

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: January 15, 2006

Location: Chicago

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: May 13, 2024

Opens with three strikes and chanting

Good morning.

Please sit comfortably.

[poem in Korean]

Good deeds. Good deeds do not go further than your gate, but bad deeds travel ten thousand miles.

This used to be moral guidelines for villagers who usually spent most of their life, or often their entire lifetime, in small community boundaries.

Now, good deeds do not go further than your gate. Common, ordinary, common, ordinary people, from 1 year on they learn to share whatever they have. Even little of what they have. And they learn to care for each other and they learn to stay away from troubles. Also they learn to render their life harmlessly or from harm's way. They do it so naturally. They don't even think about it. In the West we say "unsung heroes." Even they don't (laughs), even that word does not apply here. They are trying to make a living as peacefully, as harmoniously, as they can. So whatever they do doesn't have to travel outside their gate. It's so intimate, so immediate, and they do so, so spontaneously.

Now, bad deeds travel ten thousand miles does not need an explanation, you can see that. Violence, war, conflict, or fraudulent activities which produce, often, a lot of victims. Usually, these acts are usually committed by people in the powerhouse. Or people, by people, who are desperate.

Now this tradition, which has a strong content of peace work, usually it goes through three stages. First is called worldly tradition. Silence, meditation is practicing silence. So usually we say, "Where your words fail and thoughts exist, your true meditation begins." More poetically, Zen folks, they would say, "Where mountain ranges exhaust and waters end, there you see a new village." So where words fail, where your concepts fail, where your thoughts fail, that's, you have awareness. You pay attention. Awareness. So like looking at the landscape you conjure up with your awareness. It's like direct perception. So mind to mind relationship gets established.

And then the way of self-help, it's also called the practice of waking up or culture of enlightenment, prevails. Sometimes we call it right livelihood. So you come here and learn to meditate and relate to the worldly tradition. When you lose words, sometimes you become more aware. You begin to see things better. Then when you go home, when you return to your community, to your, ... then this right livelihood or culture of enlightenment, you're supposed to promote. And then finally, this culture of unknowing mind. It's called [mushin?], difficult to translate. Culture of no mind, or mind to mind, prevails.

Now, there was this monk, his name was **Hyang Bong**. He became a monk when he was 16. Actually, he had no intention to become a monk and his elder brother was a monk so he came to visit him. Then he got to know the teacher of his brother who was a monk. So he got interested, he became interested and got a little fascinated, so he decided to become a monk at the age of 16. So he spent about 5 years doing novice work. This was about a hundred years ago. And then he began to cultivate himself seriously, so he spent about 10 years on his own. Well he was traveling. They go through these three months in summer they put for training and then three months in fall. You know, they travel. And three months in winter, they go through snow retreats, stay put. So now it's around this time, actually in a couple weeks, then, you know, they would come out of retreat and travel again in spring time. In Canada we have, spring does not, you know, spring usually comes with April showers so you have to wait until April. Maybe with this kind of weather (laughter).

A couple weeks ago, someone wanted a greeting card from me with a short poem. So I said, I wrote it down, it's, "No New Year, no hoopla. A homeless family of sparrows on the utility line." Does that make sense to you? (laughs)

Now so, so one day he was visiting his teacher and his teacher demanded, "Well if you have a piece of enlightenment, show it to me." Then right away while, there was, his teacher was, there was this wooden pillow, you know. In those days a small scale wooden pillow, you see. You try that (laughs), when you sleep. That probably takes getting used to (laughter). So he got up right away and kicked it. And his teacher disapproved of that. That's not the conduct of a person with enlightened heart. Then he said, "A thousand words would not show a piece of my enlightenment. The Buddhas and Great Masters, they have been deceiving me all this while, for ten years."

What he means by that is, you see, all these teachings, wisdom teachings or scriptures and all that, they are, they are no more than fingers pointing to the moon. So if you get stuck with fingers, of course that's how you get deceived. If you get stuck with fingers and fail to see the moon. Well fingers are necessary, pointing to the moon. But you alone should be able to see the moon.

So, then he was recognized for that. So it's like, worldly tradition is usually put this way. It's no special transmission outside the scriptures. That's why Buddhists, Zen Buddhists in particular, they don't take scriptures very seriously. Plus except one, it's called Diamond Sutra. Diamond Sutra is full of contradictions and parables. It's wisdom words. They call it leading words or live words. Other than that is dead words. They say dead words and live words. That is, wisdom is knowledge that is liberating. Knowledge that is not, you know, producing any conflicts. It's a special transmission outside scriptures and no dependence on words and letters. And directly pointing to one's heart, it's called directly seeing into your true nature and realization of your Buddhahood. So such is the extent of worldly tradition, that which is meditation, concentration, Samadhi.

So then this guy, this monk, he was proud of himself. He was able to handle his teacher (laughter). So he was traveling around, you know. A little bit puffed up, you see. Then he met this [Songchal?] Sunim, he was a renowned Korean Seon master, Zen master. And Songchal Sunim, so he met Songchal Sunim on the road. So Songchal Sunim posed a question. "If you cannot kill the almost dead completely, you'll never gain a Wisdom Eye." Then Songchal Sunim continued, "If you don't know how to give life to one who is almost dead, then you have not completely killed him."

So he got completely stuck with this. So he sat on this hwadu, koan, and struggled with it for three years with his unknowing mind. But once he was crossing this stream and inadvertently he looked down and saw himself reflected in the water. There all he saw his two arms, you know, flapping in the water crossing the stream. His body completely disappeared. There he was greatly awakened. Sometimes you see that. Just your two arms running around. Without legs, without body. It's called dropping out of body-mind. But nevermind.

It's, the worldly tradition, awareness, that's one reason why we never close our eyes while meditating. If you close your eyes, almost immediately you become subject to your daydreaming or fantasizing. In other words, you lose awareness. You lose this precious moment in your life. Actually all you have is this precious moment in your life, which is called Eternal Now. It's just, the progression of mechanical time is just, it's the continuum of this present mind. Which is inclusive of all your past, all your present, all your future. It's called Eternal Now. Right here. That's all you've got. So you are alive, you are among the living, and hopefully you are awake. Be happy, and be grateful. And as we recited, you can make resolve with all beings. To promote peace, to promote harmony. To pass on the wisdom tradition. It's a liberation.

And then our everyday life, it's nothing other than here, just revisit this, this Gatha I recited. "Good works, or good deeds, never go further than your gate." Sure there are a lot of people doing good and everybody gets to know about it. And sometimes it may turn out to be nothing more than their own selfish craving, this doing good. So that's why this culture of unknowing mind. This unknowing mind, mind going beyond knowing and unknowing. Since you want

praise in your social activities, I, you know, I don't mean you have to cultivate this, your unknowing mind 24 hours. Well I'm just promoting five minutes of unknowing mind, you need that. That's all I'm saying. Because if you talk about unknowing mind, you'll never get bank loan from your banker (laughter). Or you cannot even date your friends. But you need, you know, Monday through Friday, at least five minutes of unknowing mind. To have, you know, to have inner peace. Or even, you know, sanity or emotional stability.

This, this past Thursday we had the first class of the first five Thursday evening introductory meditation course of this year. And some of you maybe have been here. How many of you are here from introductory meditation course? Okay, four of you (laughs). There were thirty of you, right? And, well I wish more would come and attend. And someone asked, well I gave them five, three foundation stones like peace of mind, and happiness and contentment, and gratitude or grateful heart. And she asked, she said she just don't have any gratitude.

It happens, poor people. People in, you know, in need. Actually, they know something about gratitude. Whether, if you live in a comfortable society like this, you know, we are really spoiled. So we don't know, what is gratitude. It's part of our culture of consumerism. It's, have you ever thought about this? You just don't have gratitude. So I have to, "Okay don't worry about it, just be happy." (laughter) But then they have trouble to be happy (laughter). So, well anyway, well be happy and be grateful that you are still alive. It's wonderful to be alive and to be among the living. And just go from there.

Three strikes and chanting to close

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: April 23, 2006

Location: Chicago

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: May 14, 2024

Opens with three strikes and chanting

Good morning.

[poem in Korean]

Here at Buddha's selection ground. The [unclear] more like this one. Here at the Buddha's selection ground, with emptiness of mind, or with purification of mind, you pass the trials and go home.

Here at, at this Buddha's selection ground with emptiness of mind, with purification of mind, that's after your meditation practice, you pass the trials and then go home.

We have a Buddhist living in Detroit or just outside the city limit over there. And his name is, his Buddhist name is [Gongzen?] which means born of emptiness. And he's, he lives closer to our temple in Anne Arbor than to Toronto temple but he feels somehow he's stranded over there in Detroit. So neither going to Anne Arbor temple or coming to Toronto temple, I think he practices meditation and his Buddhism at home. He writes poems, so occasionally, every other month or so, he sends me his verse, which I have been appreciating. So recently he sent me this to me, so I'll read it to you. It's titled, "Doubts About Zen." (laughs) Which Zen actually encourages. It encourages to have doubts.

"Sometimes I wonder if Zen even works. Sometimes I wonder if I have been ripped off. Sometimes I wonder if Zen is more strict than the most puritanical Christianity ever. Sometimes I wonder if Zen is some flakey, politically correct dog food and New Age weird shit. Sometimes it seems that Zen is so sweet that tooth decay sets in. Sometimes I just actually hate all religions, but always, I go to my altar and do some prostrations." (laughter)

In Toronto we had spring membership meetings and one member attending the spring membership meeting, he started as if, an opening remark (laughs). He seemed pretty upset or disgusted with the conduct of world religions, and I sympathized with him actually. Then he said, "Buddhism is the religion that turns me off the least." (laughter) So I took it as a great compliment (laughter).

Well it's, you know, if you have, you know, something like the first commandment, "Thou shall have no other Gods before me," then, Islam then, they have something very similar, you know. Their Allah is the only God. So under this belief, they do a lot of things, you know, that are very harmful. They are very destructive. We all know that, you see. I mean, we can sympathize with their cause but the method they employ are so violent, so destructive, so averse to what, you know, I think religions should teach or preach, you know.

Few days before I left Toronto, there's this television station, national television station, called CBC. Canadian Broadcasting Company or something like that. It was actually a radio station, CBC radio station. They had a, the lady who called, they had a, kind of this program, you know. Scientists questioning religion. So I think basically, when I listened to it more carefully, it was like God versus Science or Science versus God. Or something like that. So they thought it would be interesting to bring Buddhism along (laughter). You know, over the years, you know, it's kind of, you know, sidekick or side effect, you know. Maybe more, they think that it's more enriching, you know?

So, and then, so she kept asking these questions of, what are your beliefs? Basically, she wanted to say me, we believe in some kind of a God or commandment and, you know, bible, all that. So Buddhism does not exactly fit into that category. So I also kept saying, we don't have that kind of belief system or dogma, you see. So we kind of got stuck (laughter). So finally I had to tell her that if you believe in something that keeps changing, that becomes subject to change, then we call that delusion. And she was happy with that (laughter). So then, oh that's it! And then she cut me off (laughter).

But since, like my work here is like inculturation of bringing Buddhism into our culture here. At least facilitate it. So people understand it better if I say we believe in something, you see. Because, you know, we all, you know, have this psychology like, we like to be really sure. Yes there's a ..., there's a cure, and there's hope, and there's future. Of course there's future, there's hope. So as Buddhists, we Buddhists, we do believe, we believe in life. One life, in which we, all lives, including yours and mine, all lives, partake and participate over and over and over again. So that's the first and foremost belief. So Buddhists, they believe in Life, with a capital L. In one Life, in which we all participate.

Buddhists also believe the goodness of Buddhahood or Buddha-nature of all beings. All living beings, but all beings. Sometimes sentient and insentient. Buddhists, Mahayana Buddhists in particular, they like to include insentient beings. So we believe in the Buddhahood, Buddha-nature, or just simply goodness, goodness of all beings. And Buddhists believe in the power of peace, love, and happiness. That's a Mahayana expression, non-violence. In other words, we Buddhists believe in cherishing all life. So this much is clear. That's what we really believe. And we are supposed to promote and carry forward what we believe.

Anicca, who is from Toronto, he'll be introduced later, he reminded me last night. This was around 1982, this temple was founded in 1992. In 1982, he brought a friend. He was trying to persuade him to come to temple, but he was protesting, he was saying I don't like organized religion. And then he reminded me, I said, "Buddhism is disorganized religion!" (laughter) It could be, depending upon how you use the word organized or disorganized. But I think we are much more organized than where we were in 1982 (laughter). So, I mean, if you are better organized than where we were in 1982, we have to do some work.

So I always feel, I mean, in this country, I guess everywhere these days, the numbers do matter. So if there are more Buddhists, and hopefully if there are more awakened Buddhists or Buddhists with awakened heart, I think we could make some difference. Quite a difference. It's, well you see, the Christians and Muslims are the most populous, you know. Most, you know, in terms of numbers, those are the two greatest religions in terms of numbers in the world. So they are very, very powerful. And, so they make a great difference. Negatively, you see. Quite frequently negatively. So if you think of that, Buddhism being very tolerant, and also in a pluralistic society,

you know, we have to learn to harmonize, to tolerate and harmonize, with each other. With difference. So if you have such, you know, commandment [unclear] it can be very difficult. Of course many, many Christians are much more civilized so they don't follow that literally. That's, you know, luckily.

So each of us, you know, we say, you know, one good Buddhist can be equal of 100 people who do not follow the Buddhist path. Such is the power. So we can make a difference. So that means, you know, what are we doing in our everyday life. It's, well of course this is, you know, living hwadu for American Buddhists. Obviously you have your own life. You know, private life and professional life and this. But also on top of that, you are Buddhists. And these days, Buddhists do count. And what do you do as a Buddhist in your everyday life? Promoting these values. Promoting all lives. And goodness of all lives. And the power of peace, love, and happiness. So take it as your koan. Buddhism is known for talking to people, you know, it's called the power of gentle persuasion. Gentle persuasion is not passive, but there's a power of gentle persuasion. Using non-violent means, non-coercive means, you see. I'm sure each of us, we can do a lot more than we have been doing. Well, we are going through a very critical time, you know. So, you know, after all, Buddhism is all about the practice of waking up. So we can wake up from our own, I would not call it petty, but from our own predicaments or private concerns.

Three strikes to close and chanting

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: April 30, 2006

Location: Chicago

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: May 15, 2024

Opens with three strikes and chanting

Good morning.

[poem in Korean]

The Great Way has no gate. So the south and the byways are its path.

In other words, the Great Way, the Great Way of Buddha, has no particular gate. So the gate to enter the Great Way is everywhere. So the south and byways are its path.

When we take refuge, the first refuge, going for Buddha as my refuge, we see, we realize, the Great Way. So the realization of this Great Way. And now, how to enter the gate, this non-dual gate of emancipation, non-dual gate of liberation? So that you would be able to take down all the barriers and remove all the obstacles, in order to perform great action. Great action that adapts totally. Everywhere. And great activity that manifests itself unbound by convention.

Wherever that the path, the gate, has, not even a thousand, let's say it's numerous byways, for you to enter. In other words, wherever you are, there appears a gate for you to enter. So the gate is everywhere. The gate to enter the Great Way of Buddha. It only takes your unknowing mind. Unknowing mind that has become free from past, present, and future.

Some of you may recall, it's in the Diamond Sutra, which is part of great wisdom sutras or scripture, past mind cannot be grasped. The present mind cannot be grasped. The future mind cannot be grasped. So where is your mind that has become free from past, present, and future? There's a story. Right now, I'm conducting our spring membership meeting. The topic for this spring membership meeting is Samsara. The Buddhist worldview and the Wheel of Life. I'm sure many of you, perhaps all of you, may have heard of the word Samsara somewhere. Can you raise your hand if you have never heard of the word Samsara? Oh (laughs). It's, I heard there is some Buddhist café called Samsara (laughter). And, where have you heard of Samsara, first time?

“A bottle of perfume.”

Hm?

“A bottle of perfume.”

Huh? A bottle of perfume, yeah. Okay. And where did you hear the word Samsara, first time?

“Here at temple.”

(Laughs) Anyway it's, there's this Rochester Zen centre. This happened when Philip Kapleau Roshi, who is the author of Three Pillars of Zen, awesome book, and when he was alive, so this may have happened, certainly more than 20 years ago. More likely 25 or 26 years ago. The Rochester Zen centre, there's one time it was known as a bootcamp for Zen in the United States. So only, you know, fearsome practitioners would go there to the Sesshin, you know. To the, our Yongmaeng, you know, like Yongmaeng Jeongjin. So they were very, you know, alert and wonderful practitioners. And these guys are willing to become, you know, excellent monk overnight (laughter). To remove the barrier of birth and death, and to take down all the barriers, all the obstacles. Then, I think Philip Kapleau, one of the staff, realized they were wonderful practitioners but when it came to Buddhist teachings, like key Buddhist teachings, they were all very ignorant. So they hastily organized, you know, Dharma class, you know. To teach them, you know, some Buddhist teachings. And then even set up library. So while, I had two membership meetings and it reminded me something. So, you know, so I recommend at least you go and get a good Buddhist dictionary. There is a wonderful Shambhala dictionary has been around, but there's this paperback, you know, Oxford Buddhist dictionary. It's pretty good.

Now, this unknowing mind. So there was this, now, studying Buddhist scriptures is one thing. We say it's, first you get the basics. And then you start your practice. Over the years I've seen people who have been reading Buddhist books every day for 10, 15, or even 30 years without ever having practiced meditation, or chanting, or anything. They get, you know, you can get really addicted to reading. This book and that book, there's a lot to read in Buddhism (laughs). And we say it's, we are not talking about this like a Koran or, you know, Bible or, you know, Torah or anything like that, have practically hundreds of volumes. Even the best scholars, even team of scholars on Buddhism would not, cannot hope to go through all these volumes. Of course these days, you know, everything's digitalized and, you know, concordance and all these things. They cannot.

So it's, this guy. He was a specialist, you know, in Diamond Sutra, you know. Commentaries and sub-commentaries. He would carry, you know, like a living library of Diamond Sutra. So, and then, anyway to make story short, he stopped by at this tea house. Because while climbing up the mountain to see the Zen master living on top of the mountain, you know some Zen masters they, you know, purposely they make themselves inaccessible, you know, in those days. In other words, you have to climb up all the way to see this guy. So he stopped by at, like a, like a Starbucks, you know, on the mountainside (laughter). To quench his thirst, you know. You know, tea house. So this grandma who was, you know, running the tea house, and she saw this monk, this Reverend monk, carrying this load of, you know, something, you know. So she asked, "Reverend, why are you carrying all this, all this, all, you know, Diamond Sutras and commentaries and sub-commentaries? Oh, is that right? Then I have a question for you, you know. In the Diamond Sutra it says past mind cannot be grasped, the present mind cannot be grasped, the future mind cannot be grasped. Now, with what mind are you going to have tea and cake?" (laughter)

You know, this guy really got stuck. I mean surely, you know, I mean, he's got, you know, several PHD's, you know, on the Diamond Sutra and he knows everything. So in the Diamond Sutra it says past mind cannot be got at, cannot be grasped, the future mind cannot be grasped, and the present mind cannot be grasped. He got really stuck, and it's very humiliating with this grandma, you know (laughter).

And so the, you know, this guy, the colour of his face, you know, went through, you know, from blue, white, and red, and pink, and all that. Like these colours, you know. Later on, you look at the colour guidance for lantern dedications. And it took him, you know, about seven minutes to come out of these colours, you see. Humiliation, anger, and all that, you see. But after all, you know, he's a, he's a good monk. So finally, after seven minutes he bowed down, you know, to this grandmother. Well, could you please teach me? How the, you know, the mind, you know, I can't have, you know, because she refused to serve actually (laughter). Unless he, you know, he

came up with an answer. If you came up answer, you know, she said I'll serve you free. Free cake and free tea, you know. Maybe Starbucks people can do that (laughter).

So anyway, usually I'm not supposed to give you answer and I will not be giving you the answer. So it takes unknowing mind. I mean, knowing mind, if you have knowing mind there's also past, present, and future, everything. Right? All these obstacles. Of course, you do need knowing mind. I'm not, you know, downgrading. In everyday life, you are not a monk, you see. You are not in mountains, you are in everyday life.

There's this interesting thing. I'm doing some research for nuns, on nuns, you see. So I visited this, there's this Dubuque in Iowa. Have you heard of the city Dubuque? Sometimes it's called a little Vatican. There's a lot of Catholic convents and monasteries and temples in this small city. And although, apparently its geographic shape is, somehow resembles the Vatican. So it's called a little Vatican. In Mexico, there's this place Cholula. It's called the city of temples. Also it's a small town like Dubuque, but everywhere are temples and monasteries and convents. So I visited the, I only visit convents, not monasteries. There are lots of them, you know, it's called presentation, order of presentations, order of visitations, you know. Order of something. Interesting talking to nuns. They are all aging nuns. But it's, the order of nuns started in Europe, and then they are the order of nuns started in USA. The order of nuns, or even the first Mother superior or something, they are more spunky, you know. The European ones are, well, more obedient and, you know. That was interesting, like American spirit, you see. And, and I even, they loaned me some of these missionaries records or some histories, not book, it's a binding form, you know. Mimeograph editions. It's interesting to read. They used the word secular, you know. So the nuns were more like, even the teaching orders, they were more monastically oriented, you see.

So one, she was archivist, you know. She was, you know, all these priests, they have a monopoly over everything, you know (laughs). You would think of politi – (laughs), like a priest. And then, and so much so, you know, they have this kind of old nursing home, you see. And there's this severe shortage of priests. So without priests, I mean, dying people, they cannot even be forgiven, you see. So the nuns cannot do that. Cannot give the mass. So it's a touchy situation. And then when I visited the Archdiocese, the priest, with the archivist, "Well," he says, "I know some nuns, they like to become priests" (laughs). With a little cynicism. But anyway, it was secular. This was written in 1920's, almost like recollections of early days. So this nun, well as a priest, you know, would go around and visit them so that they would have a mass or Eucharist. And so, she was talking about secular. So finally, I think this priest, visiting priest, he was a little upset. "What do you mean? What is your definition of secular?" "Well, someone like you who goes around, you know?" (laughter)

Anyway, so you do need knowing mind. Like this priest, you see. If you, don't talk about non-self or unknowing mind to your, you know, to your, you know, like, to your bank loan office, you

know. You will never get bank loan (laughter). Or even to your, to your girlfriend or boyfriend, you see. But from time to time, there's unknowing mind, you see. You have to discover your unknowing mind. You have to cultivate your unknowing mind. It's, we talk about Bodhisattvas, it's something like, you know, it's a mop. You use a mop, right? The job of a mop is getting dirty. In other words, you take all the dirt, all the defilements, all the uncleanness from other things. So it's called a dirty mop. That's one type of Bodhisattva.

So it takes unknowing mind to penetrate no birth, no death, no self, no other. In other words, non-dual, to go through non-dual gate of liberation. That's why we say, and also, if you [unclear] it's, resolve with that. We go for refuge to the Buddha and resolve that with all beings, I will realize. That's the Bodhisattva vow. So just once a day, even once a week, you have to come up with unknowing mind. For your peace of mind. To break free from the past, to break free from the future, to break from the present. To become anxiety-free. So that you would be able to enjoy great function, great action, great activity, that adapts totally. That would manifest itself everywhere, unbound by convention. So that your ordinary, everyday life is the way of Buddha. So that you would be able to perform, like pick up hoe or sit down before your computer, free from anxiety.

Three strikes to close and chanting

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: July 09, 2006

Location: Toronto

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: October 15, 2024

[reciting in Korean]

Three strikes and chanting

Good morning.

Please sit comfortably.

[poem in Korean]

Mind resting, body resting, mind at ease.

Let it be, let it go.

Thirty-six thousand days of your life are filled with peace and happiness.

When I first came to North America, that was around this time actually, August in 1967, I arrived in Manhattan, New York City. And, actually en route, I had to change flight in San Francisco, so I had three days on my experience of flower generation over there. So when I heard this song “Let It Be” and also “Let It Go”, I think “Let It Be” is by Beatles, in those days everybody was singing that, along with San Francisco. I thought, wow, these guys, you know, where did they get this kind of Buddhism, you know (laughter)? Usually it takes 5 or 6 years to get to that and these guys were singing on the streets.

There was this monk, his name was [Tongsan? unclear]. Seon Master or Zen Master [unclear]. And he spent his entire lifetime teaching seven agatas. It’s called tathagata, tatha-agata, like tatha, tathagata is a compound word of two words, tatha and agata, coming and going. So it’s suchness, something like that. Suchness. So he was known for his seven suchness teachings. That’s all he taught.

In those days many people, they never went to public school. And so the Zen teachers, they had no reason to complicate things. So they just pick a simple teaching. Simple, clear, crystal, and authentic. That’s all they need.

So, for instance, “Single thought, straight for ten thousand years.” That’s one of the suchness teachings. And then, “River flowing constantly for ten thousand years.” And then, “Just like incense burner in the old shrine, completely free from attachment.” (laughs). There’s no detachment, no attachment. It’s just called ashes in the old incense burner of the old shrine. And also it’s said, “Just like piece of wood,” actually it’s an old dead tree in the mountain, “completely free from discrimination.” And so on.

Then he finally checked out. Then his assembly, 1000-strong assembly, so they all got together to decide who would be his successor. So consensus was the [unclear], the monk doing the duty of [unclear]. [unclear] is modest and cheap for the meditation hall. So he was a virtuous monk and he had Wisdom Eye too. So nobody disagreed with that, so it was almost decided.

Then one monk said, well we have [Kubung?] Sunim. [Kubung?] Sunim, this guy was, the [unclear] Sunim who just checked out, his personal attendant. He’s still young, he was still in his twenties, but he was personal attendant and also he was known for gaining recognition of [unclear] Sunim for his Wisdom Eye.

So this monk said it would not do without [Solbong Kubung?] Sunim approving of this. So then nobody said anything, so then it's said first they would check it out, the matter with [Kubung?] Sunim, the personal attendant of Seon Master, Zen Master [unclear] Sunim.

So when the senior monks came to visit [Kubung] Sunim and related the matter. [Kubung?] Sunim said, "oh, that's a marvelous idea. But I must make sure that this [unclear] clearly understands the Dharma teaching of [unclear] Sunim." So [Kubung?] Sunim and others accompanying him, so went to [unclear]. And [Kubung?] Sunim asked, like challenged, you know, well I have no objection to your succeeding [unclear] Sunim as the leader of the community but I must know that you understand, you indeed understand, [unclear] Sunim's teaching. That's the teaching of seven suchness.

So then this [unclear] gathered this reply. He really, [unclear] Sunim, he really understood the world of form. You know, it's form, emptiness, emptiness, form. And then, and then this [Kubung] Sunim said, "No, no you don't understand. I'm sorry, this [unclear], he cannot, in my opinion, in my humble opinion, he cannot succeed [unclear] Sunim since he does not understand his Dharma."

So then [unclear] said, "So you don't approve of my Dharma power?"

And ([Kubung?] Sunim) said, "I'm sorry, I don't."

"Then okay, then I will display my Dharma power in front of everybody. And you bring incense burner, and then burn incense. Stick before the incense stick lighted, emits any kind of smoke, I will check out."

So they did that. They duly brought incense burner and someone lighted incense stick. And the incense, this [unclear] monk checked out while seating in meditation.

Well that was marvellous (laughs). Well the thing is, here they call it [unclear], you know. It's, the one quality of enlightenment is enjoyment. Complete freedom in coming and going that's in birth and death. So you can check out at will, and then you can come back at will. Not being subject to, you know, greed, anger, and, basically, samsara.

So everybody marvelled that. But then [Kubung] Sunim said, he patted, he patted the shoulder of [unclear] Sunim who just checked out. Well indeed your Dharma power is marvellous. I can see that. But still, even in your dream, did you understand [unclear] Sunim's Dharma?

Well, so in this community, fortunately there were non-verbal, enlightened monks, who recognized the Dharma Eye, the Wisdom Eye, of this young monk who was personal attendant to

[unclear] Sunim. Otherwise they must have an uproar and uprising. Because, this [unclear] guy, he performed well.

So anyway, and then the news spread fast, even in the olden times, like from mouth to mouth. So people would compose poems, send it out, approving of [Kubung?] Sunim's performance.

Now, here I promote constant practice and constant waking up. Life is constant, it's constant life. In other words, constant flowing life. You become constant. You become subject to constant movement, constant flow. In a moment, you get upset. In a moment, you get joyful. Unfavourable situation shows up, next minute favourable situation shows up. All the time. It's constant flow. Thirty-six hundred days, and over and over again. On and on.

But constant practice goes on like that, along with a constant life and also constant practice, constant awakening. Through favourable times, unfavourable times. Through happiness, through sorrow, through pain. That's [unclear], that's Buddhism for people. What more do you want? Awakening, enlightenment, salvation, it's all here. Everyday developing your Wisdom Eye, when you wake up in the morning.

If you wake up in the midst of all this, that's called all beings are Buddhas, common, ordinary. Common ordinary things are Buddhas. There's no other miracle. If you miss it, you completely missed.

Three strikes and chanting to close.

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: August 13, 2006

Location: Chicago

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: May 16, 2024

Opens with three strikes and chanting

Good morning.

[poem in Korean]

When you stretch out and go to sleep, there is neither false nor truth.

Is that right? Buddhism and Zen, it's as simple as that. When you stretch out and go to sleep, there is neither false nor truth. That is, don't attach yourself to what is wrong. You know, when people make mistakes, you hate them. Don't attach yourself to what is true. And sometimes you feel you're right, and others are wrong. Sometimes you feel so strong that you are true.

When I first came to this country, this was in the summer of 1967, I had a little stop over in San Francisco before I flew to New York City. And there, I started hearing people say "Hey man, take it easy!" (laughter) I thought, these people really understand Buddhism (laughter). That was really cool, you know. And I also heard, you know, some songs by Beatles, you know. "Let It Be" and "Let It Go," and I thought gee, you know like 15 or 20 years to study Buddhism to get it (laughter). These people really got it, you know?

There was this monk. His teaching was, you know there's this hwadu or koan. Everything, everything is reduced down to one thing. Everything returns to one thing. Million things, myriad things, and internally you have a million things going on, you know. You are 108, these days it's more like 365, passions. Emotions. Taking their turns, even vying with each other for, competing with each other for attention. You know, one is jealous, the other is hate, you know. And a number of other things. Million thoughts. And outside, externally, there are a million things going on. So the Zen studies bring all these things down to one. So everything, million things, return to one. Now, what is this one thing?

So the Zen teacher, they would come up with one thing, you know, to show. One Zen master, he would, he used to raise one finger. It's called One Finger Zen. His, everything is here, you see. And also there's [unclear, Korean], this is Dharma [unclear]. This is called [unclear Korean] in Korean. So when, here, the Heaven is down it's Earth, so the Dharma talk comes between Heaven and Earth. So, you know, so everything is on tip of this [unclear Korean], you know. Where the Dharma Talk comes.

So there was one guy, one young fellow, he was 12 years old. So he came to temple, he's brought by his grandma. His grandma took him to temple in the mountains. So the kids, they like to play, you know. Instead of trekking up the mountain, even in the olden times, you know. But the grandma goes so they follow the grandma. So this monk, you know, gives Dharma talk, you know. Bang, bang, bang, you know. That's, all my Dharma talk comes from the tip of the [unclear Korean]. He thought that was really strange and beautiful. So when everyone left the Buddha Hall, he would go and take a look at the, ... (bangs, laughter). And so intrigued he eventually became a monk. Now anyway, these days, you know, the people are too complicated and too sophisticated and...

Now, so, and then still, other Masters say have you had a good breakfast? And yes, sir. Then you go and wash the dishes, you know. So that was Dharma, you know. So that's, the statement goes, you know, the very reason the way of Buddha is in the world is so that you can awaken to your

true nature without leaving your worldly life. So your worldly life, you have breakfast and wash dishes, right? So washing dishes is great Dharma. That's what, not too long ago, I saw this copy of Zen and The Art of Bike Changing. So you don't have to renounce the world. And yet, the other Masters say, you know, stop daydreaming, you know. And that's actually kinder. Some other Master would say more strongly, like stop barking your head (laughter). Then they get it more strongly.

So, but this Master, Seungsahn Sunim, he would use this word. It's difficult to translate, but Seungsahn Sunim, who passed away a few years ago, he would usually say it this way. "Go straight ten thousand years." That's much more literal. Go straight forward. Go straight ten thousand years. More fuller translation, literal translation is, "With a single mind, you go straight ten thousand years." That means, that means don't get distracted.

So this variation of million things is reduced down to one thing. So what is this one thing? So, and now, means this one thing is like, be happy and promote peace in your everyday life. For yourself and for the world. So everybody's trying to learn to be happy. Not being disturbed, not being upset, not getting angry. Yet, promote peace. So, well this teacher, Seungsahn Sunim, so he spent something like 30 years and then he passed away. Well he actually ended up giving, you know, seven specific instances where you can promote, so he called like, something like Seven Kinds of Going Straight, you see.

And when he passed away, he had, eventually he built up a strong community. So there were about a couple hundred disciples. And he did not designate, you know, his successor. So the senior monks, they got together. "Now he's gone, so who will be our leader, who can lead our community?" So the consensus was, there was such a monk, he's a very, kind of, model kind of monk. Very virtuous and senior and all that. So no one had any objections to his being their leader. Then one monk said, "Well I don't have any objections, but I think it would be proper to go and ask, there was this monk, the Seungsahn Sunim who passed away, his personal attendant. Although he was young, in his 20's, in his late 20's, he served his teacher about 10 years, you know. So it would be courteous, respectful, to go and seek his advice."

So they sent a couple of senior monks to, you know, consult with him. So this personal attendant to the deceased monk, Hyang Soeng, said, "Why of course, that's a wonderful thing. He's a true and virtuous monk, I have no objection. But it would be proper, I must ask him about his understanding of my teacher."

How, you know, so nobody disagreed with that. So the assembly was called and then, so then he formally asked this virtuous monk, "What was the Dharma of Seungsahn Sunim?" And he said, and then this virtuous monk said, "He did not go out of the way of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." That's like a great complimentary thing, you know. It's kind of a stock phrase. He did not go out of the way of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It's something like, it's an understatement of, well, his

Dharma was excellent or something like that. And then this monk said, “Nice, but you never understood my teacher’s Dharma. Not even in your dream.” Then, so the whole assembly was stunned.

Then this virtuous monk, obviously he became unhappy (laughter), challenged by this young monk. “Do you not believe me? You don’t trust me.” “No.” (laughter) Well, then he challenged the whole community. “Well, would you, one of you, please burn an incense? Before the incense was being lighted, I can depart from this life to next life.” You know, here, this is a cultural thing here. It’s, if you’re an enlightened person, you become freed from birth and death. It’s called no birth and no death. So even, you know, [unclear] this you can even make up the date when you can check out, you see. So everybody was, there was a, you know, fervour. So indeed, this guy checked out before the incense had been lighted, and everyone marvelled at that. But then this personal attendant, you know, he, you know, he passed out, he checked out while being seated, like this. So he went there and patted his shoulder. “Your Dharma power is indeed wonderful, but yet you never understood my teacher’s Dharma.”

Now, there’s this line, (reciting in Korean). “Once you become freed from your delusion –” Delusion is, like, lack of wisdom, lack of awakening. “Once you become free from your delusion, your body-mind, your Buddha, your inherent Buddha, would shine.” It’s like sunlight breaking through clouds in order to shine over and over again. I talk about this, frequently about it, in the context of constant practice.

Buddhism is still new in this country so that means there’s, there are a lot of books. A lot of books on Buddhism being sold at the book stores, but the majority of them about Buddhism and psychology and healing and modern western interpretations. But it shows, you know, the stage of people in this country interested in Buddhism going through, you know. That’s what they’re interested in. But Buddhism, or Zen, is much more than that, you know. So since they read all these books and get involved and come to temple, so what they don’t realize is their understanding of Buddhism is quite limited, you see. It’s, of course my, my position is to understand to that, you know. To relate to that. Understanding where people come from.

Now it’s, for instance, people, of course some people who think literally, think meditation is your mind becoming empty or block out all your thoughts or become completely free from your thoughts. Nothing is (farther) from the truth. I said, you are living being (laughs). I mean, you know, unless you drop dead you’ll never become free from your own thoughts. Your mind or brain or whatever, they would never become blank or empty, you see. So that’s, sometimes they think. And then the opposite is, then of course the grim reality is, you have to face all these things, you know. Like the internal chatter and all these negative thoughts or positive thoughts, all that going on. That’s the grim side, and how to deal with them.

I mean, they're okay, you know, as they are. There's nothing wrong with that, you see. It's impermanent. It's like, as I often describe as in our mind clouds or, you know, planes go by and rainstorms and all that. Our mind is like sky, you see. They don't mind, it's fine. Also because of your mind, because of your Buddha-mind, because of the sky, these, all things can happen, you see. It's like a mother's womb, you know. We are, you know, life is formed.

So it's, well the meditation I teach is concentration. And many people who come, it's just how to deal with, you know, your old habits and these habits or, it's, that's actually a Buddhist word, it's old habits. It's a nice word. Whatever, you know, negative things going on or you established or things going on, it's not necessarily evil. We do use the word unwholesome things, unliberated side in our lives, you know. We all have that. We all have old habits.

So I sometimes say, it's even unwise wasting your time worrying about this unwholesome side, you know, and trying to get rid of that. But the meditation I teach is concentration, so instead of worrying about it, you know, you learn to meditate, you learn to concentrate, you learn to wake up, you cultivate a Wisdom Eye, to have a different take on what's going on, you see. To learn to see things with Wisdom Eye, you see. So it's, that's the wisdom side. And then of course, the compassion comes when you look at these things. First you look at yourself too, you know. You have to learn to forgive yourself, make reconciliation, make peace, and then learn to go forward. Right now it's, luckily I think there's a ceasefire or United Nations security council is trying to enforce ceasefire. Ceasefire, for, for a full month there has been such destruction. Killing of children, women, and innocent civilians. And, I watch the news on television screens. Even on television screen, it hurts, you know, to see the destruction. Totally unnecessary. And human beings, I mean, those weapons of mass destruction. I mean, they build it, which costs so much money, to use to kill and bring about such carnage. And the whole world has been standing by while these things going on. And, could you call this a civilized world? A civilization? And is this like a democracy? To tolerate that?

It's, there's called a wholehearted practice in difficult times, in troubled times. It's, for just a moment, you place yourself in their shoes, in their situation. Being bombed and killed. Your neighbours and your house destroyed, and you are left on the street among the robbers with nothing to fend for yourself. Now what do you have, you know? All you have is hatred and resentment, and this will be passed onto generations, the next generation. And so we cannot, when you think about it, they don't have all these machines or guns to fight or to protect themselves. So you cannot totally blame suicide bombers in this [unclear] place, in this situation. But anyway, so what they have left is like, you can feel the hatred and resentment filling the air. So it's, it's almost like broken-hearted compassion. And if you can, and our duty, your duty as a Buddhist is, somehow, of course this hatred and resentment should not be passed on. The whole world will pay the price for that. Somehow, somehow, even in our deepest feelings, if you can reach that, yes we care. Yes we care for that. So that somehow they would be able, capable of alleviating their pain and suffering. Not do any kind of destructive things out of desperation.

Dharma Talk

Teacher: Samu Sunim

Date: August 20, 2006

Location: Chicago

Event: Sunday Meditation Service

Transcriber: Zack, Toronto

Date of Transcription: May 17, 2024

Opens with three strikes and chanting

Please sit comfortably.

Good morning.

It's a beautiful day. There's a sign that fall season is just around the corner. A few years back we had two or three kinds of t-shirts we were selling at our bookstore. One is, "Suffering Is Optional." I think we still have that t-shirt, we carry that t-shirt. Another t-shirt had a saying, "Every Day Is Happy Day." So you are troubled or undisturbed, every day is happy day. You have to remember that, you know. Regardless of your mood or sentiment, every day is happy day. So you simply have to learn to make your day happy day every day.

There's this koan or hwadu. They divided the, you know, it says full moon. People in the olden times, they used to go by lunar calendar. The agricultural people. So full moon, new moon, these seasons are important. So every day is happy day after the full moon, and what happened to the days before the full moon? So there's such a hwadu.

Now the gatha I just recited, "Our house is so rich, we don't know what a joy a simple meal brings." (laughs) Now we are so busy with work, we don't have, we cannot enjoy to have a quiet sitting meditation. So that's the gatha. Our house is so rich, we don't know what a joy a simple meal is or brings. We work, we are so busy with our work, we cannot enjoy a quiet time for sitting.

Meditation is good for you, meditation is good for your friends and relatives, and meditation is good for the world. The ingredients and contents of your meditation are pretty simple and clear. First, silence. You are doing nothing. You just drop everything, just to sit quietly. And your body-mind, away from attachments, just breathing or counting your outgoing breath. And learn to concentrate your mind to become free from defilements and delusion. Or to cultivate a Wisdom Eye. All this you do in order to enjoy peace, love, and happiness.

As I often say, you are not a monastic. So you must develop a practice, a meditation practice, from where you are. That is, in your everyday life. No matter how happy, no matter how stressful your everyday is, you must develop your practice and cultivation in your everyday life. In other words, you must learn to incorporate your practice, your Buddhist practice, into your everyday life. So that is your task. That becomes a real practice. In other words, you know, after meditation, when you leave the temple, your meditation practice should not stop there. So it becomes big practice. You know, compared to your task, actually the monks, they have an easier time in the monastery. Well either up in the mountains or in isolated place, they are protected. But you are not protected. But remember this method coming from long cherished Buddhist tradition. "What compares, what compares with just getting dressed or eating your food? Aside from this, there are no Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." That's where you are, so your everyday life. Just getting dressed and eating your food. Breakfast and go to work. And struggle with your task.

Aside from this, there are no Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. So given your situation, from where you are, there are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the making. That's your real work, you see. That's the future of Buddhism here, and hope for the world.

So if you are sincere and truthful about yourself, about what you are doing, you must awaken to this truth. The task facing you. You don't just come here and meditate for yourself. Well, there are a lot of signs we are living in troubled times. So there's called wholehearted practice in difficult times or in troubled times. And so we have to, you know, wake up and make a strong commitment to our practice. For peace of world, for love and happiness of all beings. So it's, well I have been living in big cities, so sometimes how tough it can get. I don't go to work everyday, you know. I work out, I work at the temple. But, you know, I come into contact with quite a number of people almost daily. Our temple in Toronto, here we don't have our own parking lot, but Toronto temple has, actually a big parking lot, and which is underused (laughs). But so, it's in a, you know, our temple is located facing, you know, a busy street and quite a busy [building?]. And so people just, you know, come and park illegally. It's a nice space (laughter). Well the commercial parking is right there, right next to it, but they don't go to commercial parking lot and they just come and park. First we tolerated it, but then it's just full of cars. It's, it does not look good. Zen Buddhist temple with, full of cars in front.

So we tried to cut down, you know. We called traffic police and they come and give a ticket for illegal parking. And we put up signs everywhere. And actually, there's another building which we rent out and, I mean, they were also troubled. They actually contracted a towing company so they get towed, I mean, your car gets towed and you get the message (laughter). So it's a lot better now, you know. Actually quite a few days go by without any car parking. Because they know, you know, we live there and so it's, it's nice, you know. To see, you know, particularly on weekend, see an empty lot, you know. Then sometimes when we sit early Sunday morning, all these seagulls and pigeons and other (laughs), they make great noise. Sometimes when you sit on

the meditation platform, you come under this illusion you are sitting on an island, you see. They make so much noise but it's nice, you see. Their noises.

So now, and then about a few weeks ago, there's one fellow, he pulled over and parked illegally. Very nice car. So I went out and to tell them that this is private parking. And sometimes they are very nasty, they try to argue with that. And he got immediately mad, you know. And hurling these insults, you know, like, you know, you miserably bastard, with a four letter word at the front (laughs). And in a second, I see my anger is rising, you know. And soon I could become like him, you know. But then I realized, you know, if it is painful to hear these words, even though it's his words. It's, you know, it's his words and, you know, whirling around in the air and then disappeared, you see. But then how much he would suffer, he would suffer, you know, many more times than I would, you see. You know, saying all those things. So I looked at him and I just walked away. But I'm sure you, you know, you are confronted with these things, you know, quite a few times. Sometimes every day, or every other day, or on weekly basis. It's hard. But, so that's a real practice. That's why the monks, even though, you know, they cultivate Wisdom Eye, get enlightened, unless they come down the mountain and go to marketplace and get it tested, you know, it's not certified (laughter). So you try to get your enlightenment and Wisdom Eye get certified every day (laughter). And I'm sure you miserably fail, but sometimes you become successful, you know.

I mean, you hear this, you know, it's a Buddhist prayer. It's, this is a real prayer. It's The Way of the Bodhisattva. So, "Whether those who encounter me consider a faithful or angry thought, may that always become the source for fulfilling all their wishes." That's real Bodhisattva prayer. So it's, it's when you get upset and angry, then you should come to temple and meditate. When you get happy and overexcited, also you should come and meditate. And of course, when you become broken-hearted, or feel betrayed, and all these reasons, you come.

Well in Asia, people come and look at the Buddha statue. More than words, I know you come from the tradition of words. We are strongly attached to words and instructions and sermons. But it's, the Buddha statue, it's the embodiment of Buddhist teachings. Peace, love, solitude, serenity, happiness, and all that. So they look at, particularly, you know, in the olden times and particularly women folks, they were not educated. Sometimes they don't know how to read and write. But they, they can relate to visual aids or visual teachings. So it's a visual teaching there. So they look at the Buddha statue and it has the power to calm your mind. So they observe the qualities. So you look at the Buddha statue to calm your mind and to cultivate wisdom, compassion, and love instead of hatred, and anger, and frustration.

But again, in your everyday life, you can even do retreats. Sometimes you say I'm busy, I cannot come to retreat and all that. But you can do, well of course, we have a two day meditation, you can come for half a day. But also you can do retreat in your everyday life, doing what you have to do in your everyday life. Like you can spend half a day after being silent or if you can spend

half a day dusting. You can spend half a day just thinking one thing, love and happiness of some people. Or you can do that and then from there you can go for one day. One day of fasting, or one day of no meat, and one day of silence. You can do that. On weekends, on Saturday. Or just one day of solitude. Not going out. Even shopping.

So you can do things. But also, the other kind of activity you can do is compassion, you know. You can be more helpful. You can be more generous and more open with, these days, with cultural intelligence. And to promote peace and happiness. Peace of the world and happiness of all beings. You can think about a way you can do it. There are, I'm sure there are a number of things you can do to help, given your situation.

And, and of course it's also, there are other things. You can promote Buddhist teachings, Buddhist messages for tolerance, and happiness, and wisdom. And awakening.

Three strikes to close and chanting