. I don't like it.

There has been a lot of pressure on me in the last few weeks from my family. An uncle who has never written me a letter wrote to me. My grandmother said that if I did not have this separate ceremony with my parents she would never speak to me again, and would no longer love me. This is as if she were going to cut off her own arm, because her whole sense of worth is based on how loving a mother and grandmother she is. So it has been very heavy. I wrote everybody a letter trying to calm their fears—that you are not working for the Korean CIA, that I am not a mindless robot, that I have not taken on a set of doctrinal beliefs such as Catholicism. I wrote about sitting and kong-ans, about clear mind and who-am-I. I might as well have written in Martian. My father understood but he already understood. None of the others could even read the words. They are too frightened by something that is outside their tradition. Anything outside their tradition carries the seeds of apostasy and listening to it is dangerous. Well, I remember what that is like. When I was a child I would have that reaction to any mention of Jesus because if you learned about Jesus you might become a Christian and that was a terrible thing to happen.

So that is how things stand. There will be this other ceremony that I am angry and resentful about. So I guess I have to let my anger and resentment go. I will try to keep signalling to my family that I love them, although right now it doesn't seem very easy.

Stanley and I are very honored to have you come to Kansas and give a Dharma talk and perform our true Buddhist marriage ceremony. Other people in the Sangha here are also very honored by your visit. I am sorry that my own mind has been so muddled by my family situation. I hope it becomes clear.

Tonight when sitting I saw myself walking towards a doorway, only I was standing in the way.

I have mixed feelings about this letter going in the public book. Since many of your students have similar problems, this letter and your answer might help some people. But this letter is about people who would be upset about strangers knowing their private affairs, and it is full of my opinions of them. So I would appreciate your taking this into account when it is decided whether to include it or not.

I hope you are well and that everyone has recovered from the flu. Have a good trip to Korea.

Much love,

Judy

P.S. And happy birthday!

August 6, 1978

Dear Judy,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Stan?

I read your letter. I understand your mind. I also understand your parents' mind. Both are correct. Your mind is your opinion. Your parents' mind is your parents' opinion. So your opinion and your parents' opinion are opposite ways, so you have a problem. If you make your opinion disappear, then no problem. That is Zen. Then your mind is very wide and can take care of your parents opinion. But if you keep your opinion, you cannot take care of your parents' ideas. So I think when your opinion disappears, your mind is clear like space. Then you can digest any idea, any opinion.

You and Stan are already strong Zen students. Zen mind is not Zen mind. If you are attached to Zen mind, then you have a problem, and your way is very narrow. Throwing away Zen mind is correct Zen mind. Only, what is the best way of helping other people? So, "I try sitting. I try a Zen-style wedding." So if your wedding is only for you, then your mother's idea and your idea are the same. But if you keep your mind, "My wedding is only for all people," then this mind is already beyond time and space, life and death, good and bad, and like/dislike.

So your parents want a justice of the peace ceremony in late September. After or before doesn't matter. What is most important? Moment to moment, how do you keep just-now mind? That is most important. Getting money is important; my job is important; helping parents is also important; a good house and a good car are also important. But most important is moment to moment, keep correct situation and help other people. This is called Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way. You and Stan have high-class education, high-class jobs, and are high-class Zen students. So already, your ideas, your jobs, and your practice help other people. So, only, you are attached to Zen. That is the same kind of narrowness as your mother's mind has. So—that mind—put it all down. If you help other people, then two ceremonies, three ceremonies, 100 ceremonies, 1000 ceremonies—why not? Only, first follow your parents' idea. But don't lose your correct direction. Then

your following their idea is Truth. The Great Way has no gate. The tongue has no bone. I already told you.

So, just your situation is very difficult. But if you make difficult, it is very difficult. If you make easy, it is very easy. Many people are watching you. So on one side, follow your parents; on one side, correctly keep your True Way. That is called keeping your correct situation moment to moment.

Also, all of this happening is not an accident, not a coincidence. Already, it is a natural process. Your karma and your parents' karma, before, before, long ago, determined it. If you understand that, don't keep your idea. Only help your parents. But your center is already not moving, which means your direction is very clear. It is like a child who cries a lot and does bad action. Then, you must give it candy. Than this child will not cry and will be very happy. So you must give your parents Dharmacandy. Than your parents will not cry. And slowly, slowly, teach your parents, which means don't use your mouth, only your action. If you use your mouth, you already lose. Very careful.

Example: Nowadays, I am teaching Korean psychiatrists in New York, about twelve people. They almost all have problems, which means their wives are all Christians. They don't like Buddhism, don't like Zen. But, the psychiatrists like Zen because their job and Zen are very close, and the same way, and Zen helps their job and their ideas. This means their jobs become stronger and they help other people more. So they like Zen very much. So they sit at home every day. Then their wives are very angry. "Are you becoming a monk? Going to the mountain? Are you going to the temple?" So they don't talk to them for two weeks, do bad action, don't make such good food—everything is a problem. So many doctors, when I lecture, ask me, "What shall I do? How can I control my wife?"

So I told them, don't worry. If your wife goes to church, you must go to church. "I sit Zen. I cannot go"—this is no good. If they go to church, during the ceremony, only keep don't-know mind. This is possible. Very good meditation.

Also, Oriental style means the husband controls the wife—"You do this; you do this!" He never goes into the kitchen. Also, they never take out their own shirts and socks and clothes from the closet. Also, they never take care of the children. But I said to them, Zen is not special. You must keep your correct situation moment to moment. When you are with your wife, 100% keep husband's mind. This means you and your wife come together, become one, which means your wife only working alone in the kitchen is no good. You must help your wife. Also, everybody is very busy. Your wife has a job and you also have a job. In Korea, the wife has no job, so she has time, but in America, she has no time, which means you must take care of your family. Rest. Resting your hands is no good. Also, if you meet your children, keep father's mind 100%. Play with them, talk with them. That is 100% father's mind. If you do that, your wife will be very happy and will like Zen. Also, this is correct Zen.

I already said outside action is not good, not bad. Why do you do it? This *why* is very important. Zen is Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way. Then first, you must save your wife, your children, and your parents. This is very important. So saving is not difficult. Moment to moment, keep your correct situation, which means, when you do something, you must do it, 100% believe in yourself. That is very important. Then

there is no subject, no object. There is no my idea/your idea. If my idea disappears, then my ideas become clear like space and can digest any idea. "Digest" means it is possible to control other people's ideas.

So then all these doctors went home and tried, tried that, not keeping their idea, only helping their wives, children, and their whole family. Then their wives and children were very surprised. "Oh, my husband, my father, he changed his life!" They liked their husbands and their fathers more than before. Then they said, "I practice Zen so this style appeared." Then the wives said, "Oh, sit more Zen, sit more Zen!" So nowadays, they sit Zen more.

So I think for you also, what is a daughter's correct responsibility? When you are with your parents, only follow your family. When you are with Stan, only follow Stan. Moment to moment, keep your correct situation. Also, helping your parents is very necessary. Outside action is no problem. Why do you do it? If this "why" is very clear, then any action is already Great Bodhisattva action. So the Bodhisattva Way has four kinds of action. First is generosity—giving outside things. Next is good speech—Great Love speech. Next is good action. Only help them—helping action. Then next, if they don't listen, you must do the same action as them—together action. So I think, don't make a narrow Zen way. Zen's way is not narrow. There is no gate, no way—this is Zen's way. So any way and Zen's way becoming one is possible.

This means, if you correctly understand Zen, you understand your True Self. If you understand your True Self, if you are Christian, correct Christianity is possible; if you are Jewish, correct Judaism is possible; even if Communist people sit Zen, correct Communism is possible. But they keep their opinion, hold their opinion, are attached to their opinion, so cannot find correct Christianity, Judaism, or Communism. So nowadays, with the same Communism, Russia and China have different ways, because Russia and China's opinions are different. That is not correct Communism. Also, your mother becoming very strongly Jewish means she is attached to Judaism and doesn't understand True Judaism.

This is because God is holy. God made everything. Then any way is god's way; everything has God-nature. Then this God's way is very wide, has no hindrance. Your mother makes Judaism become very narrow. So if you only correctly teach everyday mind, then maybe your mother will open her mind and understand your action and your mind. Then you and your mother, your parents, and your family—no problem. That is Zen.

I hope you only go straight, keeping a mind which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, become Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way, get Enlightenment, save first your family, and all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

You say I already have it. I've looked everywhere. I can't find it. Where is it? Tell me! Tell me!

Fondly,

Jim

August 7, 1978

Dear Jim,

I hit you thirty times! Go drink tea!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

July 17, 1978

To Soen Sa Nim—*Happy Birthday,*

Soen Sa Nim travels around the world
His Dharma Energy travels around the whole universe
This grey suitcase flies with four wheels
Today the wind is blowing, the flag is moving.

Ontario Zen Centre

(Sent with a suitcase on wheels.)

Soen Sa Nim's Birthday Poem

August 5, 1978

How many times spring coming, fall going?
Spring, fall do not bind mind.
The stone lion eats spring, fall, mind, and says,
"Seven seven. Four nine. Add two."

August 1, 1978
Zurich

Dear Master Seung Sahn,

Your kind letter has deeply moved me. Thank you ever so much for your good thought and the address of the Korean doctor you have given me.

It is indeed to be greatly regretted that Zuk-Nae Lee has neither written to his friends here nor even to you who have been so helpful and good, but this young man seems to forget all those who have assisted him and even loved him. He himself is such an egoistic person, with great charm, but no feeling of responsibility and obligation for his fellowmen. For two years, for example, I made it possible that he could continue his studies, see Europe, obtained a marvellous library, offered him a home and good friendly feelings. But all this was taken for granted, and now the bitter impression remains of having been a hard working, paying computer only which was stopped as soon as it has been no longer needed. The very day he had his diploma he had put away the mask he had worn during all the time. Has been cruel and awful and hurt one's feelings to the deepest. Apparently these days he has sent a letter to his analyst telling her how happy he is now with his wife, but that he has no job. Well, we do not know how much of all this is true, because unfortunately his words cannot be believed, as he changes his mind and opinions from minute to minute. I myself have lost faith in his honorability, kindness of heart and sincerity. I do not regret having done what I did, but it should have—may be—for a better man. Nevertheless, I still hope that one day in years to come some Korean student can take advantage of the valuable books I gave Zuk-Nae, but all his good friends here are deeply disappointed. He has lost his face. I myself try very hard to distance myself from him, realizing that the game he played has been an unworthy one. I meant so well and lost. He is to be pitied.

I am doing Zen practice with Wanner and Eugene Pascal once a week, and it helps to reach a certain peace of mind. However, they are leaving Zurich very soon and I don't know with whom I can continue.

I am leaving for Spain today for a month, and I just wished to thank you very much for your kindness and send you my sincere wishes.

Yours very respectfully and sincerely,

Hedda

August 14, 1978

Dear Hedda,

Thank you very much for your letter. How are you?

I think you are very attached to Zuk-Nae Lee and love Zuk-Nae Lee. But, you have had no news from Zuk-Nae Lee, and he hasn't done kind action for you. That's very bad. But, a bad situation is a good situation; a good situation is a bad situation. All happenings are not accidents, not coincidences. It is by natural process. Your karma and Zuk-Nae Lee's karma is already determined from many hundreds of generations. So good karma and bad karma do not disappear and also continue to happen constantly. So if you are attached to something, hold something, your mind constantly continues to be unhappy. If you put it all down, anything, karma constantly appearing or disappearing doesn't matter—no hindrance. You already said, "I do not regret having done what I did." But you were very kind to Zuk-Nae Lee. That is Great Bodhisattva action. I hope you keep in your mind that Zuk-Nae Lee will become a great man. Then at that time, he will understand your kind action.

An eminent teacher said, "If you have no I, my, me, then you will get numberless happiness. But if you keep I, my, me, even good action for other people makes bad karma. So don't hold something; don't make something; don't attach to something. Then you are already complete."

You said you are sitting with Wanner and Eugene Pascal. That is wonderful. Zen mind is not special. If you make special, you have special, but this special cannot help you. Long ago, Nam Cheon Zen Master said, "Everyday mind is Zen mind." Everyday mind means moment to moment, keep your correct situation. When you are hungry, eat. If somebody is hungry, give them food. Don't think "I", "my", "me", "you", "he". If you want to keep your correct situation moment to moment, than making your opinion, your condition, and your situation disappear is very necessary. Then correct opinion, correct condition, and correct situation appear. That is called Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way. That is Zen.

Here is a kong-an for you:

"Soeng Am Calls Master"

Every day Master Soeng Am Eon would call to himself, "Master!" and would answer, "Yes?"

"You must keep clear mind!"

"Yes!"

"Never be deceived by anyone, any time, any place!"

"Yes! Yes!"

Master Soeng Am Eon used to call himself and answer himself—two minds. Which one is the correct Master?

If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know, always, everywhere, try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 5, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I need your help...

It seems as if I am your only student that does not hold the same view regarding the word "Sangha". The other students state they are part of the Sangha. It is possible I do not understand the Zen language as yet.

As far as I understand according to orthodox tradition regarding the meaning of the Three Jewels, "Sangha" specifically refers to those that have left the home life, taken full ordination to become a monk, or nun. Members of the Sangha do not marry, they work to transcend the material world and cultivate Precepts. I have looked up the meaning of the word in various Buddhist texts and sutras and cannot find any evidence that states "everyone," according to the tradition, "is part of the Sangha." "Sangha" is a Sanskrit word which means "harmoniously united assembly". If a broad view of this is taken it could be possible to state all who study Buddhism is Sangha I suppose... I don't know.

Please tell me... I was told I was attached to the word. I do not accept that as valid at this point. Your name is Soen Sa Nim. If I call you, you answer to that name. It is for me only a point of reference, not an attachment to a name.

The Triple Jewel "Buddha"
"Dharma"
"Sangha"

is part of Buddhist history—it is important to have correct understanding. How can the meaning vary from center to center? When I explain to the children about the Three Jewels I show them your picture and tell them you are a monk, a member of the Sangha. Also, No Su Nim, Jung Su Nim, and Mu Bul Su Nim.

The rest of us are part of the Buddhist community, laymen, householders, whatever term one prefers to use and together we cultivate the Buddha Dharma. Please, as my teacher, enlighten me on this subject as I am in need of clarification.

Thank you for your last letter. I stand at the bottom of Won Gak Mountain, the dusty road stretches out before me. My shoes are off, caw, caw, the crow...

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

August 14, 1978

Dear Sumana,

How are you Sumana Kwan Se Um Bosal? Thank you for your Sangha letter.

You are already Kwan Se Um Bosal. Kwan Se Um Bosal understands everything. Why is Sangha a hindrance?

First, I ask you: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha—are they the same or different? If you understand that, you understand Sangha. If you don't understand, I hit you thirty times.

Sangha means all beings, not only people. But we separate monks (Bikku), nuns (Bikkuni), Laymen (U Ba Sae), and Laywomen (U Ba Ni). So this is our Buddhism's structure of the Sangha. The structure is Buddhism's community, not only monks and nuns. So if you are attached to words, you take it. But if you hold it, you have a problem. Put it all down. Only go straight—Kwan Se Um Bosal. That is Buddha; that is Dharma; that is Sangha.

Sangha means trying to understand myself. If you have no try-mind, even cutting your hair and becoming a monk or a nun is not Sangha. But even if a dog or a cat want to try and hear the sutras, that is correct Sangha. Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism are sometimes only attached to outside form so they separate: "This is Sangha; this is not Sangha." But in Zen, outside form doesn't matter. Even if a demon has only try-mind, that is great Sangha. So I ask you, are you Sangha? If you say, "I am Sangha," I hit you. If you say, "I am not Sangha," I also hit you. What can you do? Tell me! Tell me!

I hope you only go straight—Kwan Se Um Bosal, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, become correct Sangha, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 6, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I don't know if you remember me—I'm including my picture—but last year I was going to the International Zen Center in New York. I got angry with one of the people there—I think that was called "checking other people"—and I left. I was also feeling the pressure of schoolwork at the time, but I also got sick later and had to leave school. I recently read a book on Zen, and re-read your book, and I would now like very much to start studying with you again. I don't know if I'm qualified though. Someone at the Zen Center told me that I have a very strong gaining idea. I didn't realize this at the time that they told me, but now I think I do. I think your teaching, "put it all down" relates to this—but I find it very difficult to do. What I want is not clear to me, but I feel that if I can clean myself up—i.e. clean up my mind—that I can help other people better. I have a tendency to be selfish, but trying to be unselfish seems to be beyond me. As I write this, I think of your teaching to let my situation and condition disappear—but I'm not sure how to do that.

Someone else at the Zen Center told me that I'm taking something that doesn't belong to me. I'm not sure that I know what that means, unless it has to do with grasping at the teaching without really understanding it. I don't know. I hope I'm not doing something wrong now, by writing to you, and trying to rejoin the Zen Center.

Sincerely yours,

Bill

August 14, 1978

Dear Bill,

Thank you for your letter and your picture and your donation for the Newsletter. How are you?

I saw your picture, and I remember you a little. You said you were angry at somebody and then left the Zen Center. This is human's karma. But you want to understand your True Self. That is Zen mind. Everybody has karma. Karma appears; then this karma controls your True Self. If your True Self is very strong, then this True Self controls karma. This is your center not moving in any situation or any condition. Then you can see; you can hear; you can smell; all, just like this, is Truth. If somebody does bad action for you, that is also Truth. Anger doesn't appear, and then your speech and action are already teaching other people.

You said you have a very strong gaining idea, and that you think my teaching, “put it all down”, relates to this. That is wonderful. But you said it is very difficult. If you make difficult, you have difficult; if you make easy, very easy. Which one do you like? There are two kinds of “difficult”. First, your opinion is very strong and you are attached to something. Next, lazy mind. These things are from I-my-me mind. If you put down I, my, me, then where does difficult appear? So very easy. Then, how do you put down I, my, me? This is very important. When you are doing something, you must do it. When you drive, just drive. When you eat, just eat. When you sit, just sit. When you play tennis, just play tennis. Don’t check I, my, me. Only do it. This means there is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Inside and outside become one. This mind is very important.

Zen is not special. When you see the sky, what? When you see a tree, what? Only that. If you don’t understand, ask a tree. Ask the sky. Then the tree, the sky will teach you.

Nobody guarantees your life. After one hour, tomorrow, after one month—you don’t know how long your life is. Why do you hold selfishness, around, around, around? This “selfish” does not exist, and you cannot keep it for a long time. Even good food, good clothes, a good house, a good car, are for your selfishness. But this “selfish” finally disappears. Then after, what? Don’t make “selfish”. Then your True Self appears by itself. That is Zen.

Here is a kong-an for you:

Soeng Am Calls Master

Every day, Master Soeng Am Eon would call to himself, “Master!” and would answer, “Yes?”

“You must keep clear mind!”

“Yes!”

“Never be deceived by anyone, anyplace, anytime!”

“Yes! Yes!”

Master Soeng Am Eon used to call himself and answer himself, two minds. Which one is the correct Master?

If you understand, tell me! Tell me! If you don’t know, only go straight—don’t know. Don’t hold your opinion, your condition, your situation. Only try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You like my book and you want to become my student. You like, I like. My secretary will send you the Newsletter.

August 3, 1978

Ampolla, Tarragon

Dear Master Seung Sahn,

If I am writing you once more it is because I feel remorse with regard to my last letter. My words have been bitter and without understanding regarding Dr. Lee's behavior. I wish to apologize and ask your forgiveness for having given a hard judgement. Even if everything I said is true, I should have restrained from giving my thoughts expression. Too deeply am I hurt by his not answering my letters, by not acknowledging the receipt of the books of philosophy and psychology sent to Korea, for not having found a word of sympathy for the sudden death of my sister-in-law whom he knew well. This hurt has been so terrible that I failed in discretion and gave way to bitterness and pain. I should not forget the good hours we had together, the mountain climbing, the long talks about Zen, his endeavors to become a better man. These two years during which we have been friends were the best in my life, and asking for more or a lasting relationship was most likely too much requested from the Gods. I loved him as a child-boy of mine and did more than maybe a mother does. Perhaps too much. I hoped that I could follow from the distance his future career and keep in touch. Seemingly he does not wish it, and all his words in this respect were words only which I gladly believed. He took what he could, I gave and gave, but hoped, naturally, that a connection would remain and that he would not just go away and not even look back. I'm not used to such an experience and we are not taught to act in such a way. The lesson I have to learn now is somewhat too cruel and the wounds receiving do not heal quickly. But once again, forgive me for having been too open, too harsh in my bitter words, as it may happen that one day in future I see Zuk-Nae Lee again and he can give me a plausible and acceptable explanation for his behavior which to all of us is inexplicable.

Thank you again, dear Master, for your kindness.

Yours sincerely and humble,

Hedda

August 26, 1978

Dear Hedda,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I know you understand but a bad situation is a good situation. Good and bad are both your wonderful teachers.

Here is a picture of Bodhidharma for you. He has a large beard. But Hok Am said, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” Do you know this? If you don’t know, only go straight don’t know. If you understand this, it will help you and Dr. Lee and all beings, because you are a good Zen student.

I hope you keep a mind which is clear like space, soon forget everything, put everything down, finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 7, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

I am not sure which address to use when writing to you. I sent my last letter to you to the above address, but previously, I wrote to you in Berkeley, California. Which address is the best to use?

I await your earliest reply.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

August 7, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

I have now read your letters dated June 20th and July 24th numerous times in order to get the essence of what you are saying to me.

I summarize the message in your letters as follows:

1. I am already in a state of Satori; it is just a matter of stopping my “wants and desires” in order to enjoy it and be aware of it.
2. If I let my mind go, that is, let it fall or drop away, then there will be no problems. All problems are created by myself.
3. When my mind stops searching, seeking, etc., it is restless. When I stop searching and seeking, I will be complete.

Thank you for this assistance. I am deeply appreciative. However, I think there is still a much higher level for me to reach, such as, sunyata or no-mind. Can you recommend a kung-an, such as Joshu’s MU? I understand that many people have reached Enlightenment through this kung-an. What do you recommend? I recognize that I will need supervision on the kung-an.

Thank you so much.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

August 9, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your letter of August 4th and the enclosures. Your letters are very challenging to me.

In “Nam Cheon’s ‘True way’” JoJu attained nothing. He was therefore left with No-Mind or emptiness. By negating his understanding, he was left with the greatest understanding which is non-intellectual mind or intuitive mind. This is because one must transcend the ego, recognize one’s ego-ignorance and consequently regain one’s unity of mind. Do you agree?

I am working on your expression “Completely don’t understand. Completely become stupid.” When I meditate on this, I tend to lose a certain awareness of self; it seems as though I am dissolving into a nothingness; something that I would describe as returning to my source. This dissolution of self appears to be a step in the direction of becoming totally aware. I would greatly appreciate your comments on this. I might add, it is a pleasant, but frightening experience. Is this what may be referred to as Zen consciousness?

In D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series* there are many examples given of people who had achieved Satori experiences. The experiences are always described in electrifying terms. The individuals who talk about these great enlightening experiences are indeed very elated and very happy that they had had the experience. Now, my question is this: why is there never any mention of how long the Enlightenment lasted? Why is there never any mention of any long-lasting effects of the experience upon the individual? I get the impression that the experience is abrupt and temporary. If it is temporary, how could it benefit a man to meditate for 10 years or so in order to have an experience that only lasts a few minutes, or seconds or hours? Do Zen Masters stay in a permanent state of Enlightenment or do they have ups and downs—one day Enlightened, the next day not? This is very important to me. Also, there appears to be a higher level of consciousness after one has achieved Satori. In some cases mentioned by D.T. Suzuki, the Zen Master accepted the monk’s Satori as only a partial awareness and prompted the monk to move into a higher level of awareness. Now, I was always under the impression that Satori was the highest level of consciousness. Is there a higher level in your understanding? When you say “finish the Great Work of life and death” how would a kung-an solve the problem of “life and death” or birth and rebirth? Are you saying that the solution to the problem of “life and death” lies within the higher consciousness of man? Please explain this. This is very important to me because as a child I had a tremendous fear of death and I always wanted to know: why do we die? Many years later, when I had a kensho experience and became very aware, I had an intuitive realization that “we never die” and that life and death are only part of our illusion. The Heart Sutra says, “no birth, no extinction of birth; no old age and death, no extinction of old age and death.” If it is true that within emptiness there is no suffering, then obviously that is the ideal state for me to be in and that is the state that I would want to reach.

Can you supervise me in Chaou-chou's Wu? This kung-an has apparently helped to enlighten many people.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

P.S. There are about 5 more Federal prisoners here out of a population of 2,300 who are interested in Zen Buddhism. Is there any way that you could become our Zen Master? My understanding is that if we petitioned the authorities, they could not deny us because we are permitted this by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Also, the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary is the largest Federal prison and is supposed to set the example for the others.

August 10, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

You say, "Prison is a wonderful Zen Center." In general, I tend to agree with you. However, Atlanta Penitentiary is no ordinary prison, therefore it would be no ordinary Zen Center. There are many very disturbed people here. The kinds of crimes committed by some of the inmates here would turn an average person's stomach. People here are on an extremely low level of evolvment. The vibrations they emit from their thinking processes are extremely negative. Most of the individuals here are completely self-centered and would not give a second thought to destroying an arhat. I am serving seven years for mail fraud which was really "credit fraud". However, most other inmates at Atlanta have sentences ranging from 30 to 2000 years. There are 150 men here with natural life sentences which means they will never be able to return to the outside community by means of parole.

Why am I telling you all this? Because you said this place can be a wonderful Zen Center and I am having a great deal of difficulty meditating in this place because the people surrounding me are very disturbed people. I want to reach a state of No-Mind, but I don't know how I can do it in a place with some of the world's worst cut-throats and psychotics. In order to survive in a place like this, I have to become one of "the boys". This is contradictory to what I want to accomplish for myself through Zen.

I suppose that if I can become Enlightened here in Atlanta Penitentiary, I will be able to become Enlightened anywhere. The hotter the fire, the stronger the metal. This much I am sure of—there are a lot easier places to achieve Enlightenment than this place.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

August 11, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

When you say “You must make ‘I’ disappear” you obviously mean that I must negate the self-image that I have developed from earliest childhood. But, I am not sure what will remain when I make “I” disappear. It is difficult to work on such a kung-an without knowing what type of consciousness I am working toward achieving. You say that if “I” disappears then all problems will automatically disappear and I will already be whole and complete. This is in keeping with the Diamond Sutra. I assure you I understand exactly what you are saying from an intellectual point of view, but how do I get to this state of consciousness in which “I” disappears?

If one reaches the highest level of consciousness possible, one is then aware of one’s True Nature. This “seeing into one’s True Nature” is what I want, but how do I reach this level? You say “Don’t check anything. Only go straight—don’t know.” Can you explain this a little more clearly for me?

Many thanks for your assistance.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

August 25, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your one, two, three, four, five letters.

I know your mind. Your understanding wants to write, write, write letters! Put it all down, your want-to-write mind. All dead words. Dead words means opposite words. These come *after* thinking, so therefore make opposites. I don’t like that! So first I hit you thirty times! Tell me, tell me—what are you?

If you don’t know, only go straight don’t know. Don’t make anything; don’t hold anything; don’t attach to anything; don’t check your understanding. Then you are already complete. Many words are not necessary. You must use *live* words. Here is an example: Somebody asked JoJu Zen Master, “What is Buddha?” He answered, “Dry shit on a stick.” Do you know the meaning of this? If you don’t understand, only go straight, don’t know. Your understanding cannot help you. That is most important. Don’t hold your opinion, don’t hold your condition and your situation. If you put it all down, then correct opinion, correct condition, correct situation appear. Then everything no problem.

So here is a question for you. Same question—two Zen Masters. One Zen Master said, “three pounds of flax” and the other said “dry shit on a stick.” Are they the same or different? Tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know. That is your original job. You must try, try, try—for 10,000 years, nonstop, O.K.?

I hope you only go straight don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, attain Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I am sending you a Newsletter with addresses of all the Zen Centers. I always travel around to them, so any address is no problem.

P.P.S. You asked about becoming a Zen Master for the prisoners who are interested in Zen. Please be more specific about what this would involve and then I can decide what is correct.

August 20, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

This is a thank-you letter: thank you for the Kido, for special energy, for Kwan Se Um Bosal, thank you for your teaching!

To Nam Cheon I would say, "XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX"

I love you very much.

Barbara

August 25, 1978

Dear Barbara,

How are you? Thank you for your short letter. You liked the Kido, the special energy, and Kwan Se Um Bosal. That is wonderful!

And your answer to Nam Cheon Kills the Cat is wonderful, wonderful!

Next, "In the evening, when JoJu returned from outside, Nam Cheon told him of the incident. JoJu took off his shoe, put it on his head, and walked away. Nam Cheon said, "If you had been there, I could have saved the cat." What does this action mean? Tell me! Tell me!

Next I send you a Bodhidharma picture. This Bodhidharma picture. This Bodhidharma has a big beard. But Hok Am said, "Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?" You tell me! Hurry up! Hurry!

I hope you only go straight don't know, for 10,000 years, soon get Enlightenment, finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

The tea was delicious. Thank you. Here is a poem:

Trying to meditate,
The sound of the wind chimes,
Interrupts my dreaming,
Clear mind, clear mind, clear mind,
Don't know...

Yours in the Dharma,

Jim

August 26, 1978

Dear Jim,

Again I hit you thirty times! Go drink tea!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 7, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Since my last attempt at “JoJu’s Washing the Bowls” I have had many experiences. I felt overshadowed by the kong-an, unable to give a good answer—so, it has taken me a while to write. I am finding kong-ans exist all over the place—each needing my answer—is this not the Great Work of life and death?

I hope you are feeling well and your Zen Centers are flourishing. I believe it will take a lot of Zen to relieve the world of suffering, but, as you say, “Try-mind is stronger than demons, stronger than Buddha.”

You asked me about JoJu telling the monk to wash his bowls, and what did the monk attain?

I say the monk attained, “JoJu’s Washing the Bowls.”

I sort of fell kin to this monk and his kong-an,
the rain is falling
and already
the sun is shining.

Have a good day,

Ned

August 26, 1978

Dear Ned,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You say, “Try Mind is stronger than demons, stronger than Buddha.” That is correct. So I ask you, what *is* try mind? Tell me! Tell me! If you are thinking, I will hit you thirty times.

Next you talk about JoJu’s Washing the Bowls. You say, “the monk attained ‘JoJu’s Washing the Bowls.’” You are a monkey! I ask you, what did the monk attain? Only thinking answer no good. Give me another answer. Hurry up! Hurry!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 10, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter dated August 9. You ask me to answer the same kong-an about the monk being told by JoJu Zen Master to wash his breakfast bowls and the monk on hearing this got Enlightenment. My answer is the same “I don’t know what the monk attained.”

All words that drop from wisdom’s mouth are as shit droppings from a canary. The dog barks the truth. I eat those words and spit them out.

In a previous letter to you I said that “even in a blissful state, I always feel that there is something missing.” Now I realize that there is nothing missing, but something extra is there that shouldn’t be there—my self.

I am as I was, I am as I will be, I am as I am. Creation is full of things, the Unmanifest is full of emptiness; Creation is empty of emptiness, the Unmanifest is empty of things. The Creation and the Unmanifest intermingle in this delightful mystery.

Respectfully with love,

Norm

August 26, 1978

Dear Norm,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

First I hit you thirty times! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know, O.K.?

You say, “I don’t know.” This is not correct. So you don’t know “I”—so you must say, “Don’t know says don’t know.” That is only “Don’t know.” In your letter you use “I” many times. Why make “I”? You don’t know “I” so only go straight— don’t know. Don’t make “I”.

Also you say, “Creation is full of things, the Unmanifest is full of emptiness...” All dead words, which means opposites words. Not necessary. This is your understanding. Understanding cannot help your practicing. Put it all down! Only go straight—don’t know, try, try, try for 10,000 years—nonstop! O.K.?

Again I ask you, what did the monk attain?

I hope you soon attain what this monk attained, soon finish the Great Work of life and death and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 20, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope this letter finds you and everyone in Los Angeles well and happy! Once again Hilary and I are on summer vacation and have missed your visit to the East Coast—did you have a good birthday celebration? I'm sure everyone there was so glad to be with you. Soen Sa Nim! I miss seeing your twinkling eyes and hearing your laugh, that laughter which cuts through everyone's miseries...

Hilary and I are fine, we visited our friends in Northern California and now she is with my parents for three weeks. I have just returned to this valley from twelve days way up in the hills where I stayed in a funky little trailer in the woods. Having this time just to practice was wonderful, and practicing all alone and far away... I wish that all mothers everywhere would have the chance to do this! The wind in the fir, madrone, and the laurel trees—the deer crackling lightly through the woods, golden tall trees bowing to one another in the meadows—all gave very beautiful Dharma talks all day and all night long. Now I am on my way back to Cambridge, to meet Hilary and get ready to start work again.

Also this summer I was lucky to be able to sit seven-day sesshin with Kobun Chino-Sensai, with whom I sat two years ago when visiting California. It was so good to see him again and to sit. I feel close to many of the Sangha here, friends who are his students, too. It is really a gift to be able to receive his teaching, too; same teaching!! but different style.

Once, a couple years ago, you wrote me a letter asking me not to hide my Dharma Treasure, to open and let this treasure shine throughout the whole universe for the benefit of all people. Then I did not feel any particular treasure in my heart, although I certainly wanted to believe you and follow your guidance. Now I must thank you, for your words suddenly make sense—not as Zen Master's words!—but as my own body, heart and mind.

I send all my strong wishes for a safe journey, for you and everyone accompanying you. Please take care of *yourself*. Looking forward to November, see you soon.

Love,

Trudy

P.S. You may wonder what I attained during my retreat—now I can go pee in the moonlight and no fears exist. Sun rises, sun sets, only THIS!!

August 26, 1978

Dear Trudy,

Thank you for your wonderful, beautiful letter. How are you and your daughter Hilary?

You talk about my birthday—thank you very much. But I have no birthday. Many people coming make my birthday. You also make my birthday. Thank you again!

You say you had a retreat alone up in the hills in a funky little trailer in the woods, where you could practice alone. That is wonderful! Also you say that you did a seven-day sesshin with Kobun Chino Sensai. He is a very good teacher. I know him very well.

Also you say that now you understand about not hiding your Dharma Treasure, that this makes sense in your own body and heart and mind. That is correct! An eminent teacher said, “One by one, each thing is complete. One by one, each thing has it. It and dust interpenetrate. It is already apparent in all things.”

So you are complete. Everything is complete. If you have it, everything has it. Open your eyes, open your ears, open your mouth, everything is treasure. So keeping a mind which is clear like space and using your mind—meticulous and perfectly complete. The name for keeping mind is meditation. The name for using mind is cognition. Meditation and cognition come together is correct practicing. Then you get correct wisdom.

You are already a great, wonderful Dharma Teacher. I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You say “only THIS!” So I ask you, this is a picture of Bodhidharma. Hok Am says, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” Tell me! Tell me!

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

The trip with you to Korea and Japan is—to me—the most wonderful of happenings in my life.

Am working on the pre-planning for this house—Brindle and cat. As yet we have no one reliable who can take over when I am gone. I wonder if you can think of someone?

Six weeks—expenses paid. Good place for a retreat—you know it. Please forgive my asking you, Soen Sa Nim.

Thank you!

Yours, Jo

August 8, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It's been your birthday again, may there be many, many more to come in this—your life and ours—to stay with your great work of guidance as our Master and friend.

In deep appreciation full bows to you
Soen Sa Nim—
How are you?

To understand is to be with the True, but this is not attainment. Why is attainment so difficult to “catch”? to “hold”? Something is missing; what?

And there is a question I can't get together
how to ask—at this time.
Maybe when sitting opposite you
Soen Sa Nim—hope this will be soon.

Love from your grateful student,

Jin Weol—Jo

August 26, 1978

Dear Jo,

Thank you very much for your two wonderfully written letters. How are you?

Originally I have no birthday but many people make my birthday. You also make my birthday. Thank you very much!

Next you say to me, “Why is attainment so difficult to ‘catch’? Why is it so difficult to ‘hold’?” and that something is missing. If you “catch”, cannot get. If you “hold”, already lose. If you don’t make “missing”, already complete. The Heart Sutra says, “no attainment and nothing to attain.” You must attain that! Which means don’t catch anything; don’t hold anything; don’t make anything. If you make something, already you lose everything. Enlightenment is not special. When you are hungry, what? When you are tired, what? You already understand that. Don’t make Enlightenment, then already you have it.

Also you say that you have a question that you can’t get together how to ask right now—that is wonderful. I am waiting.

We are going to Korea together. Very, very wonderful! You worry about your house. I understand East Coast students but not West Coast students so well, so I will ask Diana to help you.

I hope you always keep don’t-know mind, don’t catch, don’t hold, don’t make anything—soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 6, 1978

Dear Friend in Dharma,

- 1) Your July 19th letter got to me yesterday—August 5th—I was glad to finally know that you got my letter (from Grove Press) so very late, but you *got* it. I'm happy. Thank you for your prompt and interesting reply.
- 2) Thank you for saying that you think that I'm *not attached* to "stillness." I'm not only not attached to stillness, I'm not attached to NON ATTACHMENT, or the *idea* of the same. I only wrote that I'm *content* and *quiet*.
- 3) I never "talk to trees". I have nothing to ask them—nor could they answer me in Western intellectual "words". Everything just "IS".
- 4) Where is Dr. Seo Kyung Bo now?? In the U.S. or in Korea?
- 5) I don't wish to "Judge" with my discriminating mind—but I feel that in *Japan—at present*—Zen and Buddhism are dead. The Japanese people are a very enigmatic and strange people. They don't know whether to be Western or Eastern so they just work and scheme to make money. My teacher—YAMADA MUMON Roshi—told the Press that Zen and Buddhism are *dead*. I sadly agree.
- 6) I trust your "work" in the Dharma with Americans is going well for you.
- 7) On NOVEMBER 1st my Japanese wife and I will move to Hawaii. Please note this in your address book. But for now, reply to me here, please. Thank you.

Sincerely, in Dharma,

Jacob

August 27, 1978

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your wife?

- 1) I worried about my letter because I got your letter very late and thought that perhaps you had moved. But you got it so I am very happy.

2) I know your mind. You are not attached to stillness but what is stillness? What is content and quiet? What is that? Speech and words sometimes are not complete. Example: Here are honey, sugar, and a banana. All are sweet. Can you tell me how honey, sugar, and banana sweet are different? Even if you have ten thousand mouths, it is not possible to explain how they are different. You must say, “Open your mouth! This is honey sweet, this is sugar sweet, this is banana sweet.” Speech not possible. Demonstration is necessary. So I ask you, what is content? What is quiet? Show me! Show me!

3) You are correct—“just is!” I think “just is” is the same as “just like this.” This means when I am hungry, I eat, when I am tired, I sleep. Then only understanding the word is not important. I ask you, what is “just is”? Here is a “just is” kong-an for you:

JoJu’s Washing the Bowls

A monk once asked JoJu, “I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me Master.”

JoJu said, “Have you had breakfast?”

“Yes, I have,” replied the monk.

“Then,” said JoJu, “wash your bowls.”

The monk was enlightened.

What did the monk attain? If you understand this, you attain “just is.” Only words are not necessary. If you attain “just is” then what did the monk attain? If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years! This is very important.

4) Dr. Seo Kyung Bo just returned to Korea. He is working at Dong Guk University.

5) You are correct about Japanese Buddhism. But I think some Japanese groups are strong. Maybe in the future the old Zen style will fertilize the new young Zen style.

6) Now American Zen is very young, pretty strong. Last spring several students and myself went to Europe. At that time I checked Europe. There are not many Zen Masters there so Zen is not so strong. I think in the future, American Zen will teach Europe. Nowadays in America there is a Japanese style and a Korean style. Someday these styles will interpenetrate and create an American style and will be able to teach the whole world. I hope!

7) You are moving to Hawaii. That is wonderful. Aitken Roshi is in Hawaii. He studied in Japan with Yamado Ko Un Roshi. He has temples in Honolulu and on Maui. He is a very wonderful and gentle keen-eyed Zen Master. When you move there, if you have time, visit him.

I will visit Korea and Japan with nineteen of my students from September 17th to October 19th. We will be in Japan from September 30th to October 6th. If we have time we will visit you.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 24, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your wonderful visit to us. It was such a joy to have you here—teaching us, and thumping the big drum; sharing our city-view; opening our eyes up. Thanks!

Today the wreckers are here tearing down the old garage. The plumbers have already taken out the old tiny pipes and are putting in new ones. And the carpenters have torn down two of the kitchen walls, making the kitchen wide and high. I love this! It's very exciting. Before I thought: well, here is the kitchen and there is the pantry. Now, oh. This pantry is the kitchen. And this wall is just pieces of wood and plaster. And, as we bend down picking up the pieces of the wall for kindling, I see, oh—this is for winter fires to warm us. So kitchen = wood; wood = fire; fire = warm toes. How wonderful it is!

Last Wednesday after you had gone, we had ten people sitting with us—four new students and David and some regulars. We had special chanting first—David helped us a lot with that, acting as our moktak master. And then, after sitting, we had a combined birthday party for David (36 years old!) and a good-bye party for Martin—hitching to meet you soon in California.

Soon you will go to Korea with our Dharma brothers and sisters, and soon I will go up north for a retreat and Lawlor will go back to being a lawyer. And you say, when our minds are clear, we are not separate. KATZ!

Thank you very much, Love and good wishes to all of the new traveling Zen Center—and our warmest hellos and hugs to Andre and Johanna and Antony—to our newest brothers and sisters in Poland.

Sherry



August 31, 1978

Dear Sherry,

Thank you for your letter. How are you, Lawlor, and the Zen Center family? You are a great Bodhisattva. Buddha said, "One Mind is pure, the whole universe is pure." So, one mind strong, the universe is strong. Your mind is strong, so Zen Center is also strong. Also, we had a very good Kido, helped many people, and everybody got strong universal Dharma Energy. So, I say to you: Thank you very much!

You said, "The wreckers have taken out the old tiny pipes and are putting in new ones. And the carpenters have torn down two of the kitchen walls, making the kitchen wide and high. I love this! It is very exciting. Before I thought: well, here is the kitchen and there is the pantry. Now, oh. This pantry is the kitchen. And this wall is just pieces of wood and plaster. And, as we bend down picking up pieces of the wall for kindling, I see, oh, this is for winter fires to warm us. So kitchen = wood; wood = fire; fire = warm toes. How wonderful it is!" So I say to you, wonderful! David's birthday also wonderful. Next you say, "When our minds are clear, not separate, KATZ!" So I ask you, this Katz, how many pounds? Next, after Katz, have no taste. I want some taste. Give me some. Hurry up! Hurry!

You said, "Love and good wishes to all of the new traveling Zen Center—and our warmest hellos and hugs to Andre and Johanna and Antony—to our newest brothers and sisters in Poland." When the Polish students come, I will give them your wonderful mind.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, attain Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 24, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Other business keeps me away from Yong Maeng Jong Jin so I probably won't see you until your next trip thru L.A. Since I can't come, I am sending this poem instead:

坐 禪 非 是 道
 坐 禪 非 非 道
 道 就 是 甚 麼
 喝 也 非 是 道

See you later,

Michael

August 31, 1978

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your family? You are a great Dharma Teacher, great lawyer, everyday helping many people. That is wonderful, which is: Great Love, Great Compassion, Great Bodhisattva Way. Also your poem is very good. But last word is not so clear. In Zen poems, the last word is very important. Here is a poem for you:

坐禪 即是道
坐禪 不是道
如何 是道
喝 喝 喝 道

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, using your mind meticulously and perfectly complete, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August, 1978

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

At a Sunday evening meditation at the Zen Center in New York, I asked you the question, “If in babies there is no thinking and in Buddha-mind there is no thinking, why is there thinking at all?”

I would like to ask a different question.

Please answer my question.

Yours respectfully,

Chris

September 8, 1978

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

First, put it all down. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your understanding. If you check your feelings, your mind, and your understanding, you have a problem. What are you? If you don't know, only go straight—don't know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, always, everywhere. O.K.?

Next, you said you would like to ask a different question. I hit you thirty times. What can you do?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 21, 1978
Paris, France

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Your most wonderful letter arrived Monday last when I was in the middle of a 3-day Sesshin that I did by myself and it was such an inspiration coming at just the right moment. As always, I am overwhelmed by your generosity and am staggered at the thought of the care you give to each letter and you have many, many students to whom you write all the time!

So will work on the “why” supposing that it is the same problem as the “who”—will do my best to “put it all down” and hope it all comes clear (it is getting clearer) and wait for the direction to make itself evident.

Since my little one-man or woman Sesshin am very joyful—even though because of lack of practice I manage to be able to sit only 7 hours a day—not much when Sesshins of Eido Roshi are 14 hours a day! But better than nothing.

As for my Master and Soeng Am’s Master—if they are not the same, and not different, and I can’t have Dokusan with you because you are there and I am here, and can’t make a gesture nor a silence, I am sending my answer under separate cover.

Thank you, thank you, Soen Sa Nim—to know that the Three Treasures are an actuality is so strengthening and beautiful.

With all my most sincere good wishes in the Dharma,

Elizabeth

September 8, 1978

Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your letter and beautiful flower painting. How are you?

You said you did a three-day sesshin by yourself, and that you will do your best to put it all down and wait for the direction to make itself evident. That is wonderful.

Last, you said your Master and Soeng Am’s Master are not the same, not different. I hit you thirty times. Not the same, not different—you have already opened your mouth. Even if your Master and Soeng Am’s Master are not the same, not different, there is no name, no

form, no speech, no words. But you say, “Not the same, not different.” You have already opened your mouth, so that is a big mistake.

For interviews, being close or far away doesn't matter. If you attain Soeng Am's Master, you can answer correctly. If you don't understand Soeng Am's Master, you must go straight—don't know. This is very important. If you check your understanding, if you hold something, if you attach to something, it is not possible. Put it all down—your opinion, your condition, your situation. Then you can see; you can hear; you can smell; everything is your Master and Soeng Am's Master. Don't check your understanding; don't hold your understanding; don't attach to your understanding. Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know, for 10,000 years, try, try, try, nonstop. O.K.?

So, again I ask you: Soeng Am called himself and answered himself—two Masters. Which one is the correct Master? Tell me! Tell me!

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. We are going to Korea with twenty of our students. We will leave Los Angeles September 17 and come back next month the 19th.

September, 1978
London, England

Dear Seung Sahn,

I am writing to you for some advice. I have a problem concerning self-discipline. For some years now I have been studying several spiritual matters intellectually; I seem to have been in what a friend called the “spiritual department store.” Such a bewildering array of techniques and philosophies! Over the years it came to me that there is only one way, my way. But in this I have great difficulty over self-discipline—I enjoy sex and rich foods immensely and I seem to be more than a little lazy. It is written:

The abstinent run away from desires
But carry desires with them.
When a person enters Reality
He leaves desire behind. *(Bhagavad Gita)*

When I try to discipline myself I find I get very resentful and bad tempered—in this internal struggle I lose my concentration. I give in, then end up feeling guilty at having given in. As you have guessed, I think a lot. I try not to struggle with myself, but if I give up the struggle I end up with no practice at all. This situation is equally frustrating. I know I should “drop it all”, but I cannot. I feel torn between feeling the need for disciplined practice and yet feeling uneasy about forcing myself to stop my lazy, indulgent habits. At present I oscillate between these extremes, I can find no balance. Perhaps your words can help? I would be very grateful.

Yours faithfully

Dave

September 8, 1978

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You sent me your “I” twenty-nine times. So you have a problem. You only sent a small paper, but you already have twenty-nine problems. But you don’t understand “I”. But you use I, so you have a problem. You must make “I”, “my”, “me” disappear. Then there is no “I”. No “I”, no problem. If you have “I”, you have a problem. If you make ten, you have ten problems. If you make twenty, you have twenty problems. If you make 1,000, you have 1,000 problems. If you make 10,000, you have 10,000 problems.

Your letter said, “I like sex; I like rich foods; I am lazy; I try to abstain; I feel guilty; I think a lot; I struggle with myself; I try not to struggle with myself...” So you have problems. If you have no “I”, where do these things come from? They have already disappeared. Then how do you not make “I”? I ask you, what are you? Tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. Don’t check your mind; don’t check your feelings; don’t check your understanding. O.K.? Only go straight—don’t know. Always, everywhere.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 31, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

That monk attained monkhood.

Things have been chugging right along here, not good, not bad. I've been doing electronics working Zen and Linda has been doing department store working Zen. Also eating, sleeping, sitting, and dog walking Zen, as usual. Also we are doing a good bit of herb hunting right (good season for it).

We attended the Vietnamese Buddhist Vu Lan Ceremony a few weeks ago in a nice park, chanting, sitting, and burning incense. The elections for the new board of directors for the upcoming two years was held, and I with others was nominated. The results are not out yet, but if I get put on the board, I may have to learn to speak some Vietnamese. The election was humorous. No one wanted a position, and when Mrs. Ho nominated me in Vietnamese, I didn't even know what she was saying. The whole thing was very animated.

Have a good time in Korea and Japan, and Linda and my prayers are with you, for all beings. Take care.

Just like this,

Dale

September 8, 1978

Dear Dale,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Linda?

Your answer is, "That monk attained monkhood." What is monkhood? Tell me! Tell me! My Zen stick already hits you thirty times. Very careful! You must read the kong-an again and tell me, tell me, what did the monk attain? Only a thinking, thinking answer is not so good. What is just like this? I already explained.

You said you have been doing electronics working Zen and Linda has been doing department store working Zen. You also said you went to the Vietnamese Buddhist Vu Lan Ceremony, and you were nominated for the new board of directors. That is wonderful. But what is most important? You must understand your True Self, and you must believe in yourself 100%. That is very important. If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. If you have try-mind, already there is no

subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Subject and object, inside and outside already become one. When you are doing something, you must do it. That is called everyday mind, Zen mind. Also, it is the mind this monk attained. We say it is called clear mind, everyday mind, just-like-this mind. When you are hungry, what? When you are tired, what? What did this monk attain?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 28, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I am sorry to have taken so long to write, but words kept getting in the way. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet you, share dinner and talk.

I have been working very hard doing absolutely nothing and yet doing many things. In all my activities in the prison there is only a search for the answer to the question that can't be put into words.

This is silly, of course! There is really no question, no answer, and no search. Only...

There are many things about my life in this body that I would like to share with you. Someday I will become a great psychologist and bring Zen to the world through the mental health profession if I chew these words up right now and eat them!

Please let me know as soon as you can when you will be in Cambridge again so I can make arrangements for a furlough in advance. You are not a good teacher and I am not a good student, but I would like to become a student of yours and learn from everything what this is!

Here is a poem for you:

Hard training is not difficult—
Beginner's training is not easy
A hundred-day retreat is a pile of shit
And a monastery is useless.
A single thought?
The sound of typewriter keys!

Love,

Stephen

September 8, 1978

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I read your letter. I know you have a strong direction. If you have a strong direction, everything is no problem. If your direction is weak, many problems appear. So I ask you, what are you? Tell me! Tell me! If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. If you attain that, if you want to be a psychologist, it is no problem. If you have any questions, no problem. Your saying I am not a good Zen Master is no problem; your saying you are not a good Zen student is no problem. Everything is no problem.

Here is a kong-an for you:

“Soeng Am Calls Master”

Master Soeng Am Eon used to call to himself every day, “Master!” and would answer, “Yes?”

“You must keep clear mind!”

“Yes!”

“Never be deceived by anyone, any time, any place!”

“Yes! Yes!”

Master Soeng Am Eon used to call to himself and answer himself, two minds. Which one is the correct Master? Tell me! Tell me! If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know, always, everywhere. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

Your poem is wonderful. Here is a poem for you:

Hard training—very difficult!
Beginner's training—not difficult.
Don't make difficult. Don't make easy.
Not only a hundred days—whole life, bullshit!
Attain bullshit; whole universe, wonderful monastery.
A single thought? Big mistake.
KATZ!
Clack, clack, clack, clack—the typewriter.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 7, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter and picture of Bodhidharma. It was wonderful to hear you on the phone!

Homework:

—JoJu put his shoe on his head and walked away. Nam Cheon said, “If you had been there, I would have saved the cat.” What does this mean?

KATZ!

I put my shoe on my head and walk away.

—Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?

KATZ!

Hok Am is mistaken—Bodhidharma has a beard.

—To the cigarette man I say, “You understand one but you don’t understand two.”

Last night I watched a program on T.V. about slavery in America. Sometimes I put away the terrible parts of our history in the back of my mind, but this made me remember. Soen Sa Nim, how can people hurt other people so much? I just can’t understand, and it makes me very afraid. So I only do my mantra, but I still don’t understand.

I wish I could see you when you come to Providence today, but maybe I can sit Yong Maeng Jong Jin at New Haven in November. Have a good trip to Korea, and please take care of yourself!

Much love,

Do Mi, Barbara

September 8, 1978

Dear Do Mi, Barbara,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I was glad to see you at PZC, but you soon disappeared and I could not find your face.

Next, your JoJu answer—you are a monkey. One more step, please. Correctly understand JoJu's situation at that time. O.K.?

Next, you said Hok Am made a mistake. You too. I want a not-mistaken answer. Take away Hok Am. I ask you: Why does Bodhidharma have no beard? Tell me! Tell me! This kong-an is an attack kong-an. For an attack kong-an, an attack answer is necessary, which is reflected action.

For your cigarette-man answer, he hits you again. What can you do? How do you explain two to him?

You said you watched a T.V. program about slavery in America. That is wonderful. You wonder how people can hurt other people so much. You have this question. I ask you: A tiger catches animals. Cats catch mice. Birds eat worms. People like meat and fish. Why is this? We say that is tigers', cats', birds', mice's karma.

In this world we say, "Yak Yuk Kang Shik." This means "Strong eat weak." Not only animals—countries, businesses, groups. That is the law of appearing and disappearing. If both appearing and disappearing disappear, that stillness is bliss. Then you have no problem.

This history is also all karma. If you control karma, you are the king of the dharma. If you cannot control karma, you are the same as an animal. Only that. So which one do you like? What are you doing now? When you are doing something, you must do it! Don't make something; don't hold something; don't attach to something. Put it all down. Then you are already complete. Then you can make your universe pure and free.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 29, 1978

Dear Antoni, Joanna, and Andrzej,

Thank you for your telegram and beautiful letter. You made us all very happy! As soon as I got the letter I telephoned Soen Sa Nim and he also was delighted. He asked me to write to you right away and tell you that he and Jacob will as soon as possible go to the Polish Consulate and discuss your visas, as you suggested. He also said that there will be no problem with the Korean and Japanese Embassies. Then formal invitations will be sent to you from the Providence Zen Center, as well as airplane tickets.

Yesterday I went to the Travel Agent and found that it is a little difficult getting reservations from Europe to the United States in either late August or early September as many American tourists are returning at that time—however, there is a flight on September 13th and I have made tentative reservations on it for the three of you. Soen Sa Nim and Jacob are checking on other flights also—so soon we will be able to tell you something definite. If you come on the 13th of September, you could perhaps stay in the United States a couple of weeks after the trip to Korea and Japan and visit some of the Zen Centers here. Everyone is looking forward so much to meeting all of you!

Your Tuesday night meetings sound wonderful! Also the Buddha's Birthday Celebration with thirty-five people and the YMJJ! We will be thinking of you on July 6th when you begin your three-day YMJJ—that is really marvelous. Will you have it in Joanna and Andrzej's house? That is such a perfect place for it. I will never forget how beautiful it was to be there, how you fixed everything for us to be comfortable—and also, how delicious your food was!

Here in Berkeley we are very happy because we will be moving to a larger place the end of July! Perhaps when you come here you will be able to come for a visit! It also has a potters' studio and a gas kiln! Maybe we can start up a Zen pottery group and make some money!

When I read the part in your letter about Kwan Se Um Bosal chanting I felt very good inside because that particular chanting means so much to all of us. Also, we just finished a three—day "Kido" where we did not sit but only chanted, mostly Kwan Se Um Bosal, for three days. It was very powerful. When we go to Korea you will also experience this as a Kido is planned while we are there. Also there will be a YMJJ.

I will write to you again as soon as we know something more definite, and at that time I will also send you an itinerary of our trip.

Our love to all of the Krakow family!

Yours in the Dharma,

Diana

1978

Krakow, Poland

Dear Diana,

Thank you for your letters. I am answering you so late because when they came I wasn't in Krakow but outside it where I spend my vacation with my family. As a father of two kids I was especially busy. To take care of about every step of my younger one-and-a-half-year-old Martin was my only job. Hard job. I received tickets and all the information about the trip. We are very happy with such a great surprise Soen Sa Nim and you were so kind to do for us. Thank you very much!!! In a letter I wrote to Louise I said that this trip is like visiting Amitabha Heaven. It means so much for us that it's difficult to believe it all would happen. Although I am busy with kids now I find time to translate from Soen Sa's book. It is successfully written every week's Wednesday meetings. And we learn more and more Soen Sa teaching. Discovering beautiful things.

Now because I am outside Krakow, then Johanna and Andrzej take care about Wednesday and sometimes also Thursday meetings. In a letter they sent to me it is said that newcomers are seen often. I think when we finally finish the translation of *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* it will help many Polish Zen students.

Our YMJJ's are pioneering work here and are also very inspiring. We are very thankful to you for deepening the atmosphere of last YMJJ, which I believe was done by your thinking about us when we were sitting these three days from July the 6th. Next YMJJ we planned September. We are still at the same house. It is a good place and, I hope, will be even better because there is a possibility to have large space for the Dharma Room upstairs. The whole house is owned by Johanna and Andrzej. Upstairs part of it is temporarily occupied by one family who will move.

As you already know, there are some artists sitting Zen so we will be able to build beautiful Buddha's altar, paint Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. For example, Johanna is a sculptor and also makes ceramics.

Please say thank you to Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim for his father's care about Miong family in Krakow. Also we say hello to Ezra and Zen family in Berkeley. Good luck!

To see you then in Berkeley new
Zen Center, Hapchang,

Anthony

September, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim:

In the name of your whole group of students, but especially in the name of Joanna, Anthony, and myself, I would like to thank you for the invitation to your Zen Centers. It is very likely that all three of us will appear on schedule in the U.S.A.

Our minds still cannot believe in this. The whole group of your students practices regularly every Wednesday. There is a steadily growing number of interested people. My personal problems are beginning to move away from me and even to become resolved, because I stopped worrying too much about them. A few days ago we received a package with robes and moktak for which we are deeply grateful.

Lately we've been taking much from you; it will force us to greater giving. Or is it just mind? As yet I don't know. From September 7th to the 11th we are organizing YMJJ. Already over 15 people signed up for it. In Poland, the summer is slowly ending, cool nights are coming. Many stars. Nature is becalmed. This brings out my reflective self, hopefully not laziness. Anthony with friends are translating your book. Many chapters were read at the weekly meditations. It is for our group a direct hearing of your words.

Recently Toni Packer from Rochester was in Poland. We were invited by Kapleau Roshi's students to participate in a one-day meeting with Toni Packer. During that meeting we had a chance to hear a teisho by Toni Packer entitled "Fears and Pains". To express our gratitude, in the name of the group of your Polish students, we gave Toni a photo album about Krakow.

Once again, with deep gratitude and a deep bow, we thank you for the caring during our first ("baby" as Jacob wrote) steps on the way to self-knowledge.

Andrzej

(no answer)

August 5, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your letter and the Newsletter from the Providence Zen Center. The Newsletter is sometimes very helpful.

I get the impressions from your letters to me that you are impatient with my search for Satori. You believe that I am going about it the wrong way. You say that I should stop thinking and understanding and already I will be in a state of Satori. But, there must be more to Satori than this!

If there is nothing to attain, then why am I searching? Also, if I do not write to you, how will I be able to communicate with you? When you ask, "What am I?" my answer is "Spirit." Do you accept that answer? Please explain to me what you mean when you say, "If you don't understand, only go straight don't know." I assume that you are implying that I should seek intuitive understanding, not intellectual understanding. I can understand this!

One final question: If there is nothing to "understand" how will a person know when he has attained Enlightenment? Is it not a *feeling*?

Please let me know as soon as possible, before you go on your trip to Korea.

Have a very pleasant and enjoyable trip.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

September 5, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

I want to add a postscript to my last letter:

What I am seeking is a state of Zen consciousness which will lead to Satori. I am fully aware that I cannot reach this state through my intellect. So, the path is non-intellect. It is intuitive. How do I get onto this path? Tell me! Tell me!

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

September 12, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? You are very attached to Satori, all attached to Satori word. Put it all down, Satori! Which means don't make "I". Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am"; I am not thinking, therefore what? If you are thinking you make opposites; if you are not thinking there are no opposites. It is absolute!

There is no name, no form, no speech, no word. So, no Satori, no no-Satori. Satori disappears, then that is correct Satori. If you again want Satori, or talk about Satori, I will hit you thirty times!

What are you? Tell me! Tell me! If you don't understand, only don't know, try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

You ask, "If there is nothing to understand how will a person know he has attained Enlightenment?" The Heart Sutra said, "Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva when practicing deeply the prajna paramita perceives that all five Skandhas are empty." The five Skandhas are form, feeling, perception, impulses, consciousness. You must understand that!

Next you said, how do I get onto this path. Again I hit you thirty times. What can you do? Only go straight, always, everywhere.

Here is a kong-an for you:

Master Soeng Am Eon used to call to himself everyday, "Master!" and would answer, "Yes?"

"You must keep clear!"

"Yes!"

"Never be deceived by others, any day, anytime!"

"Yes! Yes!"

Soeng Am Eon used to call himself and answer himself, two minds. Which one is the correct Master? Tell me! Tell me! Which is the correct Master? If you don't understand, only go straight.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 31, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

i have been a hungry ghost for enlightenment.
i have been a monkey.
you told me to throw away my situation—i have checked, checked, checked—sorry.

What is try-mind?
Don't-know answer.
What about "JoJu's Washing the Bowls"?
Don't-know answer.
Sorry, i have hurried.

Your picture (of Bodhidharma?)
blew me away.
i bow in your direction.

Thank you,

Ned

September 12, 1978

Dear Ned,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Don't check feeling
Don't check your mind
Don't check your understanding
Don't hold something
Don't make something
Don't attach to something

Put "I" down
Put "my" down
Put "me" down

Two eyes
Two ears
One mouth

What did the monk attain? If you don't know then only go straight—don't know. Only go straight for 10,000 years, nonstop, O.K.?

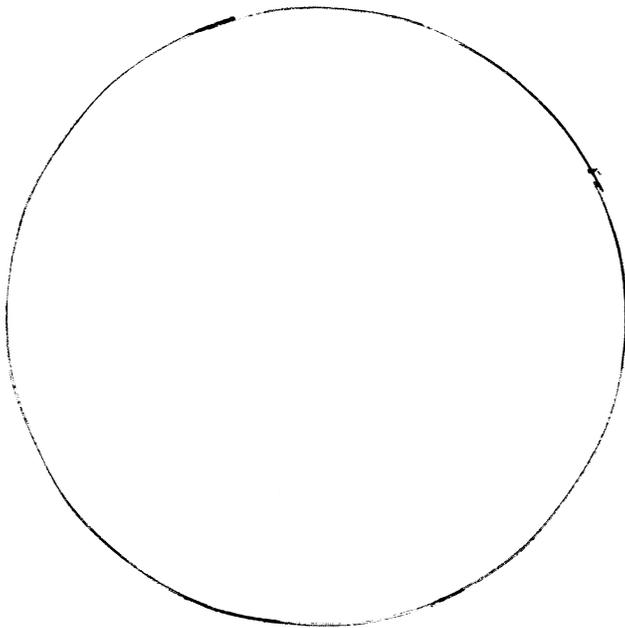
Yours in the Dharma,

S S.

September 1, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter of August 26. You ask me again, “What did the monk attain when told to wash his breakfast bowls?” He attained nothing; he lost something and was enlightened.



The pen is making a noise on the paper; the rain is falling outside through the open window.

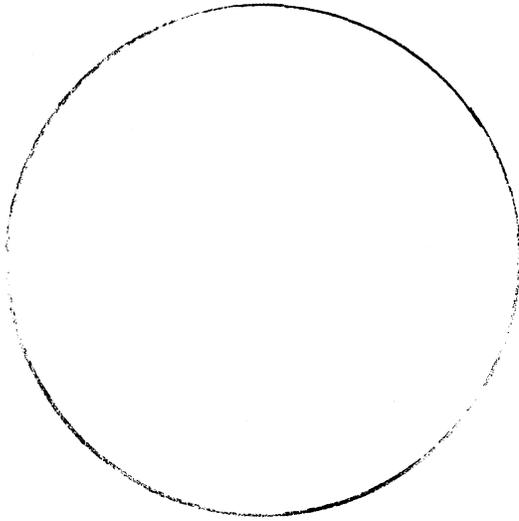
Respectfully with love,

Norm

September 12, 1978

Dear Norm,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. Don't make something. You make something; don't make nothing! What is nothing? True Nothing means there is no speech, no word. You make all, make nothing, that is something! So, I hit you thirty times! You make circle.....



What is this? Tell me! Tell me!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 1, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? It's always so good to hear from you. Thank you for the meaning of your words to me. The Oxherding pictures also came helping to realize meaning of my questions: "Why is attainment so difficult to catch?", "Why is it so difficult to 'hold'?", and what is missing?

Don't know if I will ever put it together to ask "the question"—words hard to express with. It must answer itself.

Yes—no birthday, no deathday.

And Bodhidharma has a beard
and Bodhidharma has no beard

My gratitude to you for taking us to Korea and Japan. How very, very wonderful to be in your presence.

Practicing Kwan Se Um Bosal.
Three full bows to you, Soen Sa Nim.

Yours in the Dharma,

Jo—Jin Uwal

September 1, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for helping in finding House-Sitter.

The Big Sur person who offered to caretake is familiar with animals, house, and this kind of country and will know how to cope if needed. So, I feel it best, also in Mark's interest, to stay with this choice. Thank you very much Soen Sa Nim for finding a way to help.

A friend, Judith Weaver, student of Mumon Roshi, has, last year, been at Roshi's Temple for laymen. It would be wonderful if we could visit (Chiba, Japan). Judith says, "The very kindly monk in charge is called Shunan-San. You may say you're a friend of mine." Mumon Roshi is not always there.

Mark likes to know where to write to. Could you please give a Seoul address if possible?

Today Berkeley YMJJ begins. Unforseen happenings cut off my coming so—my next meeting with you will be at Tahl Mah Sah Sunday the 17th September—the big day of the beginning of our trip. Yesterday I found three little gifts for our Korean friends.

Soen Sa Nim, in gratitude, bows to you.

Love, yours,

Jo

(no answer)

September 3, 1978

Kyoto, Japan

Dear Friend-in-Dharma,

Your August 27th letter at hand yesterday. Thank you very much.

We're well and very busy preparing to move back to Hawaii the end of next month (October). Till then—we are here.

Delighted you will be *here* in Japan. Please allow me to present you in a lecture Thursday, October 4th or Friday, October 5th. My honored friend and teacher, Yamada Mumon Roshi, is the Koncho of Myoshin-Ji Temple and I could arrange it. He is a very great Zen Master and is revered in Japan. I await your word on this by return letter. *Thank you.*

At the time you and your students will be here—the World Fellowship of Buddhists will be meeting in Japan: in Tokyo and Kyoto. It should be interesting for all concerned.

I know Bob Aitken and his wife for many years (sic). I know with whom he studied—met him once briefly in New York.

When we meet here we will “talk”, or just drink tea. I look forward to meeting you and your students very much.

I wait for your letter. Thank you.

Most cordially,
In Dharma,

Jacob (Kyo-Zen San)

September 14, 1978

Dear Jacob Kyo-Zen San,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your wife? In your letter you said you will move back to Hawaii at the end of October. That is wonderful.

Also, you invite me to give a lecture at Myoshin-Ji Temple, and you could arrange it as you and Yamada Mumon Roshi are well acquainted as friends, and as your teacher. That is wonderful! Thank you very much but we will be in Kyoto on October 2 only then on the 3rd

leave for Tokyo, stay in Tokyo until the 6th, then return to Seoul, Korea, so your invitation for a lecture is not possible. I am sorry, but thank you very much.

In Tokyo I have a temple. I would like to meet you very much.

You said you have known Robert Aitken Roshi and his wife for many years. That is wonderful.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon become Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way, and save all beings from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 5, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Hope these two poems find you well on your return to the East Coast.

Zen, Zen, Zen, Zen.
You know what?
There is no Zen!
The sun is burning hot
On this fall day.

Ah the past.
Ho the present.
M-M-M the future.
What bullshit!
A cockroach crawls
Into a crack between
The walls.

Murray

September 12, 1978

Dear Murray,

Thank you for your two poems. How are you?

Put it all down!
Put it all down!
Put it all down!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 7, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I don't know where to catch up with you travelling around the country as fast as you do, so I will send this letter to Tahl Mah Sah and wait for you to get there and catch up with it.

Thank you very much for your poem. The last line is much clearer than mine was. You are a wonderfully clear Zen teacher.

When I gave a Dharma Talk at Tahl Mah Sah a few weeks ago, I tried to explain about Zen practice in American language by finding different words than the traditional Zen Dharma-talk shorthand. This is what I said (some of it):

“Just like this” means just what the Buddha meant in all of his talk. For Buddha, the kong-an was not out of a book but out of his life. It was, “Why is there suffering? What can be done about suffering?”

“Suffering” is really too strong a word. The Sanskrit term “dukha” really means something like “aggravation” or “frustration” or “tension”. It means being unhappy.

But what does being happy mean? Doesn't it mean that you don't want anything to be different about the present situation than the way it is? When you say, “I'm happy,” doesn't that mean that there is nothing about the present situation that you would want changed?

Most people try to get happy by setting up some idealized picture of how things should be and then trying to make the real world conform itself to that picture. It never does, quite, so they are always conscious that this situation is not perfect. So they're never quite satisfied, never really happy.

The Buddha used the opposite tactic. He said, throw away all your idealized pictures of how things should be and accept each moment just as it comes, just like this, only like this.

Zen is a method of teaching people how to do this. Throw away all your idealizations, all your fantasies about how things could be better. Reflect the actual situation just as it is.

That does not mean being passive. Correct response to the situation may mean the utmost activity. But the situation determines that, not your preconceived idealization. When you have put them down, your mind is clear. When your mind is clear, nothing hinders its flow of activity. As the days go by, you do everything and you do nothing at all. This is not mysterious. It is very simple and straightforward. Only put it all down. Only go straight ahead.

There was more. This was the heart of it.

Sincerely,

Michael

September 12, 1978

Dear Michael,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You like my poem, that is wonderful! Your Dharma Talk was very wonderful. If you would add last word then it would be more wonderful!

Example: At the end you said, "Only put it all down." "Only go straight ahead," then add, "Go straight ahead, you can see; you can hear; just like this is truth. The sky is blue, the trees are green. A dog is barking, woof, woof. A cat is meowing, meow, meow." What do you think about this? If you like this example, take it!

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon become Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 31, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Good morning!

Here is a wedding invitation for you.

We have moved into a beautiful old house on a hill two blocks from campus. The previous owner was an architect, and he did extensive and beautiful remodeling so the house is in very good shape for the years to come.

We have a Dharma Room on the second floor overlooking our yard which has many trees. When the free university starts, we will offer a course in Zen, similar to the one I took from Jonny Cabot. Start people sitting a little, then more and more; read from Suzuki Roshi, Huang Po, and your books; answer questions reassuringly. It is scary to do something like that, but we want very much to. That is one reason we bought this house, so it can be a place for people interested in Zen to come by.

The Sangha here keeps growing and shrinking and growing. Right now it seems to have shrunk to three—me and Stan and Hal, who is a student of Sensai Kobun. When Stan and I got back from California, Hal was very disturbed at the way things had been going here. There was no form and a lot of confusion. So we got together and made up a simple but exact form—it is really the Chogye form without reading and with only Heart Sutra chanting. I think this scared some people off. As you know, people in this country like to think that no forms are necessary. But that's okay, because now when people sit with us they will start out correctly and see correct practice. Then they won't be attached to anarchy, so it won't be hard to give up.

So, the solitary wandering mathematician finds a home in Kansas. Okay!

When you come, maybe the weather will be warm enough for you to sit on our porch swing in the late afternoon. Then you will be a real midwesterner.

Much love,

Judy

P.S. Thank you very much for your great, wide teaching letter.

September 17, 1978

Dear Judy,

Thank you for your letter and invitation. How are you? You said that you have moved to a beautiful old house and have a Dharma Room on the second floor, where you will have sittings for people slowly at first then more and more. That is wonderful! Very wonderful!

An eminent teacher said, "In one moment, attain Truth; but one moment cannot exhaust karma." One moment cannot exhaust karma means it is like putting hot water in a cold glass, then the glass will be broken, so slow, slow heating is necessary. Your teaching style is wonderful: first slow teaching and starting out simply but correctly, then someday hot water into the glass is possible which means that correct Zen-style is no problem.

Many people are not necessary. It is necessary to have only keen-eyed Zen students. One keen-eyed lion is better than 10,000 blind dogs. So if your practice is strong, then the whole world is strong. I think that you and Stan together are very, very strong and have already saved many people, so I say to you, wonderful, wonderful!!!!

I hope you only go straight, which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

See you in November.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September, 1978

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

Thank you for your letter. How am I? O.K. I guess. I have food, clothes, somewhere to sleep, but it's not enough, something is missing. The world seems crazy, everywhere people abusing each other! Eating bad food. I don't seem to have any energy either and feel very detached and apart from life.

So I work with "Put it all down." I can see that my judgements are just in my head and have no reality. One thing puzzles me—you say keep "don't-know mind" or "before-thinking mind" yet also you say "thinking is O.K."

Dropping Ashes on the Buddha Kong-an:
Answer 21st August—

Sometimes the sun shines
Sometimes the moon
Dirty sheets in the washing machine
The blind old dog is dying.

Answer 5th September—

I have killed the man
Burnt down the Zendo
Put the Buddha in the dustbin (trash can)
And if I see a blind old dog or a bright-eyed lion I will kill them also.

When I read "Try, try, try, any place for 10,000 years, nonstop" in your past letter, tears began to come. Also in your book "be like a dead man", tears also.

If I counted all the grains of sand on the beaches of the world and then counted them again or made a life-sized model of the universe out of wood and it took a million years, what would I be; what am I?

Thank you for "Pai Chang's Fox Story." I don't know.

Hey man, this Enlightenment is expensive. I keep writing on letter forms and not sending them. This one may make it.

How are you, man?

Peace and health,

Paul

September 17, 1978

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You said, “How am I?” Then you answered, “O.K. I guess. I have food, clothes, somewhere to sleep, etc..... but I am not good, O.K.?” So I hit you thirty times! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know, O.K.?

Also you said that something is missing, people are abusing everything, everywhere, and that you don’t have energy and feel very detached from life. So I say to you, your mind is like this, so you have this. An eminent teacher said, “One by one each thing is complete, each thing has it. It is apparent in all things.” If your mind is complete, then everything is complete. So if you say you have it, then you have it. If you say you do not have it, then you do not have it. If your mind is not complete, then everything is not complete. You must understand this.

You said you work with “put it all down” and that you are puzzled by “thinking is O.K.”—are they the same or different? If you say different, I hit you thirty times. Also if you say the same, I hit you thirty times. What can you do? Tell me! Tell me!

Next, about the cigarette man kong-an: not good, not bad, but if you try this kong-an, then first you must understand cigarette man’s mind. Your answer does not understand his mind. He has already understood and attained emptiness, so any word or speech by you, he will just hit you!!! How can you fix his mind? How can you help him?

You said when you read, “Try, try, try for 10,000 years nonstop” and “Be like a dead man,” that tears came to your eyes. Maybe sad tears, maybe happy tears, but don’t check your mind; *don’t check your feelings*; don’t check anything; only go straight—try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, O.K.?

You also said what would you be if you counted all the grains of sand and recounted them and made a universe out of wood and it took a million years. Do you know the Heart Sutra? It says form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Is it the universe or you? That is the first course. Then you must understand no form, no emptiness. If you attained no form, no emptiness, then you can find form is form, emptiness is emptiness. That name is moment to moment, keep correct situation. Which means, if you are doing something, DO IT. That is try-mind. Don’t hold anything; don’t make anything; don’t attach to anything; only go straight. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

Next you say “don’t know” about Pai Chang’s Fox Story. That is a wonderful answer.

You said, “Hey man, this Enlightenment is expensive...” and also, “How are you man?” That is wonderful speech. But already you have lost your tongue. You must understand that!! My Zen stick hits you thirty times.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment,
and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind...

Wednesday night I slept in your room. So now I decided—simple like much better. I want to donate most of my books to Zen Center library. My room is nice, but maybe smaller room is better, then more students can use the room I now have. I only need a few clothes for work later on. Only have a few needed things much better so—later if you think best small space for me is O.K.

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

(personal reply)

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4 x 5 = 20

From the August, 1978
Newsletter

On the first evening of the stay in Poland during Soen Sa Nim's trip to Europe this spring, about twenty Zen students gathered in an apartment in Warsaw to hear a Dharma Talk and ask questions of Soen Sa Nim. Dharma Teacher Jacob Perl, returning to his native country for the first time since he was fourteen years old, gave the introductory talk. Then he asked if there were any questions. What follows is the beginning of the question and answer exchange:

Soen Sa Nim: O.K., very good. Any questions are O.K., not only about Buddhism. (Long pause.) You have no questions, so this means you already understand: So I have a question. Long ago in Korea there was a famous Zen Temple on a mountain-top. At the bottom of the mountain there was a Sutra Temple. In the middle there were some wonderful hot springs. The manager of the hot springs was a woman who was a Zen student. Zen monks and Sutra monks sometimes came to the hot springs. One day a Sutra Master went to the hot springs to bathe. When he was finished bathing, this woman said to him, "Oh Master, now you have cleaned your body, but how do you clean your mind?" If you were this Sutra Master, how would you answer her? What kind of answer is good?

Student: What is this for?

Soen Sa Nim: I hit you, not enough! What kind of answer is good? O.K. Somebody ask me, then I will tell you. "How do you clean your mind?"

Student: Master, how do you clean your mind?

Soen Sa Nim: Don't smudge mind. (Pause.) Original mind is not tainted, not pure. So—"how do you clean your mind?" is already a mistake. Don't smudge your mind. Very simple. If you have mind, then cleaning mind is possible, smudging mind is possible. But if you have no mind, cleaning and smudging are not possible. So you must take away your mind. No mind is clear like space. Clear like space is clear like a mirror. Red comes; red. White comes; white.

Zen is not difficult, also not special. If you want special, you have special. But this special cannot help you. When you are eating, just eat; when you are walking, just walk; when you drive, just drive. That is Zen. There are many kinds of Zen—eating Zen, television Zen, driving Zen, playing tennis Zen. Sitting Zen is one part. Most important is, moment to moment, how do you keep clear mind? So Nam Cheon Zen Master was asked, "What is

Zen?” “Everyday mind is Zen mind.” So don’t make special, don’t hold something, don’t be attached to something, don’t make something; then you are already complete.

Somebody asked Ma Jo Zen Master, “What is Buddha?” He answered, “Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind.” But the next day somebody asked the same question and he said, “No mind, no Buddha.” How are these answers different? “Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind.” “No mind, no Buddha.” If you have your mind, you must practice. If you have no mind, already you are Buddha. Very simple.

So before, Dok Sahn Zen Master was asked, “What is Buddha?” “Three pounds of flax.” His mind was empty mind. Just at that time he was weighing flax. So, what is Buddha? Three pounds of flax. Very simple. O.K., do you have any questions? (Long pause.)

O.K. I will teach you our formal style for questions.
(Hits the floor with his stick.) Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.
(Hits again.) No form, no emptiness.
(Hits again.) Form is form, emptiness is emptiness.
Three statements: which one is correct?

Another student: YAAAAH! (pounding the floor.)

Soen Sa Nim: You understand one, don’t understand two. (Laughter.) What do you see now? What do you hear now? So only become one. Buddha and you become one mind. But Buddha is Buddha, you are you. The name for this is, “form is form, emptiness is emptiness.” You only hit—this means, “no form, no emptiness.” So more practicing is necessary—one more step, O.K.?

O.K. We have a teaching style we use to understand the correct answer. This is a bell. If you say this is a bell, you have an attachment to name and form. If you say this is not a bell, you have an attachment to emptiness. Is this a bell or not?

(As Soen Sa Nim finishes asking the question, two students make head-first dives for the bell, accompanied by much laughter and clapping.)

Soen Sa Nim: Somebody already understands. O.K. Very good.

In our teaching style, what kind of answers are there? “Is this a bell or not?” First course, only silence. This is without-like-this. Next, your style—hit! This is become-one-like-this. Then next, “The bell is gold, the wall is white”: only-like-this. Next, ring the bell (Soen Sa Nim rings the bell): just-like-this. Four kinds of answers.

So before I told you: form is emptiness, emptiness is form; no form, no emptiness; form is form, emptiness is emptiness. Which one is correct? (No answer.) Yah, somebody ask me, then I will tell you. (Long pause.) No? Then I have an answer for you, O.K.? If you say correct, some word is correct, if you find correct, I will hit you. If you cannot find correct, I will also hit you. Why?

KATZ!!!

The second student gets up quickly, scrambles to the front, picks up Soen Sa Nim's water cup, and smashes it to the floor.

Soen Sa Nim: Not good, not bad. You only understand one. Hit, breaking the cup, Katz, are all the same realm. Yah, when you are a great Zen Master, then sometimes Katz!, hit are not only become-one-like-this; any use is possible—freedom. But also, $3 \times 3 = 9$. Before, when we talked about the bell, only *ring* is correct. Just like this. What is the function, O.K.?

(Soen Sa Nim picks up Jacob's water cup.) This is a cup. If you say "cup", you have an attachment to name and form; if you say "not a cup", you have an attachment to emptiness. Is this a cup or not? Will you break this?

The same student: No, I can drink.

Soen Sa Nim: Correct! Why did you break the cup? This is not correct. (He tosses a cup fragment on the floor.)

Same student: "I"?

Soen Sa Nim: You must make "I" disappear.

Jacob: He said "The 'I' which broke the cup?"

Soen Sa Nim: Who is breaking the cup? You broke. So you only understand one, you don't understand two.

Student: I don't understand anything.

Soen Sa Nim: You don't understand anything means you already understand "don't understand anything," so already understand something. Don't understand anything is already one. Where does "don't understand" come from?

O.K. Next, this cup and this bell, are they the same or different? Then do you break them?

The student again gets up quickly...

Soen Sa Nim: Strong action is not necessary, O.K.? Very strong student! You only (hits the floor with his stick) understand this style, but this cup and this bell, are they the same or different? What can you say? Only this style (hits the floor again) is not enough. You ask me, are they the same or different? You ask me!

Student: Are they the same or different?

(Soen Sa Nim rings the bell and drinks from the cup. There is laughter.)

Soen Sa Nim: Now you understand. Very simple.

Zen is understanding your correct situation. Correct situation means your correct relationship. You and this bell, what is the correct relationship? You and this cup, what is the

correct relationship? You and your parents, girlfriend, husband, wife, your job, your country, the whole universe—what is your correct relationship?

This means, you and something always become one. Don't make subject-object: no inside, no outside. Subject and object become one action. We say that is the nature of function. That is your correct relationship. So we say, when you are doing something, you must *do* it. This is Great Love, Great Compassion, the Great Bodhisattva Way. When you are hungry, eat. When someone is hungry, give them food.

From the August, 1978 Newsletter

Jacob Perl helped with teaching and acted as translator during most of Soen Sa Nim's visit in Poland. He also worked to coordinate activities and translate teaching material. Here are some of his impressions of his visit.

When I went to Poland to be there for Soen Sa Nim's visit, it was the first time I had been back since I left the country fourteen years ago. The entire 27-day stay was memorable—full of small adventures, happy reunions, heavy discussions, and exciting visits. But all the days that followed only reiterated the insights and impressions of the first five days, which were spent with Soen Sa Nim and Company, and our Polish students.

For me, the most overwhelming impression of our stay with the Polish Zen Community was that of warmth and hospitality. This was true not only of the Zen students welcoming their American Dharma friends, but of everyone I visited; however, there was a very special quality of openness and enthusiasm among the Polish Zen students not found in such abundance elsewhere in Poland.

It was clear that our friends had been very busy with preparations for a long time before our visit. They had planned our whole itinerary, meals (excellent food), visits to other Zen and Tibetan Buddhist groups, and sightseeing, all in addition to time for formal practice, which included a one-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

Zen in Poland is very young, and received its first great impetus with Philip Kapleau Roshi's visit there two years ago. Following that visit, the Katowice Zen Center was born, and soon there were affiliate groups in other cities and towns. Soen Sa Nim is the second Zen Master to visit Poland. Outside of these two visits, Buddhism has received its guidance mostly from books and through correspondence, and maintained a life and direction from the dedicated perseverance of the students there. The lack of a resident Teacher makes the breadth and the intensity of the practice all the more remarkable.

Aside from the lack of a resident Teacher, there are other difficulties to be overcome. A housing shortage makes a change of apartments, or finding one suitable for Zen Center activities quite difficult. Wherever we went, however, people managed to get together for group sittings in private apartments. Cars are not so numerous or available, and telephones are not so easy to have, so travel and communication require much much more initiative and energy there than they do here.

There's a young Krakow family with a small three-room apartment, and they set aside one of these rooms as a full-time Dharma Room. Not too unusual, except that they also have four children and an odd number of dogs and cats! Soen Sa Nim's famous phrase, "a bad situation is a good situation," comes alive again. It seems to me that although we had come

to teach, somehow things got turned around and we ended up in the student's corner. Certainly the enthusiasm and the energy we encountered in Poland were contagious.

These impressions came forth again and again throughout the duration of my visit. The openness, the sincerity, the intelligence, and the courage to inquire were not limited to the Zen community. I found myself talking about Zen to many different people, most of whom were familiar with Buddhism only superficially, if at all. Not only did they challenge my skill as a Dharma Teacher to the utmost, asking very pointed questions, but at the end, they were willing to lay their value systems down to take a new look at our teaching.

The most dramatic of these encounters for me was with my best friend, with whom I'd been brought up. After a seven-hour discussion at which he consistently tried to point out the absurdity of Zen, I found out the following morning that he had stayed up all night mulling things over. As a result of this "mulling", he asked for sitting instructions because "there may be something to this after all, and it doesn't hurt to cultivate one's mind anyway."

I think that the most meaningful way to sum up the Polish experience is to say that we have met with a great infant. Indeed, historically, it is an infant, but clearly in terms of its strength and maturity, Polish Zen is anything but a baby.

Today, Seventh
Tomorrow, Eighth

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From the September, 1978
Newsletter

Empty Gate, the Berkeley K.B.C. Zen Center,
contributed this kong-an and the section about
their Zen Center, which follows.

The following is taken from a question-and-answer
period with Soen Sa Nim at the Berkeley K.B.C. Zen
Center on December 17, 1978.

Q. I was wondering—where did the water at the end of a
four-bowl meal, * you know, the clear water that’s poured
down the sink, where did it used to be poured before the
hungry ghosts were in the drain? (Laughter, followed by many
attempts to explain the question to Soen Sa Nim.)

S.S. In America there are only sinks, yah? In China there were no sinks, so there was a special
place in front of the Dharma Room.

Q. That’s where they lived?

S.S. Where is the hungry ghost? In your stomach.

Q. Where do the ghosts come from?

S.S. You make them. They come from the six levels of beings: gods, ashuras, humans,
animals, hungry ghosts, then demons. Where do all these six levels come from? You already
have them in your mind. A good view, good music—this is heaven. Beings with great energy,
very strong, always fighting—these are ashuras. Much desire, desire, desire—this is animal.
Hungry ghosts are, “I want something very, very much.” Stealing, killing—this is hell.
Tibetan Buddhism has a picture in which one mind has many demons, many heavens, all six
levels. The outside form is different, but you have them all inside.

Before, in Korea, a woman went to visit the great temple Kong Bong Sa with her child. This
child was about five years old and could only talk a little, but he was very clever. The mother
went to the Buddha Hall with a monk and prayed to Buddha. The child thought, “Praying
doesn’t matter. I don’t like praying,” so he went looking around. Usually the Buddha Hall is
in the middle; on the left side is a Zen Center, and on the right side is a Sutra Center. The
child went to the Sutra Center, but it was very noisy—many people reading sutras. He didn’t
understand so he went to the Zen Center and looked through a little open door. Everyone
was facing the wall, bowing to the wall (Soen Sa Nim imitates someone falling asleep while
sitting). That was O.K., but sometimes somebody would disappear and become a snake;
someone would disappear and become a big dog; somebody would become a mountain god,

or somebody would become a hungry ghost you know, they would have a very big stomach and a very small neck. This was very interesting to the child. “Oh! A snake! The snake disappeared! Now a dog! The dog disappeared!” Changing, changing.

About an hour passed, and the mother finished praying. She wondered, “Where is my child?” and went all around looking for him. Then she went to the Zen Center and saw the child at the door.

“Oh! A snake! That time a snake! Oh, a dog!”

The mother thought this was very strange and asked, “What are you doing?”

“I’m watching the dog.”

“Where is the dog?”

“Over there, over there!”

But the mother could not see the dog, only a great monk (Soen Sa Nim again imitates a monk sitting, then nodding off). At this time (when nodding off) the monk became a dog or a snake, and the child would say, “Dog!” or “Snake!”

The mother said, “No good! This is a Zen Center, and these are all great monks. This style is no good.”

“No, no, no! See, a snake! A snake!”

“Come here!”

“No, I like this!”

Then the mother asked the Zen Master, “My child said he saw dogs and snakes appearing inside the Zen Center.”

The Zen Master said, “Yah, correct. All people have these consciousnesses—god, ashura, human, animal, hungry ghost, demon. They all have these minds. If you are attached to something, then you become a dog or a snake; you get heaven or hell. Your child is very clear, so he can see other people’s consciousnesses. Normal people cannot see them. Why? Their minds are dusty, not clear, so they cannot see the consciousness body. Your child can see these monks’ consciousness bodies, their attachments. These monks are attached to something. They have their minds. So they must clean their minds. So they sit Zen. Therefore, Bodhidharma said, ‘The Buddha taught all the Dharma in order to save all minds. When you do not keep all these minds, what use is there for the Dharma?’”

“Child’s mind is Buddha’s mind. Just seeing, just doing is truth. Then using this mind means when you are hungry, eat. When someone is hungry, give them food.”

*A four-bowl meal refers to the formal temple style of eating that is used at our Zen Centers and in Monasteries in the Orient. This procedure, centuries old, includes serving the food, eating, and cleaning the bowls with tea and then water. The water referred to above is used

for the final rinsing of the bowls. All food scraps are eaten, and only clear water is collected in a common bowl and poured down the drain. In addition to not wasting food, this tradition is said to save the hungry ghosts in the drain from suffering. These beings have throats like the eye of a needle and insatiable appetites, so clear water saves them from the torture of having food caught in their throats, which symbolizes saving them from the perpetuation of their endless craving.

From the September, 1978 Newsletter
Contributed by Empty Gate, Berkeley K.B.C. Zen Center

A number of people from the BKBCZC went down to attend the Opening Ceremony of Tahl Mah Sah on April 8th this year. When they arrived, they noticed three very large paper lanterns that Soen Sa Nim said he had made. Knowing what a busy schedule Soen Sa Nim had, one person asked him when he had found the time to do the work. Soen Sa Nim replied, "Tomorrow." There were some dubious looks among the bystanders, and one person began to explain that what was meant was not when he would finish them, but... At this point, Soen Sa Nim interrupted and said, "You don't like this answer? O.K. February 29th."

From the September, 1978 Newsletter
Contributed by Empty Gate, Berkeley K.B.C. Zen Center

In Berkeley, one can find any kind of group one wants, and that gives Berkeley its exciting and sometimes frantic pace. Every kind of meditation you've ever heard about, and some you haven't, is taught in Berkeley. From Sufi to Yoga to immersion tanks, the whole spectrum is covered. There are many Buddhist groups in the area. There are three Zen groups (one affiliated with Kennet Roshi, another with Baker Roshi, and the Empty Gate), two Tibetan groups (Dharmadhatu, under Chogyam Trungpa, and the Nyingma Institute, under Tarthang Tulku), several Vipassana groups, and some more. As the newest Buddhist group in the area, we feel we have settled on fertile ground.

The Empty Gate Zen Center really started at the Esalen Institute, where Dharma Teachers Ezra and Diana Clark first met Soen Sa Nim several years ago. Soon after that, the Clarks began to hold Yong Maeng Jong Jins at their home and Kidos in Northern California. It gradually became apparent that there was enough interest in the Bay Area in Soen Sa Nim's teaching for there to be a Zen Center in Berkeley. So last September, the Clarks turned their home into a Zen Center, so that people could live and practice together.

After about six months it was clear that if the Zen Center were to grow, it would need a new location. We looked at several locations but when we saw our present house, we knew *this was it!* In four days it was bid on and accepted, and the Clark's old home was sold. Then the work began.

Hammering, sanding, scraping, hauling, endless painting and finishing—these are the sounds and activities that have filled the Berkeley Empty Gate Zen Center for a month now. The building is a large nine-bedroom house, seventy years old, basically sound, but suffering from much abuse and neglect. It has been through communes, collectives, and experimental living groups in rapid succession.

One of the most gratifying things about moving was the great number of people who dropped by to help us paint, haul, do carpentry, sew, and paint and paint and paint, etc. etc., that it would not be possible to list them all here. To all of you, many thanks.

June 10, 1978

Dear Everyone,

Hello and how are you? Plans are coming together for the trip to Korea and Japan. Soen Sa Nim has worked out the itinerary and I have just finished negotiating with the travel agent in Los Angeles. It is time now to find out exactly who can come so this letter is being sent to all the Zen Centers so that everyone has a chance to know about the trip. About twenty people is maximum since we will be staying in temples, so there are only a few spaces left! Here is the itinerary:

September	17:	Los Angeles to Seoul (Korean Airlines, leaves 11:55 PM, arrives September 19, 8:00 AM)
"	20:	Ko Bong Memorial Ceremony at Hwa Gae Sa Temple
"	21:	Yong Maeng Jong Jin (3 days) at Su Dok Sa Temple
"	25:	Return to Seoul
"	26:	Poep Ju Sa Temple, Hae In Sa Temple
"	27:	Bul Gak Sa Temple
"	28:	Tong Do Sa Temple, Bo Mun Sa Temple
"	28:	Pusan to Shimonoseiki, Japan (ferry boat leaves 5:00 PM, arrives September 29, 8:30 AM)
"	30:	Osaka
October	1:	Kyoto
"	3:	Tokyo
"	6:	Seoul (Cathay Pacific Airlines, leaves 3:55 PM, arrives 6:05 PM)
"	9:	Kwan Se Um Bosal Retreat (Kido) (3 days) at Shin Hun Sa Temple
"	13:	Seoul—free time
"	19:	Return to Los Angeles (Korean Airlines, leaves 9:30 PM, arrives 9:10 PM)

The total cost will be \$1,300.00, which will include airfares, trains, ferry boat, buses, food, lodging, etc. You will only need to bring money for personal expenses such as gifts. The money will need to be sent to me at the Berkeley KBC Zen Center by August 1st. This amount will also include Soen Sa Nim's expenses. Please make checks out to Berkeley KBC Zen Center and I will open a special account. Please let me know as soon as possible if you want to come.

Kwan Se Um Bosal,

Diana

P.S. Members of the party may be reached during the trip at:
Hwa Gae Sah Temple. 487 Su Yu Dong, Do Bong Gu, Seoul, Korea

October, 1978

After their trip to Korea and Japan, a student asked Soen Sa Nim, “When you teach Buddhism to us in America it’s a little different style from Korean style. We went to Korea to learn traditional Korean Buddhism, and then we see that you are also teaching Koreans this American style. What is the difference?”

Soen Sa Nim: Korean teaching is a very old style. For the Korean structure of consciousness it is O.K. But Americans and other Westerners have a different structure of consciousness. In Korea and the Orient, people are always pushed by their parents, their society, their country, into doing things a certain way. They may have likes and dislikes inside, but these do not appear outside, the people only try correct action. This is the Korean tradition, not Buddhism. But in America and other Western countries, if you push people, they don’t like it. “I don’t like that; I am free.”— this style structure of consciousness. So when Koreans chant, if they don’t chant the same notes together, it is no problem for them. They still have a direction. But for Americans, together action is very important. First comes together action. If the note is high, everyone should chant high; if the note is low, everyone should chant low. The rhythm should be together. This is all teaching together action. So bowing together, correctly sitting together, sound and rhythm together—this is very important.

Q: Why is this more important for Americans than for Koreans?

Soen Sa Nim: Americans have “my idea”. “My action is correct.” This style thinking appears very strongly sometimes. “My idea is correct. I want freedom.” So more together action is necessary. So this is different karma. I saw this American karma and saw that only together action is necessary. The American structure of consciousness wants freedom, doesn’t listen to other people’s ideas. This means the organization of each person’s consciousness is more developed. Americans do not depend on their country, do not depend on their parents, do not depend on anything. Younger Americans don’t depend on God. So hippie style—everyone doing their own thing—appears. This means not depending on anyone. So, although this is a my-way direction, the organization of consciousness is working. “I am making my own way. I don’t depend on my parents, on tradition on anything. I only like this, then I do it.” No thinking, only action. But in Korea, I may like something but if my parents or society say, “No good,” then my organization of consciousness is always depending on something outside it.

Q: But we have organization in our Zen Centers. I cannot always do what I like.

Soen Sa Nim: This means we use this organization of consciousness and only change its direction. Before, the direction was only “my way”. But if you keep your way, if you are attached to your way, you cannot find the correct way. It’s like a juice machine: if you put in good food, you get good juice; if you put in bad food, you get bad juice. The machine is our organization. So before it was always “my idea” that was being put into the machine. So

don't put your things, don't put your idea into the machine. Only put together action into it. Together action means not only Buddhism but in any kind of group you must make your opinion, your condition, your situation disappear. Then this group is smooth. It's like an army: they don't keep "I, my, me"; they only do together action. The army direction is only helping my country, only fighting. We say this is not the correct direction, but because my idea, my condition, my situation have disappeared, this army is very strong. This means completely becoming one and so becoming strong. But our Zen group means understanding our True Self, understanding truth, helping other people. This is our direction. This is world-peace direction, Great-Love direction, Great-Compassion direction, Great-Bodhisattva-Way direction. But army's direction is not love, compassion, only fighting. So although they keep their idea, their action means making their situation, their condition, their opinion disappear, so they become strong. If you have a correct direction and make your situation, your condition, your opinion disappear, this is even stronger. Then you soon get something.

But Orientals have a problem in that they follow the situation outside, but inside they cannot follow the situation, they are sometimes confused, sometimes checking themselves or others. For example, when we chant Kwan Se Um Bosal and do the special energy part at night, American students soon get special energy and begin jumping, but Orientals are always checking something inside so they can't jump. For an Oriental to jump he must have a very simple mind. This mind is the same as an American student's mind. If he is more high-class, if he has had a high-class education and understands a lot, he cannot jump. This means that although outside he has no problem, inside he has a problem. But Americans, once they get correct direction, do not check. To this extent their mind is very simple. This means not depending on anything. Before only my way was strong. So we change this to only a together way, only change the direction but keep the organization of consciousness. So teaching Zen is very easy, practicing Zen is very easy.

Q: So Koreans now like American Buddhism?

Soen Sa Nim: Yes, they very much like American chanting. They see this organization working. It is very wonderful. American chanting is better than Korean chanting. So we are learning a lot from Korean Buddhism, and also we are teaching them.

Q: In Korea I sometimes felt that if Korean Buddhism is correct, maybe I must become like a Korean.

Soen Sa Nim: I already explained: my teaching means keeping "my way" is not correct. Always follow the situation. When we went to Korea we were a group of 20 American students. This is very difficult to control, so together action was necessary; we only tried American style. But when Mu Bul Su Nim, Mu Ryeom Su Nim, Ken and Jan went to Korea before, I told them to only follow the Korean Buddhist situation, not to follow American style. This is my only teaching. So in Korea, you must follow the Korean style; when you come back to America you must follow the American style. Don't think, "Ah, Korea is wonderful; now I only like Korean style."

September, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health. Thank you for your wonderful letter—it was like a breath of fresh air blowing many old cobwebs away. All day friends were asking, “Why are you smiling so much?” I had to laugh: “I have 10,000 problems” I told them. (That is four “I”s already!) Here is a sort of poem:

A friend brings some tea
“Are you going to India, Dave?”
She sadly leaves without an answer.
My warm bed
At day’s end
Is a dream.
A cup of tea
A wooden flute
Too many choices
One mind to make them
No confirmation.....

I moaned to you in my last letter and you hit me thirty times. Now “I” offer “my” head once more. How do you make a decision with a “don’t-know mind” that involves the happiness of another? “Don’t-know mind” flies out the window and once again “I” am complaining. Outside the sun is shining on the old pear tree; it whispers to me of India, a voice from childhood. Yet I can still taste salty tears of one who does not wish me to go. How can I find “my” don’t-know mind when loyalties are torn?

Yours in love and friendship,

Dave

October 28, 1978

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and “another”?

You like my letter. That is wonderful. In your letter you said, “All day friends were asking, ‘Why are you smiling so much?’” You laugh! That is wonderful Dharma combat! But your next line is very, very bad! “I have 10,000 problems!”

Long ago, Buddha picked up a flower on Yong Sahn Mountain in India. Nobody understood in that assembly of 1,200 people. Only Mahakashapa smiled so Buddha said, “My True Dharma I transmit to you.” I ask you, are your smile and Mahakashapa’s smile the same or different? If you say the same, I hit you thirty times; if you say different, again I hit you thirty times. Tell me! Tell me!

If you can understand that, your 10,000 Dharmas disappear! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know, then your 10,000 problems will all disappear. Don’t-know mind is very powerful. Always, everywhere, keep it, O.K.?

Your poem is wonderful. Here is a poem for you:

Someone asked JoJu
What is Buddha?
JoJu answered,
Go drink tea!
Your tea change to JoJu’s tea
Go to India not necessary!
Then she very happy
All universe very happy.

Wake up!
Your mind not clear.

Hot tea not necessary
One cup of cold water
You must drink!

I already hit you thirty times! This is very expensive! You want more? How much will you pay me? Put it all down, your opinions. Put it all down, your situation. Put it all down, your condition. Why do you want to go to India? What do you want? Watch your step!

First course—you must understand your True Self. Then going anywhere is no problem. But if you don’t understand your True Self, India, Buddha’s place, God’s place, everywhere—all are problems; So I ask you, what are you? If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know; try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, everywhere. O.K.?

I hope you always go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

October, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your letter. Also thank you for explaining about “How are you,” and “If your mind is complete then everything is complete.” My answer to “How are you?” now is Don’t Know, Don’t Know.

You ask me to “put it all down” and “thinking is O.K.”—are they the same or different? Answer: today is Wednesday; the sun is shining.

Cigarette-man kong-an: The way for me to help him is to achieve only “like this” or “just like this.” Then I will know. Answer: Don’t Know, Don’t Know.

I don’t know the Heart Sutra. *Autumn comes leaves fall.*

I asked, “How are you” and you say, “That is wonderful speech. But already you have lost your tongue.” I say,

There is no arrow
There is no downtown
Walk on Walk on.
Walk on Walk on.
For 10,000 years nonstop

May all beings be well and happy and free from fear.

Paul

October 28, 1978

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your beautiful letter. How are you again? If you say, “don’t know” I will hit you thirty times. Zen is everyday mind. I say, “How are you?” What do you say? Don’t make special. Don’t attach to something. When you are hungry, what? When you are tired, what? When I say, “how are you?”—then what?

That is wonderful. You say that I asked you, “Put it all down” and “thinking is O.K.”—are they the same or different? And your answer is, “Today is Wednesday; the sun is shining.”

To the Cigarette-man kong-an you answer, “don’t know, don’t know.” Very wonderful, very, very wonderful! But you must teach him “like this” and “just like this”. This is very important.

You say, “I don’t know the Heart Sutra” and you say, “Autumn comes leaves fall.” Not bad! Then I ask you: Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Next, no form, no emptiness. Next, form is form, emptiness is emptiness. Which one do you like? Tell me! Tell me!

Next you say, “Walk on Walk on. For 10,000 years, nonstop.” What is your destination? Tell me! Tell me! Only “Walk on” has no direction. If you have no direction, you are blind dog. I think you do not like being a blind dog, so you must find your correct destination.

If you don’t understand, only keep don’t know walk on for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

October, 1978

Dear Uncle Seung Sahn,

How is this?

With utmost sincerity, humility,
and gratitude,

Chris

October 29, 1978

Dear Nephew Chris,

You ask me, "How is this?" I hit you thirty times! What do you say?

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 13, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Hello. My name is Peter, the one you taught to hit the floor when asked, "What is my name?" at the Berkeley YMJJ. Ha! (Katz?!!)

You did not answer my question; I ask you again:

Roses are red, violets are blue. So why are you celibate?

I had never done Zen sitting before, and I found offering no resistance to my thoughts and feelings to be worthless, as a special exercise. That is often my normal waking state. When I wielded the axe with no blade to cut off my thoughts and feelings I had short spurts of still mind. What do you say?

Please have a safe and fulfilling trip to the Orient.

Your fellow human being,

Peter

P.S. If you like to gossip, Loie is an old friend.

October 29, 1978

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I know you! You are a wonderful man. Also a beautiful letter.

You say you are the one I taught to hit the floor when I asked, "What is your name?" If you only hit the floor you are a monkey and only follow my words like a robot. Zen is not dependent on words. Don't be dependent on my words or my actions. So I ask you, what is your name? Tell me! Tell me! If you cannot, you are a corpse.

Zen is not special. Everyday mind is Zen mind. You don't understand everyday mind so your karma takes your mind everywhere. So your karma only controls you. So always your everyday clear mind you cannot find. Do you have your mind? If you cannot find your clear mind, go to the bathroom—cold water for ten minutes is necessary. Then you will understand!

What do you want? I will help you! Money, sex, fame? Good car? Good home? It is possible for you to get everything—but what is most important? Tomorrow you don't understand... nobody guarantees your life. What do you want? I will help you. Tell me! Tell me!

If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.? Put it all down—your feelings, your opinions, your condition, O.K.?

Thank you very much for wishing me a good trip. Twenty people had a good trip, understood Korean and Japanese Buddhism.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 14, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. It came at just the right time. How are you?

I have been working very, very hard, doing hard training. I am a janitor here—not much work, maybe an hour a day. I have all day to meditate. We are having a work strike now and it has lasted six weeks already. I meditate constantly, determined to reach a final understanding. This is it. There is a blind Buddha in my belly that must wake up right now and see what this is.

When this body first came to prison, I had not given it much physical exercise. Then I worked it hard—very hard—and got it into good condition. I practiced karate, judo, wrestling, ran track, lifted weights, and played hockey. Now, for the past two years, there have been many psychosomatic symptoms. Meditation helps. I only came into this world to save all people, and I must understand or it is time for this body to leave. How can I save all people if I can't even save myself?

I need your help with my meditation. I am having problems. I see, I hear, I feel, and thoughts come. Sometimes there are scenes from the past, and I watch the play of my Karma-I. Different koans flash into my mind, but all the words are not even there. I am completely crazy right now, but I have trouble achieving any degree of one-pointedness. What can I do? What do you suggest? I am here right now!

In your letter, you asked me two questions. I will try to answer them. First question: "So I ask you, what are you? Tell me! Tell me!" Here is my answer. But it is hard to see right away! If you look closely enough, you will surely find it...

Second question: "Soeng Am Calls Master. Which one is the correct Master? Tell me! Tell me!" Poor Zen Master. Two minds. Big trouble! Here you are...

Your poem was wonderful. Here is my last poem for you before the great awakening:

Meditation is not meditation.
Meditation is meditation!
?
Fuck poems.

Please let me know when you will be in Cambridge again. I have to apply for furloughs in advance, and I would enjoy seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Stephen

October 29, 1978

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? We have just returned from our trip to Korea. I read your letter—I think you want something. If you want something, your mind is panting. Put it all down, panting! Then your mind will be breathing smoothly.

You say you have been working hard, doing hard training, and that you are getting your body into good physical condition. That is wonderful. You say that meditation helps your “psychosomatic symptoms”—that is also wonderful.

You say you watch the play of your Karma-I. If you understand your Karma-I, you can disappear your karma very easily. And you said, “I want to save all people from suffering.” That also is wonderful mind. If you want to save all people, first you must save your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind. If you save them, already you save all people from suffering. If you want to save these things, then you must understand the Heart Sutra. The Heart Sutra says, form is emptiness, emptiness is form, therefore no eyes, no ears, no nose, no mouth, etc., also no color, no sound, no smell, etc., until no object of mind. If you keep this mind, your mind is clear like space. Clear like space means clear like a mirror—red comes, red; somebody is happy, I am happy; somebody is sad, I am sad. So *first* keep a completely *empty* mind. That is your substance. *Then reflected* mind is possible, which means correct *function*. There is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Inside, outside become one—not separate—which means when you are doing something, you must do it. *There is no I, my, me.*

If you want something, again appears I, my, me. So I say, when you are doing something, do it. And you must keep don't-know mind. Don't-know mind already cuts off all thinking, which is therefore before thinking. Before-thinking mind is the same as clear-mirror mind. My actions are for all people. We say that is Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

Your answer to “What are you?” is not good, not bad. But to open your mouth is already a mistake! So I hit you thirty times! So again I ask you, what are you? If you don't know, only straight—don't know, O.K.?

Next, Soeng Am calls himself and answers himself: which one is the correct Master? You don't understand Soeng Am's Master. You don't understand your Master. Don't make “poor Master” and don't make “two minds”. If you make something, you have a problem. Also, don't make “here” and don't make “you”. Correct Master means no speech, no word—to open your mouth is already a mistake! What can you do? If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know. If you open your mouth again, you lose your tongue!

I hope you always go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

September 18, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your letter dated September 12, 1978.

As I have said before, I understand on an intellectual level, exactly what you are saying. But I can't seem to grasp it on an intuitive level.

I get the impression in your last letter that I am not supposed to "feel" anything. Is "feeling" related to "thinking"? If I put all thinking down, will I then "feel" nothing? In 1968, when I had what I refer to as a Satori experience which lasted three days, I felt better than I ever felt before in my entire life. But you say that it was not "Satori" because Satori is "unchanging, unmoving and not-thought." Can you see why I am somewhat confused?

You mention the Heart Sutra. I have read the Heart Sutra numerous times. I have read your book, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. I have read many of D.T. Suzuki's books many times over. I understand everything intellectually. If necessary, I could probably give a very good lecture on the history and content of Zen Buddhism.

My problem is: what am I supposed to "feel" when I *put it all down*? How can a person not have any *feeling*? I always thought that Satori was like a state of constant orgasm. Please explain all this to me. Where am I making a mistake in my pursuit of Zen consciousness?

Most sincerely yours in the Dharma,

Robert

October 29, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? We have just returned from a month in Korea and Japan.

Before you said, I already had Satori. And you said you read many books. Then you said that your problem is, you don't know what you are supposed to feel when you put it all down.

Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." I ask you, if I am not thinking, then what? Somebody answers, "nothing!" Then I say, don't make "nothing". You make something and you are holding something, also you want something—so you have a problem! What do you

want? Is this want for you or for other people? If it is only for yourself, always you will have a problem. If it is for other people, you are already a great Bodhisattva.

Feeling coming, going; thinking coming, going—it doesn't matter. For *whom?* *That* is very important! So you understand too much. This understanding makes complications in your head. This understanding cannot help you. Don't read books, even *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. What are you? You don't know. If you don't know, only go straight—don't know. This don't know is very strong so any situation, any condition, no problem. If it is not strong, then any situation, any condition—big problem.

If you keep don't-know mind 100%, always, everywhere, then feeling coming or going, thinking coming or going, all help your True Self. Also, reading books is no problem. That is a most important point.

So again I ask you, what are you? Tell me! Tell me!

If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

I hope you always go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

October, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for the “don’t make anything”! I am about to leave for another retreat—about 2-1/2 months—and will make a strong attempt not to make anything—even not to make *something* out of “don’t make...” Your gift is mounted and it will be hanging and keeping me company during the retreat. It always amazes me how you can be so prompt and personal with your students even though you are so busy. Thank you again.

I saw Stephen (“Mu Gak”) for a few days. He seems well, and will marry a very nice Chinese girl in February.

I am sorry that I will be unable to be with you when you give a talk at Interface. I arranged for the talk and wanted to work with you but it is necessary for me to go on retreat. Jonnie will help out instead. Many people will probably come and hopefully some new “customers” for Cambridge Zen Center.

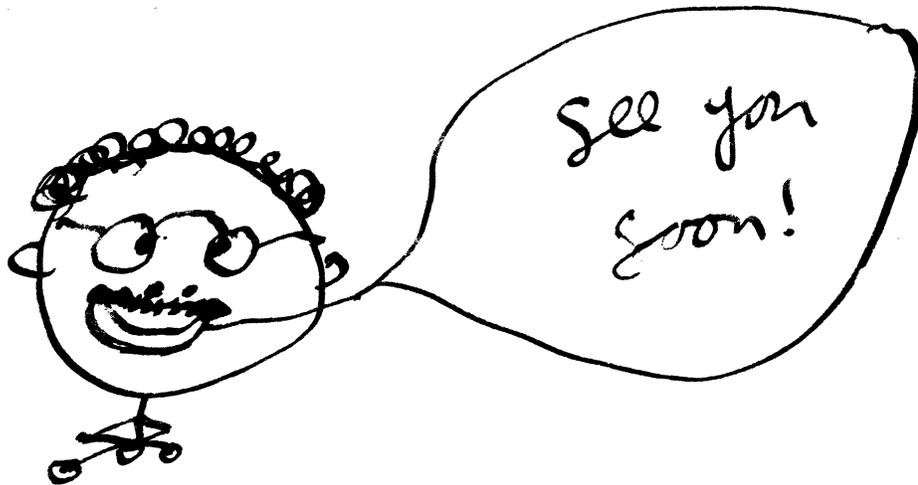
In January when I come back, it will be very busy—teaching here at Boston University, one day a week at a hospital for very sick people (the staff and patients want to learn to meditate), and a few other odd places like a prison, school for Policemen, etc.

Your “don’t make” teaching is very powerful because *even though* I don’t use kong-ans, don’t chant, don’t eat special way, don’t don’t don’t don’t, *still* it helps me all the time. Nowadays my sitting practice is shikan-taza. Not breath in, breath out, but formless attention. I look into my mind with *strong interest* to see what is there and this cuts thinking like “what am I?” During the rest of the time I try and keep clear mind and do each thing as I do it. Sometimes I am a little sorry that I don’t have karma with kong-an style, etc., because I know it would help me a lot. But when I get stuck here, I can hear you say, “when you are thinking, all methods are different; not thinking, the same.”

Please take very good care of your health. I hope you had a good time in Korea and didn’t work too hard.

Love, your friend in the Dharma,

Byon Jo Gosa (Larry)



October 29, 1978

Dear Byon Jo Gosa, Larry,

How are you and your girl friend? Thank you very much for your wonderful letter. We just returned from Korea. Everyone is very happy and liked Korea very much. Before we left for Korea, we said this would be a thirty-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin, so everybody only kept a YMJJ mind, sometimes sightseeing, sometimes Kido. So twenty people only one mind, one head—that is, I think, wonderful.

Also, here is good news. Some of the professors at Dong Guk University said hello to you and would you please come again. They like you very much. And Mr. Kim Yong Wu, who is a special-help-you person, he likes you very much also and says hello to you and “next time bring Byon Jo Gosa”, so I say, “Maybe!” So I ask you, next time you want to go? Is this O.K.? Only one month, not bad!

And next, in your letter you said you like “Don’t make anything.” That is wonderful. Don’t make anything means there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no mouth, no mind—which is your original face. So there is no color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no object of mind. Then you see only color—there is no Byon Jo. Then you hear only sound—there is no Byon Jo. Finally, you and object of mind become one. That is shikan-taza—same as kong-an. Kong-an and shikan-taza are not different. Don’t make kong-an; don’t make shikan-taza. Than what? What do you see now? What do you smell now? What do you hear now? You already understand. You are already a great man.

Still you make “my style” so kong-an is a hindrance: it has like and dislike, difficult and easy. Don’t make anything! Put it all down—your opinion, your situation, your condition. Don’t hold anything, don’t make anything, don’t attach to anything. Then your style is correct. What are you? Only go straight—don’t know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.?

You met Stephen. That is wonderful. I hope he attains a wider mind, doesn’t check inside, doesn’t check outside, takes care only of himself, soon gets Enlightenment and becomes a

great man. So I gave him special small beads, cedar smell, and said to him, “You must make good smell. That will help you.”

I also am sorry that you will not be with me when I give a talk at Interface, but it is good that Jonnie will be there. It is wonderful that you are going on a 2-1/2 month retreat. Also that you will be busy with teaching at places like hospitals, a prison, and a school for policemen when you return.

I hope you only go straight shikan-taza, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, become a great and big man, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Thank you very much for the “see- you-soon” picture. Just your face! Wonderful! See you soon, you, too!

September 19, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter of September 12th. You sent me a face with features, I sent you a face without features. Or it could be the inside of a raindrop; it could be a planet; or the answer to all the kong-ans. It is vibrant with creativity, yet has nothing except the outline—

(dried flower glued on paper)

Now even that is gone. The paper was blank before the writing, the breakfast bowl was clean before the breakfast; the paper is still blank, the bowl is clean.

Respectfully with love,

Norm

October 29, 1978

Dear Norm,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? We are just back from Korea. Everybody had a good time and many attained Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism.

Your letter is very wonderful and you sent me a little flower. But many words and speech. Not good, not bad. No speech is better than much speech. So I ask you: you sent me a flower. Long ago, Buddha was on Yong Sahn Mountain and picked up a flower. But at that time there were 1200 people at the assembly and nobody understood. Only Mahakashapa smiled. So Buddha said, "My True Dharma I transmit to you." So I ask you, your flower and Buddha's flower, are they the same or different? If you open your mouth, I hit you; if you close your mouth, I hit you. What can you do?

Speech and words are not necessary. Buddha never opened his mouth. Mahakashapa never opened his mouth. If you understand that, you will get your True Self. If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know, for 10,000 years, nonstop. Try, try, try, O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

from “The Middle Way”

Zen Master Seung Sahn Visits Europe

by Anne Bancroft

Anne Bancroft is a member of the Buddhist Council and author of *Religions of the East and Twentieth Century Mystics and Sages*. She is at present working on a book entitled *Zen*.

Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn with six American followers came to London on the last weekend in April. They arrived at Friends International Centre, tired from travelling but exhilarated by the welcome and enthusiasm of Buddhists they had met in Italy, Germany, and Poland; and at once felt at home in the peaceful atmosphere of the International Centre where meditation at 6.0 in the morning is not considered unusual.

Master Seung Sahn, called by his pupils and friends Soen Sa Nim (Honored Zen Master) has spent six years in the States (he was previously Master of a temple in Japan) and his English although adequate is not fluent. Language, however, seems of little real importance when he presents Zen teaching, for his personality is so dynamic and so warmly at one with his audience that words seem superficial. Nevertheless they can still be very effective and when a student in Oxford asked him, “Why *thirty* blows for a wrong answer?”, Soen Sa Nim’s instant response of “Put it down” was understood by everyone in the room. On another occasion one word sufficed. After a Chinese meal we were walking up from Gerrard Street to Oxford Street and passed a strip club where a couple of touts were lounging about outside the doorway. When they saw Soen Sa Nim in his grey robes they sniggered and one asked, “Do you do karate?” Soen Sa Nim is short and square and very strong, from deep down in his diaphragm came the one word, “Yes!” There was silence from the touts.

The basis of Soen Sa Nim’s teaching is what he calls the “don’t-know mind”, by which he means the mind which is fresh to every situation. “Don’t make anything” is his constant advice and he means “don’t put into the situation that which isn’t there.” Our everyday ordinary mind is perfectly able to deal with all situations if we allow it to do its work freely and don’t try to possess a situation through imagination or thought, thus turning it into something different altogether. So this don’t know mind is the clear mind which doesn’t hang on to anything in the way of ideas and preconceptions, and it is thus unbounded and free to respond wholly to every situation. Asked by an Oxford graduate if this meant that one shouldn’t think at all, Soen Sa Nim said that thinking is natural to the human brain, but there should be no attachment to it. He compared the mind to an electronic calculator. As long as it is allowed to stay as don’t-know mind in its clear, straightforward state, it is like the calculator, clear and ready to deal with whatever programme is programmed into it. But when a mind thinks it knows everything, it is like a calculator which has not been cleared of its old programmes before a new programme is put in and so it cannot give the correct answer to the present situation.

During his brief stay, Soen Sa Nim gave two public lectures, one at Friends House, Euston Road and one at Wadham College under the auspices of the Oxford Buddhist Society. As well, he conducted a day's sesshin at Dharma House in Lewisham. Tapes were made of much that he said.

August 15, 1978

Krakow, Poland

Dear Soen Sa Nim:

In the name of Joanna and me, once again I wish to thank you for the opportunity to meet you and your students.

We are still under the impression of your visit and the Zen matters which you brought into our home.

After your departure we decided to continue the so interestingly begun path of Zen.

Together with a group of friends (about twenty people) we meet once a week to sit Zen together, to read writings of Zen Masters (especially yours), and to chant. New people keep on coming. Some go away, some stay. People from other cities in Poland are becoming interested in Zen based on the Korean tradition. Anthony and a few friends are translating your book, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, others are sewing sitting cushions. Chanting is a problem because the texts and melodies are not easy for the European ear; probably it is the same for the American ear too. We have cassettes with the chanting; we play them and chant together with the speakers. It is as if we were chanting with you under your direction. We are still learning. Anyway, Anthony surely has written of these and allied matters.

It so happened that after your departure, in my life and Joanna's came a period of great problems. As if it were a test period. Zen is so simple, but after all not easy. Perhaps our mind is not easy.

One suffers, rubs against evil, then sits Zen and has many thoughts. We are still waging a great battle with ourselves. I have the Zen of practicing. Very difficult Zen for me. Perhaps because for me. I don't know.

I send my greetings and again thank you for everything you did and are doing for us. Sincere greetings and bows from our whole family.

Joanna & Andrzej

September 24, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? By the time you get this, the Oriental Express Zen Centre should be back in L.A. How wonderful! We send our love and thanks to all of you for your hard work. And my love—please tell them—and thanks to Andrzej and Joanna and Anthony.

I've just finished a twenty-one day retreat up north, and I'm sending you some poems and some homework. You gave me a schedule—two hours and two and a half hours sleep and 1000 bows—which helped me a lot. Thank you very much. Also, Kwan Seum Bosal helped me, and so did a bunch of mice and the trees. Now I'm home—wonderful!

Thank you Soen Sa Nim, for your most generous and patient teaching. I am grateful to you.

With love and respect,

Sherry

Morning river
Many trees, green, yellow, red
Very clear.

Gloop. Gloop.
River rises on rocks.
Winds come.
Green, yellow, red disappear.

Where are the trees?
Appear? Disappear?
SHHH! SHHH! SHHH!

Half moon floats near.
Catch it! Catch it!
Sun rises.
Time for morning bows.

Round yellow mushrooms,
Red leaves falling
Geese crying in the cold air—
Is this not enough?

KATZ!
Mouse runs by—
Move your foot.

A man comes into the Dharma Room and drops his cigarette ashes on the Buddha. I say, “Smoking is not permitted in the Dharma Room,” wipe off the Buddha and hand him an ashtray.

He hits me.

I say, “Oh, very good. You understand that there is no Buddha, no you, and no me—and no extinction of this. So you are already a very clever fellow. But do you understand emptiness?”

He hits me.

I say, “Oh, not enough. You must try, try, try and soon you will understand true emptiness. Then your ashes will be better than me, better than Buddha, better than all the Zen Masters. So you must only go straight: DON’T KNOW—and soon you will be a wonderful teacher and will help save all people from suffering.”

7. 1) The sun in the sky shines everywhere. Why does a cloud obscure it?
Today it is raining.

2) Everyone has a shadow following them. How can you not step on your shadow?
Step, step, step.

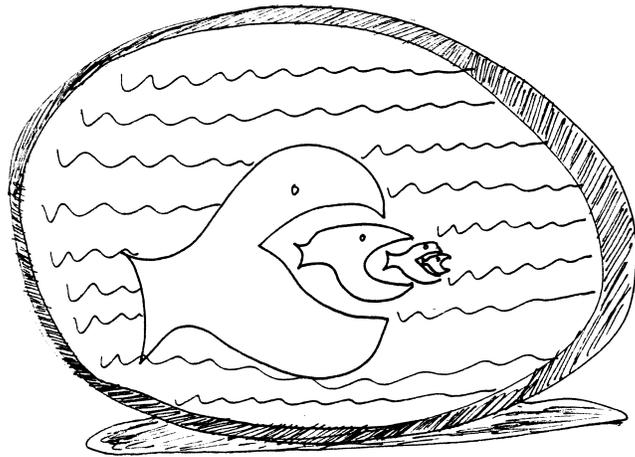
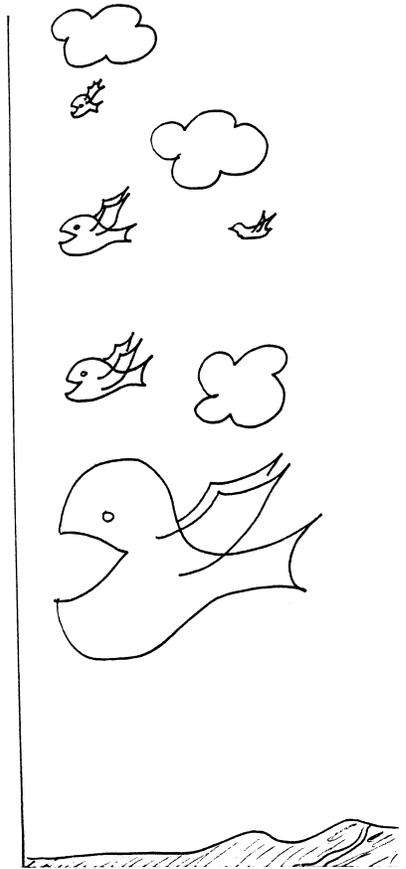
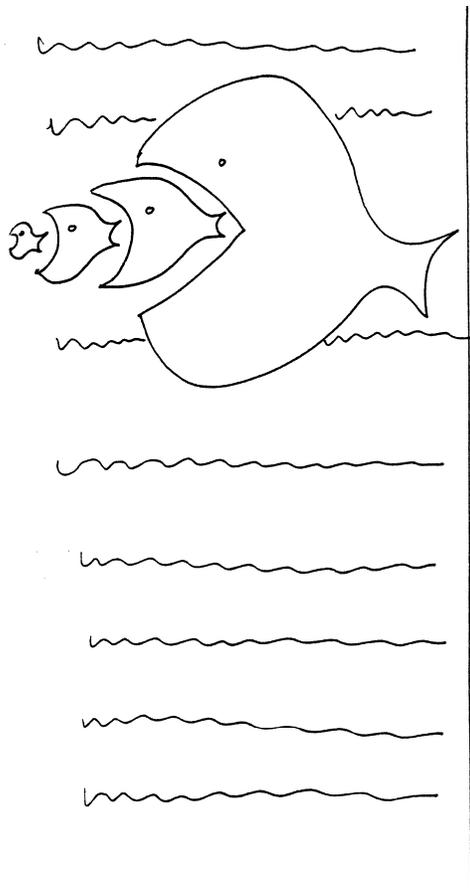
3) The whole universe is on fire. Through what kind of samadhi can you escape being burned?

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

8. 3) I already hit you thirty times!

Thank you for asking these questions.

10th Gate: The mouse eats cat food, but the cat bowl is already broken.



October 29, 1978

Dear Sherry,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. How are you and Lawlor and the Zen Centre family? We have just returned from Korea and are having YMJJ at the Empty Gate Zen Center in Berkeley. Everyone was very happy about the trip. It was different from the Europe trip. The Europe trip was many head, many food, many body. On the Korea trip, first week: exciting head. Next week: many food, many body, many head. Third week: head beginning to disappear, so head controlled food and body. Last week: one head, one body, one food. So, seeing is wonderful, hearing is wonderful, smelling is wonderful, touching is wonderful, object of mind is wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. So everyone attained wonderful—Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism. Someone still has head in Korea and only body here. So I said to him, wake up from Korea!

So we had a very wonderful trip. This happy give to you.

You gave to me a wonderful twenty-one day retreat so I am happy. You are a great Dharma Teacher. Nowadays you are strong and clear. I think your retreat was better than the trip, so I say thank you very much.

Your poems are also wonderful. Here is a poem for you:

Very clear everything
Green, yellow, red disappear
Shhh, shhh, shhh!
Sun rises
Time for morning bows.

Not enough!
Not enough!
Not enough!
What more do you want?
The mouse bites your toe!
OUCH!!

Next, kong-an talk:

Sixth gate: Not good, not bad, but this man will not listen to you because he is very attached to emptiness. You must teach like this and just like this. So how do you correct him? Before, I said to you, you must check the kong-an book, the one-hundred titles. One title will help you. When you keep a clear mind and check the titles, a good answer will appear by itself.

Seventh gate:

- 1) One more step because no more rain — then what?
- 2) Also one more step because you are only *writing* “step, step, step.”

3) Wonderful! 100%!!

Eighth gate: Your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches.

Tenth gate: This kong-an does not ask a bird, does not ask fish. What is correct mouse situation? Example: A quarter is twenty-five cents—twenty-five cents is ice cream—ice cream already in the stomach so he said, “wonderful!” So a quarter changing to wonderful—that is the correct quarter’s situation. So I ask you, what is the mouse’s correct situation?

If you understand, tell me! Tell me! If you don’t understand, only go straight—don’t know, for 10,000 years. Try, try, try nonstop, O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, become Number One Dharma Teacher, soon get Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Diana, Ezra, Antoni, Joanna, Andrzej, and *everyone* say hello to you! We will meet at the December Dharma Teacher Ceremony.

October 15, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? How was your trip? I hope it was really wonderful! It feels good to have you back here again.

Sorry I haven't been in touch with you since your letter of June 9th. My kong-an homework seems to be at a standstill—nothing emerges to show you as a Zen answer.

Correct understanding in relationship to things, like a mirror to look into, a book for reading, a bed for sleeping, etc. When it is time to write to Soen Sa Nim, just write to Soen Sa Nim! Just that, right?

Moment to moment then, is simply doing what comes next?

You said, “thinking is a bad habit” then not thinking would also be a bad habit! Thinking mind, not-thinking mind correctly used is also moment to moment. Sometimes thinking mind sometimes no thinking mind according to the situation. Right?

To open my mouth, thirty blows.
Close my mouth, thirty blows.
When there are no clouds,
the sun shines.
When there are clouds,
the sun shines.
Indeed, what *did* the monk attain?

Hope to hear from you soon and am very much looking forward to seeing you here Sunday, November 5th!

Gassho,

Virginia

October 29, 1978

Dear Virginia,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. We have just returned from Korea and are now at the Empty Gate Zen Center in Berkeley doing a Yong Maeng Jong Jin with twenty eight

people. Everyone had a good time on the Korea trip and attained Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism.

In your letter you said, “moment to moment, then, is simply doing what comes next?” That is wonderful but one more step is necessary. Someone asked me, “You said that children’s mind and Buddha’s mind are both Enlightenment mind—how are they different?” So I said to him, “Children’s mind is keeping clear mind; Buddha’s mind is *using* clear mind. So keeping a clear mind is clear like space. Using clear mind is meticulous and perfectly complete. Example: Children when tired only sleep, when hungry, only eat. But if a child meets a hungry person he doesn’t do anything. But using a clear mind means if you see a hungry person, you give him food. So we say that children’s mind is *subject* just like this and using clear mind is *object* just like this.

So I ask you, keeping clear mind, using clear mind, are they the same or different? Tell me, tell me! If you don’t understand, you attain correct relationship to everything, and if you don’t understand that, then only your thinking understands “moment to moment, then, is simply doing what comes next.” This understand cannot help you!

So you said, “Sometimes thinking mind, sometimes no thinking mind according to the situation. Right?” So I hit you thirty times! Put it all down! Don’t make thinking; don’t make no thinking. What are you doing now? When you are doing something, you must do it! O.K.?

Your poem is not good, not bad. I ask you, what did the monk attain? When you understand that, send me again a correct poem answer.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop; don’t check I, my, me, soon get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Did you have a wonderful trip and are you well? I hope so! and thank you for your letter of September 8—which, actually, disappointed me a bit because my answer to Soeng Am’s Master was the flower painting. Before your letter arrived, the photo of you came, sent by Louise. On receiving the photo of you smiling, I took this for the answer to my answer and was happy.

Then your letter came which said I had opened my mouth—but in reality, I had not opened my mouth. I was quoting your previous letter in which you said, “If you say the same, I hit you thirty times; if you say different, I hit you thirty times.” So I wrote, “If I can’t make a gesture, or a silence, because I am here, I will send you my answer under separate cover.” My answer was the flower—which was my gesture—Is it still wrong? I feel it is right. But one can’t differ with a Zen Master, can one?—or can one?

In September, I attended a ten-day session—not sesshin— of Buddhist Meditation—80% of the people knew nothing of Buddhism or meditation. There were 180 people. The Big lesson for me was how to do zazen in complete chaos—it was Tibetan and the teaching was really frightening (almost reconverted me to Christianity). Many people terribly upset—and many people came asking me about Zen—at home at last, the mind became clear again but the lesson of that ten days was the urgent need to practice hard—so even if frightening, perhaps it was necessary and done for a purpose.

Plans for going to the U.S. still have not jelled as there are work prospects in the offing and I seem to be still attached here—but practicing zazen faithfully. But am still left with a strange feeling about those ten days—as if the Dharma was encumbered and clouded over by too many words and images. But I suppose each method of teaching fits each kind of temperament. Expedient means—confirmed me that Zen is my way.

As always, Soen Sa Nim, thank you and I send you all my best wishes in the Dharma.

Elizabeth

P.S. Could you be kind enough to give my very best to Diana and Ezra? There is going to be a mail strike tomorrow and this must be put in the post office immediately. I’ll write to Diana when the strike is over—thank you again.

October 29, 1978

Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? We have just returned from Korea and I am now at a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Berkeley with twenty eight people. The Korea trip was a little different from the one to Europe. In Europe sometimes had lectures with one hundred people and in Korea sometimes there were four or five hundred. Also, before we began we said this would be a one-month YMJJ. So sometimes sightseeing, sometimes YMJJ, sometimes Kido in the Sorok San Mountains. Very, very wonderful. Twenty heads disappeared—one head, one body, one mind and all nature, mountain, sky became one. High blue sky, rocky peaks through the white cloud...

You said that the flower painting was actually the answer to the Soeng Am Calls Master kong-an. Now I understand! But I did not ask for a flower! Soeng Am calls himself, answers himself; which one is the correct Master? Only flower is not enough, even though the flower is very beautiful! Give me a beautiful your Master! If you think flower is Master, Master is flower, then I hit you! Flower is only flower, Master is only Master! O.K.?

You say that the ten-day session was very difficult for you but that it confirmed that Zen is your way. If you have your correct direction, every situation, every condition is no problem and a good teacher for you. But if in your mind there is like and dislike, you cannot find the True Way and everything cannot help you.

Next you said your plans for coming to the United States are not jelling because you are getting more work prospects—no problem. You must understand what is most important. If you find that, U.S. is O.K., Paris is O.K.

I hope you only go straight—“What am I?”—and keep a don't-know mind, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

November, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am a student at Holy Cross College in Worcester and would like to study Zen in Korea next year. I spoke to Larry Rosenberg, who recommended that I contact you, since you would know more about monasteries and universities in Korea than him. I am applying for a grant from the Fulbright-Hayes foundation to study overseas and would greatly appreciate it if you could tell me about the best places for studying Buddhism in Korea. If possible, I would like to visit you sometime in Providence, to talk about how to plan a program of study.

Thank you in advance for your help,

John

November 8, 1978

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You want to study Buddhism in Korea. That is wonderful. I just came back from a trip to Korea with twenty of my students.

But why do you want to study Buddhism in Korea? This is the first question. Next, what kind of Buddhism? You say Zen. It is possible for you to learn Zen in Africa. If you only want to go to Korea and study in a Korean monastery, I can give you an introduction. First, we must meet together and talk about it. That is very important. If you find the correct way, Korea, Japan, Africa, anyplace—it doesn't matter.

So first we must talk about your situation and condition and your opinion. When can you come here? My secretary will send you my schedule. We can meet either at Cambridge or at Providence. See you soon.

Yours in the Dharma,

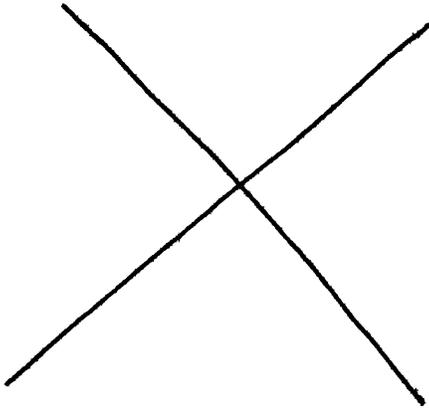
S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Elizabeth

November 8, 1978

Dear Elizabeth,



What is this?

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

November 2, 1978

(Trying to begin this letter, my room-mate says, “come look at the moon, it’s perfect! Then the phone rings and my other roommate counsels, “be a little wary of interpreting these experiences yourself”—we’d been talking about “enlightenment.”) Then the phone rings again and its my friend Richard, who asks, what are you doing? “Trying to write a letter to Zen Master Seung Sahn.”

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

Please forgive all these words, but I am feeling very friendly, which seems to attract them. Anyhow, I have been very much feeling your presence since seeing you at Empty Gate Zen Center last weekend, and in light of my recent experience, I thought it would be O.K. to write you, though I know you are busy, etc. But even zen masters must enjoy receiving mail, if it isn’t too obnoxious, which I’ll try not to be.

I came up to you after the Dharma talk, re: your trip to Korea, last Sunday and in an inhibited way told you I was scared a lot. You asked me “who are you?” and I said I don’t know. You said something about “don’t know mind” which I didn’t understand, though I thought I did, and then you suggested that I continue to meditate.

Well the reason I’m writing is because I’m glad you now have a center in Berkeley, which will enable me to see more of you, and also because I would like to relate an experience that happened the next day.

I had been doing some meditative exercises as part of a post graduate E.S.T. training, and when I was called to share my experiences with the other people in the room, I stood up, and something happened, of which I am not sure, but when each time the trainer asked me questions such as “where are you at?” or “are you here now?” I could only answer “I don’t know” because the questions weirdly didn’t make sense. All there was was the *space itself* in the room, which seemed mysteriously charged, so when the trainer asked if I was here, it didn’t make sense, so I had to keep answering “I don’t know.” I didn’t think much of it at the time, but the same feeling of my self disappearing, and “space” being transformed happened again today, and I realized what Suzuki Roshi meant when he wrote, “you might not even be aware of the moment of your own enlightenment.”

Which I then realized to be the same thing that Tarthang Tulku Rimpoche had once said to me, “it’s not you that becomes enlightened.”

I should add that Tarthang said this during a mondo, that had been preceded by two weeks of intense practice, and the moment he said it I had the experience of the ceiling tilting and the wall “becoming enlightened.” Without making a big deal of it, he validated the experience, but in retrospect, I am sorry that there was not more follow-up and direction to my subsequent practice, because the experience just became a kind of spiritual memory, and

food for later ego tripping, leading ultimately to much suffering, and failure to strenuously continue to apply myself to practicing. And this is why I felt justified in writing to you asking for comment/advice. I know it might be, for you, more safely done, if you knew me personally, though I have written enough to give some sense.

Is there a kong-an I should take up, having seen somewhat into “don’t know mind”?

When can I see you again? Though I sat for a number of years in another Zen center, you are the only zen master in America I feel I could work with. And having said this, I’m not even sure zen practice is right for me now—I’m afraid of the medicine because of my previous zen sickness that I associate with it. Don’t know, don’t know.

I love you. Who loves you? Don’t know.

Thank you for reading this, and I hope you will answer.

Yours in the Dharma (I feel a little sheepish saying this),

Gary

P.S. my “strategy” of sitting and cultivating the mind during daily life has been to reside in “don’t know mind”—and when thoughts or feelings come up to ask myself “who is thinking this, who is having this feeling?”—as a means of returning to the channel of “don’t know.” But sometimes I feel I am clinging to this practice (who is?!) or using it to avoid my emotions (who?!). Thus, sometimes I feel in the course of keeping a clear mind, I am not being very aware of, or grounded in my body. What do you recommend—perhaps holding my questioning mind in the belly, being aware of breath?

One of the reasons I thought zen practice may not be appropriate for me now is that I have had the tendency to “stay above” my body and feelings and have sensed the need to become more grounded.

Thank you for your consideration and teaching. May you with all beings be well.

Gary

November 8, 1978

Dear Gary,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I remember you. I checked your letter. Your sickness is Enlightenment sickness. Why do you want Enlightenment? If you want Enlightenment, you cannot find Enlightenment, because you make “Enlightenment” and “me”—two things. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 100, 1000, 1,000,000, infinity. This comes from where? Who made that? Is it truth or empty?

Before, I told you Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am. Then everything appears. But, if I don’t think, therefore what? That is a very important point. If you are not thinking, you and everything, you and the universe and a dog barking, a chicken crowing, Enlightenment, no Enlightenment, *everything* become one. If you don’t understand that, you don’t understand “You might not be aware of the moment of your own Enlightenment,” don’t understand “It’s not you that becomes Enlightened,” don’t understand Buddha’s speech, and don’t understand my speech. If you still are holding “I, my, me”, all that speech is demon’s speech. It will make you sick. If you put it all down—“I, my, me”, and don’t hold something, don’t make something, don’t attach to something, then you are complete. The cars pass by—vroom, vroom. Trains whistle—toot, toot. These are better than my Dharma speech, any Zen Master’s Dharma speech, even Buddha’s Dharma speech.

So what are you? If you don’t understand, don’t make “I don’t understand.” Take away this “I”. Only don’t know. Try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop. O.K.? If you don’t listen to these words, you will always be confused and have problems, won’t understand your True Self, and cannot get Enlightenment. Attention! Attention!

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Don’t open your mouth. Don’t read books. This is the first course. Only go straight—don’t know always, everywhere. This is very important.

November 3, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It was a pleasure to shiatsu you last week. I wish that I had had the opportunity to shiatsu you one more time before you left. It is correct that a body like yours, that serves people, gets served, too. I would like to make a practice of giving you a shiatsu every time you visit Berkeley—if you have time. It is a great opportunity for me to keep “just-now mind.”

I want to thank you for reminding me about keeping “try-mind”. My son’s school work was incomplete because he had a strong “can’t mind”. After discovering this, I worked much with your “try-mind”. We changed “can’t mind” to “can mind”. Devin’s self-confidence increased dramatically, his work became perfect and his teacher sent home a beautiful report in which she said that the change in my son’s work and attitude was astonishing! She said that it happened “over-night”. Again, thank you.

Unfortunately, the results in my practice, in keeping “try-mind”, are not as immediate as my son’s schoolwork. My practice reflects thinking mind—*always* thinking mind. I inhale “clear mind” and exhale “don’t know mind” but before I know it, thoughts and feelings have taken over. Is there another way that might work better for this “thinking” mind to become still? I’m not really impatient, I just want to do what works. I have had three strong teachers in my almost three and a half years of Zen practice: Soen Nakagawa, you, and Sasaki Roshi, and all three of you have very different styles. Sometimes when I sit I begin listening to “Mu”. Other times I work on “don’t know”. Is this disturbing to correct practice to change to different styles?

Soen Sa Nim, I have one last question. And this problem has been my kong-an for over one year. Four years ago, I left my ex-husband because it seemed like the correct thing to do. Since that time, I have fallen “in love” with another man. This man introduced me to Zen. You might say that I fell “in love” with his enlightenment. I was not interested in his body, only his consciousness. Several years passed and he taught me many things. I became very attached and as a result suffered greatly. This man is very loving and never tries to change me—never criticizes me and supports me in discovering who I truly am. The one problem I have is that he does not want to share his home with me and my son and he does not want to commit himself to me—yet he wants our relationship to be exclusive; he does not want me to see other men. I want a home for my son—and to share it with him. I sometimes think it would be best for everyone if I stop seeing this man and move back with my ex-husband and son. And yet my attachment to this man is very strong and when I decide to stop seeing him it becomes stronger than ever. I realize that to stop seeing this man is not the solution and to continue seeing him is not the solution and this kong-an nags at me. My son is growing up and I want to spend more time with him. My work and life style take me away from my home for long periods of time. It takes two people to raise a family properly; I will just

continue my Zen practice and hope that someday when I have “clear mind” I will do the correct thing.

Thank you for reading this letter

Stay strong and well,

Donna

November 8, 1978

Dear Donna,

Thank you for your beautifully written letter. How are you? You are a wonderful Shiatsu master. Thank you again for doing Shiatsu for me when I was at Berkeley.

You talked about your son. Children think that their mother is the best thing in the universe. Also, they depend on her for everything. Also, they follow her. Therefore, if you have can-do mind, your children also have can-do mind. If you have cannot mind, your children also have cannot mind, because your children only follow your action and your mind. So I think your action and your just-now mind teach your children better than Buddha’s speech, better than the Bible, better than any teachers.

You said, the results in your practice, in keeping try-mind, are not as immediate as in your son’s school work; that your practice always reflects thinking mind; that thoughts and feelings take over, and that the different styles of the three teachers you have had confuses you, and you are not sure which one to use. This means you have no strong center. Do you know the Bodhidharma toy? It has a strong center, so if it falls down it soon stands up again. If somebody pushes it, it falls, but if they let go, it soon returns to its original position. If you have a center, not only three Zen Masters—100, 1000 Zen Masters are no problem. If you don’t have your center even if Buddha appears and teaches you, it cannot help you. You are lucky to have three Zen Masters. Their styles are different, but the direction is the same.

For example, American people eat with a knife and fork. Korean people use a spoon and chopsticks. Japanese people only use chopsticks. The eating styles are different, but enough stomach is not different. If you understand knife and fork, understand spoon and chopsticks, understand chopsticks, then no problem. Only follow the situation. With Americans, use a knife and fork. With Koreans, only use a spoon and chopsticks. With Japanese, only use chopsticks. That’s all. But you must understand what is most important. If you understand that, you can find your center. All Zen Masters cannot give you your center; only you must find your center. If you want to find your center, then you must only try, try, try. Don’t check your feelings, don’t check your mind, don’t check your understanding, also don’t check any Zen Master’s speech, and don’t hold something, don’t make something, don’t attach to something. Then already you are complete. At that time, your center is very strong. Any condition, any situation is no problem because there is no “my opinion, my condition, my situation.” Try, try mind has no “I, my, me”. When you see, when you do something, when you take up a position, that is correct opinion, correct condition, correct situation.

Any problem is from your opinion. So put it all down—your opinion. I again tell you—don't make "I, my, me"; only help other people. Then your practicing is strong and your center is strong; your love is also Great Love. So your son will also follow your idea with no problem. This means complete mother's mind and Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

Next you talk about your kong-an with your ex-husband and your boyfriend. That did not happen from this life. Already it is a result from a previous life. Your relationship with these people means that your karma and their karma have been determined from your previous life. So anything that happens is by natural process. If you understand that, you can understand that these events are made by your thinking—from your past life we say karma. Karma is clear—primary cause and result. If you make primary cause disappear, the result also disappears. Primary cause is made by thinking. If your thinking disappears, primary cause disappears and changing the result is possible, and you can make karma disappear. So very important is just now, moment to moment, how do you keep just-now mind? This means moment to moment if you keep clear mind and correct situation, then your bad karma disappears and makes a good primary cause. Then in the future this good primary cause makes a result. Then any problems disappear. But if you only keep I-my-me mind and want something, hold something, attach to something, you cannot make your problem disappear. Let it be—everything. Most important is "What am I?" Don't know. Any kong-an—you don't understand. Also, the direction of these kong-ans is don't know. If you keep complete, 100% don't-know mind, the 1700 kong-an questions are clear.

So, an eminent teacher said the 10,000 kong-ans return to this one big question, which means "don't know". "Don't know" is also words. Don't know means cutting off all thinking and keeping Great Doubt, which means before thinking. There is no "I, my, me", not any of "my opinion", any of "my condition", any of "my situation". If you keep that mind, which is clear like space, it is clear like a mirror. Red comes, red; white comes, white. If someone is hungry, I give them food; if someone is thirsty, I give them a drink. With your children, keep 100% mother's mind. Don't check your children's minds. If you meet your ex-husband, keep correct ex-wife's mind. If you meet your boyfriend, keep correct girlfriend's mind. That's all.

You already understand. You understand shiatsu. Don't keep "I, my, me". When you do shiatsu, you only do shiatsu 100%. That is correct—only one point, one point. That means moment to moment, only keep correct opinion, correct condition, correct situation. If you keep shiatsu mind, this is correct Zen mind, correct Enlightenment mind. Correct mind in any relationship. Zen and shiatsu are not different. Zen and any relationship are not different. When you do something, you must do it. Don't make anything.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, keep correct situation moment to moment, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

August 23, 1978

Dear George,

Enclosed please find our robes. Apply costly robes to our past dues.

Dharmingly yours,

Carl and Susan

P.S. When damming the river, take care not to cut off your water.

September 14, 1978

Dear Carl and Susan,

Thank you for your note telling us you no longer wish to be Dharma Teachers.

Since I met you both in Providence some time ago I've felt that you are deeply connected with Soen Sa Nim. I hope your feelings about the Dharma Teacher Association won't prevent you from keeping your kasas and remaining connected with our school in a less formal way. For this reason we are returning your kasas to you. Being a Dharma Teacher means acting together with other Dharma Teachers to help spread Soen Sa Nim's teaching. Certainly it is not always necessary to make or keep this formal relationship. Stopping being a Dharma Teacher need not mean no longer studying with Soen Sa Nim.

I hope you will keep your kasas and remain members of our Sangha. My best wishes to you both for the future. Take care of yourselves and practice hard.

Yours in the Dharma,

George

November 9, 1978

Dear Great Man Carl and Bodhisattva Susan,

How are you?

I already talked to George and we are sending you your robes. You already understand what is Dharma, so you must take these robes and use this Dharma to save all beings—that is your correct job. Your get-money job is not your original job—you must understand that.

I like you *very* much. Any time you have a question, talk to me before you take action, O.K.?—because you are my best Dharma students.

I am sending cedar beads to you. Big man, you take the big beads. Bodhisattva Susan, you take the small beads, and give the other beads to your Dharma friends. I am also sending you a moktak. You use these things moment to moment to keep your correct situation, make Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

I hope you will put it all down—I, my, me—keep a mind that is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I already told Michael M., your Dharma friend, that practicing one time each week together is very important, maybe in your home, or best at Sambosa. Then I can come to your place for some lectures and short Yong Maeng Jong Jins when I am in California.

Poem from Joanna Czarnecca—Poland

Yong Maeng Jong Jin, Berkeley

“No Special”

This is only the sun.
This is only the upraised flower.
This is only what you see.
If you are hungry, then bite it.
If you are tired, rest on it.
Breathe it.
In it.
Outside of it.
Full,
Empty.
Empty and full.
At the same time empty.
At the same time full.
Do it.
If you want to talk about it,
Don't open your mouth.
You have it forever.
Looking for it you miss it.
It's yours, then what are you looking for?
Don't move.
Just open your eyes wide.
Why does the bird sing?
Why is Buddha unborn?
Why is every answer wrong?
Why has it already past?

October, 1978

November 5, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim and No Su Nim,

I am now living at the S & W Boarding House in Phoenix. I am washing dishes and helping the management. Doing Zen with you certainly helps me in daily endeavors. I am reading your book and *Swampland Flowers* by Ta Hui.

For a long time now, about ten years, I have used No Mind as my Hua Tou or Kong-An. The driftstone of God or the Buddha-world has long seemed to me the natural whetstone of life; but in this world of sorrow (institutions), man has made this kong-an into a boiling stick of iron that makes the whetstone the knife. Like a woman's caress, Mara invades the world till even the Unknowing is the demon. This is the state of the mad. So your don't know is the armor of sanity.

A lion crawls in guilt, a worm hustles in pleasure while the snake waits. Kwan Seum Bosal is the grass humble below them. No, Yes, No, No. Beware of your Zen students for they are making a maze for you. Love to everybody, especially Park Bo Sal and Adjima.

Love,

Terry

November 16, 1978

Dear Terry,

How are you Terry? Thank you very much for your letter.

Still you have a tongue and you smoke. A tongue is O.K.; eyes are O.K.; ears are O.K.: your body is O.K. First, understand your karma. Then you must fix your karma and make your karma become clear. Next, use your karma to save all people from suffering. You are very smart and you understand very much. You have the diamond treasure. It shines everywhere and saves all people from suffering. This is possible. But you don't use your diamond sword, and you cannot find your treasure. So you don't understand what is most important. Your head is a rock.

This rock is also a special rock. Too much understanding gathers and becomes a rock. Also, it is very heavy. So first you must make this rock become water and then become steam; then all names and forms disappear. If you want that, you must boil your mind. The Japanese say, "Naet Shing". Naet means "hot"; Shing means "mind". If your practice is Naet Shing, your

rockhead becomes water and becomes steam. Then your bad karma disappears, and you get clear karma and you can use your karma to save all beings.

So I'm giving you a good medicine for you. If you take this medicine or not is up to you—I don't care. But I care a lot about you. First, every day in the morning, noontime, evening time, each time do 108 bows. That makes 324 bows a day. This is the most important. Second, everyday you must do Kwan Seum Bosal 10,000 times. Third, you must cut your smoking. 100 days, you will be a different person. You will become a Great Bodhisattva, and Great Love and Great Compassion.

I hope you take these three medicines everyday, keeping a mind which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. If you still have a tongue, I will cut your tongue. Be careful.

November 2, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Welcome home! I do not only hit the floor, I also hit you, because you think that is my name. I do not hit robots and monkeys. My name is Peter. My friend Don calls me Asshole. Do you think corpse is better?

I enjoyed your letter immensely. Thank you. You ask what I want. I want to love, to experience union. I would also like to be healthy and joyful if my karma is willing; and if money, sex, fame, car, and home can bring me to those states I will embrace them. (But you and I know they are only scenery. Better to embrace each other along our common way.)

I don't know Zen, I don't know everyday clear mind, and I especially don't know Don't Know. Perhaps you do. Do you?

Buddha loves you,

Peter

November 18, 1978

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your writing is not good, not bad. Also, I think you like writing. Also, you like jokes. Your jokes kill Buddha, kill all eminent teachers, and all Zen Masters. Then after—what? Maybe your jokes will kill you.

Understanding cannot help you. You must attain your True Self. That is very important. What are you? If you open your mouth, I hit you thirty times; if you close your mouth, I also hit you thirty times. If you hit the floor—any action—I hit you thirty times. What can you do? If you have the correct answer at that time, you can find your true face. So again I ask you—I hit you thirty times. Any action is not possible. What can you do? Tell me! Tell me!

Do you know “bull’s eye”? There are many ways to answer, but a correct answer is like a bull’s eye—there is only one. You must find that. That is very important.

You said money, sex, fame, car, and home are only scenery, and that you would embrace them if they would bring you joy and health. You also said that it’s better to embrace each

other along our common way. You understand what is most important. Here is a kong-an for you:

“Hyang Eom’s ‘Up a Tree’”

Master Hyang Eom said, “It is like a man up a tree who is hanging from a branch by his teeth; his hands cannot grasp a bough, his feet cannot touch the tree (tied and bound). Another man under the tree asks him, ‘Why did Bodhidharma come to China?’ If he does not answer, he evades his duty (will be killed). If he answers, he will lose his life. If you are in the tree, how do you stay alive?”

If you don’t understand that, only go straight—don’t know. This don’t know is the utmost medicine—it can fix any kind of sickness.

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S

November 5, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Hello, how are you?

Today we finished YMJJ. Roger, Bridget, James, See Hoy, Steve, me, Mu Bul Su Nim, and Kenny Stateman sat together most of the time. Strong together action!

This afternoon all the Korean ladies came for their Zen practice. It was really funny because as they came up the stairs they all started into my room and were bowing to the Buddha near the window. The room got so crowded I couldn't move! Then they all disappeared into the Dharma Room. I will try to sit with them as much as possible. There is a great potential there for a good strong women's organization in the future.

The children from Sunday School are all busy writing a small paragraph on any subject related to Buddhism. What do you think if we submit one article every other month or so to the Newsletter from "The Children's Corner?" Also, the older children that come on regular basis and learn the procedure in time can be appointed "Little Dharma Teachers". These children are wonderful!!! We read them a story from *Dropping Ashes* today. They loved it. Bridget is a good teacher in Sunday School.

I am pushing on getting everyone going on fixing up your room. Bridget is in charge of the paint; See Hoy will build a bookshelf; I asked Mu Bul Su Nim to install the phone buzzer system. My friend is sewing a new cover for the floor pillow (brown). Too bad I have to stop for surgery. I would rather stay to fix the room...

The air beds arrived in time for Mrs. Kanda—she was happy.

The candle is lit on my altar, the light flickers across your picture—incense fills the air... Now I am very busy... pulling *all* the *weeds* so I can build this very small temple so *the most wonderful* keen-eyed lion can stay there forever and *always*.

Yours in the Dharma,

Sumana

P.S. You are always very busy there so there is no need to answer this letter. You must rest.

November 18, 1978

Dear Sumana Kwan Seum Bosal,

How are you, Sumana Kwan Seum Bosal? Thank you for your letter.

It was nice to hear your voice on the telephone last night. First I was worried about your operation before I spoke with you. But you said that tomorrow you would return to Tahl Mah Sah. That's very wonderful. I hope that your body will soon heal and become strong like an army general.

Next, what you said about Yong Maeng Jong Jin is wonderful. Also, the Korean ladies visiting your Buddha and your wanting to sit with them is wonderful. Your idea to make a women's organization is also wonderful. You will sit with each other, become Buddha with each other, and save all people with each other. Next, you talked about the Sunday School. You want to submit some of the children's atticles to "The Children's Corner" and appoint some of the older children who attend regularly "Little Dharma Teachers". That is a very good idea. Try that. Why not?

You are fixing my room. You are a great Bodhisattva. Thank you very much. You also got the beds for Kanda Bosal Nim. Thank you very much for this also.

So, you are Great Love, Great Compassion, and a Great Bodhisattva. Next, your room has many Buddhas and many Bodhisattvas, so there are many eyes. I ask you—your eyes, these Buddhas' eyes, and the Bodhisattvas' eyes—are they the same or different? If you say, "KATZ!", you only understand one, do not understand two. What can you do? Tell me! Tell me!

See you soon,

S.S.

November 5, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter. I hope you are well and I hope that your trip to Korea went well.

However, the bone of space suddenly appears, crashing into Soeng Am's skull and smashing
What are you to smithereens. What can you do?

Put down "wonderful". Put down "hit thirty times". Put down "don't-know mind".

Don't you know by now that a wooden typewriter clacks without keys?

See you soon,

Steve

November 18, 1978

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your letter is not good, not bad. I ask you: Soeng Am Zen Master called himself and
answered himself—two minds. Which one is the correct Master?

Your typewriter said, "You are scratching your right foot when your left foot itches."

You misunderstand the four kinds of like this: without like this, become-one like this, only
like this, and just like this. If you are clear about these four kinds of like this, you understand
your mistake. If you don't understand your mistake, you don't understand the four kinds of
like this and your True Self, which means you don't understand your Master. How do you
know Soeng Am's Master?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon find Soeng Am's
Master and your Master, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for “gate, gate, paragate, paragatesamgate, bodhi svaha.”

Thank you for your teaching.

Two children are sleeping in the next room and soon I will join them. I hope you are well!

Fondly,

Won Kwang (Loie)

November 18, 1978

Dear Loie, Won Kwang,

Thank you for your postcard. Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha. You can do everything.

Here is Kwan Seum Bosal for you. This Kwan Seum Bosal has a prajna point in between her eyes. You also have a prajna point. Which one is better? Don't touch my fishing hook. Only go straight—gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, boshi svaha.

May you become Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way.

See you soon,

S.S.

November 3, 1978

Dear Zen Master,

Thank you for your most recent letter. I hope that you had an enjoyable trip to Korea and Japan.

It has been a long time since you have written to me, but I feel as though I am beginning to understand what you are saying when you keep asking, "What are you?" I am a part of the eternal spirit which never dies and is always present.

Is Don't-know Mind the same as No-Mind?

Can't I reach Don't-know Mind through meditation?

Can you give me a short kong-an to meditate on? Or could I simply use "What are you?" as a kong-an?

Thank you for your help.

Yours in the Dharma,

Robert

P.S. I am leaving prison to finish my time on Parole very shortly. Is there a Zen Center you will be able to refer me to?

(another copy of same letter enclosed)

November 20, 1978

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your two letters. I'm now in Providence so both your letters were forwarded here. If you send your letters to Providence they will be forwarded to me wherever I am.

Thank you for hoping I had a good trip in Korea and Japan. We had a good time, thank you very much. I'm sending you this month's Newsletter so you can attain our Korean trip.

In your letter you said you are beginning to understand about "What are you?" but you ask, "Is Don't-know Mind the same as No-Mind?" My answer is to hit you, because don't know is already having cut off all thinking, which is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking.

Before thinking is your substance. Then universal substance and your substance are the same. Everything and you have already become one. The name of that is primary point. So don't know is not don't know and no mind is not no mind. This mind is primary point. Primary point is sometimes don't know, sometimes no mind, sometimes God, Buddha, nature, substance, the Absolute, energy, or holiness. But in the true primary point there is no name, no form, no speech, and no words, because primary point is before thinking. But you ask, "Is Don't-know Mind the same as No-Mind?" Opening your mouth is already a mistake, so I hit you. If you attain the meaning of this hit, then you attain your True Self. If you don't understand that, only go straight—don't know; only try, try, try for 10,000 years nonstop.

Next you ask, "Can I reach Don't-know Mind through meditation?" Of course. You also ask if you can use "What am I?" as a kong-an. You only don't know. Don't know is the original kong-an. Only keep this kong-an always and everywhere. That is very important.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S

P.S. When you go on Parole, it is fine for you to live at a Zen Center. Please come. Check the Newsletter for the addresses of the Zen Centers and go to whichever one you like.

November 4, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Back in Big Sur my first day after 48 days of being with friends. Looking at pictures I bought in Korea and Japan—doing the trip in my mind, the friends are here—together action!—Great Teaching! Yet as simple and wonderful as all else around us:

TREE—Soil it grows in—Seeds fall on soil—
 Sun makes grow and green—Birds make Nest—
 Make birds—no beginning no ending.
 what *is* this flow of constant change of together-action?
 Katz—

Thank you Soen Sa Nim, for this opportunity you gave me to be with you in your beautiful country—for taking us on this very special trip.

Much, much Buddha in Korea coming from those warm-hearted, friendly, generous people, whose devoted minds could build such wonderful Temples aglow with colors in homage to the Buddha. (Looking at the ceiling—no ceiling—purest of joy.)

How are you? Often I wonder how very tired you must be at times “Standing up for us”. For you *this trip* seems never-ending. Thank you for your strength to make our strength grow, for “going straight”, showing us the way.

This morning, opening up at random *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, up comes Page 155:

Soen Sa said: There are four difficult things in this life. The first is to receive a human body. The second is to encounter the Dharma. The third is to meet a keen-eyed Zen Master. The fourth is to attain Enlightenment.”

Today it’s 69 years ago when—I) *received a human body* called Jo with something that was asking: “What is all this about?”—“What am I doing here?”—“What am I *doing* here?”—“Whatever this is, it’s everywhere.”—“Makes no sense.”—“What’s the good?”—Down—Up—Down—Up—taking much time from this precious life-span to find out. Until, maybe twenty years ago, somehow, tripping around, some flashing, the first book: *A First Zen Reader*.

II) *to encounter the Dharma* A discovery to confirm that which had been with me all along. Wonderful—Happy—Questions—need to talk—L.A. no contacts 1965—Big Sur—*Esalen strong karma*—Beginning to see “HERE and NOW”—meeting two Great Zen Masters: 1966 Suzuki Roshi, 1974 Seung Sahn Soen Sa.

III) *Keen—eyed Zen Master* Thank you, Soen Sa Nim, for putting the gray robe on me and making me your student.

Three of the most difficult things have come to me in this life. The fourth—Don't Know—On this day I feel like telling you about my way to finding you. Bow—what bows?—to what?—Katz. How fortunate my friends, your *younger* students are.

Homework

Dear Soen Sa Nim, also Page 155 made me see the following situation: Using much of your own words: “Dropping Ashes on the Buddha”, *Clear mind, Bodhisattva mind*. The smoker drops ashes on the Buddha statue. Bad action. Bodhisattva mind *very sad*. *With great care* he wipes the ashes off the Buddha statue and is thinking: “Why are you doing this?” “Now you are alright but in the future you will have much suffering.” The smoker looks at him and sees that there is no anger, that there is only motherly compassion on his face. So—the smoker is a little confused—this person has let him do what he wanted to do and now is teaching him the correct way. However, he does bad action again and again. Bodhisattva mind—clear mind. Try, try try again for eons of time. Saves all people. Just this. And what can I do? *Uncover* the Buddha. Try-try-try again to keep *clear mind*. Practice “go straight” (Not put ashes on the Buddha), get Enlightenment and save all people. just this.

The just said is a similar situation to the beginning of this long letter. “Thank you Soen Sa Nim for your strength which makes our strength grow. Thank you for ‘going straight’ showing us the way. Let’s go.” Just this.

Three full bows,
Yours in the Dharma,

Jin Uwal—Jo

P.S.

Soen Sa Nim
Please—
take care—
Rest.
Love
HAL MO NI

November, 1978

Dear Jo, Jin Uwal,

How are you, your friends, and your dog? Thank you for your wonderful letter containing your life history.

I know your mind. Your mind is very wonderful. So your poem is also very wonderful. Also, happy birthday to you! So I am sending you this calligraphy.

Your body age is sixty-nine but your true age is infinite time—there is no life, no death. You must believe that. So I ask you: before you were born, where did you come from? When you die, where do you go? You already understand that. Only go straight with this mind. We call that the Great Love, Great Compassion, Great Bodhisattva Way. This world is infinite, so all beings are also numberless and therefore suffering is limitless. So our Great Bodhisattva Way is nonstop. This means Great Vow. You already have this Great Vow, so try, try, try; only go straight for infinite time, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, life after life always carry out the Great Bodhisattva Way, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma

S.S.

November 6, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I was not able to talk very much with you yesterday, but this visit of yours was of great importance to me and has made me very happy within. I realized that you are the Teacher for me, if you will accept me as your pupil.

After much sitting and with the help of Louise, I know it is important to have a good Zen Master, and to just start off and go straight ahead with it. You come to Chicago three or four times a year, and I haven't really realized how lucky I am; you can give me a "hit" from time to time and keep me on the right track.

If it is agreeable to you I will plan on my vacation so I can come to Providence in March.

Next time you come to Chicago, and if you arrive on a Friday or early Saturday, I would like you to come to the home of Nancy Di Roin, a Zen student. She lives near the lake and quite a number of people will come to meet you. It seems that Sunday night is not too good a time for people who have to plan on working Monday. But Saturday night they will be more relaxed and not worry about getting home early.

Louise is a super Dharma Teacher; she was very helpful to me. She has real understanding of life and people, but you know this better than I do.

Soen Sa Nim, Louise tells me you need a good rest. Please rest so we can all benefit from your strength.

My dear Teacher I bow before you: Kwan Seum Bosal!

Your student,

Harrington

November 19, 1978

Dear Harrington,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your family?

Before, when I went to Chicago, your face first appeared. I like your face very much because your face is a great Bodhisattva face. There are no smudges—very clear!! You understand

what is most important, so you like to sit. But you have a tether, so you only move around in a small area and cannot get free. You must cut this tether.

Your letter said that you want to come to Providence in March. That is wonderful. Maybe at that time you will cut your tether.

But originally you have no tether and there is nothing. You make your tether. Don't make your tether. Moment to moment, only go straight—try, try, try. If you check something, your tether appears and pulls you. Then you cannot move. All kinds of problems appear. So don't check your feelings, your mind, or your understanding. This is very important. What are you? Tell me! Tell me!

Believing in yourself 100% is the correct way. If you have don't-know mind, that is already cut-off-all-thinking complete mind. An eminent teacher said, "One by one, each thing is complete." So your mind is complete. Then everything is complete and the universe is complete. So moment to moment, keep don't-know mind, which is correct situation. Then there is no "I, me, me", and your actions are for all people. That is Great Love, Great Compassion, and your original job.

I hope you will only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S

November 8, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Many, many thanks for your letter. I hope this one finds you strong and well. What good exercise, hitting all those people thirty times! Before your letter arrived I decided to come and stay in California for a while; it was a nice surprise that your letter came today from a center in Berkeley as that is where I hope to stay. I shall come and see you and pay for these expensive thirty strokes! I loved your poem—(I just cannot write “I” anymore without laughing, since your last letter “I” find myself counting—eight so far). Feeling desperate and empty in London I shall come and try and drink that cup of water in California. You said “Watch your step!” but at present I cannot even see “my” feet.

letter from an empty gate
letter from a zen man
cloudy head reading it
not hearing the lion’s roar
from inside the den
he sinks his blues
in an idealized Pacific
Blue in blue
But even that’s not enough... yet...

there is an old playground poem:

“Roses are red
Violets are blue
If I am me
Then who are you?”

I look forward to seeing you.

Yours in great respect,

Dave

November 20, 1978

Dear Dave,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? You are coming to California—that is wonderful.

Now your “I’s” are fewer as before you had many, but you still have thirteen “I, my, me”s, so I hit you again thirteen times! We have five kinds of I: Small I, Karma I, Nothing I, Freedom I, and Big I. Your I is only Karma I. If your Karma I disappears, you will get Nothing I. Nothing I is before thinking. Before thinking means no words, no speech—so there is no I, my, me. Then your mind is clear like space. If you keep this mind for a long time you get universal energy, then you can do everything—that is Freedom I. An eminent teacher said, “The whole universe surrounds my body, but my mind surrounds the whole universe.” This is Big I.

So if you make “I”, you should make numberless “I’s” (not only thirteen), then your “I” will surround this universe and your “I” becomes Big I. If you cannot do this, then you must kill your “I”. This means only go straight—don’t know. Then already your “I” is dead because don’t know has cut off all thinking. Cutting off all thinking is before thinking. Before thinking there is nothing. Nothing is also not correct—there is no word, no speech, so opening your mouth is already a mistake. So only go straight—don’t know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop, then get Big I, get Enlightenment and save all people from suffering.

Your poem is not good, not bad, but first you must attain your True Self, and then make your poem. The last part you say, “If I am me, then who are you?” First, I hit you thirty times. Then, here is a poem for you:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue.
Roses are red,
Violets are blue.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

November 9, 1978

Dear Seung Sahn and friends,

How is everyone doing? I hope all is well. Much has happened in the last few months—I have moved into a big house with two other people. We have set aside a room as a “Dharma Room”, and we are having chanting and sitting every Monday. Our group is very small but we practice regularly. The three of us practice daily.

I plan to come for Enlightenment Day in December. I cannot afford YMJJ at this time but hope to do another intensive in the spring. A friend is planning to come with me though he may have to back out later. I shall see you all in December.

Yours in the Dharma,

Guy

November 20, 1978

Dear Guy,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? Making a special Dharma Room and chanting and sitting every day is wonderful! This is your original job.

Next you said you want to come to Buddha’s Enlightenment Day ceremonies. That is also wonderful. You can’t come for YMJJ—that’s O.K., no problem. If you have a strong direction, any place, any time, already you have YMJJ. So only go straight— don’t know; try, try, try for 10,000 years, nonstop.

I hope you only go straight don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

See you soon,

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. These characters are “Buddha Mind” which means Great Love, Great Compassion.

November 9, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Washing bowls; realizing correct situation! (my answer, “JoJu’s Washing the Bowls”)

Welcome home—can’t wait to hear “Perceive World Sound!” Love the photograph that came with the album order slip!

Thanks,

Ned

November 20, 1978

Dear Ned,

Thank you for your homework answer. How are you? Your answer is not good and not bad, but don’t put legs on a snake. Hitting the bull’s-eye is very important. This means giving a 100% complete answer. Your arrow hit the outer edge of the target—maybe 90% correct. One more step is necessary. Listen to me: I ask you, “What did the monk attain?” Tell me! Tell me!

I hope you only go straight—don’t know, which is clear like space, soon finish your homework, attain Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. “Perceive World Sound” will be coming out soon. The record company is having a slight problem with it so there will be a small delay.

1000

November 9, 1978

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I saw your picture on the Perceive-World-Sound brochure with many students, and you looked very good. Eric and I think of you and the people we met in Providence often.

We have been practicing quite regularly here, half-hour sitting in the morning, half-hour sitting and half-hour chanting in the evening. We have a Dharma Room now at our house, but only two Zen students to use it. More would be very welcome.

Back in March you gave me the kung-an “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?” (while I am hanging from a tree branch by my teeth with arms and legs bound and an angry swordsman waiting to cut me up if I don’t answer). My answer is, “He was already too late.”

Over the months I have had many questions about Zen practice. Sometimes I have felt very angry or very unhappy. But these questions are not of concern right now, so they need not be asked. “Only don’t know” and “try, try, try” help me go straight.

Thank you very much for your teaching. Hope to see you soon.

Marcia

November 19, 1978

Dear Marcia,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? You saw the picture of Perceive-World-Sound. That is wonderful. You also said you have a Dharma Room and practice regularly. That is wonderful.

Next you said that your answer to Hyang Eom’s kong-an is, “He was already too late.” I say to you, you are already dead because the question is, “If you are in the tree, how do you stay alive?” If you open your mouth, you lose your life. Be careful, be careful!

Next you said that sometimes you have felt angry or unhappy. When you sit, feelings of all kinds, not just anger or unhappiness, appear and disappear. You must let it be. You already said “Try, try, try.” That is wonderful. Only “try” medicine can cure all bad karma and any feelings. Then you will find your True Self and get freedom from life and death. Then this kong-an will be no problem. How do you stay alive? So, try, try, try, go straight—don’t know for 10,000 years, nonstop. This is very important, O.K.?

I hope you only go straight—don't know, which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.