

The Story of Jim

A Dharma Talk By Seung Sahn Soen-Sa, September 3, 1976

This is Jim. I first met him at Esalen Institute almost one year ago. He had taken a lot of special medicine so his consciousness was all broken, all broken. He wanted to talk, but couldn't. Many, many thinking, moment to moment, then talk. This style is a little crazy, O.K.? Someone told him only to do bowing. Also, during sitting he would breathe in and out very hard. So, perhaps, he was getting bad teaching. He was very worried. Many of his friends were taking care of him, and one of them, Joan, asked me how to fix his mind. So I told her not to worry. Broken consciousness means that all consciousnesses have separate action. The sixth consciousness, seventh consciousness, and eighth consciousness all have different action, each wants its own way. But mind is one mind. So he cannot control his mind, cannot control his body. "One mind" means that the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses all become one. "Become one" means empty mind. So the Heart Sutra says "Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva when practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita perceives that all five skandhas are empty." The five skandas are form, feeling, perception, impulses, consciousness – all empty. This means, when you see the wall, only white. When you hear the sound of the crickets, only this sound. But if you have separate consciousness action, then many thinking. "Why this sound? Why this? I don't like this! This is noisy!" This style thinking, many thinking, thinking, thinking. So you become crazy. So I told Jim he must try, Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi swaha.

Later I visited there again with Jacob, a Dharma Teacher and also a Dharma Play Master. Dharma play means all concentration action, only rest mind, very easy, become one. Sixth consciousness, seventh consciousness, eighth consciousness become one action, become one practice. This is very important if your mind is broken. First we say, "All energy out, all energy out of your right hand." Only keep one mind. "Then all energy out of your left hand, of your right leg, your left leg." Then, "Your palm is very hot," etc. Only become one mind, keep your mind at one point. This is sixth consciousness action. Next after this, good feeling. "You can see this sun like a dream, now you can see the ocean (then he can see the ocean), now you can smell very good smell." This is seventh consciousness. Next eighth consciousness action. "Now you are very deep, deep, deep. Now you are ten years old," ten years appears. "Now you are five years old, now you are before life." My consciousness goes to before life. This is Dharma play style. So Jacob tried Dharma play three times a day and taught it to Joan. We stayed there only three days, it was very good. Only try mantra and Dharma play. Maybe one month after we left, his mind was completely fixed.

This is crazy mind. You must understand why somebody becomes crazy. There are many kinds of crazy. Someone takes special medicine becomes crazy. I want something, like money or fame, so I become crazy. I have strong desire, so become crazy. I am very attached to something—love, a girl, a boy—I become crazy. If you understand why

somebody become crazy, it is very easy to fix, not difficult. So in the Heart Sutra, Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi swaha, means that already the five skandhas are empty. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. But next, “No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind. No color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind.” This means no mind. “No mind” means no object of mind. If you attain no mind then there is no Buddha, no God, no you, no I. Everything is “no”. So no form, no emptiness. No cognition, no attainment with nothing to attain. This means no attainment. You must attain no attainment. How? Only go straight, Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, swaha . Then you can see, you can hear, everything just like this is the truth.

Next, Nirvana and Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. In Nirvana there is no attainment with nothing to attain. Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi means “just like this”. Nirvana is 180°, Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi is 360°. How are they different? Nirvana is no form, no emptiness. Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi is form is form, emptiness is emptiness. If you correctly understand no form, no emptiness, you understand that form is form, emptiness is emptiness. There are three kinds: form is emptiness, emptiness is form; next, no form, no emptiness; next, form is form, emptiness is emptiness. So are they the same or different? If you correctly understand the meaning of this, you understand what is Nirvana, what is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. So Sunday morning we had interviews, that time I got a good answer from Jim, to what is Nirvana, what is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi.

So, nowadays, Jim is very strong, but sometimes he is too strong. Still thinking, thinking, thinking. If someone is talking he soon catches the story, “Ah, this is this is this.” Too strong. So I tell him, “You’re no good! You must keep silence!” So, nowadays, Jim just practices silently. Sometimes people ask him when he will end his silence. I tell him to answer, “Maybe tomorrow, maybe infinite time.” “Maybe tomorrow” means, if he gets enlightenment tomorrow then he can open his mouth. If he doesn’t get enlightenment, for an infinite time he cannot open his mouth. Very strong practice. So how can he open his mouth? Only go straight. All practicing means, only go straight. If you understand your karma, you can fix your mind. If you don’t understand your karma, you cannot fix your mind. So we sit Zen. Then all my bad karma appears. Thinking comes and goes, comes and goes, pain in the legs, all this appears. So you must correctly find your karma. Then, how does this bad karma disappear? Only go straight, don’t know. Thinking is not necessary. Don’t check your mind, don’t check your feelings, also don’t check other people’s minds, other people’s actions. Only go straight, don’t know. This is very important. It is very easy to say, but your practice is very difficult. Someone may understand when I say, “Don’t make anything, then you will get everything.” Very easy words, but very difficult. You must only go straight, only this question, don’t know. Very easy, very difficult. But don’t make difficult or easy, O.K.? Only go straight.

Wake Up From All Dreams: The Story of Dol Um

A Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-Sa

“Wake up! Wake up!” These are interesting words. “Wake Up! Master, wake up please, you are having a dream.” Then you wake up. Then what? If you are thinking, this too is a dream. Why? Thinking is consciousness action, dreaming is consciousness action. Dreaming is very simple—it is seventh and eighth consciousness action. The seventh and eighth consciousnesses are not hindered by time and space, so coming and going, visiting New York, Korea, Los Angeles, is easily possible. But *this* dream is very difficult. In this dream we have sixth consciousness, which is always together with eyes, nose, tongue, this body—always carrying this body. So time and space are a hindrance.

Nighttime dreaming is very interesting. Tcheew! go, techeeow! come. Interesting. Daytime dreaming is very difficult, sometimes crying, sadness, depression. At night, if your situation gets difficult, a quick change is easily possible, but daytime difficulties, thinking and suffering, are not so easily changed. Why? In daytime dreams there are many hindrances, in nighttime dreams there are not so many hindrances. So you must wake up. “Wake up” means cut off all thinking. “Cut off all thinking” means no sixth consciousness, no seventh consciousness, no eighth consciousness. The Heart Sutra says, “perceives that all five skandhas are empty.” Then what? No form, no feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness. No consciousness, then Tchkuuh! Wake up!

So “wake up” mind is correct view; “no wake up” mind is perverted view. So you must keep a clear mind. If you keep just now mind, when you sleep you aren’t dreaming. If you have a dream, it is not a dream, O.K.? Dream is not a dream, not dream is dream. You must understand this. Dream is not dream. Why? If you are dreaming, you must keep clear mind. If you find yourself dreaming, just try Kwansum Bosal, Kwansum Bosal, Kwansum Bosal. At such a time you are not dreaming. Dream is not dream. But “not dream is dream” means being attached to something, hindered by something, separating things in your mind. This is all a dream. This is perverted view. If you are having a dream and a Zen Master asks you, “What color is this?” and you answer immediately, “White” this is not a dream, already you are awake. In a dream, already wake up! So “wake up” is very important.

Long ago in Korea there was a famous Zen master, Dol Um. Dol means “cart”, Um means “cloud”. Before his enlightenment he first went to a large temple where there was a rich and famous sutra master who did not teach. At this time, 500 years ago, often only one monk at a temple had money. Now in Korea everyone is equal. If you keep money, you are not a monk. If you get money, no good, only empty pocket style. Before one monk might have many fields, and so get a lot of money. Rich monks had many students, poor monks had no students. Why? Rich monks would give their students money so that the students could pay to go to sutra school. When I became a monk thirty years ago, it was

the same style. Korea was following Japan, so the monks were married and had to get money to support their families. You had to get money to stay in the temple and learn the sutras. Nowadays in Korea all the monks are single. None of them have money, everything is free, and they can stay at any of the temples. After World War II there was a revolution in the Chogye Order. Married monks, Japanese-style monks were forced to leave. For fifteen years there was conflict. When I first became a monk I also had no money, so I worked making charcoal and earned the money to go to a temple and learn the sutras. At this time Zen temples and sutra temples were different. Su Dok Sa was only a Zen temple, so there was complete together action. Under our teacher Ko Bong, we would go out together to get rice, come back together and eat at the temple. Since the temple was poor, we would spend three months working outside to get money, then three months sitting. This is Zen temple style.

So once there was a very rich monk who had 100 students. He decided that 100 was enough. The 100th monk, Dol Um, was a very clever young monk. He was given money to learn the sutras and did so for three years. Then he thought, "These sutras are not necessary. All sutras only save your mind; if your mind is empty, what use are sutras?" He understood that the sutras aren't necessary, that he must only practice at a Zen temple. So the young monk spoke to his teacher. "Master, this sutra style is no good. We must go to a Zen temple. You are old and will soon die. Where are you going?"

"Yes, I understand, but who will take care of my land, my barns, my possessions?"

"You have many capable students. Leave everything with them."

"O.K. then, it is decided. We leave tomorrow."

None of the other monks were like this one. They only thought, "I want to be rich. I want to be a famous sutra master or mantra master." But this 100th monk was very clever. His teacher thought,

"Ah, I decided to stop at 100 students, and Buddha has helped me by sending this especially clever boy. It is good to follow his direction."

There was a meeting of the whole monastery at which the teacher announced that he would be going to the Zen temple with his young student. Then he told everyone to take care of his rice fields and large barns, assigning each monk some responsibility. Early the next day, they packed provisions, said their goodbyes, and left for the Zen temple. After walking some three miles up the mountainside, they stopped to rest and drink some tea. Looking down at the monastery in the valley, the student noticed a fire. "Master, look, a fire. What is burning?"

"On no ! It is my barn! You go on alone. I must return to the temple."

"But Master, soon you will die. Where are you going?"

"No, no, no. I must go back."

So the sutra master returned to his monastery. Dol Um continued on his journey. He realized that his teacher had many attachments, and that he could not change his mind. He went straight ahead to the Zen temple.

Three years passed. The famous sutra master died, and the news spread. A great 49th day ceremony for 1000 guests was planned, and many singing and dancing monks came to share in the food, drink, and money. Dol Um came to the funeral ceremony. He was met by a Dharma brother, the head monk, who said, "You are no good. When the master was dying you did not visit. You're only coming now to get a share of the property."

Dol Um said, "No. I don't want any land or money, thank you. I would like two pots of rice soup, please, if this is possible."

"Only this?"

"Yes."

"O.K."

Everyone had a job for the duration of the ceremony, some more difficult than others. The head monk asked, "What kind of job do you want?"

"Anything is good."

"Then you can wash the dishes." Dishes for 1000 people!

As people finished eating, Dol Um would carry the dishes to a large wooden tub full of water and dump them in. None would break, and all would be clean immediately. If anyone was watching, he wouldn't use magic but would only scrub, one at a time. So one man washed dishes for 1000 people.

The ceremony was over, everyone was very happy, all had received money, many had been drinking alcohol. Dol Um went to the second housemaster. "Do you have two pots of rice soup for me?"

"Yes, right over there."

He took the soup to a large field outside the funeral area in which there were large rocks for milling rice. (It was a custom to make an offering of food to the demons who would be afraid to trespass on the ceremonial grounds.) Then he returned to the innermost Dharma room of the Buddha and hit a column three times. Immediately a large snake appeared, went over to the rocks, and ate all the rice soup.

"Teacher," said Dol Um, "why did you get this body?"

The snake said, "I am sorry. I should have listened to you. Now I have a snake's body."

Why a snake? He had a great 49th day funeral ceremony, and only got a snake's body! His consciousness was like a snake, so he got a snake's body. Now the snake was crying.

“Teacher, you have many desires. You have eaten all this soup, yet it is not enough. This snake’s body is no good. It is only desire body. You must hit your head against the rocks, and take away this body.”

But the snake replies, “Oh, this body is not so bad. I cannot.”

“You must try!” Only silence. “You must try!” Then Dol Um hit the snake three times, the snake died.

A cloud of blue smoke appeared and floated away. The Zen Master followed it. A bird flew nearby, and the cloud began to assume its form. “No good!” shouted Dol Um. Again it flew on and began to enter the form of a cow. “No good!” Then the cloud floated further and further into the mountains, deep into the mountains to a little house where there lived a middle-aged couple. The cloud entered the house. Dol Um waited for an hour, then knocked on the front door.

“How are you?”

“Who are you?”

“I am a monk.”

“Oh. Why have you come here?”

“To tell you that you will have a baby.”

“What? We built this house twenty years ago, and we have been unable to have children all this time. You must be mistaken. My wife is now over 45 years old. It is not possible.”

“O.K., but if you have a baby, you must give it to me.”

“Sure. If we have a baby, we will give it to you.”

“O.K., I’ll be back in one year.”

As time passed, the woman’s belly began to swell, and the couple realized that the monk understood the truth. They were very happy. After ten months had passed, they had a fine boy, their first and only child. Then Dol Um appeared.

“Ah, you were right. We have a child.”

“Give me the boy.”

“Oh, no!”

“But you told me before that you would give him to me.”

“No! He is our boy. After living here for twenty years, praying for children, we finally have a son!”

“All right, but this boy will not live past three years. You must understand this.”

The boy grew for one year, two years, no problem. His parents thought the monk must have been wrong. Then the boy became sickly, he had no appetite, diarrhea, he was always sick, soon he was near death. “Oh”, they said, “the monk was correct.”

At exactly three years, Dol Um again appeared. “How is your boy?”

“Soon he will die.”

“Just as I told you.”

“What shall we do?”

“You must give him to me.”

“Yes. You will take good care of him?”

“Of course.”

As soon as the boy was in Dol Um’s hands he was no longer sick, only laughing, very happy. All his suffering had disappeared. The parents saw that he had Buddhist karma, so they were happy to let him go. Dol Um took very good care of the boy. He had good food every day and was never sick.

When the boy reached five years of age, he was very active. One day, while the Zen Master was sitting, he went to the kitchen and picked up a knife with the thought, “I will kill the teacher.” He came up behind the master, who was aware of him. Just as he was about to strike, the Zen Master said, “Put it down. Be careful, careful now, put down the knife. Come here. You remember me, why do you want to kill me?”

“I don’t understand. I just don’t like you, so I want to kill you.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“In the future you will understand, but now you must understand yourself.”

“Yes sir, how?”

Then the Zen Master led him to a rice paper window in which there was a tiny hole. “You must sit here and look through this hole until a big cow comes into the hole. Only this. Don’t think about anything else. Only watch for this big cow, When it comes, you will understand your true self.”

So, at the small temple in the mountains the child only ate, slept, and looked through the hole in the rice paper. “When will the cow come?” Very clear child’s mind, only the question. One day passed, two days, almost one hundred days, then the hole grew bigger and bigger, and a huge cow appeared. “Mooooo!”

The boy cried out, “Master! Master! The cow! The cow has come!” Then the Master rushed over and slapped his face.

“Where is the cow?”

“Oh!”

The child understood himself completely, got enlightenment. Then he said, “You were my student before!”

“Yes sir,” said Dol Um, bowing.

So wake up! This child woke up early. In his previous life he had many desires, so he could not wake up; he died and became a snake. His student liked him and cared for him. He had wanted to sit Zen but the fire had changed his mind. Dol Um understood his mind, so he followed the blue smoke of his consciousness—had it entered a bird, he would have been a bird; a cow, then a cow—so he called out, “No good ! no good!” until the smoke entered a house and became a human being. This is interesting. Having the same karma is very important, The 100th student and his teacher had very good karma, so in the next life they were again teacher and student.

This is a “wake up” story. If you cut off all thinking, you wake up. If you keep a thinking mind, this is a dream. Waking up from this dream is more difficult than waking up from an ordinary dream, so you must wake up. You must wake up!

God and Buddha

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-Sa, New Haven Zen Center,
December 9, 1976

Recently I held a two-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. for a group of lay Christians, ministers, and monks. During interviews I asked each one, “Where are you coming from?” “Washington.” “Whose hand is this?” “Mine.” “Whose leg is this?” “Mine.” “Your body comes from Washington, but I’m asking you, not your body. Where does your true self come from?” “God.” Everyone answered, “God,” so I said, “Yah, you are correct, but I ask you, where is God?” “Everywhere.” Some answered, “Everywhere,” some could not answer. All the ministers answered, “Everywhere.” So I said, “Then is God in your mind or outside your mind?” Very difficult! “If you say God is inside your mind, then I say, Oh, this God is very small! If you say God is outside your mind, then I ask you, Are God and your mind the same or different? If you say they are the same, I will hit you. If you say they are different, I will also hit you.” Everyone stops, no one can answer. Don’t know. This is correct.

Buddhism first taught that there was only one Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha. This is Hinayana style. Later, in Mahayana Buddhism, there were 84,000 Buddhas, 84,000 Bodhisattvas, 84,000 demons, 84,000 Dharmas, many sutras. In response to this, Zen Masters say, many Buddhas are not necessary. If you meet Buddha, you must kill Buddha. If you meet a Bodhisattva, you must kill the Bodhisattva. Too many, you know, so all kill. Mahayana Buddhism has too many Buddhas, so it’s no good. Also if demons come, you must kill the demons. Buddha, demon, Bodhisattva—you must kill everything. This is Zen.

Student: “Then what?”

Soen-sa: “Then hit!”

So, killing everything means that if, in your mind one mind appears, you must kill it—good mind, bad mind, kill everything. Then what? You always have opposites thinking in your mind—good and bad; Buddha and not-Buddha; Heaven and Hell; the American sky is dark, the Oriental sky is blue—always opposites thinking. You must take away these opposites. Then your mind is absolute. So Zen is a revolution. Mahayana Buddhism has many styles, but Zen is a revolution in Buddhism. Or rather, a revolution in your mind. Then you will get complete peace. Complete peace means complete equality, complete freedom.

America is wonderful. You have freedom for any speech. But what is complete freedom? If you *want* freedom, you already lose freedom. If you *want* peace, you already lose peace. If you want equality, you already lose equality. You must make want mind disappear. This

means, you must kill your true self. First kill Buddha, then kill everything, then finally kill your true self. Then what? Then world peace, O.K. ? So I asked the minister, “Why these days don’t American young people like Christianity? Why don’t they go to church?” You must understand American people have already almost become Buddha. Already 90% Buddha. It’s like Christian style—long hair, beards, ragged clothing—almost like Christ. The only difference is that Christ had no desire for himself, only for all people. Some hippies, though, think “Only me”. I like this, I don’t like that. I like natural style. I like natural food. I like natural medicine, only natural-natural. I don’t like plastic, I don’t like machines, I don’t like this government, I don’t like this person”—this mind. “I like something, I don’t like something.” Christ liked everything, liked everybody. No desire for myself. So complete hippie mind equals complete Christ mind. But some hippies are only outside hippies; inside they don’t have hippie mind. So it’s necessary to be a complete hippie, inside and outside. This means you must make likes and dislikes disappear. Then your mind is the complete absolute. No opposites. Then you already have equality and freedom.

Student: If the truth is already in me, why am I looking for it?

Soen-sa: What do you want?

Student: Truth.

Soen-sa: Already mistake. If you open your mouth, it is not the truth. What is truth? You say, “I want truth,” so you don’t believe in yourself. You already *have* the truth, but you say, “I want truth.” So you make a mistake. What color is this floor?

Student: Brown

Soen-sa: Correct. This is truth. If someone said, “White,” this would be crazy. “The floor is brown” is the truth. You already understand. So if you make the mind that wants to understand truth disappear, then you are already complete.

Dream Talking

From a Dharma Talk By Seung Sahn Soen-sa, New Haven Zen Center December 9, 1976

Student: Do you dream about different kinds of things now that you are a Zen Master?

Soen-sa: What kind of dreams?

Student: Well, I dream about things I desire, but if you don't desire anything, what do you dream about?

Soen-sa: Yah, I have dreams.

Student: What kind of dreams?

Soen-sa: You are laughing so I am laughing. This is a dream. You say you have a dream, so I am having a dream.

Student: I understand what you say but I can't believe it.

Soen-sa: You can't believe the dream. So your dream is not-believing dream. Everything is a dream, O.K.? Last night you had a dream. Just now we are talking. How is it different?

Student: I can feel it's different.

Soen-sa: Feel? You say "different." I am the same. So here is a famous story. Before in China there were five schools of Zen: Rinzai, Soto, Poep An, Un Mun, and E An. E An and An Sahn together made one school. E An was the teacher, An Sahn, the disciple. Once E An was asleep. At that time An Sahn was only his secretary. He happened to open the door, saw that the Zen Master was asleep, and slowly closed the door. The Zen Master woke up, asked An Sahn to come over to him and said, "Just now I had a dream. Do you understand?"

An Sahn said, "Yes, just now I understood," and washed the Zen Master's face with water. The Master said, "Oh, thank you for washing my face." Then another disciple, later a Zen Master, Haeng Om, came into the Zen Master's room. The Master said, "Oh, Haeng Om, we were just talking about my dream. Do you understand my dream?"

Haeng Om said, "Yes sir," went into the kitchen, and brought in some tea. The Zen Master said, "Ah, my students are very wonderful. You all understand my dreams."

This is dream talking. What does it mean? A dream is just like this. Just like this is a dream. If you wake up, you wash your face. This is the correct way. Then you drink tea. This is the correct way. If you completely understand dreams, then you understand the

correct way. If you don't understand dreams, then you don't understand the correct way. So you must understand that this whole world is a dream. Then my desire is also a dream, my anger is also a dream, your life is also a dream. You must understand dreams, then you will have no desire. Only Bodhisattva action is possible. So this is a dream, O.K.? I have a dream. Once, Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream." Famous speech. So you must understand dreams. Understanding the dream is no good. You must attain the dream. Then you will understand your true self, O.K.?

Three Courses in Zen

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa, New Haven Zen Center, December 9, 1976

Student: You say one must return to the mind of a child. Then what is the role of intelligence in understanding Zen?

Soen-sa: What do you want? Just now, what do you want?

Student: I want peace and quiet.

Soen-sa: Peace. What is peace?

Student: No turbulence, no moving.

Soen-sa: Yah, correct. "Peace" is a very important word. Sometimes we use a pocket calculator. If there is already a number on the window, you can't make another calculation with it. So there is a button marked "C". If you keep a clear mind, then you will get happiness everywhere. This is complete peace. So always push "C". If your mind is angry, push "C" and your mind will be clear. Don't-know mind is push-"C" mind. If you have a lot of thinking, only go straight, don't know; then your thinking will disappear. You must return to your original mind. Don't know.

Mu Gak Su Nim was just telling me how the Emperor of China asked Bodhidharma who he was, and Bodhidharma replied, "Don't know." Don't-know mind, complete don't-know mind, an emperor's don't-know mind, Bodhidharma's don't-know mind, all don't-know mind is the same don't-know mind. So already all thinking is cut off. When all thinking is cut off, mind is already empty. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking is your original mind. So if you use a calculator, push "C". Then many zeroes appear on the screen, all zeroes. This is empty mind. Empty mind is very important. $1 \times 0 = 0$; $2 \times 0 = 0$; $1000 \times 0 = 0$; mountain $\times 0 = 0$; anger $\times 0 = 0$; desire $\times 0 = 0$. If your mind is zero, then everything is zero. Everything is empty.

The empty mind is *not* empty. We say "empty", but it is not empty. You can see the sky. There is daytime sky and nighttime sky—sky is sky, O.K.? But the daytime sky is blue, the nighttime sky is dark? Why? The sky is the same. Your mind is dark, so it is dark. Your mind is blue, so it is blue. Why is the nighttime sky dark? Why is the daytime sky blue? Already you have graduated from primary school, so you understand everything. It is the same sky. Right now the American sky is dark, the Korean sky is blue. Why? What then is the original sky? Who made this dark, who made that blue? *You* made it. So you must push "C", don't-know. Then there is no dark, no blue. This is very important. Do you understand?

Student: I understand, but I do not believe you. In fact, if you walk into a wall, it hurts and it is there whether you want to believe it or not. The idealism you talk about does not work in reality.

Soen-sa: Yah, you understand a lot, so you are better than me. I don't understand this. You understand a lot. You understand too much! So I ask you, why is the American sky now dark, the Oriental sky now blue? Why? Same sky. (silence) Yah, this is difficult. So we'll try this: $1 + 2 = 3$; $1 + 2 = 0$. Which is correct?

Student: $1 + 2 = 3$.

Soen-sa: Correct. But $1 + 2 = 0$ is also correct. You must understand this. Don't know, yah? So you must come here to Zen school, O.K.? Other schools only teach $1 + 2 = 3$. Zen school first teaches $1 + 2 = 0$. This is very important course. It costs a lot of money. That is, it's very hard on your body to come here and sit. Then you will understand that $1 + 2 = 0$. Before you were born, you were zero. Now you are one. In the future you will die and again become zero. So $0 = 1$, $1 = 0$. So $1 + 2 = 0$. This is Zen school. Now you understand, so I ask you: $1 + 2 = 3$; $1 + 2 = 0$. Which one is correct? Both are correct, O.K.?

But in the next course, if I ask you which one is correct and you say both are correct, I will hit you. If you say both are not correct, I will also hit you. Then what? I ask you, is zero a number?

Student: Not exactly, yes and no.

Soen-sa: If you say it is a number, it's a number. If you say it's not a number, then it's not a number.

Student: Not exactly.

Soen-sa: If you say "not exactly" I will hit you. If you say it's a number I will hit you. If you say it's not a number, I will also hit you. This is the second course. If you completely *attain* zero, then there is no Buddha, no mind, no form, no name, no God, nothing at all. Also, there is no speech and no word. If you open your mouth, you're wrong. This is the second course. So only sit, don't know. This don't-know mind is already before thinking. Before thinking there is no speech, no word. So opening the mouth is wrong. Don't know mind is primary point. Someone once said that primary point is mind, or Buddha, or nature, or substance, or absolute, or energy or everything. But the true primary point has no name, no form, no speech, no word. If you keep don't-know mind, already you are before thinking. Before thinking is your substance. This substance has no name, no form. Then what?

So when someone asked Zen Master Lin-Chi, "What is Buddha?" he only shouted "KATZI!" When someone would question Zen Master Dok Sahn, he would only hit the questioner. When someone would question Zen master Ku-Ji, he would only raise one finger. So they didn't open their mouths. They didn't use words. Only transmission from me to you. It's like this. When I first came to the United States, a truck would come past the Zen Center every evening playing music. I didn't understand what was going on. Finally one night I looked out the window and saw children shouting "Ice cream!" So I

understood. The ice-cream man didn't open his mouth, he only used music. Then everyone understood "ice-cream". The ice-cream man already was transmitting ice-cream mind to the children's mind.

First there is talking. "0 = 1, 1 = 0." Next, if you completely attain zero, there is no talking. Only hit, only KATZ!, only one finger, and you already understand. Earlier Mu Gak Su Nim told the story of Buddha picking up the flower and Mahakasyapa smiling, after which Buddha said, "I transmit my true Dharma to you" This is very bad speech. Everyone already has the true Dharma, how can it be transmitted? Your mind is already your Dharma, my mind is already my Dharma. So this speech is a mistake, a big mistake. When Buddha picked up the flower and Mahakasyapa smiled, the dialogue was already finished. This is Zen.

If you attain zero, then your mind is correct empty mind. Empty mind means clear like space. Clear like space means like a clear mirror. Red comes, there is red. White comes, there is white. Someone is sad, I am sad. Someone is happy, so I am happy. This is the Bodhisattava—no desire for myself, my actions are for all people. This is world peace and your true peace. You want peace, so I am explaining what peace is. If you want correct peace, you must come here, first attain $1 + 2 = 0$; next correctly attain zero; then attain just like this. Three courses. Primary school, high school, university!

January 6, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope you are O.K. This letter was started before you even left Providence for the West Coast. My small I has been having problems, but this is nothing important. However, it does bother me that my health has been affected. Many head colds lately. And when I am ill and have to take special care of my body, I think more, "Why am I not well?" "What have I been doing wrong?" "Surely it is all in my head." All this thinking makes me feel worse. No good.

Usually I let my small questions go by without mentioning them to you or the older members of our family (although I do pester Lynn a bit). I realize that they are thinking questions and not worthy of attention. You are a big help in this regard. When I see your face, my questions disappear. Nevertheless, I cannot always dispel my questions so easily, though I ignore them for a while. Sometimes they hang around and badger me like unwelcomed guests. Well, here is one question that has been hindering me for a long time, and I would like to put it down. It is probably *the* reason I put off practicing Zen for so long.

When I meet Zen students, they usually strike me in one of two ways. Either they seem concerned about perfecting their own minds, or else they are clearing their own minds in order to help everyone. Despite everything, my discrimination comes through. I realize that the direction of both these "types" of Zen students is the same; but the fragrance is different, if you know what I mean. I know from my own experience that Zen practice often appears selfish to people first confronting it, and my friends not formally engaged in Zen plague me about this matter especially now that I am living at P.Z.C., so that the wound remains unhealed. What can I say to them when this discrimination still exists in my own mind? Aside from my problem, I wonder how many people are turned off to Zen because of this. What can I do?

If you say, "Put it down," I will only laugh, because I tell myself this every day, and here I am.

"Master!"

"Yes!"

"You must keep clear mind!"

"Yes!"

"Do not be deceived by others, any way or any time!"

“Yes. Yes.”

I still do not know which is the correct Master. So I will write a poem.

Master Seung Sahn took an ax
And gave his student thirty whacks
And when I see what he has done,
He gives the Buddha thirty-one.

I glad that Jim is on retreat, because he is doing it for all of us, whether we know it or not.
Have I answered the question?

Enjoy the warm sun.

With many love,

Nancy

January 19, 1977

Dear Nancy,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

I always think about you. Your body is big and your mind is big, so you are a great woman. Great woman means a great Bodhisattva. This means that you are thinking of all beings as your children. Only keep this Big Love. So, anytime I look at you, you have no hindrance, freedom, and Big Love. You are checking your mind, yourself, and your feelings, so you cannot find this. You said that when you think of your body, you become more sick. Don't check your body. Sick time only sick.

Next, you have many questions. Many times I have told you: ten thousand questions return to one question. If you lose this one question, then many questions will appear. So, if you keep this one question, that is 100% question. 100% question means already cut off all thinking, which is just-like-this mind. What are you doing now? This is the big question. Don't make anything. Don't check anything. Only go straight – don't know.

Next, your friends think that Zen is only for yourself. That is correct. Your true self is everything; everything is your true self. If you find your true self, then you will find the Great Way. The Great Way is great love, Bodhisattva love. Great love means that there is no subject, no object. Many people become one. That is great love. That is true Zen, your true self, and true love. You must teach Zen to other people in this way.

You say you cannot find the correct Master. If you don't understand, then only go straight – don't know. Your poem is not good, not bad. Put it all down.

Jim is O.K. Only go straight. Don't make anything; then you will get everything.

I hope that you will always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment,
and save all beings from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 7, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

You gave away the answer during your Dharma talk at the end of Yong Maeng Jong Jin in New York, *and then* I understood what the question had been!

That old rascal Ko Bong
Tells stories of the strangest kind
If you believe him,
You will go straight to hell.
If you ignore him,
You will go straight to hell.

Either way... ..30 whacks!!

For the homework:

Hit him with a bucketful of garbage... .SPLAT!!!

The Problem...
Turning a shiny sponge
Into a crystal mirror.

Hope you are having a good trip in the West.

Respectfully,

Merrie

January 19, 1977

Dear Merrie,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

Your Ko Bong answer is not good, not bad, but it is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. You are very attached to Ko Bong. Don't make hell; don't make Ko Bong. Then believing or not believing is no problem. Heaven and hell are no problem.

But after that, what? This is very important. Understanding cannot help you. You must attain *just like this*.

When you're hungry, what?

When you're tired, what?

Next, about your homework: this man, is stronger than you. If you hit him, then this man will hit you harder with a bucketful of garbage. Then what?

Don't make a problem. A sponge is a sponge; a mirror is a mirror.

I hope you only go straight ahead, always keep a don't-know mind, then soon everything will become clear, and you will soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 9, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I've just returned from our house meeting at the International Zen Center, and I thought you might like to know how we are making out without you and without our Dharma Teacher, Jerry.

I miss you both and hope you are well in sunny California. But we are managing somehow. The Center is open every evening for chanting and sitting, and on Sundays we have our regular Dharma talk with Matthew presiding as Dharma Teacher.

Tonight, we all had dinner together before the meeting. At the meeting, we mostly spoke about moving from 20th Street to Sunny's studio. We are all a little confused about when this will be and how it will be. Sunny was there, and she very generously said that her place will be available every morning and three nights a week to the public. Other evenings there will be dance classes, but we could sit in another part of her place. I think this will be a very difficult situation for Sunny, but of course I am thinking too much about things in the future! When the time comes for us to have our own Zen Center, we will get it together.

The past few weeks has been a very difficult time for me with much thinking about jobs and money and the future. I keep sitting body but have much trouble to find sitting mind. Sometimes I can, and this is a tremendous help for me in everything else. But much, much, very hard training is needed and I know it. I guess you can see without my saying it, that I don't have homework answers. But thank you for being there to receive my letter, because writing has given me new determination to work very hard and keep clear mind always.

Love,

Carole

P. S. Love to Linc and Jerry

January 19, 1977

Dear Carole,

How are you ? Thank you for your letter. In your letter you talked about the Center schedule, the Dharma talks, and the house meeting. All this is very wonderful. Now Jerry is here, and I've spoken to Sunny on the telephone, so don't worry about moving. Jerry will return to New York, and he understands the schedule of moving and sitting. Sunny

suggested that we divide the hall, but I think we can just arrange the schedule to fit the needs of everyone. So everything is no problem. Only go straight.

You say that your body sitting is easy and that your mind sitting is difficult. If you make something, or if you want something, then it becomes difficult. What is the true way, I ask you? You already understand the true way, but understanding cannot help you.

Linc, our Dharma Teacher here, already has his Ph.D, but he doesn't think about a good job. Sometimes he fixes cars or paints house, only keeping a clear mind, moment to moment. Maybe he'll get married or change his job, but he is not worried. His mind has no problem about the future or a job. Only moment to moment he keeps a clear mind and his correct situation. This is the true way. No one knows when they will die – maybe tomorrow. If you die tomorrow, what can you do? Money, a job, and the future are necessary, as are all things – but, what are you doing *now*?

Don't make anything. Only go straight. You say that writing gives you determination. That is good. But correct Zen is not dependent on Buddha, or on God, or on writing or receiving letters. You must use your own resources. Already you are complete. Already you have everything.

You must believe in yourself 100%. That is very important, O.K.?

I hope that you will always keep a mind that 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.

Dear Master Sahn,

I respectfully request that you mail to me the important information dealing with your center, and especially any information pertaining to your method of teaching.

I feel compelled to spend my future in search of my Buddha-nature. I hope that your response will guide me in my first steps.

Humbly Yours,

John

January 19, 1977

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter. You say “my Buddha-nature,” so you understand your Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is not your Buddha-nature, or my Buddha-nature. It has no name or form. So, Buddha-nature is not Buddha-nature. I ask you, what are you? If you understand, then you understand that the name for your true self is Buddha-Nature. If you don’t understand, then only go straight – don’t know.

Here is a kong-an for you. Buddha said that all things have Buddha-nature. But someone once asked Zen Master JoJu if a dog has Buddha-nature, and he replied that it doesn’t. Buddha said that all things have Buddha-nature, and JoJu said that a dog doesn’t have Buddha-nature. Which one is correct?

If you have the correct answer, then you have no problem. But if you don’t have the correct answer, then only go straight – don’t know, always, everywhere. Zen is understanding your true self. This means understanding the truth. Understanding the truth means freedom from life and death. If you get freedom from life and death, then you will understand the true way. The true way means great Love. Great Love means the great Bodhisattva Way – no desire for myself, only helping other people. This is Zen teaching.

Zen is practicing. Then you will get everything, and not be dependent on understanding or on words. You must attain your true self.

I hope that you only go straight, keeping a don’t-know mind, soon get Enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I am sending you “Three Letters to a Beginner.” Maybe the book store in your area has a copy of *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, a book I have written for American students.

January 4, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your reply. How are you?

You hit me thirty times. What can I do?

KATZ!

The lake has ice fisherman on it today.
The snow is melting off the road.

Thank you for the kong-an you sent me. I am sharing it with some close friends.

If I was in the tree, how would I stay alive?

KATZ!

I'm going to eat my lunch before I go back to work.

Sincerely,

Martin

January 19, 1977

Dear Martin,

Thank you for your letter.

Understanding cannot help you. You must attain. You used *katz* many times. There are four kinds of katz. The first kind is a katz of checking good and bad. Next is the katz of cutting off all thinking. Next is just katz. Next is a blind katz.

Your katz is a blind katz. "How would I stay alive?" You say "Katz". Therefore, you are already dead.

Don't pull around a corpse.

If you don't understand, then only go straight – don't know, O.K. ?

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope you are well.

I was sitting at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, Mass. when you came to visit. Your talk helped me with my practice there.

I have some questions to which I hope you can find the time to respond.

What do you think of the Vipassana as taught at the Insight Meditation Center? Is it good to stay with one form of practice or to go to many teachers and many teachings?

I like the Zen you teach because it confuses me (*makes me keep don't-know mind.*) I think it is the Zen form that is confusing. Do I have to understand Zen talk and Zen form to learn from your teaching?

It is asked, "If all things return to the One, where does the One return to?" But, I would like to ask you – why did all things leave the One in the first place?

I think that I have asked enough questions.

I will do my best to do training with you when you return to the East Coast in March – for the week-long session in Providence if there is room.

Thank you.

Pax,

Steven

January 19, 1977

Dear Steven,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You say that my speech has helped you – that is wonderful.

Next you asked me if Vipassana meditation is good or bad. If you are thinking, then it is very bad. If you have cut off all thinking, then it is not bad. Good and bad are in your mind, not in Vipassana meditation. What do you want? This is very important.

Next question: when people go to the market, some of them want soap, others want clothes, and others want food. Other things are not necessary for these people. They are only there for what they want. What do you want? All teachers have different directions and different teachings. If your wants and a teacher's are the same, then follow that teacher. If you have no direction, then you will only go around and around. So you must first find your direction and find your teacher. This is very important.

If you want to learn Zen, then you must learn Zen style. If you don't want this, then this is O.K. and is not necessary. What is important is *why* you learn Zen.

You ask why all beings left the One. I answer you that if you make one, I will hit you thirty times, and if you make 10,000 I will also hit you thirty times. Don't make one. Don't make anything; then you will get everything.

I am happy to hear that you will be attending our training period in March.

See you soon,

S.S.

These are the New Year's greetings for all my brothers and sisters in Dharma.

December 19, 1976

Venerable Seung Sahn,

How are you ? Thank you for your letter. It has encouraged me very, very much.

There are two levels of my practice. I don't know yet which of them is first. But they are: my enthusiasm for the way and, on the other hand, don't know – unconscious level.

First of all, I may say that my enthusiasm causes to me some trouble and more, that it is the way of trouble. Enthusiastically concerned about the Way, one is living on the surface of Zen. However – seems to me – that without enthusiasm there is no practice.

The great trouble of mine is my wife's attitude toward the Way. She isn't a Buddhist and wants not any explanation about it (can I explain it?)

Don't Know Way – what a wonderful medicine! We are creating samsara by our thinking. There are many samsaras: family life samsara, friends interfeeling samsara, other circumstances' samsara...

Isn't bad; she allows me sitting practice in home. However, sometimes things are taking wrong direction. I realize that I have to work for her better than I did before. Life alone has profited my enthusiasm and is still profiting it.

“Changes, changes, changes” – How well I remember these words spoken in Won Gak Sa – New York! Only don't know – I'm repeating this very often now.

I've found that what I've learned coming mostly from reading books.

There is still not so much of my own. Although words help me a lot in practice (especially the words of Zen Masters of old and contemporary times). They are also driving me in a particularly book-like life manner. But there is little more already driving me to an opposite side – real life experience. This is a complicated process which is consistent with my getting older and Zen-like life guidance.

Is it possible to “practice” the Great Doubt?

What about people who seemed to us they were born with that doubt rising spontaneously to something called “metaphysical fear”? Is it possible for everybody?

I'm experiencing such moments – short enough to forget them when I feel we need to be saved, all human beings need some fundamental rescue, And tears go to my eyes.

Who am I? JoJu, like everybody, is truly empty-handed.

Yours in Dharma,

Anthony

January 19, 1977

Dear Anthony,

How are you, your family, and your Zen friends? Thank you for your letter.

You say that your practice has two levels, don't-know mind and your enthusiasm. I already told you not to check your mind or your feelings. If you check, then you will have not only two levels but maybe three, four, or even ten thousand levels. Don't make enthusiasm or don't know. Only go straight – don't know. 100% don't-know mind means cutting-off-all-thinking mind. This means before thinking, which is your substance. Your substance is the universal substance. So when you keep don't-know mind, you are the Universe, the Universe is you. That name is primary point. Don't-know mind is not don't-know mind. Don't-know mind is the primary point. The primary point's name is don't know.

Somebody said that the primary point is mind, Buddha, God, energy, nature, substance, the absolute, and everything. The true primary point has no name and no form, no speech and no words because it is before thinking. If you open your mouth, you are wrong. So, I say to you, don't make don't know, don't make enthusiasm. Only go straight – what are you?

You say your wife doesn't like Zen. Don't worry. Zen is not special. You have made Zen something special, so your wife doesn't like Zen. Zen is, moment to moment, keeping a clear mind, moment-to-moment keeping your correct situation – 100% eating, 100% driving. When you are with your wife, 100% love mind. When you are at home, a 100% husband's mind. This is Zen mind.

Why doesn't your wife like Zen? You only want to sit. This is attachment to sitting. When it is time to sit, then sitting is O.K. But what is correct sitting? Sitting means cutting off all thinking and keeping a not-moving mind, becoming clear, and understanding your correct situation

You understand that everything is always changing. You understand samsara. That is correct. But don't become attached to the changing or to samsara. They are both the truth, and they are both clear.

You say that you have read many books. This is no good. If you read many books, then your mind will have more thinking. After you completely attain your true self, then reading books is all right. If you read many books before you attain your true self, then these books can control you.

You ask if it is possible for everyone to experience this great doubt. Everyone already has everything. Everyone is already complete. So , the Buddha said, “Already you are Buddha.” Great doubt means 100% question. 100% question means no question. No question means *just like this*. An eminent teacher said, “Without thinking, just like this is Buddha.” So without thinking, you are already Buddha, already complete. You must believe in yourself 100%. This is correct Zen.

You say that JoJu is empty-handed. That is good. What is empty-handed?

A monk first came into the temple and asked JoJu, “Master, I have just come to this temple. What should I do?”

The Master said, “Did you eat breakfast?”

“Yes,” replied the monk.

“Then,” said JoJu “wash your bowls.”

At this the monk suddenly got Enlightenment. What did this monk attain?

If you understand this, then you have no problem. If you don't understand, then only go straight – don't know. Zen is not difficult. Don't make anything; then you will get everything.

I hope you will always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 7, 1977

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your prompt reply and thank you, too, for asking how I am. I'm well, thank you.

I know that you are busy. I know that writing in English presents a problem for you... but I do feel that my questions are worthwhile. In fact, if you've any intentions of compiling another book, I wouldn't be surprised if those questions are just the sort that a lot of other people are raising. In fact, I know a few people who have done just that.

In your last letter, you did it all over again. You set up the situation I wrote you about, in which I am asked what I am and I, in turn, reply that I don't know. Then you tell me to keep this "don't-know" mind. That is just what one of my questions in my last letter dealt with. I asked how I was to practice "don't-know" mind. I and a couple of other people who visited the N.Y. Center while you were there were told not to *make* "don't-know" mind, you see. I explained (in my last letter) that I would ask myself what I am, just as you had... or even imagine you asking me (as you have on more than one occasion). I explained this, and I was told that I shouldn't make "don't-know" mind. So the question was... What am I supposed to do? How am I to sustain "don't-know" mind?

In that famous last letter, I wrote to you of someone who understood you to mean that he practices by repeating over and over "don't know." Is that right?

I do hope you still have that last letter and I hope, too that you might consider reading it again and just possibly answering the questions. They really all dealt with practice... with how to practice, and unless that's clear and there are no doubts about it, very little can be expected of almost any practitioner. Without it, I could practice incorrectly by not having understood how to practice in the first place.

Frankly, I don't know how I can apply what you've suggested in your last letter to me. In fact, you say something there that I find very confusing. You say, "So, I ask you, what are you? Maybe you will say, 'I don't know' or maybe you will say no words. Just keep this mind." *But...* how do you keep this mind?... without checking? And isn't *keeping* it already wrong, anyway? (because in your last letter you wrote that Nam Cheon said, "If you try to keep it, already you are mistaken." referring to the true way... to everyday mind). Besides... even when my answer to our question has been that I don't know, there are still many ideas present (although they may not be as demanding as they might have been without "don't know"). Look... in all due respect.. I don't know how to practice "don't know." Please consider me very stupid and smothered in ignorance..and so please answer the questions in my last letter specifically in terms of what I should do..stupid as I am.

Thanking you for your patience in the Dharma..so far..

Sincerely,

Sam

P.S. I mentioned T.M. in that last letter to you. Doing T.M., there were periods of “no thought”..of great clarity – and so I wasn’t being flippant when I mentioned it.

January 19, 1977

Dear Sam,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

I only hit you thirty times.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 13, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have heard you say that the house we will buy is in the mountains near Woodstock, New York is in a very good location, a place of special energy. Why is it a special energy place? And why, in the practice of Zen as everyday mind, is special energy important?

Would you explain the mountain and water configuration around the house as you described it to us: the mountain to the right as the white tiger, the mountain to the left as the blue dragon, the mountain behind as the turtle, etc.?

Several of us will go visit the house next week-end to look at the inside more closely. Then we can start planning how and when to use it.

It's very cold here, lots of snow and ice. I hope you are taking it easy in Los Angeles.

Yours,

Louise

January 20, 1977

Dear Louise,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You ask why the house near Woodstock is in a good location and why it's a place of special energy. In Korea, there is a metaphysics of wind-water geography. This was brought to Korea from China by a monk about fifteen hundred years ago, and since that time, all temples have been built with this in mind.

A good location is necessary for the temple to grow, to save all people, and to prosper for a long time in the future. The wind-water geography determines a place as a special energy spot, where a temple can be built.

In Korea, all temples and cemeteries are placed with these ideas strongly adhered to. It is felt that the temple will grow and produce great teachers, and that the cemetery will help the descendents of those who are buried there to become prominent in society.

Why do these special places exist? This is very important. Mountains and rivers are like the earth's physical body. On our bodies, the most important part is the head. On the head the most important parts are the eyes, the nose, and the mouth. They are also among the most sensitive parts on our bodies. If you touch them, then you have a strong feeling.

Strong feeling means that they use strong energy. In the same way, mountains are like our bodies, and these special places are like eyes, nose, or mouth—they are very sensitive. As in our bodies, the energy circulates in the mountain and is very sensitive in these special places. These places enable us to become one with this universal energy.

So, we check a mountain in five ways: First, we check the form of the mountain; then where the mountain begins and ends; next we check it in terms of the composition of the five elements—wood, water, earth, fire, and metal; next we check the high and low points; and finally, the Yin-Yang balance, the direction the mountain faces—North, South, East, or West.

The basic form of the wind-water geography is a tall mountain, original turtle, which has two mountains extending in front of it like two protecting arms, white tiger to the right and blue dragon to the left. The house or temple is located at the very base of the tall mountain. In front of the house is a body of water, and just beyond that is a smaller mountain, which is called the red bird.

We check this basic form with the five characteristics that I've already explained. Which of the extending arms goes out further? This makes a difference, as does the direction of the flow of the water in front of the house. If the white tiger extends out further, then this place will be stronger for men. If the blue dragon extends out further, then this place will be stronger for women. Our place is very good because the two streams come together at the base of the tall mountain in front of the house.

In Korea there are professionals who also check the flow of the water in and around the temple area. They also check the mountain in terms of its importance in the whole mountain range. They check the ground for the elemental composition—that is, whether the ground had been used or moved in the past, to see if the temple will be located on land that has not been touched. They check to see whether the individual characteristics of the location will help or hinder the others—for example, if the blue dragon balances with the white tiger. Also very important is the direction that the front of the house will be facing. The balance of the characteristics is the single most important factor, just like a big nose would look funny on a small face.

So, I think our place is wonderful.

Now, there is a white house, but in the future we must build a new house. This is very necessary.

You ask why special energy is important. All people have different karma. Karma appears, and people lose their true selves. Karma appears—this means that our minds are easily moved. At a special energy place, your energy and the universal energy come together, and it is very easy to make our bad karma disappear. Sometimes, people cannot control themselves, so we need this place very much.

An eminent teacher said, “Our minds change from moment to moment, but the blue mountain is always high and the clear river is always low.”

I hope that our family will use this place, get special energy, finish the Great Work of life and death, save all people from suffering, and attain world peace.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Two Hae Tae for you to bring happiness in the New Year! And the wish to you, and all of us, that the seeds you sow out will sprout and grow.

I miss you and am looking forward to being in your presence soon.

Love,

Jo

January, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am sorry that I have to bother you with this letter, which has been long in getting to you. I was expecting Joan's visit to have a talk so that I could give you a clear picture.

One day Joan and I happened to meet at our mailboxes on the highway, and she said that she would like Kwan Yin to come to my house, and she will visit me to have a talk before she departs Big Sur to live and work in New York.

She has not come yet, and I think she has left. One day Hidden Mountain came and brought Kwan Yin from Stan and Christina's house. I do not know what has happened to the Zen Center things. Only Joan could tell you, and maybe she has talked to you.

Also, I am sorry to tell you that for some time to come, Big Sur may be without a Zen Center. For more than one reason, it is not possible to have happen on this particular land at this time.

There are zoning restrictions which have been tightened by the Big Sur Coastal Commission in charge of the Big Sur Coastal Plan, of which "Selinas" informed us recently. These acres are by law strictly residential zoning.

Also, it has been found that the borderline of my husband's property happens to cross right through the "Esalen House" where Joan used to live—a legal matter which has to be cleared up for tax and maintainance reasons, which Esalen has been dragging on for two years now. This will mean a lot of legal stuff to go through.

And last, but not least, our house is much too small, and building restrictions have also been tightened.

This is how things stand at present—but in time this may change.

This is almost a business letter and am sorry it took so long in coming and the news is no good.

I think I will be in L.A. for Yong Maeng Jong Jin and stay on to attend Karmapa's Vajra Crown Ceremony on the 5th of February. I wonder if the Tahl Mah Sah family will attend?

If you and Linc will visit Sambosa soon, I hope it will be possible to see you at my house. Would you please let me know?

It is very special to sit with Kwan-yin's peacefulness. I am deeply grateful.

Yours in the Dharma,

Jo

January 20, 1977

Dear Jo, Jin Uwal,

How are you? Thank you for your letter and the beautiful New Year's greeting. I was happy to hear of your short meeting with Joan, as I have had no news of Joan other than what I have heard from you.

I am happy to hear that you have the Kwan Yin in home. I don't know where the other Zen Center things are—the candle sticks, the moktak, etc. Maybe Joan or Hidden Mountain knows where these things are. If we find them or don't find them in the future, that's O.K. We could make or buy these other things, but we could not make or buy the Kwan Yin, so having this is enough. Don't worry.

Whether you make your house a Zen Center or not in the future doesn't matter. One, five, or one hundred people sitting Zen—it is the same. One is many; many is one. If you sit Zen, then it already is a Zen Center.

You say that it is not a Zen Center. Don't be attached to name and form. If you are attached to name and form, then you will have many problems. What is very important is how you keep just-now mind. What are you doing now? This is very important. Before, when you said that you wanted to start a Zen Center and that your husband would help you, I said that was O.K. Now there are problems, so again I say that is O.K.—not making a Zen Center is O.K. Any time, you like, I like.

I think that sometimes the Jin family, or our Zen family in general, will visit you. Sitting, bowing, and chanting together for a few days is wonderful. If you like this style, then

that's O.K. The zoning and other laws prohibit you from making a regular-style Zen Center, so a family-style center is O.K. Our family likes you. The Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center has zoning problems, so we have a house-style Zen Center here. The neighbors do not like the chanting in the morning, so we don't chant. So, any style that you like is fine with me.

Don't make anything—only go straight. Then you will get everything.

I hope you will 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.

January 20, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope your body is strong and that you're enjoying California.

This is the coldest winter in 59 years. Why am I warm?

When my brother died, I was very upset and sad, and felt like everything was completely meaningless, that my family's karma is very bad, and I wanted to know why. I felt very angry. Then our practice was very hard, and I didn't get up for bowing and sitting some mornings. Now I'm sleeping in the Dharma room, and that feels very wonderful. People in our New Haven family have helped me so much, and I feel very grateful. So I think that my karma is also very good and like it here very much. On Monday I'm going to begin a 3-day retreat in the house. I feel like I must understand my job. There are many problems, but right now everything is no problem.

Mu Gak left on Monday and is in Cambridge, and leaves tomorrow for you and California. His leaving made everyone here start talking and trying to understand ourselves and why we all have had problems with each other. I think that this was very necessary and am hoping that I and everyone else will grow from this experience. I personally am really sorry that Mu Gak isn't here now. He's a very good friend and teacher too. And now I understand that I must take care of the New Haven Zen Center.

I always want to say thank you to you. So here → Thank you.

I have a kong-an answer for Master Soeng Am Eon. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

No cigarette answer. But don't know is good—yah?

Please take care of your body, and see you in March.

Much Love,

Andrea

P.S. Everyone here likes Mr. Lee very much, including me. So this is working out very well for everyone. And I am happy.

P.P.S. I just read this letter, and I think I said "very" too many times.

February 1, 1977

Dear Andrea,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and the New Haven Zen Center family?

You mentioned your brother's death and your family's bad karma and your sadness. That is correct human form. This means that everything has a primary cause, and when this primary cause meets dependent origination, then there is a result. The name for this is karma. So when karma appears, everything appears. So everything is from the primary cause. The primary cause is made by thinking. So all humans made the primary cause and got the result. This is human form.

But many people don't understand this, so they are attached to the result. So they are very sad, they cry, and they suffer. But if you understand karma, it is possible to soon put it all down and relax your mind. Then everything is no problem. You already understand, so you said in your letter that there is no problem. That's wonderful.

You said you were starting a three-day retreat. That is also wonderful. All the time I say that a retreat is like dry-cleaning your mind. Cleaning your mind means that because you have your karma, dry cleaning is necessary. But this karma is originally nothing, so then dry cleaning is not necessary. This means that you believe in yourself 100%. If you cannot believe in yourself 100%, then retreats are necessary.

Mu Gak Su Nim is now here at the Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center. You said, "His leaving made everyone here start talking and trying to understand ourselves and why we all have had problems with each other." But all problems are not outside but inside. When inside problems disappear, then outside problems disappear. So when you are sometimes fighting, sometimes having arguments, sometimes talking, sometimes together, sometimes someone is leaving, then you understand inside-outside problems. But these problems are only each person's problems. They are not together problems, not outside problems.

So Buddha said, "When one mind is pure, the whole world is pure. When one mind is fighting, the whole world is fighting." And an eminent teacher said, "Put it all down. Only go straight ahead. Don't check your mind. Don't check your feelings. Then you will get everything."

You said now you will take care of the New Haven Zen Center. That is wonderful. That is your correct job.

Next you said, "Thank you." You're welcome. You are a wonderful woman.

Your first kong-an answer was wonderful. Your second was also wonderful. If you don't know, only go straight ahead. But with your first answer, I again ask you, is it correct? Then what? You already understand. Keep a clear mind.

Everyone and you like Mr. Lee—that's wonderful.

But in your P.P.S. you said you wrote "very" too many times. This style is no good. Don't check your mind. If "very" is necessary, then 1000 are good, 10,000 are good. If you write, don't check your letter. Only go straight ahead.

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.

January 24, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you so much for your letter. It made me very happy to receive it.

You asked me, “What do you want?” This question is very funny, because after I read it, the blind dog chased after its tail! I must make many things to answer “What do you want?” So I will put the many things down and practice I-don’t-know mind and read your book.

There is one attachment I have terrible difficulty putting down—my situation in that I am a woman. I have many, many many thinking about this duality, male/female. I suppose all I can do is apply “I don’t know” to it, but sometimes I’m not sure I want to. In your book I read about Sul and Pass-a-million. I wish I could know them. Thank you for their stories.

I am sitting outside in the sun. It is very warm. I hope you are enjoying this nice California sun, too, as you teach Zen students in Los Angeles.

With much love,

Wendy

February 1, 1977

Dear Wendy,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your letter was wonderful. Every word in it was the complete, true Dharma. So for forty-nine years Buddha talked only about the human mind, teaching people of all capacities how to make this mind clear. Everything you said in your letter was correct, but you must understand how to control yourself and your thinking. If you want to control your mind, then you must not make anything. Only go straight—don’t know. Then you will get everything. But if you make something, you will only get that something, and you will lose everything.

Here is a famous story for you: When JoJu was a student, he asked Zen Master Nam Cheon, “What is the true way?”

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

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

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

JoJu said, “But if I don’t 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 true way of not thinking, it is like space, clear and void. So why do you make right and wrong?”

Upon hearing this, JoJu attained Enlightenment.

Zen Master Un Mun said:

Flowers in springtime, cool wind in summer,
Moon in autumn, snow in winter.
If you don’t make anything in your mind,
For you it is a good season.

So I ask you, what did JoJu attain? If you understand, then you must answer me. If you don’t understand, only go straight.

You said you liked the stories about Sul and Pass-a-million. I am glad. But all your thinking about male and female is only opposites thinking. This kind of thinking cannot help you. Your don’t-know mind is better than Buddha, better than God, better than Zen Masters, better than anything. Only keep don’t-know mind. Then you will get everything, O.K.?

I hope you always keep don’t-know mind, soon find your original job, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I will go to Big Sur on the 10th for a Kido, so I am sending you this advertisement. Please call Diana for information. If you have time, please come. I would be glad to see you.

January 22, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Since you have gone from the East Coast, winter has become worse and far more severe. People spend so much time indoors and trying to fight “against” the cold that they revolve around their problems all day and, for this reason, they get much worse. Some state official called a state of emergency for those people who have no heat, and they were told they could move into the projects, low-income housing, and leave their cold homes behind. The Red Cross was to supply blankets.

Since you have gone, though, the air seems a little dead around Hope Street and Wickenden. Perhaps some day this will change, but, for me, now, it is the truth.

My baby, Mica, wears the beads most of the day. I have to take them from her when I want them. She also has started putting her head to the floor and mimicking her mommy; perhaps she knows more than her mommy. Babies are so wonderful, so pure and so THERE. Sometimes I call her Soen Sa Nim, and everyone laughs at me.

My problem is a very selfish one, and I will certainly be glad when I don't have to ask such self-oriented questions. So wonderful to be able to just say, the sky is blue and the crane is graceful. I don't want to practice bompū Zen. I want to do a hard practice and go right down to the end of the line. I am doing Kwan Sae Um Bosal plus the usual bowings and sittings. However, when worries come, my mind reacts like a sick monkey who must jump around in a cage that is far too small. It reacts to every tense and crisis-like situation the same, like a person jumping around without a head. Never just right action.

I think out of a whole day, I must be able to keep don't-know for about 15 minutes, if that.

During sesshin in December I felt more alive than ever. So that when I returned home after the A.M. sitting, I found myself immersed in crystalline, rock-hard reality that “felt” the way life is supposed to feel. I felt clearer and could feel an unmistakable power from nowhere building within. Nothing mattered, except “straight ahead.” I could see my husband being weighed down by his caretaking responsibilities and realized very clearly how easy it would be to help him if he could only get “just-now” mind. I experience a degree of control and freedom that I had never known. The days flew by like light. Everything was a pleasure.

Now, it is just a month later, and I am bogged down again by the same petty, nagging thoughts. I want so much to bring my runaway mind back to that same state.

I trust you are just right and that you have brought all kinds of light to the West Coast.

Yours in the Dharma,

Leslie

P.S. I so wish everyone could answer the big question and then Soen Sa wouldn't have to fly from one end of the country to the other, and all the corners of the earth would be bathed in light!

February 1, 1977

Dear Leslie,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. How are you and your family?

I heard about the cold East Coast and Midwest. I like California; it is not so cold here. But all our Zen family on the East Coast is very cold. Some people are suffering very much, so my mind is sad.

You said that it seems the air around Hope Street is dead. But the air is not dead; your mind is dead. If you find freedom from life and death, then there is no problem.

The story about your baby is wonderful. This baby is already a great Bodhisattva, is already Buddha. You must learn everything from your baby. From moment to moment your baby always keeps a just-now mind. She has no past or future—only the present moment. Every moment, just like this means a clear mind. Clear thinking is no-attachment thinking. No-attachment thinking is freedom thinking. So there is no problem. So you must learn everything from your baby.

You said that you can keep don't-know mind at most for fifteen minutes a day. Any problem means that you are making something and checking something. So you make your own problems. Don't check anything; don't make anything. Only go straight—don't know. Fifteen minutes is fine. Also one minute each day is fine. Don't worry—only go straight ahead.

You said during Yong Maeng Jong Jin, your mind was clear and you could control yourself. That's wonderful. But after a month you have returned again to your previous style. This means that in your mind there is no great faith, great courage, and great question. So first, you must have great faith. You must believe in yourself 100%. Next, don't check anything—only go straight. This is the great question. Then whether it is Yong Maeng Jong Jin time or not, there is no problem. Any time, if you check your opinions, your condition, or your situation, you will have a problem. Put it all down. Then you will have no problem.

Your P.S. was wonderful. But everybody has already answered the great question, and the world is always bathed in light. But people want something, which means they are thinking something. This thinking is infinite. Also space is infinite. So the Bodhisattva's vows are infinite.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 23, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I heard you speak last November at Barre, Mass., when I practiced in Jack and Joseph's three-month training. Being back "in the world" has been both exciting and confusing. Last night I began reading your Dharma book. I DON'T UNDERSTAND! NEVER HAVE I BEEN SO CLEAR THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. Also I experienced fear amidst the confusion. It seems (small I talking, as usual) useful to me to verbally and physically relate with my fellow human beings. For me, to fearlessly communicate and somewhat understand what is happening with "myself" and those around me is NEW. Often an immense amount of fear and hesitation to express truth as I experience it has marked my relations with the human being planet. SO, having just begun to practice being more open, perhaps less judgmental and critical of "myself", I ran into your book. KATZ! Fear, like all the fears related to opening my mouth, once again appears. What do you think? What's going on? (I suspect much desire, fear, grasping on "my" part)... Aw look, even writing this letter, I can see so many reasons not to send it, so many ways it's incomplete. If every time I open my mouth I'm wrong, what do I do? (Go on, hit me.) Maybe I'm not quite desperate enough yet... (getting closer all the time.) Anyway, be happy.

Michael

February 1, 1977

Dear Michael.

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

Your three-month retreat at Barre, your reading my book, your KATZ, and your thinking... all these are wonderful. But from beginning to end in your letter, you are checking, checking, checking, checking. If you check you have problems. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings. Also don't check other people.

What are you? You don't know. Then you must go straight—don't know. Don't make anything; then you will get everything. So I say to you, *put it all down*. Thinking cannot help you.

Zen means believing in yourself 100%. You must believe in yourself. You must not be dependent on Buddha or God or teachers or anything, only on yourself. Then your true self will become clearer and clearer, and some day completely clear. Then there is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside—everything becomes one. When you see the sky,

only blue; when you see a tree, only green. Only just like this. So I say, don't make anything. Put it all down. Only go straight—don't know, O.K.?

I hope you always keep don't know mind, soon find your true self, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? How are Linc, Alicia, No Su Nim and Mu Chak Su Nim? Thank you for your letter and your teaching about don't know.

The day before yesterday, Master Kim came to visit us here with his mother and aunt and Master Chang. It was Master Kim's mother's birthday, and we had a party for her in our room with cake that Master Kim brought. He gave us your regards.

Kwang U Su Nim sent me a quilted winter robe that the Bosal Nims at her temple made for me. It is very warm and well made, and I was very surprised to receive it. The Su Dok Sa head Dharma Teacher said the robe's meaning is that the Bosal Nims hope that I will do hard training and become a good monk. I also think that's a good idea. I sent Kwang U Su Nim a thank-you letter in my clumsy Korean and asked her to thank the Bosal Nims.

This year, Kyol Che is very quiet. No problems.

Thank you for the new kong-an. You asked, "Which one is the correct master?"

I don't know.

KATZ!

January 18th is the 45th day of our 90-day Kyol Che.

Sincerely,

Mu Bul

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

Nowadays, when I make problems, there are problems; when I don't make problems, there are no problems.

Thank you for telling me about mermaids. Now, for the JoJu Zen master kong-an, I don't know.

For the Soeng Am Zen Master kong-an, you already understand.

"Ken!"

“Yes!”

“You must keep clear!”

“Yes!”

“Never be deceived by others, any day, any time!”

“Yes! Yes!”

Outside, the birds are chirping and the monks are laughing. Please say hello to Linc and Un Dam No Su Nim and Alicia. Stay well.

Sincerely,

Ken

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hear that you are very busy these days, so thank you very much for answering my letters.

Master Chang and Master Kim visited us with Master Kim’s mother and aunt. They checked our Shim Gum Do style. Since the ground has been covered with snow for two weeks, we have done no training. Master Kim told us that much hard training is necessary, so we will try to practice more.

Homework: 1. JoJu’s “Wash your bowls.” I have two answers for this:

— When you are sick of rice, you know its true taste.

— The stomach is full. The bowl is spotlessly clean.

2. What did JoJu attain when he spoke with Nam Cheon Zen Master?

— KATZ!

Thank you for explaining opposites questions. I don’t know if I understand. I don’t know what opposites are, what mind is, what anything is. *I don’t know that I don’t know.*

Hapchang,

Jan

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I am glad that you can spend some time in the winter months in California.

Thank you for answering my two letters. This thinking mind is growing tired of my questions, clever answers, and your kong-ans. So if you want my answer to the monk’s

bowls and correct master questions, you must go into the Tahl Mah Sah garden tomorrow after morning bows, take a big breath of fresh cool air, and open your eyes. Nothing else to say now. Take care of your body.

Sincerely,

Paul

February 2, 1977

Dear Mu Bul, Ken, Jan, and Paul,

How are you? I was glad to receive your letters, and to know that you are very strong, also good practicing, everybody happy. That's wonderful.

First, Mu Bul—Master Kim's mother's party and the winter robe that Kwang U Su Nim brought—wonderful. How cold is Su Dok Sa? Now in America, all the East Coast is very cold, much snow, no gas, and many factories have closed. So I think it is very cold at Su Dok Sa. But much cold helps Zen students. An eminent teacher said, "When there is cold and hunger, then the path mind appears." With warmth and enough food, then sleep, many desires appear. I think Su Dok Sa is very cold and has not so good food, so path mind appears. Is this true?

Next, your answer is not good, not bad, 90% O.K. I ask you, Soeng Am Zen Master called himself and answered himself. Two masters. Which one is the correct master? You must show me the correct master. O.K.?

Next, Ryun Gak Go Sa, Ken—You are correct; if you make something, you will get something, but you lose everything. If you don't make anything, you will get everything. You say to the JoJu kong-an, don't know. Then only go straight—don't know. To the Soeng Am kong-an, your answer is not good, not bad. But it is a monkey answer. I ask you, which one is the correct master? You must show me the correct master. You must show me, O.K.?

Next, Gak Shim Go Sa, Jan—In Zen words, there is one more step. You must go one step. If you don't understand, one more step, only go straight—one more step. But at the end, you said, "I don't know that I don't know." For this, I hit you thirty times. This is like marring good flesh. Put it all down. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your understanding. Only go straight—don't know.

Next, Jin Poep Go Sa, Paul—You say you are tired of your questions, clever answers, and my kong-ans. If your mind is tired, your mind sound is very high. This is not so good. So your answers are very tired answers. Put it all down. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. If you don't understand, only go straight. Your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. What is just like this? Your answer is far away in Los Angeles. So it is very tired. Just like this is like lightning. There is no space, no time. Moment to moment, you must keep clear mind. This means keep your correct situation. Then any kong-an is no problem. O.K.?

Everybody is doing hard training. Good answers or bad answers don't matter. What is important is how much you believe in yourself. Some kong-ans are easy; some are very difficult. Even great Zen Masters sometimes don't understand the correct answers. So good answers, bad answers, it doesn't matter. Only go straight, don't know. Then this don't know grows and your clear mind is like space. Then it is possible to believe in yourself 100%. That name is Enlightenment. Enlightenment is only a name. So no Enlightenment is correct Enlightenment. You must attain no Enlightenment. This means not being dependent on Buddha or God or anything. You must depend on yourself. So don't make anything. Only go straight—don't know. Then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep don't-know mind, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Thank you for the photos. Your cut hair style is wonderful. Everybody likes this.

January 21, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thanks for the card. It is a good picture of you and the Providence Zen Center family. The bell house looks very beautiful.

I wish now I had listened to your very good advice about putting off my trip to San Francisco “until tomorrow.” If I had, maybe I would still be on the East Coast. I am out of the hospital now and living in town with my wife. We are both working and trying to save money. I work at a nursing home. We will be returning to the East the first week of spring. I would like to see you. April Yong Maeng Jong Jin would probably be a good time for me to come. I want to come to the Zen Center more regularly than I did in the past. When I don’t practice, my mind and body forget that they have Buddha nature. When I practice alone for a long period of time, it inevitably leads to a sense of accomplishment and wrong understanding. There is no attainment with nothing to attain. What can practice accomplish? So I think the sangha is very important for correct understanding and practice.

Teacup with no handle
Burning incense
Eating with chopsticks
Family meals for twenty
Homesick

My trip to San Francisco is postponed indefinitely. On some level I did not want to go and was not ready to go because I didn’t stay on the bus. My wife came out here and was very supportive of me. She wants to return to Maine in the spring to get jobs and work and make a farm on our land. With the exception of not being near the sangha, I was very happy in Maine, and I plan to return there with her.

Bobby wrote that you are buying a farm in Woodstock. I am glad that you are getting a country place. Country living gives a person room to grow.

My wife has a bad feeling about the Zen Center. When she first went there, she claims people treated her as an inferior because she was not on the Zen path. Her bad feeling together with my tendency toward inactivity kept me from coming to the Zen Center. This summer some people at the Zen Center told her that all my problems were her fault. Besides being untrue (suffering is universal and cannot be blamed on one person), it has added to her bad feeling. Still she is open to relating to P.Z.C. people on her terms—that is to say, if they come to Maine to visit, for retreats, or to build a temple. You are open to her. You have suggested that we move to Providence and get an apartment. What is the

middle path? My desire to follow Buddha's way is unchanged. What kind of life situation is good? This is my problem.

I am a layman, not a monk, so my wife's needs must be given some consideration. Since before we were married, she has wanted her daughter to live with her. I feel obliged to help as much as I can toward this goal. Also, since her father's death, she has wanted to be able to offer her brother (who is mildly retarded) a place to live on our future farm. She also talks of our having a child some day. This makes a large family and would require a stable living situation. Though I am attracted to the homeless life, "drifting like a cloud" would not be a good way for me to spread Buddhism.

Once I attended a lecture by a well-known Zen Master. A student asked him: "I have obligations that will not allow me to live here at the temple. I cannot keep up a practice on my own. What can I do?"

The Master looked at him with tears in his eyes and said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot help you."

This was years ago when Buddhism in this country was very small. I was not that student, and you were not that teacher. I hope our answer can be different.

Windflowers in the tea
Cattales in the bread
Crazy priest comes visiting

Yours in the Dharma,

Michael

February 2, 1977

Dear Poep Kwang Michael Poep Sa,

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

I was glad to receive your letter and happy to see that you understand your correct karma and your correct situation. Also your problem. An oriental medicine book says that if you understand your sickness, it is very easy to fix it—just take the proper medicine. But if you don't know what your sickness is, you can't take the proper medicine, so you can't fix it. You already understand your karma, your situation, and your problem. Now you must take the medicine. Then fixing is very easy, no problem.

So before I told you, only go straight – mantra. Why? You have past bad karma. When this bad karma appears, you cannot control yourself. If you cannot control yourself, you cannot control your family, and you don't understand the true way. So only go straight – mantra, and your bad karma will disappear. Then you can control your mind and also your family, and then your direction and true way will become clear. Then staying at a Zen Center or not staying at a Zen Center won't matter. So I say to you, don't make

anything; only go straight – mantra. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. Put it all down. Only try mantra. This is your correct way.

In your letter, you said that practicing by yourself is not possible. You want a sangha. It is true that together action is very necessary. But sitting and together action for a long time is not possible for you right now. So sometimes you can come for Yong Maeng Jong Jin and then continue practicing when you go home. Then you will have no problem.

What is Zen? Zen is not special. An eminent teacher said, "Everyday mind is Zen mind." Everyday mind means clear mind. This means, moment to moment, you must keep your correct situation. When you drive, only drive. When you eat, only eat. When you are home, only 100% love your wife. When you are doing hard training, only 100% sit. Only this. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. Only go straight – mantra. This is the best way for you.

About your wife's bad feelings – this is her problem. The P.Z.C. people do not think she is inferior because she doesn't practice Zen. People who practice are no more welcome than people who do not practice. But maybe your wife was thinking "I don't practice, so maybe they don't like me." This is only feeling.

You said that someone told her your problems are her fault. You used to say that your way and your wife's way were different. So maybe someone heard this and talked to your wife. Why did this style speech appear? If your action had been correct action people would not have talked this way. So your action is very important. If your action is not correct, people may think that your wife is no good for you. So first I say to you – throw away your opinions, your condition, and your situation. This means you must understand your correct opinion, your correct condition, and your correct situation. This means that small I disappears, and you become Big I. Then together action with your wife will always be possible.

Anytime you want something, your way and your wife's way will be different. But if you keep a big mind, then no problem. Your true way and your wife's way won't be separate. In your true way, already there is your wife's way. So your way and your wife's way become one. Then your action will be correct. Then people will speak to your wife and have a good feeling toward her. So your correct practice is very important, for her sake as well as your own. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. Only go straight – mantra.

You said you will return East for the April Yong Maeng Jong Jin. That's wonderful. I look forward to seeing you then.

Next, you sent me the dialogue you heard some years ago, when the Zen master said he was sorry he couldn't help the student. You must understand the meaning of this. The Zen Master already saved him. Zen is not dependent on Buddha or on God or on Zen Masters – not dependent on anything. Zen means being dependent only on yourself. This is correct Zen. So you must have great faith, great courage, and great question. These three only become one – only go straight. This means 100% believe-in-yourself action. Then you are already complete, already Buddha, already God; already you have everything. You must understand this.

If you don't understand, don't check your mind, or feelings, or anything; only go straight – mantra, always, everywhere. Then you will get happiness everywhere. Everything you see and hear will be the truth. The sky is blue; the tree is green. Only just like this.

I hope you always keep the mantra, soon have all your bad karma disappear, finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I send my love to your wife.

February 16, 1977

Dear Louise,

Hi! I finally got a chance to write. Took today off from outside working to write letters all day. Just returned last night from Kido in Big Sur (also visited baths in Esalen) and a few days in Berkeley at Diana and Ezra's house. Dropped Bobby off at her sister's house on the way back, about one hour out of Los Angeles. Her brother came to the Kido and had an amazing time – he now understands why Bobby has been practicing Zen and hanging around Soen Sa Nim. There were 30 people there at a very beautiful place. Everyone had a wonderful time – even I did.

All is well here in L.A. There are two old Korean ladies who live with us now – they are very wonderful people. They love us all (Americans) very much, and it is like I have two grandmothers looking after me – always trying to get me to eat something. They get up with us in the morning, bow, sit, have interviews, and even sat the last Yong Maeng Jong Jin and took the Precepts.

They work very hard all day long – cleaning and cooking, and it is an inspiration to work with them and to just live with them. Also, See Hoy and Alicia are both wonderful students and are working very hard nowadays – so our Zen Center is becoming strong. We are even planning to move to a house of our own so that more Americans will come. There are four of us now, and I think it would be possible to rent a place somewhere.

See Hoy and I are starting to work together. We begin a job tomorrow remodeling someone's kitchen and an addition on their house. That may work out very well, as we could make good money and have time off once in a while.

I guess I won't be returning for a while yet. Now that something seems to be starting here, I must stay longer. Our family out here is very wonderful – it may just be that I must stay here for a while longer. I want very much to visit my family and the Zen Center family on the East Coast. I hope I can do that within the next few months. In May there will be a Yong Maeng Jong Jin for Werner Erhard's trainers in San Francisco. I am not sure of the dates yet. Also, we will have a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in L.A. in June and one in May at Sambosa. Also one in Berkeley - maybe.

Many people have visited. Jerry was here, Mu Ae, Mu Gak, and Bobby. It was good to see everyone.

Sorry I haven't written lately. Think of you sometimes and hope you are well.

Love,

Linc

P.S. We are returning to San Francisco next week for a meeting with His Holiness the XVI Gyalwa Karmapa. Werner Erhard invited us to a private reception at EST headquarters on the 23rd. So Bobby and I will go with Soen Sa Nim, and then they will fly to Chicago from there. Ought to be fun.

The Los Angeles Zen Center asked for a little statement to advertise their *Zen Writing Series*, and this is what Soen Sa Nim wrote for them. There was no bone in Maezumi Roshi's speech, so Soen Sa Nim put one in!

Linc

On Zen Practice is Maezumi Roshi's teaching book. It is already complete, and will help you understand what perfect practice means. Roshi says, "The point is always the same: to realize and to actualize the ideal state of mind." A Zen student must be very careful about this point. If you are attached to words, you fall into the ocean of life and death. If you are not attached to words, you will understand Roshi's teaching. In the book, the Shoyo Roku says, "The mouths of all Buddhas of the three times hang upon a wall. Now, there's a man who roars with laughter, Ha! Ha!" When you can ride that laughter into the bone of space, then you will find Maezumi Roshi's original point.

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Good Feeling, Bad Feeling—Zen and Psychiatry

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at a Kido in Big Sur, California,
February 1977

Small I means having many desires, anger and ignorance, also being attached to name and form. “This feels good, this feels bad.” American mind is like this. If you go to the store, you see things priced at 99 cents, \$1.99, \$2.99. Ninety nine cents makes people feel good. If it were a dollar, they wouldn’t buy. So many people are like this: If the feeling is good, then they act. Whether the action is good or bad, they don’t care. This is a big mistake.

It’s like a woman with a diamond. This diamond gives her a good feeling. I like hippies—they have no hindrance, they can eat or sleep anywhere. But this woman with a diamond is always full of desires. “I want this diamond, I want a good house, good clothes.” If she can’t get her desires, then she gets angry at her husband. “Why don’t you make more money!” Every day there’s an argument. Many psychiatrists tell people, “If you’re angry just get angry, then you’ll feel good.” So when this woman’s husband comes home and she feels angry, she yells at him—very good feeling. Then the doctor says, “If you have desires, just go satisfy your desires.” But you can’t always get what you desire, so then what? Psychiatrists only control feeling, they cannot fix someone’s mind, fix his karma.

Everyone has karma. Someone sees a picture, good feeling. Someone sees the ocean, a mountain, ah, wonderful. Someone has beautiful clothes, wonderful, good feeling. Everyone has different karma, so different feelings. This all comes from karma. If you fix your karma, then at any time, in any place, any situation, you will have no problem. When your bad karma appears, you have a problem. So making your bad karma disappear is very important. One of my students has many problems, so he goes to a psychiatrist. The doctor gives him a wonderful speech, good feeling, rests his mind. But this is only a change of feeling. The psychiatrist understands people’s attachments and helps them with them. Then they feel good. But this good feeling cannot fix their minds. So Small I means, bad karma appears, I have many problems, I can’t control myself. Small I means karma action.

Zen, Astrology and Your Future

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa, February 12, 1977, Big Sur, California

In Korea and China there are people who can read your face, read your palm. If your eyebrows are like this, you have a strong mind. If they are like that, you have a weak mind. It's like this. Unripe fruit has a very beautiful color. Completely ripe fruit is not so beautiful, but it tastes very good. So form is very important. If the form is very good, the color strong, the taste is not so good. If the form is not strong, the taste is very good. So if you understand this form, you understand the nature of the taste. So if you understand your form, you can understand your past karma, your future karma. Karma is also form, life form.

In Korea, people read your life on the basis of four numbers, the year, month, day, and the time of your birth. If you understand these, then you can understand someone's whole past and future. But maybe this is just statistical. One day in Korea, a King wondered whether in a country so large there might be another person with the same four numbers as he had. So he asked his minister to find such a person. Deep in the mountains a man appeared with the same four numbers. So the King said to his fortune teller, "You're no good. This man has the same four numbers as I do, but he's not King. I am King." The fortune teller replied, "But maybe he has the same job." The king didn't understand.

So the fortune teller went to the mountain, met the man, and asked him what his job was.

"Job, I have no job."

"Then how do you eat?"

"Oh, I gather honey that the bees make."

Then the fortune teller understood. The bees make honey and give it to the man, so he is king of the bees. Same job! So he went and told the King. "This man and you have the same job, only the title is different. You are King of this country, he is king of the bees' country. So same job! His year is the same, also the month and the day, but the time is not the same, a little different. So you have a big job, his job is not so big."

So the fortune teller understood this man's karma. This is only form. But form is emptiness. Who made this form? Who made your karma? You made it. My karma, I made it. If you only go straight, Kwanseum Bosal, not checking good feeling or bad feeling, then your karma will disappear. Then your life will change. Then the fortune tellers will no longer be correct.

How do you change you karma? It's like this. Tomorrow morning someone will die. This is his karma. But he has been chanting Kwanseum Bosal, doing a lot of chanting, so his bad

karma has been disappearing. Then tomorrow morning he will have an accident, only break his leg, not die after all. This is possible. Karma is made by thinking. If I hit someone, I already make bad karma. So he has bad feeling and hits me back. I hit him again, he hits me again. Again and again. This is samsara. But if he is a good man, he doesn't care. When I hit him he only bows. Then this is not interesting to me, so I stop. So this samsara stops. He is only chanting Kwansum Bosal, so it stops. Then his karma is already changing and his mind light is shining into my mind. Also his karma is shining into my mind, the same karma. So if you correctly save your true self, then it's possible to save your friends, your family, your fellow countrymen. If you practice hard—Zen, Kwansum Bosal—you change your karma. If you don't practice, you can't control your mind, can't control your anger, desire, ignorance. Then your original karma, your karma action, is all samsara. Your four-number program is completely working—what day this, what day that, it's all been decided. But how do you keep just-now mind? Before your life was all decided, but if you correctly keep just-now mind, you can change your life. So we practice.

Kwanseun Bosal and You Become One

From a Dharma Talk By Seung Sahn Soen-Sa at a Kido at Big Sur, California, February 1977

The first time you try chanting you won't understand. Sometimes your mouth is doing Kwan Seum Bosal, but your mind is at home, in San Francisco, in New York. But then, "No good, come back!" Chanting mind is sixth consciousness; next, going to San Francisco or New York is eighth consciousness; next, "come back!" is seventh consciousness. So we have three consciousnesses. The sixth consciousness controls the body. The seventh consciousness is feeling consciousness: "I like this, I don't like that." The eighth consciousness is your memory of storehouse consciousness. So we try keeping one mind. Then the seventh consciousness talks to the eighth consciousness, "Come back!" If the three consciousnesses are acting separately, then it is not correct chanting.

If you make a big sound then you can hear your voice and also all the other sounds. But if your mind is flying around, you can't hear. So a big sound is necessary. Also, if you want to be able to keep chanting loudly for a long time, you must chant at a low pitch.

You first chant with only one mind, into the sound. You don't hear the sound, you are into the sound. Only Kwanseum Bosal, Kwanseum Bosal—nothing at all. This is Kwanseum Bosal samadhi. One mind. Everything disappears. Your body, everything is nothing, only Kwanseum Bosal. This is being into the sound. This is not bad, not good—good. Next you can hear your voice, you can hear all the sounds. This is very clear. One mind means nothing at all, only Kwanseum Bosal. Clear mind means you can hear your voice and hear any sound. This is clear mind, the best mind. It's like having a painting which is just white. Then if you want a mountain, you can draw a mountain on it. Or like pushing "C" on your calculator: samadhi mind is zero mind; then, $1 + 2 = 3$. Special energy mind is like clear mind.

Student: Sometimes I was chanting very loud and could hear all the drums and each person singing, just as you said. Then something would jar my train of thought and I would be half asleep.

Soen-sa: This is *hon chim*. It is a sickness. You have Kwanseum Bosal but you don't have clear mind, you're half asleep. Your mind isn't going to San Francisco, or home, but it's not clear. Also there's another sickness, where you have Kwanseum Bosal but also thinking, thinking, thinking. This is *do go*.

Another student: After the Kido I was sitting by the ocean at home and suddenly it all came back, like a recording.

Soen-sa: If you keep a strong Kwanseum Bosal mind, then in your eighth consciousness you already make Kwanseum Bosal karma, samadhi karma. So afterwards, you still have

Kwanseum Bosal. This is very good. Sometimes, even during the special energy part of the Kido, you will have a little thinking. Thinking, then energy, thinking, then energy. This is American style! Especially the first time. If you try it a lot, then no thinking.

This Kwanseum Bosal is very important. Kwan means perceive, se means world, um means sound, Bosal means Bodhisattva. Perceive world sound, you must perceive world sound. Then your voice is the world sound. Then what? Already this sound is no sound. You and the sound become one. At that time, the sound is no sound. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. But no form, no emptiness, nothing at all. But if there is nothing at all, then your mind is very clear, your true self is very clear, like a clear mirror. Red comes, there is red; white comes, there is white. Just like this. Then form is form, emptiness is emptiness. Just like this. When you see the sky, only blue, when you see the tree, only green. When you hear, only the sound of the moktak. The drum makes a drum sound. So sound is sound, color is color. So only go straight, Kwanseum Bosal. Perceive your sound. Only hear your sound. Then you can hear everything. Then this sound is very clear. This is your self, O.K.

Job Karma and Monk Karma

From a Dharma talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa, February 12, 1977, Big Sur, California

Student: How can I decide what kind of job to choose?

Soen-sa: You have karma. Many people want something. There is good karma and bad karma. Also there is job karma. Someone likes music, so it's O.K. for him to have a job making music. Someone else likes acupuncture, so he goes to learn acupuncture. If you have a lot of energy, you can do two jobs, maybe five jobs. If you can't decide which of two jobs to do, flip a coin! You must believe in yourself.

Student: So I should do what I want?

Soen-sa: Maybe someone likes psychology, so he goes to school, gets a degree, and begins to teach psychology in school. But after a while he thinks that psychology is not so interesting, so he come home at night and only paints. He tries to decides which is good. He likes painting, but it's late. He's not professor of painting, only of psychology. He can't earn money painting. He only likes it, it's not a job for him . So he doesn't like his job, but he needs a job to earn money.

But – you must make your likes and dislikes disappear. If your desire appears, this is sometimes a mistake. If his desires disappear, then he can teach psychology and also paint in his spare time. If he quits his job, how can he earn a living?

Maybe he becomes a Zen student. Then any kind of job is O.K. Being a professor is O.K., painting is O.K., fixing cars is O.K., any way you can earn a living is O.K., so you have freedom, no problem. But if someone says, "Before I was a professor, but now I don't like it," then he has a problem. So, first you must understand what your situation is. Then decide what kind of job is good. This means your opinion, your condition, your situation disappear. This means your desire-opinion, your desire-condition, your desire-situation disappear. Your correct opinion, your correct condition, your correct situation – you must find this. This is very important. This is Zen mind.

Student: How can I decide whether to get married or become a monk?

Soen-sa: You must believe in yourself. What do you want? This is very important. If you want to save all people, then becoming a monk is O.K. Maybe I want to save all people, but I also have desire – I want to get married, have children, I want family. Then O.K., get married. Then not becoming a monk is O.K., becoming a Dharma Teacher is O.K. Becoming a monk is O.K. only if you completely have no desire for yourself, only for all people. If you become a monk, you have to take 250 precepts. You must keep these precepts. If you have a small thought in your mind, "I want to get married," that's no good. I once told a woman who wanted to become a nun: "If you want to become a nun

100%, then become a nun; but if you want to become a nun only 99%, 1% maybe you don't want to, that's no good." Even people who start out wanting 100% to become monks sometimes changes their minds and give up being monk. If you start out only 99% certain, maybe you'll give up being a monk the next day! So if you want to become a monk 100%, tell me and I'll cut your hair.

Student: What is the meaning of cutting hair?

Soen-sa: Buddha said hair is ignorance grass, so cut. If your hair is long, your ignorance is long. [Laughter] Don't be attached to your hair! Cutting hair is necessary for monks, not for laymen. Once one has become a monk, his life is only for all people, so hair is not necessary. If you have hair, you worry about how it looks. You look in the mirror – " Ah, wonderful." Being attached to your hair is no good, so we cut it.

Student: Not to pry into your secrets, but what kind of karma does a Zen Master have?

Soen-sa: Zen Master have Zen Master karma. You want to understand secret Zen Master karma, so I hit you! [Laughter]

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Hello from cold Cambridge. I heard that you were sick with a cold. Are you feeling better?

Things here are very good. I go to the Cambridge Zen Center to give Dharma talks; so do Jonny and Trudy. I also sat part of the last meditation session – the Center feels very good to me. Mark and everyone are doing a beautiful job.

My practice is very strong. Right after the New Year's day celebration, "what am I?" started working again. During my anger with you and all kong-ans I sat shikantaza style. I knew that I had a strong attachment to kong-ans, but when you pointed it out to me at the Dharma Teacher's meeting, it must have been the correct time because the problem melted away. "What am I?" is very strong and seems to be burning through all my mind-creations. Bowing has also become very strong – I bow every morning before sitting and every evening before sitting at home. Soon perhaps big explosion!! Thank you for taking kong-ans away from me, so that I can use them again.

I teach two courses in the Psychology Department – one on Yoga from a Zen point of view, the other on Zen compared with Western psychology. Both classes include sitting. There are about 30 students in each class, but only about 3-4 who are really serious. Most of the others are "shopping" in my branch of the American Spiritual Supermarket. Sometimes I think that my professors karma is almost over and I must find a way to support myself and a Zen school in Cambridge – freedom style. Maybe?

Many of my students like *Verses on the Faith Mind* by the Third Zen Patriarch. The language is very beautiful – perhaps too beautiful. So I try to give a commentary on it to my students (at college) and also at Dharma talks at the Cambridge Zen Center. However, my comments are too professor-psychologist style. Perhaps you could comment on the verses, more Zen style. It might make a nice little book for the students to work with, and right now it would help me with my teaching practice. I enclose the first verse. If you think it is a good idea, please comment on it; if not, I will talk to you when you return. It reads:

The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate are both absent,
everything becomes clear and undisguised.
Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.
If you wish to see the truth,
then hold no opinions for or against anything.
To set up what you like against what you dislike
is the disease of the mind.
When the deep meaning of things is not understood,
the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

Please give my love to Linc and Mu Gak.

My lady friend Nancy and I have a very harmonious relationship, but her body is still weak from the car accident we were in last Sept.

You eat your food,
I will eat mine,
May we also eat
many meals together.

Yours in the Dharma,

Byon Jo Gosa Nim

February 22, 1977

Dear Byon Jo Gosa,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your girl Dharma friend?

Thank you for worrying about my sickness. Now it has all gone away. You always help me to become strong.

It is wonderful that you and Jonny and Trudy are all going to the Cambridge Zen Center and doing together action. That means you are doing potato practicing. All the dirty potatoes are rubbing together, and they will taste wonderful. This is potato practicing. In other words, your opinion, your condition, and your situation disappear. Then the correct Bodhisattva Way will appear, and it will be possible to save all people. So together action is very wonderful.

You say that "what am I?" is very strong. Also you say that you are bowing and sitting twice a day. That is also very wonderful. But, be very careful to watch your step. In other words, don't check your mind; don't check your feelings. Only go straight – "what am I?"

It is very good that you have a teaching job at a university and have so many students. You say that you would like to start a Zen school in Cambridge, and maybe you would like to be freedom style. If you want freedom style, you must understand complete freedom. Many people like freedom, but to like freedom means that you *don't* like something. That means that you're attached to something. Being attached to freedom means hindrance freedom. This is attached-to-freedom thinking. If you want perfect freedom, you must make all likes and dislikes disappear in your mind. Then you attain freedom. So liking freedom and attaining freedom are different. Therefore, if you want freedom style, you must first attain freedom. This is very necessary, O.K.?

You want me to comment on the Third Patriarch's *Verses on the Faith Mind*. At the time when this was written, it was the best writing on Zen. But now these words are all dead words. They all have opposites.

Live words have no opposites. They are just-like-this words. For example, "The Great Way is not difficult" equals "When I'm hungry, I eat; when I'm tired, I sleep." Likewise, "For those who have no preferences" equals "When you meet a red light, stop; when you meet a green light, go." "When love and hate are both absent" means "Ten miles no clouds, ten miles clear sky." And finally, "Everything becomes clear and undisguised" means "Spring comes; the grass grows by itself."

So there are dead words and live words. If you are commenting on this work, you must use live words. If you only use professor-style thinking, you cannot understand the Third Patriarch's mind. I will be on the East Coast next month, and we can talk about this again.

We had a very wonderful Kido in Big Sur this month. We chanted Kwan Sae Um Bosal for twelve hours a day for three days. We made a powerful sound, and the longer everyone chanted, the stronger they became. I hope I will be able to have a Kido in April in Woodstock. You must come and do a special Kwan Sae Um Bosal dry cleaning.

Tomorrow we are going to San Francisco to meet the Tibetan Karmapa. Next Thursday we are beginning a three-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Bul Tah Sah in Chicago.

Your poem was very wonderful, so I will give you one kong-an.

Master Soeng Am used to call himself every day, "Master!"

And would answer, "Yes!"

"You must keep clear!"

"Yes!"

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

"Yes! Yes!"

Master Soeng Am called himself and answered himself with two minds. Which one is correct Master? Tell me, tell me, quickly, quickly!

I hope you only go straight – “what am I?” – don’t know, and that this don’t know will become clear like space, and you will soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

February 11, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Happy Valentine's Day. Just a short note to say hi and tell you how things are going at the Cambridge Zen Center.

Actually things have been going pretty much according to routine. No major catastrophes. It's been such a cold winter here. There has been more snow than I've ever seen. You are lucky to be in California.

Our Zen Center is getting very large. Now nine people live here. Many people are sharing rooms. There is always a long line to get into the bathroom. It is kind of funny.

Another woman moved in recently. So now there are three. Her name is Terry, and she is a student at Wellesley College. She is very nice and seems to be adjusting well to the schedule here.

Fred is taking Shim Gum Do. Now he always ties a red bandana around his forehead.

Peter finally found a job. He works at a xeroxing place in Harvard Square. For a while he was printing pictures on T-shirts in the cellar, trying to make money.

Paul and Carla fell in love. They are very happy.

Mark has a new job. He is working in an office now. Every morning he puts on a sports jacket and a tie. No more funky style Mark (except at home).

Becky has been coming over quite a lot lately. She is on vacation and has more time. She has been teaching some people in the house how to do Dharma play.

Guess what? The old students have started coming back. Larry and Jonny have both given Dharma talks lately. This makes us very happy. Before, we thought maybe they did not like the new Cambridge Zen Center because the style is stricter than at the old center. But they say they are very impressed with what we have done and promise to come by.

Trudy had a big party last weekend and invited the whole Center. It was fun.

This is all the news. Please take care of your health and enjoy the warm weather. We all miss you and look forward to seeing you again soon.

Love,

Dyan

Please say hi to Linc for me. I will write a letter to him soon.

February 22, 1977

Dear Dyan,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Mark and the whole Cambridge Zen Center family?

I read your letter, and it made me very happy. I have heard that the East Coast has been very cold. It has been like summer here in Los Angeles. Every day is sunny and warm. But I came here and got a very big cold. My body had much suffering. But my mind is no problem. The body always make bad karma, so sometimes suffering is O.K.

We had a Kwan Sae Um Bosal retreat in Big Sur. Thirty-one students came together and chanted Kwan Sae Um Bosal twelve hours for three days. Only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal. There were three moktaks, seven drums, and many different percussion instruments. Everyone had a different instrument. It was a wonderful sound – BONG BONG BONG BONG KWAN SAE UM BOSAL. The longer everyone chanted, the stronger they became. It was a very good feeling. We must have an East Coast Kido in April. Everyone must come to Woodstock and do special Kwan Sae Um Bosal mind dry cleaning.

In your letter you said Becky, Byon Jo, Jonny and Trudy are all coming to the Zen Center. That is very wonderful. It is also wonderful that Mark at last has become a gentleman.

I also miss you. The West Coast family says hello to the East Coast family. Mu Gak just began a one-hundred-day retreat in Canada. Linc, Bobby, and I are going to a reception to meet the Tibetan Karmapa in San Francisco. We were invited by Werner Erhard. Next Thursday we are beginning a three-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Bul Tah Sah in Chicago. Then I will return to Providence.

I hope you only go straight – don't know, soon become a great Bodhisattva, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 29, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I miss you very much and wish I didn't live so far away from you. Every day I sit Zen and bow 108 times – Lawlor and I do this together. But often, bowing and sitting, there is much thinking. “What will I make for dinner? What shall I wear to work? Thinking is no good.” All thinking!

You say – “Put it all down. Only go straight.” I ask you – isn't there some balance about practice? Maybe I should do more sitting. You talk about strong sitting. What is this?

What am I? I ask this more and more through my day. But there's so many thinking!

I hope your body is well and I send you my great love – and a good hug for Linc –

Jin Mi

February 22, 1977

Dear Sherry,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am answering so late because I had a cold and rested when I first came to California. Since then I have been very busy. We had a wonderful Kido in Big Sur. We will have a Kido on the East Coast in April. I hope you and Lawlor will be able to come.

You told me you and Lawlor have been practicing together every day – that is wonderful. A lot of thinking, no thinking, a little thinking – it doesn't matter. You say thinking is no good. *This* is no good. This is being attached to your thinking. Only try, try, try, try, and your thinking will rest. Then finally, at bowing time, only bowing, at sitting time, only sitting, and chanting time, only chanting. It is possible.

In your letter you asked me about balance in practice and about strong sitting. If you are attached to something, your mind and your body will be unbalanced. If you don't make anything, your mind and your body become one, and so they are perfectly balanced. Everything will be complete and clear.

Strong sitting means not checking your mind and feelings. Everyone sometimes has many thoughts and feelings while sitting. This is correct. Don't worry. But many people check themselves. “I am no good. What do other people think of me? I am always thinking. How can I cut off all thinking? How do you only go straight? How do you put it all

down?” etc. This is being attached to thinking. Thinking itself is not bad or good. Just don't be attached to thinking. Don't worry about everything. Thinking is thinking; feeling is feeling. Only go straight – don't know. That is strong sitting.

If you keep strong sitting, your mind will remain clear moment to moment. Clear mind means keeping your correct situation moment to moment. When you drive, just drive. This is clear mind. Then when you come to a red light, stop. When it turns green, go. That is the correct situation. Correct situation means just like this.

I understand your mind. Your mind checks, checks, checks your mind. But if you practice, and try and try every day, your checking mind will rest and you will be able to keep just-like-this mind. Then when you see the sky, only blue; when you see the tree, only green. Just like this is truth.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa,

I have just finished the book *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, and I want to thank you for your splendid teachings. I hope some day that I will have a chance to meet you.

I am writing you from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska. We work 10 hours a day, seven days a week. I work for 25 days in a row, and then I have 10 days off. Under these conditions, what suggestions could you make as to how I might pursue the Buddha Dharma?

It seems to me that the only times I ever am close to a “Zen state” is when I am playing the recorder (a kind of flute, very similar to the shakuhachi). When things go right, there is no thinking, just doing, and the music flows. Does this make sense to you?

I have a question. Why all this effort to get “beyond” words? I don’t understand why words are such a problem. Words are just a tool, like a hammer or saw. If you want to build a house, you use certain tools; if you want to transfer information, you use a tool known as words. If a hammer doesn’t work, throw it away. If a word is “bad”, don’t use it. That’s all.

Sincerely,

James

February 23, 1977

Dear James,

Thank you for your letter. I am sorry I am answering you so late, but I have been traveling and just received your letter. If you write to me again, please write to Providence Zen Center. I am sending you a newsletter; it has all of my addresses on it.

Your letter was very wonderful. You are correct. You asked me why it is necessary to make an effort to get beyond words. Words are not good or bad. But many people are attached to words. This means that people make something; they are attached to their thoughts and ideas. Making something causes you to be hindered by something. If you are hindered by something, then you are suffering.

If you use words as a tool, like a hammer, then there is no problem. But when you are attached to words, there is a problem.

So first you must return to the primary point. At the primary point there are no words, no speech. It is before thinking. This is very necessary. For example, the sun did not say, “I

am the sun.” The moon did not say, “I am the moon”. All names and forms are made by thinking. If you cut off all thinking, then your substance and the universe’s substance become one. There is no form, no name, no speech, no words.

So I ask you: in the Heart Sutra it says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Is your body form or emptiness? If you say form, I will hit you thirty times. If you say emptiness, I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?

I hope you send me a good answer.

Yours in the Dharma,

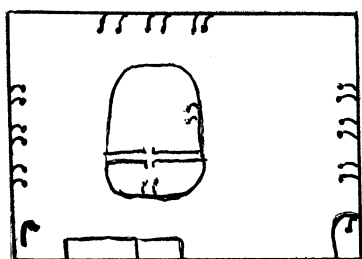
S.S.


March 2, 1977

Dear Kim and Drew,

Hi – We just returned from Hong Son, a town about 40 minutes from here by bus. We go there about every 2 weeks, around the 15th and 29th days of the lunar month, to take a bath (as Mu Bul says, “whether we need it or not”).

In Korea, most people take baths in Mog Yok Tan’s (Mog yok tahn), or bath houses. Men bathe in one room, women in another. The one we’ve been going to is like this:



It’s a big room - about the size of the PZC dining room, that has tiled walls and a tiled floor. Around three sides of the room are *hot* and cold water faucets about 1½ feet off the floor. In the lower left hand corner (of the picture) is a shower. Two hot water baths are in the center of the room – the larger one can hold 4 or 5 people if they sit with backs against the wall and legs stretched out. () The smaller one can just fit two.

The baths are about 2½ feet deep. There is one *cold* water bath (lower right) which fits one person. The near side of the room has two sliding doors which lead into a locker room that’s heated by a briquette stove in the middle of the room.

When you go to take a bath, you first wash off outside of the big tub, rinsing by pouring water over yourself from a bowl the size of a large dog-bowl. You can get water from the faucets or dip it from the tub. Then, after you’re clean, you can soak in the hot tub, then in the cold tub, and back and forth.

After you’re done with the bath, you can buy a bottle of chocolate milk to drink while you’re drying off in the locker room. When we’re done with all that, we go to a restaurant and have a big meal. That’s our bath day. Whether we need it or not.

Hope you guys are O.K. Say hi to Suzie and George and everyone from me. And don’t forget to wash behind your ears. Whether you need it or not.

Ken

February 8, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your last letter. How are you?

I wanted to write you sooner, but after receiving your last letter, I became frustrated and stopped sitting. I felt like I was too attached, too preoccupied with, and thought too much about Zen, the Zen Center, and you. I still tried to keep my “don’t-know mind” during that period.

Now sitting for a while seems to have helped me get things back into perspective. I am back to sitting again. I hope it will be better.

I am looking forward to meeting you in person in New Haven next month.

A friend asked me a question. “If the Prajna Paramita is true, then what difference could it make if the Five Precepts are practiced or not?” My “don’t-know mind” doesn’t help him. I did not know how to answer. How would you have answered him?

Sincerely,

Martin

March 3, 1977

Dear Martin,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I am sorry I am answering you so late. I have been very busy lately. We had a three-day Kido in Big Sur, and I have also been to Berkeley. Now I have just returned to Providence.

In your letter you said you had stopped sitting for a while. This is not good, not bad. What is most important is how to keep your mind, moment to moment. The position you keep your body in doesn’t matter. There are three positions in Zen: sitting, walking and lying down. Any way is O.K., but you must understand what correct sitting Zen is. Sitting means to cut off all thinking and keep a mind that doesn’t move. Zen means to become clear. So don’t worry about anything. Don’t check your mind or your feelings. Only go straight—don’t know.

Next, you asked me if the Prajna Paramita is true, what difference could it make if the Five Precepts are practiced or not? There are three meanings in the Prajna Paramita: 1)

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. 2) No form, no emptiness. 3) Form is form; emptiness is emptiness. Which one is the truth? If you understand this, you will understand why the Precepts are taken. Don't be attached to words. Prajna Paramita and truth are words. I ask you, what is Prajna Paramita? What is truth? If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times. If you don't understand, only go straight—don't know.

I hope you always, everywhere go straight—don't know, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 15, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have read *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* and other Zen works.

All methods are attachments, a clinging of “self” to meaning. What, then, is the *hard practice* you speak of? Is there a place for zazen?

I continue to care, to seek, despite knowing better. Please answer.

Respectfully,

Alice

March 3, 1977

Dear Alice,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I am sorry I am answering so late. I have been very busy and traveling a lot, so I just received your letter a short time ago. If you write again, please write to Providence Zen Center. I am sending you one of our newsletters, and you can find the address there.

You asked me what hard practice is, and you said all methods of practice are attachments, a clinging of self to meaning. You have already read *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. You must read the Circle Talk again. There are five kinds of I. They are small I, karma I, empty I, freedom I, and Big I. Just now, what kind of I do you keep?

Zen is not difficult. Nam Cheon Zen Master said, “Everyday mind is Zen mind.” So when I am hungry I eat. When I am tired, I sleep. That is correct Zen mind.

What are you? If you don’t understand, don’t make anything. Don’t check your mind; don’t check your feelings. Only go straight—don’t know. Then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

February 13, 1977
Su Dok Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? How are Bobby, Louise, George, Suzie, Lee, Lynn, Jacob, Jim, Fred, and Kuei-Ai?

We are fine. Our Ip Soen Su Nim got sick and had to leave, so now I am hitting the chugpi. Ken gets lots of compliments on his Korean, Jan is keeping silence until the end of Kyol Che, and Paul has almost attained the half lotus.

I have a request.

Two years ago, when Mu Gak, Byon Jo, and I were sightseeing with you here in Korea, you said, "You only stay in Korea is good."

Before I left Providence, I said that when I came back in the spring, I would start a Zen Center business with Linc. I still think this is a good idea and would be very good for the Zen Centers. But sometimes I ask myself, "What is most important?" You have said that a big Zen Center with many students is not important, that only keen-eyed students are important. I agree. I think staying here in Korea will help me.

I have decided that this is what I want. You are my teacher, so I am requesting your permission.

I hope this finds you well.

Respectfully yours,

Mu Bul Hapjang

P.S. We will go to Seoul Hwa Gae Sa after Kyol Che, around March 5 or 6.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter. We are all working hard to finish these last weeks with strong effort. We will then stay here for a few days before returning to Seoul. I have only a little money left with me, so I may not stay in Tokyo, only return to USA. Except for a short stop in Portland, I have no plans—only keeping don't know.

As you know, our minds occasionally turn to American food. So I can see why Korean food must taste good to you. I hope wherever you go, you can have some kim chee. It puts a round smile on your face. I also see what you have given up to come to America. That is teaching better than words.

No Zen talk this time, only a big thank you for this trip. I don't think you will be in L.A. when I return in March, so don't know when I'll see you again. Take care of yourself.

Sincerely,

Paul

P.S. Two children lay on a grassy hillside watching passing clouds. "Look!" says one, "There's a donkey, and that one's a blind dog."

"Be still," says the other. "I think I hear mother calling."

February 15, 1977
Su Dok Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I hear that the West Coast is warm, so I'm happy that you were in Los Angeles during January and February. If it is very cold in Providence, then everyone will be studying hard, and it will be easier for you to teach. Then everyone will soon finish the Great Work, and cold will only be cold, and hot will only be hot, and the weather will be no problem.

Here it is cold again. But no one is sick anymore, so this cold does not cause much thinking. Soon we will celebrate the New Year. I will be more careful with the bhikkuni sunims of Kyong Soen Am who try to fill me with food than I will be about the cold.

Thank you for your thirty blows. I hope I can attain your hit and put down my checking mind.

Homework: You say, "You must go one more step." Since originally there is nothing, there is no place to step; there is no "I" to do this stepping. "Step" and "I" are empty names which must be put down.

So, for JoJu's "Wash your bowls", my answer is: KATZ!

For Soeng Am's "Which is the true master," my answer is: KATZ!

Is this the truth?

KATZ!

See you in June in Los Angeles.

Hapjang,

Gak Shim, Jan

February 16, 1977

Dear Soen sa Nim,

How are you? I hope it is warming up in America. Thank you for your letter.

Before the donkey leaves, the horse has already arrived. I can see the ink is blue, so the horse has already arrived. Before, my belief in my practice was not so strong, so there were many problems. Now, the horse sees the donkey. The mouse eats cat food, but the cat-bowl is broken. So, I am trying to become a cow with no nostrils.

JoJu kong-an: A full stomach and dirty bowls.

Soeng Am kong-an: I hit you thirty times. Every day, Soeng Am would call and answer himself.

You said Su Dok Sa was cold and the food isn't so good. But sometimes our room is very warm, with nice hot spots on the floor. Also, sometimes, the room was only cold, and when it got really cold, I only wanted to go to sleep. The food is wonderful and plentiful. So, before, I stuffed myself all the time. Also, many desires appeared.

So, good food is bad food. But, these desires are also Buddha. So, they are very strong teachers. So this bad food is good food. You say good food and bad food, so I hit you again. Rice is white, kim chee is hot. Another eminent teacher said, "When hungry eat; when tired, sleep." But, another teacher said, "Put it all down. Only go straight, don't know!" So I hit myself 60 times. The moktak has just been hit for 8:00 sitting.

Stay well. Sincerely,

Ken (Ryun Gak)

P.S. Please say hello to everyone from me. I hope they are doing everyday-hard-training.

March 4, 1977

Dear Mu Bul, Jan, Ken, and Paul,

How are you? Thank you for your letters. Your answers are all wonderful. You have already finished Kyol Che; you already had Hae Jae. Also, you have returned to Seoul. That is wonderful!

About your kong-an answers—If you answer or don't answer, good or bad answers—it doesn't matter. How much do you believe in your true self? That is most important.

All your letters said that the first time you went to Su Dok Sa, everything was different. Different means difficult—eating, sleeping, living, talking, bathroom, doing everything. I think this is very difficult. Most difficult is food, next bathroom, next taking a bath. But all of your letters say, “We are fine, no problem.” At first, you want good food—Hwa Gae Sa food or American food—but now you like this Su Dok Sa food. So every day, every day stronger, stronger, stronger—so you correctly understand just like this, which is just now, moment to moment, your correct situation.

So, an eminent teacher said, “Everyday mind is Zen mind.” This means, as you say, rice is white, kim chee is hot; only this. You must believe in yourself 100%. Then good and bad are all good teachers. Thinking, coming and going, these are all sutras. You can see, you can hear, you can taste—all just like this is truth.

Before, all Buddhas, all Bodhisattvas tried difficult practicing. Then, they got still extinction's palace. You also finished practicing, and returned to Seoul. This means you got the Great Bodhisattva Way. This way is not only yours. Each step, each word, and any of your actions are shining to the other student's minds. So all students here say to you only, “Wonderful!” and “Congratulations on finishing Kyol Che!”

I hope you always keep Kyol Che's mind, then soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Mu Bul: If you want to stay, that's O.K. If you want to return to America, that's O.K. You like, I like.

February 28, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I wish I could express the happiness I feel. The Yong Maeng Jong Jin was beyond words (really and truly). I still don't know how the few of us deserved such a blessing. Your very wonderful people from Providence coming this great distance, helping us, taking us into their family, the whole 'happening' was incredible.

We will forever remember and love the members of Bul Tah Sah, who so joyously brought us the wonderful food, and shared their Temple with us. That was a rich experience that very few people have. I will sing their praises forever.

I am sorry more people could not have shared those days with us, but it had such a strong effect on us that it was probably right that everything happened just as it did.

I did the bows this morning (108) and will continue to do so. This was the fourth time, and it was a little easier today. I will do the 108 bows and sit twice a day. Also, I will work on my 'Homework', and try to keep Clear Mind, and Don't-Know Mind.

This was my first day on my new job, and it went very well. The 'dry - cleaning' was a very good thing to have before a new job. I was really like a brand-new person.

Soen Sa Nim, many, many thanks. I will keep in close touch with you by letter, and I hope it is not too long before I see you again.

With Love and Gratitude,

Harrington

March 4, 1977

Dear Harrington,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I am glad to hear you like your new job.

Also thank you for you. You are a great Bodhisattva. If you hadn't written me, how would we have had a Chicago Yong Maeng Jong Jin? Also Korean and American students coming together, good practicing, and making good relationships? So I say you are a great Bodhisattva!

You say you are sorry more people didn't come. That's O.K. This was the first time—just enough. Our school doesn't want many students, only keen-eyed students, like you. So don't worry.

You say you are continuing to do 108 bows and sitting twice a day. That is wonderful. Our bodies eat three times a day, so we stay strong. If your body is sick, and you cannot eat, or sometimes you choose not to eat, or over-eat, or eat at different times, then your body cannot keep strong. It becomes sick, and you have many problems. Every day your mind needs bowing and sitting on time also. Then your mind becomes strong, strong, strong! Finally your bad karma disappears, *completely* disappears, and you can believe in yourself 100%. But if sometimes you are not bowing and not sitting, then your mind is sometimes strong, sometimes not strong, so your karma sometimes disappears and sometimes cannot disappear, which means that your karma controls you, your body and mind. If karma controls you, then you cannot believe in yourself. If you cannot believe in yourself, you cannot understand the truth, which means you don't understand your direction. Where are you going? So every day, at the same time, bowing and sitting are very necessary.

Then your mind will become clearer, clear like space, like a mirror. Red comes, red; white comes, white. Only reflection. When you see the sky, only blue; when you see the tree, only green. Just like this is truth.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

You Must Break Your Cage

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the Providence Zen Center,
March 7, 1977

Once there was a bear who lived in the mountains. He was happy and free, and spent his time searching for food. Sometimes he found some, sometimes he didn't. That was his life. One day he was captured, taken to the circus, and put in a small cage. A trainer came and taught him to do tricks. After he did the tricks he would be fed. The rest of the time he just walked back and forth in his cage. It was a small cage, so he got to know it very well. He knew just where the water bowl was, where the door was, and how long it took him to walk around inside. He always had enough food. Soon he forgot about the mountains, and became quite complacent about his life.

One day some vandals came and let the animals out of their cages. The bear walked back to the mountains, which now seemed a bit unfamiliar. He didn't find it so easy to find food, so he started bouncing a ball on his head. Some other bears came to him and asked what he was doing. "I'm doing tricks. Then I will get food."

"Rock head," they laughed. "You're in the mountains. No one is going to give you any food for bouncing a ball!"

This bear had forgotten all about freedom. He had become very attached to his cage. Everyone has a cage. Some people have a doctor cage, a lawyer cage, a professor cage. They have a job that they do and get paid for it. They have friends and family. This is their cage. They don't really have freedom. They don't understand the rest of the world. They only understand the life in this cage.

When I first came to America I was impressed that the houses here do not have walls around them. In the Orient the houses all have walls. It is a very strong family cage! The Emperor of China lived in a palace with twelve walls and twelve gates. This was a very special royal cage! He had no idea of what was happening in his kingdom. All his information came from people who were specially selected and could pass through each of the twelve gates. He had no freedom at all.

So if you want freedom, you must break your cage. Then you will be able to understand any condition, any situation, any person's mind. Maybe the strongest cage you have, the one which most needs breaking, is your "I, my, me" cage. You must break this cage!

February 20, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

A week ago you were guiding us through the Kido at Fort Sufi. The last hour or so was most powerful. Clear—*together* going straight—in space—like sometimes during sitting—first feeling good—just feeling good—then white space—going away—and when becoming aware of this it passes—that’s when thinking appears. Kwan Sae Um Bosal.

White space and going away are words with which I am trying to tell you what sometimes happens. There are no words. I have never been quite clear on KATZ. Seems to me this is a time to say KATZ. Is it? Maybe many of us have realized that Kwan Sae Um Bosal *straight*, with *no EXTRAS*, on the drum, is the way – like you do. Thank you, Soen Sa Nim.

Also, thank you very much for your letter, from which I would like to quote: “You say that it (our home) is not a Zen Center. Don’t be attached to name and form.” Thank you, Soen Sa Nim.

To me, a *Zen Center* is a place where, at certain hours of the day – most every day – we get together to sit – bow – chant – listen to Dharma talks – to meet the Zen Master and his students, and where some can live and work together like a family. As you know, our house cannot be that. Yes, I understand, where one sits is a Zen Center.

I am very happy that you came here last Sunday and that you find *the high energy* in this spot of earth. When you proclaimed: “Jo is going to build a sitting room here”, it sounded like a prediction. It may come true sometime. Don’t know.

Also, it’s wonderful that Mu Gak has chosen the Bodhi Vipassana Center for his 100-day retreat. I would like to tell you how this came about: On my drive to the Fort Sufi Kido, I am hungry and stop to eat at Ventana. A girl there points at the Buddha of the Bodhi beads which you put on me last year. She tells me that she comes from the Bodhi Vipassana Center in Canada at 2400 feet – Mu Gak comes to my mind – now he is there – Good Karma.

I like Mu Gak. I like Bobby. My best to her. My best to Jim in the attic.

I hear that we may meet at Sambosa Temple in May. Please – sometime let me know, so I can find a caretaker.

Open Eyes is open eyes.
Closed eyes is closed eyes.
The true Eye of the Thousand Eyes is
HIT.

Thank you, Soen Sa Nim. I bow to you.

Love,

Jo, Jin Uwal

March 9, 1977

Dear Jin Uwal, Jo,

How are you? Thank you for your letter and the many pictures. We have just finished a seven-day Yong Maeng Jon Jin at the Providence Zen Center, so my answer is a little late, and I am sorry.

First you say, "First feeling good – than white space – going away – and when becoming aware of this it passes – that's when thinking returns." This name is Kwan Sae Um Bosal Yom Bul Samadhi. Yom Bul means repeating Kwan Sae Um Bosal's name over and over. Samadhi is one mind.

There are two kinds of samadhi: merrymaking samadhi and true empty samadhi. Merrymaking samadhi is freedom mind, 270° kind. True empty samadhi is 180° kind. After you return to Kwan Sae Um Bosal, the name for this is clear mind. Clear mind is 360°, completely around the circle – that is your original mind.

Then you say "Katz". Katz is katz. Katz is clear. Now you understand katz – that is wonderful. Katz means everything is cut. Everything is cut means everything is already there. So katz is only katz. Asking me if "Katz" is O.K. is not necessary. Put it all down. Katz is already complete. You must believe in yourself 100%. This is very important.

Your house is now not a Zen Center. But, before, I said that special energy comes down at your house. So, if you make a sitting room, many great people will appear, and many people's minds will open in this wonderful place. The location, the air, and the water are also wonderful. So, I say to you, you are lucky.

You say Mu Gak went to the Vipassana Center in Canada. When he got to Canada, the Canadian government did not let him come. They did not like his style, so he came back. Now, he is staying North of San Francisco and has already begun his retreat. So, I say to you, thank you very much for helping Mu Gak.

Linc is the West Coast Dharma Teacher, so he decides all the dates and places for Yong Maeng Jong Jin. So please ask Linc about Sambosa Temple in May.

Here everyone says hello to you. Also, many people like you very much. Yong Maeng Jong Jin and Kwan Sae Um Bosal retreats are very difficult for young people, and you are old, but you are strong. So, many people said that you already have special energy and you are a great Bodhisattva. Also, I talked to many Korean people about you and your practicing, your keeping-mind style, and also your life – that is wonderful. Many people who are

getting old become *more* attached to something, but you are cutting off all thinking, only going straight. This practicing is like the style of the former great Zen Master JoJu – that is wonderful. So, many people like you.

I hope you always keep a 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.

February 27, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It has been a long time since receiving your wonderful letter, and your words have been with me; I have a lot of difficulty keeping a mind clear like space. I know you say, "Don't check your mind," but I often catch myself day-dreaming about changing my 'situation', my 'work,' et cetera, and thinking something like, "One day, I will wander about on a motorbike. My children won't need me, my work won't be my master, and then I will be free!"

However, I know that this is bad karma thinking and that clear mind is before thinking and "only this", the knowing and attaining are separated. But, I am O.K. about all of this, as both Sherry and I are practicing our bowing and sitting regularly. In addition, your book and your regular communications with us are good. I hope you will come and see us when warm weather and spring come to Toronto.

In your last letter, you said, "If using time, use; not using time, not use. In your book you say, "No one knows when he will die. It could be next year, next week, or in the next five minutes. So put it all down, now, at this very moment. Keep your mind as if you are already dead. Then, all attachments will disappear."

It seems when sitting and bowing, the distractions are reduced to almost zero, and so "before thinking" mind comes easier than when I am working, or reading, or watching television. Now, also in your book, you tell the story of Ko Bong achieving Enlightenment, and after he was asked the question, "Who is master of this body, and where does he reside?" he made up his mind to *work* on the question even if it drove him insane, and during this period five years passed. I guess the idea of giving up everything to attain clear mind is appealing, but of course "just-now" mind can grow and grow. KATZ!!

You gave me some homework – to fix the cigarette man's mind:

Ashes, hit, ashtray;
Buddha sings to spring
Buddha smells dry shit on stick,
Don't know.

I hope that when you come to Toronto, you will meet my daughters, Margot and Daphne, and that they will get to know your mind.

My law work is very busy; the lawyer I work for is a very good lawyer and wants a lot of money. Many times, I feel my work drives me, as there is much pressure in the office to work hard, to do good work for our clients, *and* to bill the clients a lot for the service. You have said that what is most important is *why* are you doing something and what is your

intention when doing things. The more I think of my work, my intention seems to be self-motivated, i.e., to gain fame and fortune, although at present, I am able to start repaying my financial debts from studying law. At the same time, I am perplexed, as my engineering background and legal training give me a greater degree of understanding in my field of law, and so I can help other people with their problems, even though most of these problems come from “construction-business” origins. Only keep clear mind – don’t know!

Take care of yourself. Sherry and I send all our love.

Lawlor

March 9, 1977

Dear Lawlor,

How are you, Sherry, and your family? Thank you for your don’t-know and go-straight letter. Don’t know and go straight – that is wonderful. You now understand your true seat. Your seat name is Don’t Know. Don’t Know is your true seat. Then enough. More thinking is no good.

First you said you think you want to be free. You say this is bad thinking. I also say this is bad thinking. But sometimes, this style thinking helps you. Why? Because you already understand bad thinking, so this thinking helps you. If you continued this style thinking, this would be very bad, but you soon stop and return to your correct seat, so that is wonderful.

You say you and Sherry are bowing and sitting every day – that is wonderful. If you eat food every day, then your body is strong. If you don’t eat your food, your body becomes weak and sick. It’s like this. Every day you must practice. Then your mind becomes strong, your bad karma disappears and disappears, and your clear mind will grow and grow, and finally it will be possible to control yourself. Then you will be able to do everything.

If you are attached to some words, then your mind action will be very difficult. Using time, use; stop time, stop means *mind light*. Put it all down means *mind nature*. Happiness is happiness, sadness is sadness means *mind form*. So there are three kinds – light, nature, and form. Light means using. It’s like having one cup of water. When the temperature is raised, this water becomes steam. When the temperature becomes lowered, it again becomes water. If lowered more, it becomes ice. But its substance is H₂O. So, the form and the temperature of this substance do not matter – it does not appear and does not disappear. But the temperature going up and down changes the form – this is *using*. Water, ice, and steam are the form. But form is substance; substance is form. You must correctly understand the temperature. Then you will understand the form. This means correctly understand your just-now situation. Then, you will correctly understand your form.

So I ask you, what are you doing now?

So, any moment, keeping a clear mind is like H₂O. Your moment-to-moment situation is like the temperature. Then, you will understand your position.

So, it is like a man driving a car. Just driving this car is clear mind. Being the driver is his situation. Then he meets a red light. What kind of action is necessary? Stop. His driver situation changes, so the form changes. So if you're at the office, only be a lawyer. If you go to your house and meet your wife, then only be a husband. If you're watching television, only watch television. Moment to moment, keep a clear mind. Then you will understand your correct situation and your position. Then, everything will be no problem.

So, if at the office, your boss says, "Hard training, hard training!", then, if you don't work hard, no good. If you must make money, then at money time, think about money. When bowing, thinking about money is no good. When sitting, thinking about money is no good. Sitting time, only sit; bowing time, only bow; money time, only money; thinking time, only thinking. This is "using time, use; not-using time, not use." Then controlling yourself is possible, and believing in yourself 100% is possible.

About your cigarette kong-an answer: if you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Many words are not necessary. Put it all down.

What is most important? First, what is the purpose of your life? Next, moment to moment, what are you doing now? Next, how do you help other people? If you completely understand those things, then no problem. So, putting your head in order is very necessary.

I will come to Toronto maybe the first week of May. If your daughters want to meet me, that is wonderful. I also want to meet your daughters.

I hope you are always keeping don't know, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your response to my letter. I especially appreciate it realizing how busy you must be.

You asked me, is my body form or emptiness? My answer is to blow my nose.

I would very much like to pursue the Buddha Dharma here on the North Slope. Can you recommend any practices, meditations, etc. that I might be able to use? Also, you mentioned the Heart Sutra in your letter. I have not read this and could not locate it in Anchorage the few days I was out on R and R. Is there some place I could order it from? Actually I have read some in the field of Buddhism, but it has been haphazard; that is, whatever has been available in the bookstore is what I've read. So my reading ranges from Anagarika Govinda to Alan Watts. I don't think there is anything wrong with this, except that I have difficulty distinguishing the genuine article from a mere popularization.

You might be interested in knowing what attracted me to Buddhism. I think basically it was a deep disgust with the incredible pettiness of so much of humanity. How can they spend their lives belittling, fighting, quarreling and killing each other? For many years I thought that there was the chance of political solution to these problems. Gradually I came to realize that what needed to be changed was people, not the external conditions in which they lived. I searched for some means by which people could be transformed, and it seemed to me that Buddhism often brought about the kind of transformation that is necessary. To put it simply, I like to be around Buddhists. They seem remarkably free of any kind of fanaticism or hatred.

I am working on several musical compositions. May I have the honor of sending you one?

Yours in the Dharma,

Jim

March 22, 1977

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter. I am sorry your letter is being answered so late. I have just returned from Boston. We had a special training period called Yong Maeng Jong Jin ("to leap like a tiger while sitting") at the Cambridge Zen Center for three days. Next we had a one-day workshop for Shim Gum Do, which means Mind Sword Path. Mind Sword Path is action Zen. Then we had a lecture at the Clear Light Society. Clear Light means

our true self. Any light has a shadow, but the clear light of our minds has no shadow. So that is why I am late in answering.

Your answer is wonderful. But you are very attached to your nose. In the future, you will die, your body will rot, but maybe your nose will not rot. Is this correct?

You ask me to recommend a practice or meditation. So I ask you, what do you want? If you want something, you don't understand correct meditation. Then I ask you, what are you? If you understand, then you understand your correct way. If you don't understand, then you must keep 100% don't-know mind, any time, any place. Only go straight. Don't check your mind, don't check your feelings, don't check anything. Only don't know.

Zen is not dependent on Buddha, not dependent on God, not dependent on sutras or any Zen Master. Depend on your true self. This is the correct way.

I think you have read many books and checked many other people's teachings. That is very bad. Some masters' teachings are different, some have problems, but these are their problems, not your problem. Don't worry. You must understand your true self. If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Don't check your mind, don't check your feelings, don't check anything. Then you will get everything.

You talk about politics and world problems. What is good? What is bad? Good and bad have no self – nature. But many people make good and bad and become attached to their good and bad. So good and bad are only their opinions. Americans' opinions are made by American society and politics. Russians' opinions are made by their society and politics. So if America says good, Russia says bad; if Russia says good, America says bad. Why? Their opinions are different. So good and bad are different. What is correct good? What is correct bad? If you have the correct opinion, then good and bad are clear. Russians and Americans are attached to their opinions, so they fight. In each society, in each person, it is the same, belittling, fighting, quarreling, and killing each other. If you make your opinion, situation, and condition disappear, then your mind and my mind are the same – there is no American, no Russian, no Chinese, no Japanese, no Korean. Same eyes, same ears, same nose, same mouth, same body, same mind. Then world peace. So Zen is first making your opinion, your situation, and your condition disappear. Then you will get the correct opinion, correct situation, and correct condition. The name for this is clear mind. Many people have no clear mind. Their karma controls them. If you have clear mind, you can control your karma, so no more fighting. That is the true way.

An eminent teacher said, "If you want to understand the realm of the Buddha, keep a mind which is clear like space."

So let all thinking and all external desires fall far away. Then your mind can go any place with no hindrance.

So, what is keeping a mind which is clear like space? It's name is don't know. Don't know already cuts off all thinking. Cut-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, universal substance are the same. When you keep don't-know mind, 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 absolute, or nature, or energy, or everything. But primary point has no name, no form. Also no speech, no words. Only when you keep don't-know mind, then you are everything and everything is you.

Then I ask you, the tree and you, are they the same or different? If you say "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, you ask the tree. Then the tree will teach you everything. The tree is better than me, better than Buddha or God, or any sutras.

You say transformation. This is correct. But one more step is necessary: Zen is the revolution of our minds. Then we break all worlds of opposites and become the absolute world. Then everything is complete, equal – perfect freedom. Communism is only outside revolution. Zen is both inside and outside revolution; inside and outside become one. Then your mind is clear like space, like a mirror. Red comes: red. White comes: white. When you see the sky, only blue; when you see the tree, only green. Just like this. Just like this is the truth. So everyday mind is Zen mind. When you are hungry, only eat; when you are tired, sleep. Only this. Don't make anything. Don't check anything. Then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, then soon you find your true self, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I enclose a copy of the Heart Sutra. You are working on several compositions and would like to send me one. Thank you very much.

March 7, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Here are the reprints from the Kido. I hope your trip to Chicago and the East Coast were good, and that you are well. Linc stayed on for a few days, and we had a wonderful time. It has been such a gift to have so many new friends visit here with us! I feel like we are all part of a very special family – what everyone is searching for really – where people care about each other and have common goals. How you have managed to create this in a few short years, without even knowing English at first, I don't know. But I am very deeply grateful. One small way I have decided to express that is to become more regular in my practice. I have been getting up *every* morning (even weekends) at 5:30 AM to bow and sit. Somehow doing this at the *same time every day* is very good for me. In fact, the funny thing is that my enthusiasm is catching and Ezra is beginning to join me, which is a surprise as he seems to need more sleep than I and *hates* to get up if he does not have to!

Ezra did give a short Dharma talk last Wednesday night, as you said he should – and it was very good!

Another small way I am adding to some consistency in the practice is to use driving time – “when driving, just drive”, as you say. I find that more difficult in some ways than sitting as I have always used this time to think about many things, and it is really hard to break that habit. I drive back and forth quite a lot, however – and breaking habits is good for me. The more I break, the easier it gets! I used to feel quite powerless to break habits. (I guess I am just replacing them with new ones, and yet I can hear myself beginning to “check my mind” at this point!) The “new habit” of Zen (if that's what it is) is very important to my life these days – many situations, some painful, seem to arise and pass away around me – in my family, with clients and friends. If I can learn to keep a clearer mind and a “for all people” attitude – it is good. I had to talk, for example, with the mother of a client (age 23) who killed herself, probably the weekend of the Kido. I found myself telling that woman, an alcoholic who had herself given up on life years ago, that the most wonderful thing she could do for her daughter was never to take another drink ... I was really surprised at myself, not only for that statement but for not getting involved in guilt for what I couldn't do for the daughter. I really had tried – in fact things were much better for her than they had been nine months ago – she had made some positive changes. My mother, twelve years ago, had taken her life, and I always feared how it would be if one of my clients did the same thing. Very strange timing: one of the things I let go of during the Precepts Ceremony was the nagging sense of responsibility, not to mention the pain, around my mother's tragic death.

I did not intend to write about all this in my letter, but here it is anyway. I came home from talking to that girl's mother and sat – feeling just incredible gratitude for the changes which have occurred in my life since I met you and began to practice. I used to wonder if I

would become a depressed, lonely old lady like my mother – frustrated and unfulfilled and desperate – and maybe take the same course of action – and *I realized that karma is really burned!* What a feeling of freedom, newness and joy. And I all want now is to practice and be with whatever is happening.

Thank you for the Kido and for coming to our house and for so much.

Love,

Diana

P.S. Linc and I set May 12-15 (Thursday night through Sunday) for the Yong Maeng Jong Jin at our house. Is that all right with you? Sambosa dates Linc will follow up with... in June, though.

March 22, 1977

Dear Diana,

Thank you for your letter and the many pictures. How are you and Ezra? I just came back from Boston, where we did a three-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the Cambridge Zen Center, a one-day workshop at the Shim Gum Do School, and a lecture for the Clear Light Society, so my answer is late.

Your letter is fantastic. I have many students, but you are a special student – you have not been practicing long, but you have been practicing very hard, and correctly and strongly. Many students live together in Zen Centers, so everyday practicing on time is very easy. But you are not in a Zen Center, you are in your house, but you wake up early, bow and sit on time everyday. This is very difficult, but you do it, so I say that is fantastic, and you are a special, strong Zen Student, my student. So I thank you very much.

Most people make their own cages – good opinion, good situation, good condition cages – for example, doctors, professors, lawyers, and so forth. Therefore, they like their cages. And they are attached to their cages. Then, finally, their cages become stronger and stronger and they cannot get out, cannot break their cages. But they want freedom, and true happiness, and world peace. But they have cages, so this is not possible. Their cages are very strong. It is like a bear in the zoo. At first this bear doesn't like this cage, but as time passes, he likes it. He becomes attached to his cage. Then already he has, in his mind, cage karma. Some day this bear will leave his cage, but he has this mind cage, so he cannot go far away, cannot walk unafraid anywhere. So finally someone comes and catches the bear and again puts him in a cage.

Our human karma is like this. But you are already breaking your cage. So your mind is not hindered by anything.

Therefore you said in your letter that your client had died, but you didn't feel guilt. That means you understand human karma, and you understand the true way.

Before, Buddha understood that his Kapila family would soon disappear, but he couldn't help them. So one special energy and magic student wanted to help them, but also couldn't help. Then finally the student asked Buddha, "I have special energy, so why couldn't I help them?" Buddha said, "Deserved karma, when people do not practice, cannot disappear. Cause and effect are clear."

Your mind is clear like space, so everything is reflected. Only coming and going, and you are not hindered by this. That is wonderful.

Before you worried about yourself. But now you say, "I realized that karma is really burned!" These are fantastic words. This means you are able to do everything. Able to do everything means, first get Enlightenment, and saving all people is possible. Also you say, "What a feeling of freedom, newness and joy." That is your mind light. Your mind light is getting stronger and stronger and stronger and is shining everywhere. Soon world peace is possible.

How is your homework? Did you finish it? Then tell me.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon finish your homework, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. May 12-15 for Yong Maeng Jong Jin is fine.

March 15, 1977

Hwa Gae Sa

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your nice letter. We are now in Seoul seeing our friends here.

A few days ago, we found that the airplane tickets we bought are now no good because the airline (Siam) went bankrupt. But, we found a very cheap way to fly back with an organization which sends Korean orphans to the U.S. So, Paul is going straight back to L.A. the day after tomorrow, and Ken and Jan will fly to Tokyo (the ticket is good as far as Tokyo) on Friday and go sightseeing. Then, they will return to Korea by way of Kyoto by train, and ferry from Shimonoseki to Pusan, and bus or train from Pusan to Seoul. Then, they will take an orphan flight (\$250) back to the States. Ken now speaks Korean about as well as me, so I think they will have no problem. Also, Jan's father has lots of friends in Japan.

In a few days, I will go back to Su Dok Sa. On the telephone, when you asked me when I was coming back, I said, "Not coming back." I meant not with the others. I want to stay here maybe two years.

I hope this finds you well.

Sincerely,

Mu Bul

P.S. Hello to Bobby.

Wednesday, March 16

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Here are some pictures and an article about us. A reporter and photographer came to Hwa Gae Sa with Mr. Ju and his mother.

On Saturday, we went to Weol Pah Go Sa Nim's house for lunch. Weol Pah Go Sa Nim, Bo Hyeon Haeng Bosal Nim, Kwang U Su Nim, and Mrs. So were there. We thanked Weol Pah Go Sa Nim for the bell and Buddha and showed him pictures of our trip. He likes us.

In my last letter, I said Paul was going directly back. He was going to take the robes and bowls with him. The flight he was planning on fell through, though, so now, he's planning to go to Japan with Ken and Jan. Anyway, Ken, Paul, and the robes and bowls should be on the West coast in about a month. That seems to be the quickest way.

See you later,

Mu Bul

P.S. With this orphan flight thing, we can't plan too definitely.

March 24, 1977

Dear Mu Bul,

How are you, Mu Bul? Thank you for your two letters, and the large pictures, and the Korean newspaper article. That is wonderful.

In your letter, you say you had a problem with the airplane tickets. That's bad, but you got this special flight – that is very good. Paul already arrived in L.A at Tahl Mah Sah. He called me, so I spoke with him. So now, I understand your news – Jan and Ken are sightseeing in Japan. That is also wonderful.

Also, you say to me “Not coming back.” You want to stay maybe two years. That is wonderful. If you want to stay two years, that's O.K.; 10 years, that's O.K., no problem. Don't worry about Zen Centers. Don't worry about anything. Many of our family heard that you will stay in Korea for two years. Everybody says, “Wonderful! Mu Bul Su Nim is #1.” So this makes my mind feel happy.

You want to stay for two years – that is the correct way. Then, you will learn correct monk situation, correct Buddhism, the correct style for controlling temples, and how to save all people – all these things are possible.

Before, all great Zen Masters did difficult practicing, and then they got Dharma Energy, and saved all people. Don't make anything; don't check anything; only go straight. Then you will get everything, O.K.?

I hope you are always keeping a 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.

P.S. Paul wants to become a monk. Maybe we will have a ceremony at Buddha's Birthday.

March 10, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Please accept my thanks for conducting the Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Chicago last month. My thanks should have been offered long before this.

I hope to attend another with you next month. However, will you hold another in Chicago, perhaps on your way between coasts?

There are earnest students here, and it's very likely that at least twice as many would turn up for the next one held. At the Temple I attend, Reverend Kubose's Chicago Buddhist Temple, between 12 and 20 people attend the one-night seshins which are now held once a month. Many of these people were sorry to have missed the Yong Maeng Jon Jin.

The Chicago Buddhist Temple is of course not a Zen Temple. There are no facilities for anything more than an overnight seshin. The people go to California or the East Coast to sit longer seshins.

I would be glad to contribute toward your expenses for another Yong Maeng Jong Jin here. If you will let me know costs involved, I will look into raising the money necessary. Please consider this.

For about 3 years, I have been sitting twice a day. After the Yong Maeng Jong Jin, I experienced a great welling up of energy and well-being and certainty. The following weekend, we had an all-night seshin. (We sit from 8 to 12 P.M., and 4 to 9 A.M. the next day.) It was very difficult to concentrate. Since then, my mind wanders more and doubt had increased again. I feel sort of tired. How can this be dealt with?

Once more, thank you, Sir. I hope this finds you well.

Best regards,

Richard

March 24, 1977

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I am glad you liked the Chicago Yong Maeng Jong Jin. You asked about another Chicago Yong Maeng Jon Jin. Now I don't have any ideas about when that could be. Our director, Louise Stanton, is in charge of my schedule. If you want another Yong Maeng Jong Jin, you must write her.

You say that after Yong Maeng Jon Jin you experienced well-being and certainty, but that since the all-night sitting your mind wanders more. Before, I told you, don't check your mind, don't check your feelings. Only go straight – don't know, always, everywhere. Then you will get everything. But you were checking something. If you check something, you will lose everything. Be very careful. Zen is how do you keep your just-now mind? What are you doing now? Moment to moment, how do you keep your mind? This is very important.

I think you want something when you sit. Sitting is only one part of Zen. Thinking comes, thinking goes – don't worry. Only go straight – don't know. Before, I told you, don't-know mind is the great question. Great question is no question. Already all thinking is cut off. Cut-off-all-thinking mind is empty mind, empty mind is before thinking, and before thinking is your substance. Your substance and the universal substance are the same. Also, before thinking is clear mind.

So when you keep clear mind, already the universe is you, and you are the universe. Everything and you become one. There is no subject, no object. When you see the sky, only blue. When you see the tree, only green. Only just like this. Don't check your mind, don't check your feelings, don't check anything. Only go straight – don't know. When you sit, just sit. If thinking comes and goes, don't worry. At eating time, just eat; at driving time, just drive. This is Zen. So an eminent teacher said, "Everyday mind is Zen mind." Don't make anything; then you will get everything, O.K.?

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thinking it food, or perhaps a bone, the dog bit a rock in the stream-bed today.

Along the bank, bits of driftwood from the recent flood.

How are things with you?

Linda and I attended the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregational Church's New Year celebration near here (Reading, Pa.) last month, and had a fine day. We made many friends. They and we and other interested people in this area are working in an attempt to set up a regular Buddhist Church with weekly services and around-the-clock access, as they say the Buddhist temples were in Vietnam. The Pagoda where the services were held has now a permanent shrine room open to the public during the day, but its use is limited. Setting up a regular church is hard since most of the refugees, along with their American friends, do not have a great abundance of cash. Perhaps Vimalakirti will invite us to his tea room. We will be satisfied to sit on the floor.

Now I must ask you a question:

When Sariputra tried to take his seat,
did the chair grow,
or his body shrink?

Please send me the address of the International Zen Center in New York; maybe we can have tea together some time.

Have a nice day and take care of yourself.



Upasaka Dale

P.S. Hope Street is a nice name. I hope this letter reaches you.



March 24, 1977

Dear Dale,

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

Your poem is very wonderful. But that dog is not smart. Here is a very smart dog. His nose separates bones and rocks. Many dharmas bring karma into the suffering ocean. Dharma disappears; then karma disappears. Karma disappears; then the suffering ocean disappears. Then what?

The news about the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregational Church and your attempt to set up a Buddhist temple is wonderful news.

Your question is about Sariputra and his seat. So I ask you, which is heavier, one pound of steel or one pound of cotton batting? If you find the correct one, I will hit you. If you cannot find the correct one, I will also hit you. Why?

KATZ!!!

Eleven pounds is five kilograms.

The address of the International Zen Center of New York is:

105 East Sixteenth Street
New York, New York 10003

You like Hope Street, so I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 12, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I bow again to you. I began a letter to you a short time ago, but tore it up because I did not want to waste your time. So I do it again. Perhaps you will advise me on something I have experimented with. I have an emotional problem – so I make up kong-ans for myself and then crack them. Is this good Zen for emotional problems? If it works on me, it may work on others too – then we can all be one.

A short time ago I began a relationship with a woman, and now I think it may be ending. So I have a pain in my stomach, in my muscles, in my mind, and I hurt. It hurts. So I do this. I say that my mother and my father had an insecure relationship – their relationship hurt – so their karma becomes my karma – and my relationship hurts. Now, all this is perhaps delusion, I know this, but this is O.K. too. Now I do this – in meditation I summon my mother and my father to me and allow them to love one another in me. Then we all three become one, and then we disappear. So I heal their relationship. Now a question – does this heal all relationships? Is it good Zen?

She is a lioness. I am attached to my love for a lioness. There is nothing. How do I put all this down ... HOW! Is it just like this? I will make this big HOW? You are a very great teacher. I have read your book .. *Ashes* ... Thank you.

Ron

P.S. I am the Englishman who visited you last Christmas. Now away with all this – there is work to do.

March 24, 1977

Dear Ron,

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

Your letter is very interesting. You talk about relationships. If you attain correct relationships, then everything is no problem. But your relationship is only your idea – the relationship between you and Universe, you and your parents, you and your girlfriend, you and any of your things.

If you correctly keep your situation, then any relationship is correct. But if you cannot correctly keep your situation, which means you like this, you don't like this, then your relationship will have problems.

Correctly understanding your situation makes a correct relationship. Not correct means your idea, your desire. This makes likes and dislikes, good and bad, so in every relationship problems appear.

So I tell you, don't make anything; then you will get everything. If you make something, you lose everything.

Many people check their minds, their thinking, their feelings. Also they check other people's minds and actions. Then their relationships are not so good. If you don't check your mind and your feelings, then the relationship is complete. You ask me, "How do I put all this down? Is it just like this?"

I ask you what is most important? What is the purpose of your life? So I ask you, what are you? You must understand your true self. You don't know you, so you have a problem. If you understand your true self, then you understand the correct way. If you understand the correct way, then you understand your moment-to-moment correct situation. Then you can understand correct relationships.

So again I ask you, what are you? If you don't understand, only keep don't know, always, everywhere. Don't check your mind, don't check your feelings, only go straight – don't know, O.K.?

I hope you always keep don't – know mind, clear like space, then soon attain your correct situation and relationships, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 7, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How is your health, and how are the centers in the East? I hope you both grow strong.

You are a very fine teacher, and your mind is most clear. I should listen to you more, and not object as much. I finally understood the true meaning of your letter on being independent of any assistance in establishing a center, and depending only on myself. Still, I have much to attain, and much to learn.

On May 7, 14, and 21 (Saturdays), I will be teaching all-day classes on Zen at Univ. of California, Irvine (about 45 miles South of Los Angeles, near Balboa Island – which is a beautiful and quaint little town). Would you come one of those three days and talk to my classes, or even lead a half-day sitting & talk class (if you want)? I would appreciate it, and I'm sure some of the students would.

There is one student in my present class that has a good grasp of Dharma talk. Probably he will be better than me soon (because I am lousy at it).

I decided I couldn't wait for things to "look right" for me before I went East to open a center. Two of my students are already trying to set up a center for us in Santa Monica. Also, our group is now an official campus organization at U.C.L.A.

I am sorry that I could not come much in the evening to Tahl Mah Sah when you were here, but I am increasingly busy, and must sit when I can find time. Also, you were absent much, and I was reluctant to go not knowing if you were there.

Our group will begin nightly sittings at U.C.L.A. in April, and we can still bring the regular Thursday class to Tahl Mah Sah when you return, in May or June. Several students in the last class were very much impressed with the way you teach, but are too lazy to come all the way from Santa Monica and other places for nightly sittings.

Perhaps, when the Santa Monica Center is established, you will become one of the Board of Advisors for it? It would be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ed

March 24, 1977

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. How are you lately?

I just returned from Boston, where we had Yong Maeng Jong Jin for three days at the Cambridge Zen Center, a half-day workshop at the Shim Gum Do School, and a lecture at the Clear Light Society, so this answer is a little late. I am sorry.

I think your teaching is wonderful. Zen is each person understanding his own karma; understanding this is clear mind. Clear mind means your mind only reflects your karma. So making your karma disappear is very easy. If you make your karma disappear, then you are complete. In your letter, you already understand your karma, which means that your mind is already clear, so you are already complete. Only go straight – don't know. Don't make "Because I am lousy at it." Put it all down.

I don't know about my schedule for the West Coast, so you must ask the West Coast director, Linc. He will help you.

Opening a Santa Monica Zen Center is wonderful. But be very careful. An eminent teacher said, "A blind man can lead many people into a ditch." If you don't understand the correct way, you cannot teach the correct way. If you cannot teach the correct way, then all together, you will go to hell. So making a Zen Center and teaching Zen are not important. What is the correct way? What is the correct teaching? This is very important.

You asked me to serve on the Board of Advisors for your Zen Center. I am always ready to help you. Advisor style is not important. My advice together with other people's advice may be confusing. Each advisor has a different style, so maybe the students won't understand their direction. So I think only one advisor is necessary. So I will only help you. Don't worry about me.

In your letter, I cannot find your homework. Did you finish your homework? Then hurry, hurry your answer to me! If you don't understand, only go straight. This is your most important original job. Other things are not so important, O.K.?

I hope you always keep a don't-know mind which is clear like space, soon finish your original job, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 13, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It is a misty night, Yong Maeng Jong Jin is over, and my knees are sore. Here is an answer for your homework:

A master is hanging from a bough by his teeth, and his hands and feet are tied. He is asked, "What is Bodhidharma?"

The master farts.

I enjoyed seeing you in New Haven. I hope to see you again soon.

Love,

Sheldon

P.S. So you will remember me – I was the young man in blue sweat pants which said "YALE" on them.

March 24, 1977

Dear Sheldon,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I remember you and your blue pants with YALE on them. In New Haven everybody says you are a wonderful man – you come and sit, and help the Zen Center every day. So I say to you, thank you very much.

Your answer is not good, not bad. If the master cannot fart, then what? You are very attached to staying alive.

Zen is, moment-to-moment, understanding the correct situation. At that time, what is the correct situation? If you understand the correct situation at that time, then no problem. There is no life, no death. If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Don't make anything. Don't make farts. Then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep don't-know mind, soon finish your homework, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 20, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? And all the East Coast family? Hello to everybody from the West Coast family.

Here is all the latest news:

1. A building inspector came to Tahl Mah Sah last week and said that formal court papers were going to be sent in 10 days to stop any activities (other than residential) at this address. I have contacted Michael Hannon, and he says that we can appeal in court, but that we can only prolong matters for a while – the chances of remaining here as a Korean temple are very small, as many neighbors have complained about the Sunday ceremonies. The Zen Center has begun looking for a house to rent.

2. A man named William Merwin came to visit me. He has been a student of Aitken Roshi and had read your book and corresponded with Mu Gak Su Nim. He is a famous poet and is traveling to New York. He wants very much to meet you in New York and will try to come for the April Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

Aitken Roshi liked your book very much and recommended you very highly as a teacher. Also, Aitken Roshi will be in Los Angeles at the L.A. Zen Center during April and part of May. He would like to meet you, I'm sure, so I will check with Genki to see if he will still be here when you return in May.

3. Ed Muzika wants you to come to a class at the University of California at Irvine on May 7th (Saturday), O.K.?

4. Yong Maeng Jong Jin dates:

Berkeley – May 12-15

L.A. – May 26-29

San Francisco (EST) – June 28-30

Sambosa – ?

I have written to Satam Su Nim, but haven't received an answer yet.

5. No Su Nim got a new 10-speed bicycle.

6. Agima and No Bosal Nim are wonderful teachers and roommates. I am now a won ton master.

7. Paul was here for a few days and left for Oregon today and will be in Providence for April 8th. He is in good spirits and wants to become a monk – as you already know.

8. Marge King came to visit for the weekend. She is the special medicine-teacher-grandmother.

See Hoy, Alicia, and Pascale all say hello also.

Yours in the Dharma,

Linc

March 30, 1977

Dear Linc,

How are you and all the West Coast family? Thank you for your letter.

First, you talk about Tahl Mah Sah. Tahl Mah Sah always has had problems. I already told you that soon moving this house is necessary. Already, we started looking for a good Korean temple, but could not find one. Also, moving our Zen Center is necessary.

I heard about this man William Merwin from Mu Gak. Mu Gak said he will come to the New Haven Yong Maeng Jong Jin. He wants a Yong Maeng Jong Jin, and the next Yong Maeng Jong Jin in New York is not a Yong Maeng Jong Jin, only a Kwan Sae Um Bosal retreat, so if you see him, tell him to go to New Haven or Cambridge. Also, at the last Cambridge Yong Maeng Jong Jin, three of Aitken Roshi's students came, and said that Aitken Roshi liked our book and our teaching style. You said Aitken Roshi will come to Los Angeles in April and May. I also would like to meet him in May.

Next, Ed wants me to come to a class on the 7th of May – this is not possible. Why? I will go to Toronto, and return to Los Angeles on the seventh, so I am sorry. I will go to his class next time.

Next, the Yong Maeng Jong Jin schedule at Berkeley is O.K., and in Los Angeles is O.K., but the dates for E.S.T. are not possible. You already understand my East Coast schedule. If I finish on June 30th, I cannot be back in Providence in time for their Yong Maeng Jong Jin, and cannot teach them. All of June is free, and the last weekend (June 24-26) is O.K., but until the 30th is not possible.

About the Sambosa Yong Maeng Jong Jin: you said you do not have an answer from Satam Su Nim. Then send a letter to Won Jang Nim. Then, maybe you will get an answer.

You say No Su Nim got a new 10-speed bicycle – that is wonderful.

You learned Won Ton from Agima and No Bosal Nim. When I come there, I want to taste your won ton.

Paul will come maybe tomorrow and sit Yong Maeng Jong Jin with us, and after take the ten precepts and become a monk – he has already decided. So everybody likes him; everybody says, “That is wonderful!”

I already got Marge King’s letter, so I will send an answer to her. She is a wonderful student.

There are all my answers to your news. Here is some interesting news for you.

First we had a workshop at the Shim Gum Do School and the Cambridge Zen Center Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the same time. We held this workshop on only one afternoon, and many people came with us – very interesting. I gave a Dharma speech from a high stand – an original Korean-style formal Dharma speech. Many people liked this. A Tibetan-style teacher always sits on a high stand, but in Korean style, I sit on a high stand only for a formal Dharma speech.

Next, we had the opening of the Clear Light Society and a lecture on dying. Almost forty people came to hear us in Boston. I talked about “What is Death?” At dying time, how do we teach people? How do we help dying people? I talked about when people die, people with desire have more desire; people who believe in God or Buddha believe more in God or Buddha, and thinking people do more thinking.

So, I said that at dying time, keeping a clear mind is very necessary. But everybody is very afraid of dying. This means they are very attached to life, and also attached to something else. So, the dying mind is very weak and cannot keep clear.

Keeping a clear mind is necessary. Then, how do you keep a clear mind when you are dying? If you have practiced a lot before, than it is easy, but for people who have not practiced, it is very difficult. Also, it is more difficult for people with no religion. So, how can we help them?

Only use breath in, breathe out, our Dharma play teaching. Count each breath. If we say to them when they breathe out, “Very good feeling!” then their minds cannot think of anything else; they forget everything and only count when they breathe in, breathe out. This mind is very clear. If they use this special breathe in, breathe out way, then keeping a clear mind at dying time is possible.

This is the teaching style for dying time. Then, we must tell them, “You are strong. You are not dying. Put it all down. If you put it all down, you will get happiness and true peace.” Then, they have a good feeling and are not afraid, and if they die at that time, this is very good; they are not suffering.

So, Patricia Shelton Harvey made this Clear Light Society. This name is very interesting. Clear Light means our true self – there is no life, no death. So, clear light is the light of our true self. From the light of our true self, there is no shadow. From any other light, there is

a shadow. So, before dying, you must find clear light. Then, you will get freedom from life and death, so when you die, no problem.

Then next, New York has a new Zen Center – very wonderful. There were twenty people at the Yong Maeng Jong Jin there. All people like this new Zen Center. The ceiling is very high; it is also very wide. It is possible to have fifty people sitting there, but this was the first time, so twenty people were enough.

For the April Yong Maeng Jong Jin in New York, we will not sit – we will do only action Zen for two days, April 30 and May 1, a two-day chanting retreat.

I will go to Toronto on May 2. Samu Su Nim wants a three-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin, so I will return to Los Angeles maybe on May 7.

That is the news.

I hope that all the West Coast family is always keeping a mind which is clear like space, soon gets Enlightenment, and saves all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 30, 1977

Dear Student,

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

You talk about your job. Before, I asked you, what is most important? Every day practicing. If you practice every day, then any kind of job is no problem.

In the past, when I was staying in Korea, a famous carpenter was my student. He was already famous, but inside he did not like his job 100%.

So one day when he visited me, he said to me, "My job is not good, not bad. Many people like me. But sometimes I like it, and sometimes I don't like it. One mind wants to change my job." So he asked me, "What shall I do? Please teach me."

So I asked him, "What is your original job?"

Then he said, "I am a carpenter."

So I said, "Carpenter is your body job. What is your *true* job?"

"True job? What does this mean?"

"Your *mind* job," I said.

He said, "Mind job? My mind job is only Kwan Se Um Bosal."

I said, "Do you know Kwan Se Um Bosal?"

He said, "I don't know."

"You say, 'don't know.' Only go straight – Kwan Se Um Bosal. This is your correct job. If you keep this original job, then you will get enough mind. If you keep enough mind, then any body job will be no problem. Also, your body job, moment to moment, is the truth, and will save all people. Don't check your mind. Don't check your feelings. Then no problem." I said this.

So, if you check your job, if you check your mind, if you check your thinking, if you check your feelings, then you have a problem. If you find your original job, then your just-now job will be no problem.

An eminent teacher said, “My mind is complete. Each thing is complete. Also, each thing has it.” So if your mind is complete, then you will have no problem with any job or any action.

I think you have too much understanding. You must lose everything. Then your mind will be very simple. Then changing your job is O.K., and not changing your job is O.K. – don’t worry.

Don’t make anything; then you will get everything. Always I say this to you. That is very important. Don’t lose your original job. Then not only your business job, not only other jobs, but each step you take, each swing of your arm is already the true Dharma and saves all people.

I hope you are always keeping a mind which is clear like space, soon find your original job, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I was unable to return to the Zen Center on Saturday and Sunday, as I had hoped, and so could not come for the big kong-an you promised me! I was very much helped by the interview with you, and I want to express my gratitude. This illness I have is a recurrence of an earlier one, and it can be treated. But again, one is brought up against the “no old age and dying and also no extinction of them.”

Your teaching of “keep clear mind” has been profoundly helpful to me ever since I first came to the Zen Center when you moved on to Grey Gardens East.

I hope that you are well, yourself, and I shall look forward to seeing you again before you go back to the West Coast.

We have a beautiful and secluded summer place about a half hour’s drive from Providence. I have often thought that members of the Providence Zen Center might like to come there for a retreat, or just for a visit. Mu Gak has been there and can tell you about it. When the weather is warmer, it will be accessible for overnight. I expect to be there most of the summer myself, and would welcome a visit from you.

With most grateful good wishes,

Your friend,

Jean

March 30, 1977

Dear Jean,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I hope you are better. Take good care of yourself.

You are a wonderful student. Your interview was also wonderful. When you have an interview, it doesn’t matter if you have a good answer or no answer. How much do you believe in your true self? That is very important.

Already you say, “no old age and dying and no extinction of them” – that is wonderful. You must keep this mind.

Before, So Sahn Zen master said, “Hair becomes white. Mind does not become white.”

Already an eminent teacher lost this speech.

When I hear a wooden chicken crowing, the man will finish the Great Work.

So your hair is white, but your mind is not white. You already understand this. Therefore you have already finished the Great Work of life and death.

Only you don't understand your homework. If you understand your homework, then you will understand the Great Bodhisattva Way. The Great Bodhisattva Way means to help other people. How can you help other people? There are many kinds of ways. So if you understand many kinds of kong-ans, then you will understand many kinds of Bodhisattva Ways.

So I hope you will soon finish your homework, attain the Great Bodhisattva Way, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Thank you for your invitation to your summer house. All the Providence family thinks it is very nice of you to invite us. In the summer time we will visit you.

March 25, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you?

I visited the Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center last weekend and met the people there. I had a very nice time. Linc said I should ask you about my class, so... I have a question for you.

As you may remember, I am a teacher in high school, and I sit and meditate with the students first thing in the morning. The students and I also share a lot of our hopes and dreams and fears during this time in the morning. We talk a little, the exercise a little, then sit for 10 clock ticks. We have only 40 minutes together before the bell rings, so 10 minutes of sitting is about all we can manage.

Now for the question. Two of the students have recently experienced leaving their bodies. This was at their home, in both cases, and was after they had gone to bed. One girl walked all through the house and tried to turn on the lights, but couldn't make the switch work. Finally she came to her own room and suddenly knew she was still laying on the bed, and then she was back in her bed. They are asking what to do about this. Is it a good thing or bad thing? Should we go ahead and make it a science experiment? For a science experiment, she could try to go to another person's house and learn something or find something she could report when she returns to waking consciousness.

What should we do?

I miss you very much and hope to sit with you when you come to Ezra and Diane's house in May.

I love you very much.

Marge

March 30, 1977

Dear Marge,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You visited the Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center and saw Linc – that is wonderful. Also you said that you sit with your class every morning for ten minutes – this is also very wonderful.

Next, you asked about two students who experienced leaving their bodies. We have sixth consciousness, seventh consciousness, and eighth consciousness. Sixth consciousness controls the body, seventh consciousness is the discriminating mind, and eighth consciousness keeps all the memories. Your students losing their bodies means the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousness are separate.

It's like a dream. When seventh and eighth consciousness are working together, this is called karma consciousness. If you are attached to karma consciousness, you cannot find your true self.

Consciousness originally was emptiness; all consciousness is made by thinking. So, if you want to understand your true self and the truth, then don't be attached to karma consciousness. If somebody is thinking, thinking, thinking, and cannot control his mind, then sometimes we teach Dharma play.

Dharma play teaches how to control your consciousness. First, you control your sixth consciousness; next, control the seventh consciousness; next, control your eighth consciousness. If you finally control your eighth consciousness, then you can understand your previous life or your life before your previous life – very interesting. So many people are attached to Dharma play. But this is very dangerous. If you are attached to Dharma play, you cannot find your true self.

Some of my students do Dharma play very well, but I say to them, “Don't be attached to Dharma play.” They sometimes use Dharma play for people with a mind-sickness.

But, in your letter, you said some of your students leave their bodies. If it is controlled by Dharma play, then it's O.K., but if they do this themselves, every night, they will become attached to this, and all their consciousness will become broken, and they will become crazy. So this is very dangerous.

Someday you must learn Dharma play. Then you will understand how to teach your students and how to control consciousness. Then no problem.

Before, my students were very attached to Dharma play, so I taught them with a kong-an, and I am also sending it to you.

Your Dharma body and karma body are different. Dharma body is infinite time, infinite space, is clear like space. Karma body is made by thinking. If you *cut* off all thinking, your karma body will disappear. When your karma body disappears, then your body and your consciousness and your true self always do together action. The name for that is clear mind.

First you must attain clear mind – that is your true self. If you attain your true self, you will understand the true way. If you understand the true way, it is possible to control your karma body. But if you don't understand your true self, then karma body action is very dangerous.

So I hope you are always keeping a mind which is clear like space, soon attain your Dharma body, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S

Finding Your Primary Point

From a Dharma Talk by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the Providence Zen Center, March 31, 1977

I often talk about primary point. What is primary point? When you have a scale and there is nothing being weighed, the indicator points to zero. You put something on it, the pointer swings to 1 lb., 2 lbs. You take it off, the pointer goes back to zero. This is primary point. After you find your primary point, then good feeling may come, bad feeling may come, your pointer swings in one direction or the other. But this doesn't matter. Don't check it. When the feeling is over with, the pointer will swing back to zero. But if you haven't found your primary point, then it's like taking a heavy object off of the scale and having the pointer stay at 10 lbs., or only partially move back, not completely go back to zero. Then you have a problem. Your scale does not weigh correctly.

Maybe if you put another heavy object on it, it will break completely.

So first you must find your primary point. Then you must keep it very strongly. A taxi has weak shock absorbers, so it hits a small bump and bounces up and down. A train has strong shock absorbers, so it is very steady. If you keep your primary point, your mind-spring will become stronger and stronger. You will be able to encounter heavier and heavier problems and your mind will move less and less. A heavy problem comes, your mind moves, but soon returns to primary point. Finally your mind will be very strong, it will be able to carry any load, and then saving all people is possible.

March 28,1977

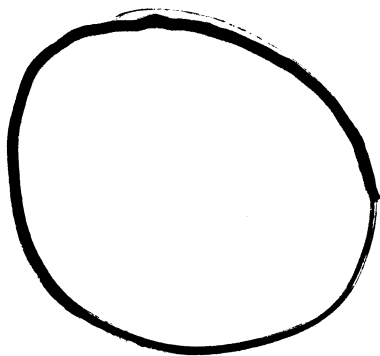
Dear Venerable Soen Sa Nim:

Yours truly,

Stephen

April 1,1977

Dear Stephen,



Do you understand this? What is this?

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 21, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your last letter; I enjoyed it very much and found it to be very meaningful for me.

In your last page, you state, “So what is most important? First, what is the purpose of your life?” This question always gets lost in the shuffle of the situation – going to work, raising children, even sitting.

Jesus said in Saint Matthew in his Sermon on the Mountain, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself ... “

Your question has connotations for me of a need to give up all the acquisitions of family and profession to find the answer; it is like looking for a golden fleece, the elixir of everlasting life. But at the same time, it seems that an obsession with such a search has the same problems with an obsession for wealth or power, etc. It’s easy to give up on a search for power using “attachment” as the reason – but it would seem, following the above, one should do the same to your question if it involves “attachment” either to the question or the answer.

So, the question remains. The answer – *Don’t Know*.

Our bowing and sitting continue. Usually, Sunday sitting, for me, is much more “clear mind” sitting, whereas sitting on weekdays seems to be more scattered and fluffy.

Several weeks ago, sitting in Court listening to another lawyer rambling on for a long time, I was watching one of the Judge’s assistants drinking water – there was an instant in which the water, the glass, the person and all in the room became the same, irrespective of their shape, size, or differences. All things appeared in that instant to be “like this.” Well, as you say, “Put it all down.”

Another thing has been going on – once in a while, the thought crosses my mind that all of this, our morality, our laws, our cities with their order and organization, our many, many concerns, are all a cosmic joke that is thinly disguised – like *knowing* we are living in the stomach of a cow. Only clear mind, only don’t know.

If you can come to Toronto in May, that would be wonderful. Can we do anything for you before you come? You are most welcome to stay with us.

Again, back to your question – “What is the purpose of your life ... putting your head in order is very necessary.” I ask you a question. Is bowing, sitting, trying to keep clear, don't know mind enough? Don't know.

I have included a short poem for you:

Buddha sat beneath the bodhi tree
and got Enlightenment

Lawlor sits behind a wooden desk
and hasn't got Enlightenment

The sun turns the snow to steam.

Too much words, I think! I hope to hear from you again soon.

Lawlor

April 1, 1977

Dear Lawlor,

How are you and Sherry? Thank you for your letter. In your letter, you said this question, “What is the purpose of your life?” gets lost in the shuffle of the situation. That is wonderful. Moment to moment, your correct situation *is* the big question. The big question is no question – complete clear mind. Complete clear mind is your correct situation. So, your action is already great Bodhisattva action.

You say the Bible says, “But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” This mind and Zen mind are the same, but if you are attached to words, then you don't understand the true meaning. What is the kingdom of God? These words make opposites – I am here, the kingdom of God is over there.

Next you say, “These things shall be added unto you.” Again, this is opposites thinking.

Finally it says, “Take therefore no thought for tomorrow.” Don't make tomorrow – then enough. “Tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself” – this is not necessary. Then tomorrow is tomorrow; just now is just now. This quotation says don't think about tomorrow, but there is already *thinking* about tomorrow. It is already a mistake to say tomorrow will take care of itself. If you keep a clear mind moment to moment to moment, then also when tomorrow comes, and the day after tomorrow, and next year, and the time when you die, you will have no problem.

So, many Christian people are attached to words. But, the true meaning of this Bible quotation is that the seeking mind *is* the kingdom of God. Then God and you become one. Then your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your body, and your mind are

God's eyes, God's ears, God's nose, God's tongue, God's body, and God's mind. There is no tomorrow, no yesterday; each moment is already complete.

But who understands this style? Only you understand it. Christians are not thinking in this style.

An eminent teacher said, "Your mind is complete. You are complete. Everything is complete. So each thing already has it." So, moment to moment to moment, if you keep your correct opinion, your correct condition, and your correct situation, the name for that is clear mind. If you keep clear mind, you are already complete, and the truth, and a great Bodhisattva, and Big Love.

Next, you wrote many thinking, thinking words about an obsession with a search. Is it necessary? Why are you keeping this thinking, thinking mind? You say finally, "Don't know." That is no good. This is an opposites don't know. You must always go straight – don't know. *This* don't know is *not* don't know; this is clear mind. I already told you, clear mind is, moment to moment, your correct opinion, your correct condition, and your correct situation. Why thinking? Put it all down! Don't make anything. You already have everything.

Next, you say your bowing and sitting continue – that is wonderful. But don't check your mind; don't check your feelings. Then there is no clear, no fluffy. Only go straight – don't know.

You say that at one instant in court, everything became one. That is wonderful. Everything became one, like this, put it all down – only the words are different, but the meaning is the same. Becoming-one mind, just-like-this mind, and put-it-all-down mind are not different. What are you doing now? *Just this*.

Next, you say all our rules, our cities with their organization, and our many concerns are like a cosmic joke. Then you say it's like knowing we are in the stomach of a cow. Then, finally you say, "Don't know." But you must understand that this thinking is don't-know mind. If you're not attached to this thinking, then don't-know mind is this thinking. This thinking is just thinking. Just thinking is the truth. Don't separate joke and cow's stomach. Then joke, cow's stomach, and don't-know mind only become one. So, I say to you, don't make anything and don't check anything. Only go straight – don't know.

Next, I will come to Toronto on May 2 and stay until maybe the sixth. Before, Samu Su Nim said that students there want a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. If at that time they want it, we will try a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. But it is not a weekend, so *I don't know*. I want to see you and Sherry. Also, I want to see the Korean monk and nun there.

Bowing, sitting, and don't-know mind are O.K., but if you try to keep a clear mind, that is already a mistake. Bowing and sitting are always clear. Clear is don't know. Then enough. Don't smudge clear mind.

Next, your poem is very wonderful, but this poem has only a head, arms, and legs, but no body. Between "Lawlor sits behind a wooden desk and hasn't got Enlightenment," and

“The sun turns the snow to steam,” one sentence is necessary. You check my poem that I wrote before; then you will understand.

I hope you are always keeping don't-know mind, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 27, 1977

My Dear Soen Sa Nim:

I hope you are feeling good. You are probably very busy with the new place in the country. Anyway, I just want to let you know I think of you every day (who can do 108 bows and not think of you!). However, it is not hard to do the bows now. I do them every morning, and I don't get out of breath anymore.

I still have trouble keeping a clear mind in sitting. The kong-an you gave me is too complex to keep in my belly during sitting, so I thought if I had one word to represent the problem, that would be better. I chose the word Om. I think it in the Hara as I exhale. It seems to work pretty good. However, I have had some tight muscles in my back for the past week, and that makes it difficult to sit "hard." Audrey Young told me of the wonderful massage Bobby gave her at the end of our Yong Maeng Jong Jin. When I get to visit you next fall (I hope), I must have her instruct me in this technique. It is something all sitters should learn, so they can help each other.

I bought a Conversa-phone record on Korean and I'm learning to say, "Pyoen an hasimnika?" and "Kamsa hamnida, Josumnida." Outside of that, I don't know how helpful the record will be – it mostly instructs how to go to the hotel, order a taxi, visit the currency exchange, and how to get your clothes cleaned.

Soen Sa Nim, I will write every few weeks and let you know how my practice is going.

With Love,

Harrington

April 1, 1977

Dear Harrington,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You say you bow every day and now it is not so difficult – that is wonderful. There are three ways that bowing is good for you. First, for your body, it is good exercise. Next, no thinking, only bowing. That means cutting small I and becoming big I. Next your bad karma will disappear and disappear and change to good karma, so you will get happiness. So, bowing is very important. So I say to you, "Wonderful."

Next, you talk about your sitting. Correct sitting means cutting off all thinking, keeping a not-moving mind. Correct Zen means becoming clear. Not-moving mind is meditation.

Becoming clear is cognition. Correct meditation is from correct cognition. Correct cognition is from correct meditation. That means correct meditation *is* correct cognition.

You talk only about body sitting. Body sitting is only one part of Zen. You must keep don't-know mind, moment to moment, everywhere. This is correct meditation. You say, "Om." This is possible only at sitting time. At working time, at watching television time, at eating time, at talking time, how do you keep your breathing and "Om?"

So I say to you, always keep don't-know mind. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings. Only go straight – don't know. Don't know is already cut-thinking mind, clear mind. Clear mind means, moment to moment, keeping your correct situation. Then you will get everything. Don't make anything; don't check anything. Only go straight – don't know.

Before, I already told you how to keep don't-know mind at sitting time. Breathe in for three seconds – clear mind, clear mind, and for seven seconds breathe out – DON'T KNOW. Don't check your body; don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your hara. Only go straight. Then clear mind is don't know; don't know is clear mind, O.K.? You are checking, checking, checking your feelings, your mind, and your body, so you have a problem. Put it all down. Only go straight – don't know.

Also, don't keep my homework in your mind. Only at interview time we check your homework. At other times, don't keep it in your mind. Only go straight – don't know.

You found this Korean record and are learning Korean – that is wonderful. Some day, maybe you will go to Korea with me.

You say you will write to me every few weeks. That is wonderful, but don't check your practice. Only go straight – don't know.

I hope you always keep don't know, then soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I was one of the students that attended the sitting retreat in Chicago a few weeks ago. A week after I came home from Chicago (I live in Milwaukee), the discipline and training became more difficult to maintain. I've always known that I am the type of student that needs group support or at least contact with a teacher more often to reinforce and aid me to strengthen my training until I am more developed. Yes, I am a low-class Zen student! If you could answer a few questions, I may be able to strengthen my practice.

First, I must tell you I'm a beginner in Zen practice. You told me to sit and breathe in three counts, "clear mind," and exhale seven counts, "don't-know mind."

Questions: What should I do if I'm having difficulty centering my focus and energy in the hara? Instead of just sitting, I am thinking what should I be doing, and therefore I am not sitting. At the last interview, you gave me a kong-an. When I sit, do I breathe the three and seven breaths, or do I sit kong-an?

Some direction would be appreciated so that I can proceed with sure-footedness.

Also – the kong-an you gave me was the one where a man is hanging from a tree limb by his teeth with his hands tied and was asked, "What is Buddha?" My answer: Let him down from the tree! I would appreciate some feedback from you regarding my answer.

Soen Sa Nim, something else has deeply concerned me. I feel very free, but I'm afraid that this overwhelming feeling of freedom can in some way confine me. I am attached to free, and am also thinking that this free feeling is very radical and is not really any type of spiritual growth. People around me think that I am very weird, and I tell them that they are attached to a specific type of normal behavioral pattern which I don't exhibit – therefore they classify me as weird. There really is no "right" or "wrong" behavior. If this is the way it is, then it doesn't matter if I go out and commit murder or become a thief. If I am free, I am not attached to anything; it doesn't matter what I do. I'm afraid of falling into some delusion or Zen sickness. Can you straighten me out on this point of freedom?

Let me give you an example. One could go out and hurt many people. What is to stop this person? Hurt is created by thinking mind, so if there isn't really any hurt, it doesn't matter what one does to others! It really doesn't matter if I train in Zen practice either. If I sit and train, then I am attached to sitting.

I deeply thank you for stopping in Chicago and sharing your wisdom with us. I only regret there were not more students who knew about your brief stop. Please, visit again!

P.S. I read and re-read your book then gave it away so I would not be attached to it, and someone else could benefit as I did. Do you have any other suggestions for reading material?

May you continue to teach.

Thanks!

Dusanka

April 1, 1977

Dear Dusanka,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You say it is difficult to practice by yourself. Also you say you are a low-class Zen student. I ask you, what are you? Where are you coming from? What is your name? How old are you? You already completely understand that 10,000 questions return to one question. Don't know. What is don't know? Tell me! Very simple. Don't make anything. Then no problem. Only go straight – don't know, O.K.?

I already told you, at sitting time, only sit. Don't make hara, don't make energy, don't make anything. Breathe in for three seconds – clear mind, clear mind, clear mind. Then seven seconds breathe out – DON'T KNOW. Not don't-know *mind*, only don't *know*.

Next, with your kong-an answer, you are already dead; you cannot stay alive. But, don't keep this kong-an in your head. Only go straight – don't know. This is very important.

Next, you are talking about freedom. This is *thinking* freedom. You must *attain* freedom. If you completely attain freedom, there is no life, no death. That mind is clear like space. Let your mind go anyplace with no hindrance. Then you will understand correct freedom.

Next, you talk about hurting other people. Don't make "I," "my," "me." What is most important? What is the purpose of your life? You say, "I," "I," "I," "I," "I." This I is what kind of I? You must *kill* this I. Then this I will disappear. When this I disappears, then there will be no I. When there is no I, then no problem. When there is no problem, then you're free. If you become free, then you will get everything. Then your mind will be clear like space.

Clear-like-space mind is Bodhisattva mind. That means your mind is like a clear mirror. When red comes, red; when white comes, white. If somebody is sad, I am sad. If somebody is happy, I am happy. Then no inside, no outside, no subject, no object. Inside and outside become one. That name is the great Bodhisattva Way, Great Love.

So I hope you always keep don't know, then get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S. S.

March 29, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Your letter came on Monday – the air is crisper, the sky bluer, and I only want to practice more and more. You make it so easy to be your student! All my life I have wanted to find a direction to put all of my energy into – you have given me that, and so I thank *you*, very, very much. Also I do not want to waste any time (and I also know that time is an illusion). I want to do whatever it takes to get rid of my cage, to “finish my homework, get Enlightenment, and save all people.”

Lately I have begun to *believe* that this could actually happen. It seems odd that a simple thing like deciding to get up at a *certain* time to bow and sit could have done so much, but it has. The truth is, it is not difficult at all, but the most beautiful part of the day, and sometimes my mind does seem much clearer. Not reading, as you told me, has also helped ... and this weekend I discovered silence, not talking, to be an amazing way to deal with the bad karma of getting angry and judgmental. After a day of feeling really helpless with my anger, opinions, needing to be “right” – it came to me while bowing to be totally silent all day. What a wonderful day! Also, it was really interesting to watch how my family reacted – a fight just could not start! I wish I could do this for a long period of time, as Jim has – I will have to settle for stopping myself from expressing opinions if I can. I can see now how different it would be if one did not have *any* investment in being right or having one’s own way. A long way from where I am, to be sure! Sometimes I feel frustrated – part of me would like so much to be able to just put down this whole materialistic life I lead - money, house, things, *comforts*, etc., and just practice, maybe live in a Zen Center, do a long retreat – just really “do” it! I also know I love my husband and my children, even though at times they feel like hindrances, and that my job right now seems to be getting myself clear right in *this* situation.

I am very ashamed to say that I am not sure what “my homework” is! Probably you gave me some at one time, and I was not able to hear it. If you would give me some again, I will work as hard as I can on it!

It sounds like you have been very busy. I hope that the Buddha’s Birthday celebration will be wonderful! Tell Bobby her idea for a combination farm, health clinic, country club, and Zen Center sounds terrific, and when do we start?

Thank you for the pictures – they are good!

Love,

Hae Soeng, Diana

P.S. I talked with someone who had been to Wilbur Hot Springs, where Mu Gak is, and he said his food was disappearing, so he must be all right – and not to worry, as the people there will not let anything bad happen to him. What an experience for him!

April 2, 1977

Dear Diana,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Ezra and your family? I just got your letter, and it made me very happy. Almost a year ago, your letters were like a crazy watch's hands – they didn't know their direction. But *this* letter is like a space ship shooting to the moon. That space ship understands its direction – it understands the correct way, and understands the way back. Each point is very clear. Your letter is like this, so I say, "Wonderful!"

You say that you get up at a certain time every morning and sit and bow every day, and that you were silent for a day, and that these things are helping you. That is very nice!

Also you say that maybe you would like to leave this materialistic life, live at a Zen Center, do a long retreat, "just really 'do' it." Living at a Zen Center is O.K., but most important is just now, moment to moment, how you keep a clear mind and your correct situation. You already said you don't care about money, house, things, comforts. You don't care. This is true freedom. Your cage is almost already broken, already taken away.

You must understand being a good wife, good mother, good neighbor, good therapist, and good Zen student. Then you are already a great Bodhisattva. Don't make anything; then already you have everything.

You say you forgot what your homework is. Your homework is that someone comes to the Zen Center, smokes a cigarette, and blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. What can you do? Already you understand the true way, and like this, and just like this. But this man only understands the primary point and is very attached to it. So he thinks, "I am already enlightened. I am already Buddha. I am already the Dharma." So how do you fix his mind? Fixing his mind is the great Bodhisattva Way. If you understand, soon tell me. If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. *Don't make good answer.*

Nowadays I am a little busy.

In the future maybe we will have a combination farm, health clinic, country club, and Zen Center. Many people like this idea. We will try this. In the future, with this style, helping other people will be very easy. Why do we try Zen? To help other people. I think in the future many people will want your head-light.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Thank you for the news about Mu Gak.

March 29, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I wanted to say thank you *very* much for teaching me while I was at the Zen Center. I have been sitting and chanting every day, and it helps me, although I rarely have quiet or privacy. My problem is that I feel very cut off from my family and friends here. They think I am very strange to be sitting every day, and Zen is so different from anything they've heard of that they can't understand it. Some try to persuade me not to do it, and some just ignore it altogether. It's very different from practicing at the Zen Center, where it is a part of everyone's lives and a normal routine, where there are people to talk to about Zen, and it is accepted. I guess I have no "together action," and that is hard. For a while I was very discouraged and didn't want to sit. Then I realized that I have to just sit, whether it goes well or not and whether I look forward to it or not. Is that right?

I've been thinking about the two kong-ans you gave me, and I don't understand why, when the man drops ashes on the Buddha, I should not clean off the Buddha and drop the ashes in the ash can. Doesn't this show him that the Buddha is the Buddha, and ashes are ashes? Anyway, nothing else comes to me. I can't figure out the two masters at all. They are both the true master, aren't they? I don't understand.

Please say hello to everyone at the Zen Center for me. Thank you very much for listening!

Love,

Barbara

April 2, 1977

Dear Barbara,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You say you are sitting and chanting every day. Also you say your situation is very difficult, but you continue to try sitting – that is wonderful.

But, most important, first, don't check your mind. Next, don't check other people's minds. Why? First you understand your correct way, but they don't understand their correct way. So don't check. If you check your mind and other people's minds, you will lose your true way. Only practice, practice. Then slowly, slowly they will understand your mind and your true way. At first, it's very difficult, but you must try and try. That is the great Bodhisattva Way. Then your bright mind light will be shining to their minds. The name for that is Big Love.

Next, you wrote about your homework. It doesn't matter if you understand or don't understand your homework. How much do you believe in yourself? That is very important. In the ashes kong-an, someone is very attached to the primary point. He doesn't understand *like this* and *just like this*. But you already understand *like this* and *just like this*. How do you teach him? This is the point.

So, this man does not do correct teaching. He only hits you. So he is a difficult man. Here is an example. If you went to the market with a small child and he doesn't understand taking things, he will take some candy and put it into his pocket. If you say, "You are no good!" and give him strong teaching, the child will become very angry. He thinks market things and his things are the same. So you must give him soft teaching; you must explain that if he takes this, he becomes a thief. Then the child will understand good and bad. This is the correct way.

You must give this cigarette man soft teaching. Only strong teaching will not help him. You check our book; it has one sentence that will help you.

In the next kong-an, don't make both true masters, and then you will understand the true master. Then next, you will understand, just like this, what is master. So before, I said to you, *I ask you*: Soeng Am Zen Master called himself and answered himself – two masters. Which one is the correct master? In this question, already just like this appears. You must find this.

If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. If you keep don't-know mind, then you will get everything. Don't want good answers, O.K.?

All the Providence Zen Center family likes you very much and says hello to you.

I hope you are always keeping a mind which is clear like space, then soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Big Love, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

April 2, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope that you are well and relaxing. We are all fine here. Orion is stronger now than before he was sick, and, with each day, he manages to acquire more and more energy!

Soen Sa Nim, there has been a big misunderstanding about the New Haven Dharma Teachers being unable to come to the Buddha's Birthday celebration and the meetings that day. Bob, Steve, and I unfortunately cannot attend due to very big responsibilities to our jobs at Yale. This makes us feel very badly because as Buddhists, Buddha's Birthday is a very special day, and we are disappointed to not be able to spend it with our Buddhist family in Providence. However, to Yale University, Buddha's Birthday is a day like any other day – not so special. Therefore, we shall all have to celebrate by working at the Big Job – by not doing anything special here in New Haven (this is *very special*).

Bob and I (Steve hasn't heard yet) don't understand why Dharma Teachers will not receive interviews at the next Yong Maeng Jong Jin in April if we can't be in Providence for Buddha's Birthday. We already feel badly, and so we think that Zen Master Seung Sahn Soen-sa does not understand our minds and hopes to *make* us come to Providence or punish us for not coming. That is a little like the Christian church that excommunicates people who do something that it doesn't like.

Suzuki Roshi once said that the way to control a cow is not by tying it to a stake, but by giving it a very wide field. Yale University has already tied us to a stake, and now Zen Master Seung Sahn Soen-sa is trying to tie us to another! Being a cow can be very difficult. As it is, since there was some confusion about the dates for the April Yong Maeng Jong Jin, Bob and I will have difficulty doing very much hard training because of being tied to that Yale University stake again.

I have asked Louise to give us a schedule of all special days and Yong Maeng Jong Jins starting next September, so that when planning for the next year is done this May, perhaps we can avoid any conflicts. It would be very nice to be a homeless monk and have no conflicts between job and Big Job, but this is not our karma. Our karma is to understand that there are no conflicts between job and Big Job, and that having a family means being a homeless monk with a home.

The Dharma Teachers at New Haven bow to you in obeisance and hope that all of our Big Family has a very special Buddha's Birthday. We will be busy making all stakes and cows disappear so that we can finish the Big Job and save all beings.

By the way, Buddhists say that Buddha's Birthday is a very special day, and non-Buddhists say that is nothing special at all. Which ones are correct?

Love,

David

P.S. *I* don't make special or not special; Buddhists and non-Buddhists make special and not special.

April 5, 1977

Dear David,

How are you and your family? Thank you for your letter. I am glad to hear that Orion is getting more energy.

First, I hit you thirty times. Is this punishment or reward? In our school black and white, high and low, sky and ground are clear.

All the time I tell you – don't make anything, don't check anything; only go straight. You tie yourself to Yale University, and you tie yourself to Zen Master Seung Sahn Soen-sa. Always you are free.

If you make something, you are hindered by something. Then you have a problem. I am only teaching you together action.

Here are five fingers. One finger is very sick. For four fingers, together action is possible; for one finger, together action is not possible. Then only keep this finger still, not moving. Moving means more pain.

All the New Haven Zen Center Dharma Teachers cannot come to Providence, cannot do together action, so the New Haven Zen Center is sick, not only the Dharma Teachers. I say no interviews on Sunday – no interviews for anybody, not only Dharma Teachers. No interview means big interview. This sickness needs good medicine.

Here is an apple – very expensive. If you want this apple, you must get money, and then you can buy this apple. If you have no money, you cannot buy this apple. If you want this apple, this is desire. If you have no money, put it all down – that is the correct situation, the correct way. If you don't want this apple, money is not necessary. Already you have enough mind.

You say, "I don't make special or not special." You already opened your mouth, so you already made "I don't make special or not special."

In everything, cause and effect are clear. You must understand this. Spring comes; the grass grows by itself.

Before, Bob said, "I want to come to Buddha's Birthday." I heard this; my ears are not broken. Next, I heard that he said he must stay with his wife. That is wonderful. That is the correct situation. All Dharma Teachers want to keep correct, correct, correct situation.

Our school also wants to keep the correct situation. The Zen master also wants the correct situation. Very clear. No problem.

No interview, great interview. A speaking interview is a low-class interview. A silent interview is very high-class interview. Don't make anything; don't check anything. Only go straight – don't know. Then you will get everything.

In Philadelphia the flowers are just blooming. In Providence, not yet.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space. Moment to moment, you must keep your correct situation, then soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your letter of March 24. Linda and I were very glad to come home from work and find your reply waiting in our mailbox.

You speak about Dharmas disappearing, karma disappearing, and the ocean of suffering disappearing. Then what?

HA!

Thirty hits, please.

You also ask about the pound of steel and the pound of cotton batting.

Which is heavier?

The steel is hard; the cotton is fluffy.

○

With a one-pound scale in his hand,
Soen-sa weighs out the Dharma.
While folding batting may not form a functional car,
Slabs of steel make a lousy cushion.

The weather is getting warmer here now. Sunday several of us flew kites in the meadow, ran with the dog, skipped stones on the creek, and blew on the conch. Today at work we threw a frisbee in a grove of trees during our lunch our.

Spring, summer, fall, winter.

How are the Providence, Cambridge, and New Haven Zen Centers getting on? Sometime when Linda and I get a vacation, perhaps we can stay at a Zen Center for a while. What must we do?

Take care of yourself. We both look forward to hearing from you again. Thank you for your words concerning Enlightenment. Enlightenment is Enlightenment; no-Enlightenment is no-Enlightenment. The bird flies; the worm wiggles. Have a nice day.

Love,

Dale

April 5, 1977

Dear Dale,

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

Your two answers are wonderful, but they are like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. You understand *like* this, but you don't understand *just like this*. Don't hold onto my questions. Please, one more step.

Here is a very clear kong-an:

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. I ask you, what did the monk attain?

All our Zen Centers are getting on very well. If you want to stay at a Zen Center, you must write to the Director for information. Each Zen Center has a Director, and they will send information to you.

Next, I told you, if you are attached to words, you will lose your life. Don't make anything. Only go straight – clear mind. Then you will get everything. Understanding cannot help you. Put it all down.

I hope you are 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.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's Buddha's Birthday Poem 1977

2,521st anniversary of Buddha's Birthday.
Happy Buddha's Birthday.
Someone said, "Before Buddha left the palace of heaven,
he had already saved all beings."
This is lightening in the blue sky without clouds.
The wooden dog is surprised,
runs into the silver mountain.

Buddha appeared in this world, tidal wave without wind.
Sky and ground, mountain and river,
everything loses light of form.
Stone girl holding a flower of wind,
fanny dancing everywhere.

Buddha said, "In heaven, in hell, only I am holy."
Un-mun said, "Hit and kill – give to a hungry dog."
Head is like rocks, same as a bear.
Mind is like midnight, same as a masked robber.
When will you get out of the cow's stomach?

Do not be deceived! Do not be deceived!
Open your mouth, already mistake.
You and I cannot defend ourselves. Hit – thirty times.
If you hear this, you become sick.
If you don't hear this, good medicine for you.
Eeeiii!
The altar Buddha is smiling. Candlelight is shining everywhere.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You say that I must lose everything and acquire simple mind. You are correct. I will try, moment by moment, to get to the root and not be so concerned with the branches. Since I wrote to you, Marilyn and I have had the good fortune of finding an even better apartment (173 Mansfield) only three houses down from the Zen Center. We must move in by May 1, so I have to paint the nursery and fix up the apartment and also move my furniture, in addition to finishing up the teaching year and preparing a concert of new works. *Very busy* next 6 weeks.

Soen Sa Nim, I don't think you correctly understand why I cannot come to Providence this Saturday. I think this because people at the New Haven Zen Center said that you thought I should drive over and give a speech and then leave. This is not possible. I arranged my Yale schedule so that I could be with you on Buddha's birthday, but then Marilyn's doctor told her that she could not be more than one hour from Yale hospital beginning April 1. Many American women have strong feelings for natural childbirth with the husband in attendance throughout labor and even the actual delivery of the baby. Marilyn and I have been attending classes in this method, and I will help her with exercises and massage and breathing from the very beginning of labor and will be in the delivery room with her. This is the most important thing in her whole life to Marilyn. If I were to drive to Providence, it would mean that I could be as much as 5 hours removed from her, if she began labor while I was on the way. So I simply cannot come. The chances are that nothing would happen, but Marilyn's sister did deliver her baby 2 1/2 hours after labor started. However, the really important point is if I were to go against Marilyn's wishes on this matter, it would be like driving a wedge (Buddhism) into our marriage and her feelings. So even if you said that you wouldn't have me as your student any more, there would be nothing that I could do. David and Steve also have what they believe are absolutely essential reasons for not coming this weekend.

What really concerns me is that there seems to be a misconception in Providence about our attitude towards the Zen family. I can only speak for myself, but I know that I want to come to the ceremonies and celebrations. It is a disappointment to me when I can't come, and I've only missed one event there since I first took vows. I know David feels the same way. It seems to me that if you feel you have to *make* people come, then the sense of family is not worth saving anyway. I know that you are concerned about many Dharma Teachers' attitudes from various centers, but in New Haven we are doing the very best that we can under the present circumstances and are trying to modify those circumstances where possible. Steve will only be a full-time M.D., rather than M.D. plus student, after another couple of months, and I'll be living closer, which will help tremendously.

I am writing all of this because morale in New Haven is very low now, because people feel they are being chastised for things they have no control over.

I will talk to you about prospective Dharma Teachers when I see you. I will have to work on the new apartment on the last two weekends of the month, so hard training will be difficult for me during the next Yong Maeng Jong Jin. If you are not giving us interviews, as rumor has it, then I'll see you in July.

Yours in the Dharma,

Bob

April 13, 1977

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Marilyn and your inside baby?

I understand your mind and your situation – no problem. Don't worry about anything. I already sent a letter to David. You only staying with your wife is wonderful. That is your correct situation.

Before, I said that the New Haven Zen Center would have no interviews one day. This is like during Yong Maeng Jong Jin, when somebody is sleeping, a big chugpi hits him on the back. I ask you, is this reward or punishment? Put is all down. Don't make reward; don't make punishment. It is the correct way.

But David already came to the Buddha's Birthday celebration, and he gave a very good Dharma speech. Everybody was very happy. New Haven Zen Center was never sick. That is wonderful.

David did very difficult action. Before, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always did difficult practicing, and then got the palace of extinction. So David's action is correct action. Correct action is already great Bodhisattva action. Great Bodhisattva action already saved all people.

You stayed with your wife, and that is also correct action, Bodhisattva action, and you already saved all people. You also did very difficult practicing, so already you have, moment to moment, a clear mind. Clear mind means correctly keeping your situation. Then already you got everything.

Don't think about me. Don't think about you. Don't think about anything – then already complete. Don't worry. Only go straight – don't know. Then enough.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, and moment to moment keep your correct situation, then finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

April 14, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Once again my karma has decreed that I can't be with you. The illness of my wife made it necessary for me to return home. My question which cannot be asked will be my practice until I see you again in July.

I have been going to a Raja Yoga center near my home. The Gurhni uses "word medicine" which tastes a little strange, but in the stomach it's the same.

In my interview, you asked me to show you the true master. My answer is – don't be deceived!

When I saw you, you told me to watch Jerry bow to learn the correct way. I watched! I saw nothing, so I hit you. I also bow to you. I hit you, I bow to you; you hit me, you bow to me. This is the correct way.

Bob

April 19, 1977

Dear Bob,

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

I understand you are a busy man. Coming to the Zen Center, not coming to the Zen Center, seeing me or not seeing me doesn't matter. Moment to moment, how do you keep just-now mind? How much do you believe in yourself? That is very important. Always keep a clear mind. Moment to moment, you must keep your correct situation. Then enough.

Next, you visited a Yoga center, and you say that the taste is different, but in your stomach it's the same. Your practicing is correct, so in your stomach it's the same – the taste is not important. If your stomach has enough, then no problem.

Your answer to the correct master kong-an, "Don't be deceived!" is not the correct master. At the primary point, there is no master, no you, no I, nothing at all. Then show me the correct, just-like-this master. "Don't be deceived" is not a bull's eye answer. Give me another answer, O.K.?

Next, you say many times, “hit,” “bow,” “hit,” “bow,” then “nothing,” and “correct way.” Don’t make hit, don’t make bow, don’t make nothing, don’t make correct. If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times. Only go straight – don’t know, O.K.?

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am sitting here on the bedroom floor, writing you a letter.

This hand moves the pen,
and black words appear upon the white paper.

Now I write,
now You read.

Have a nice day.

Thank you very much for your prompt and personal replies to my previous letters. I shelter no doubts about the keenness of your sight.

KATZ!

Yours in the Dharma,

Dale

April 19, 1977

Dear Dale,

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

Your answer to my kong-an is not good, not bad. Your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches.

There are three kinds of Enlightenment. First, there is First Enlightenment. This is the primary point – everything becomes one. Next, there is Original Enlightenment. this is *like this* – the sky is blue; the tree is green. You say, “I am sitting here on the bedroom floor, writing you a letter,” etc. Everything is like this.

Next, there is Final Enlightenment. This is *just like this*. You only understand First Enlightenment and Original Enlightenment. You don’t understand Final Enlightenment. Example: here is a bell. If you say it is a bell, you have an attachment to name and form. If you say it is not a bell, you have an attachment to emptiness. Is it a bell or not?

There are three kinds of answers. First, hit, or KATZ! or one finger. The name for this is First Enlightenment. Next, the bell is yellow; the wall is white. This is like this, Original

Enlightenment. That is not a complete answer. The next answer is 100% complete – only ring the bell. This is *just* like this – Final Enlightenment. A one-point answer is necessary to a one-point question. Your answer has many like-this answers. You understand only *like* this, not *just* like this.

Again I ask you:

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

“Have you had breakfast?” JoJu said.

“Yes, I have,” replied the monk.

“Then,” said JoJu, “wash your bowls.”

The monk was enlightened.

I ask you, what did the monk attain? Only a one-point answer is necessary. Not *like this*. You must answer *just like this*.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter. I hope you are well. I continue to improve. Your letter gave me courage. I do not do very well with kong-ans. My kong-an now is: If there is no old age and dying and no extinction of them, how can I live in the “Big I?” When I *think about* illness, or no illness, I am in the “small I.” When I cut all thinking and for a flash am in the clear mind – then, no illness. And also no extinction of it. I understood this the other day as I was walking in the country.

Perhaps I could come for another interview before you go West. I will telephone the Providence Center.

Keep well. What is my homework? If I don’t understand kong-ans, can I still really help people?

Yours in the Dharma,

Jean

April 19, 1977

Dear Jean,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

I think that you sometimes make Big I and sometimes make small I. You check your mind and your feelings, so sometimes Big I appears and sometimes small I appears. Don’t check your mind; don’t check your feelings. Then there is no Big I; there is no small I. Only go straight – don’t know. Then you are always Big I.

Big I has no name and no form. If you open your mouth, you have already made a mistake. Only go straight – don’t know. That is very important. The coming and going of thinking doesn’t matter. Don’t hold on to your thinking.

At interview time, I asked you your homework. You already understand like this and just like this. Someone comes into the Zen Center, smokes a cigarette, blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. He only understands primary point, only hit. Buddha and the ashes become one. He doesn’t understand that Buddha is Buddha and ashes are ashes. How do you teach him? How do you correct him? This is your homework. Also, teaching him is Bodhisattva action.

I hope you always keep a don't-know mind, then soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

You asked me if I am the same as a tree. Here is my answer: One winter in Fairbanks I lived in a log cabin. It was heated by a wood-burning stove which I also used to cook with. I chopped my own wood (at -60° it takes a lot of wood to keep warm!). Summer is very brief in Alaska. One day canoeing down the Nenana River in August, I noticed patches of ice along the riverbank, where thick stands of trees had cast permanent, cool shadows. I was going to send you a big log, but I couldn't find one at Prudhoe Bay; there isn't a tree for hundreds of miles.

No, I am not attached to my nose.

In response to my request for a practice, you asked what I wanted. Well, what I want is to take the Five Precepts, the lay vows of Buddhism. I realize that Prudhoe Bay is quite a distance from the Providence Zen Center, but perhaps something could work out.

I realize that reading a lot of different authors on Buddhism has its drawbacks (you said it was "very bad"). But what other possibility is there for the many people who are in the same situation as I? After all, if I hadn't been compulsively reading on the subject, I wouldn't have picked up *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*.

You talk of clearing the mind. How? I have an M.A. in philosophy, and I constantly find myself being argumentative, analytical, etc., even when I know that it is entirely inappropriate. Only in my music have I been able to move beyond good and evil. Music has often saved me from adopting facile views. I once told my advisor that whenever I allowed philosophy to dictate the kind of music I should compose, the results were stilted and sterile. But, when I allowed music to guide me in philosophy, it has always been an opening experience, unpredictable and new. Does this make any sense? I cannot explain it more clearly.

There is no need for explanations or/and apologies about answering my letters late. I fully realize how enormously busy you are, and I appreciate your letters and the time you spend on them very much. At Prudhoe there is no television, radio, movie theaters, etc., so letters take on a greater significance here than most places.

Yours in Dharma,

James

P.S. I am working on a new piece of music called "Tundra." I hope to tape it in May. Then I will send it to you.

P.P.S. Thank you for the Heart Sutra. It is deeply appreciated.

Finally, I bumped into a person at Prudhoe who met you for a period in New York.

I hope the enclosed check will help with the Center. I didn't know who to make it out to, so I left it out.

April 19, 1977

Dear James,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

Your answer to my question has much thinking, thinking, thinking, so I hit you thirty times. Put it all down. If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Your substance and the tree's substance – are they the same or different? If you say the same, I hit you. If you say different, also I hit you. What can you do?

You must check my previous letter. To open your mouth is wrong. Why? The primary point means no form, no name. Also no speech, no words – *before* thinking. Before thinking is the absolute. The absolute means no opposites, so I hit you thirty times.

Again I ask you, are you and the tree the same or different?

You say, "I am not attached to my nose." Saying these words already means that you are attached to your nose. Put it all down.

Next, you want to take the Five Precepts. Why do you want the Five Precepts? Only the Five Precepts? After you get the Five Precepts, then what?

If you only keep don't-know mind when reading books on Buddhism, then no problem. But, if you don't keep don't-know mind and read books, then the books read your mind. Many people are attached to words, so these words read their minds. So I say this is bad. What is the correct way? If you don't understand, only keep the big question – don't know. Then you can read books, and books will help you.

This is true not only with books. If you only keep don't-know mind, then the dog barking, the chicken crowing, the sound of the wind, the sound of the water, everything will help you. But if you lose don't-know mind, even the Buddha's speech, God's speech, the Sutras, the Bible, and also a Zen Master's speech are all demons and cannot help you.

You are correct – at music time, only music – don't check philosophy. If philosophy makes music, then you have a problem. But if music makes philosophy, then you follow the correct way. *Everything* has a philosophy, but everything loses its nature so doesn't understand its philosophy.

If you want to understand philosophy, don't check anything. Only go straight. Then there is no subject, no object; inside and outside become one. Then correct philosophy will appear. So, if you try music, only go straight – music. Then the music's philosophy will appear. If you drive, then only go straight – drive. Then the driving philosophy will appear.

When you hear a dog barking, then only hear. Then the dog's barking philosophy will appear. Moment to moment, what are you doing *now*? This is very important.

So, I ask you, the tree and you, are they same or different? If you open your mouth, I hit you thirty times. Don't check anything. If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Then you will get the tree's philosophy.

You say in your area there are no movies, no television, no radio – this is not good, not bad. Your mind is very simple. Zen mind is also simple mind. Only go straight – don't know. Then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep don't know, then keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You said you will send me a tape of your new piece called "Tundra." Thank you very much. Also thank you very much for sending me the check.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I am not yet assured everything is O.K. I asked you today at the Cambridge Zen Center for a mantra. Today is Monday. You gave me Kwan Sae Um Bosal.

One other time I talked to you, you seemed to be able to read people from my past. Is this true? I was mad at the Bodhisattva Karmapa for not replying to my very important letter. But you replied. Still this gnawing worry. Can you see my past actions? If you can, then maybe I won't need to worry so much.

Thank you

Merrill

P.S. Please don't put this in the newsletter. Thank you.

P.P.S. What do you think about studying Phenomena-Abidharma? There is a course offered.

April 21, 1977

Dear Merrill,

Thank you for your letter. How are you lately?

First, I hit you thirty times. I gave you Kwan Sae Um Bosal. Kwan Sae Um Bosal is clear mind. Clear mind is moment-to-moment correct action.

In your letter, you said Bodhisattva Karmapa did not answer your letter. But your mind is not clear. You sent me a letter, but it had no last name and no address. So I could not answer you. But just now, we found out your name and address – very difficult, but now I can send a letter to you. Maybe you think that I am like Karmapa, but this is *your* mistake, not Karmapa's or my mistake.

So, I told you to only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal. *Kwan* means *perceive*; *Sae* means *world*; *Um* means *sound*; *Bosal* means *Bodhisattva*. So together, the meaning is perceive the world's sound; then you are a Bodhisattva. In other words, when you keep Kwan Sae Um Bosal, Kwan Sae Um Bosal, you must perceive your true self. That is being a great Bodhisattva. Then, in your mind, there is no subject and no object. Your mind is clear like space. Clear like space means clear like a mirror. When red comes, red; when white comes, white. If somebody is sad, you are sad; when somebody is happy, you are happy. The name for that is Great Love, the great Bodhisattva Way.

So, you must always keep Kwan Sae Um Bosal – this is very important.

You asked me about seeing your before life. If you only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal, there is no past, no present, no future – beyond time and space. When you keep that mind for a long time, you will get everything. Then it will be possible for you, also, to understand your before life. Don't make anything; don't want everything; don't think anything. Only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal, O.K.?

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, only go straight - Kwan Sae Um Bosal, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. We will not put your letter in the newsletter.

P.P.S. You asked about studying Phenomena AbiDharma. First, you must understand your true self – this is necessary. If your mind is not moving, then it's O.K. But if your mind is always moving, then this course will lead to more thinking, thinking, thinking. So understanding your true self is necessary.

April 12, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have been attempting to practice Zen Buddhism for a little over three years now by striving for single-mindedness in my daily life and by sitting in the half-lotus position for a half-hour each morning before I leave for school. (I am a high school teacher.)

To be absolutely honest, my practice has been rather “spotty.” I get off the track and neglect my practice of zazen and then return to it. A herniated disk last May prevented me for awhile from sitting in the half-lotus, but now I am able to do this again.

I attended a workshop on Zen at the Zen Center of Philip Kapleau in the summer of 1975; it was an all-day experience on a Saturday, in which there were four 35-minute periods of Zazen, in which the posture was corrected, as well as talks on Zen.

I have been corresponding from time to time with Aitken Roshi of the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii. Obviously, this Sangha is much too far for me to affiliate with. However, I feel the need to join with a legitimate Zen Sangha. I believe the affiliation will strengthen my practice, and from time to time I could visit the center. Apparently, your centers are located on the East or West coasts. (I wish some Master would establish a center in Ohio, Indiana, or Michigan!)

Today, I received a letter from Aitken Roshi. He speaks highly of you and your work. It so happens that I am reading your book, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, which I am finding both helpful and inspiring.

Could you send me some information on Zen Buddhism as taught and practiced in your centers and the possibility of my affiliation with your Sangha – at least on a trial basis?

Finally, do you publish any publication that I might subscribe to? Do you recommend any books that I should read?

I realize that you are an extremely busy person, and I appreciate any guidance that you might give to me.

Gassho,

Robert

P.S. Do you consider your Sangha oriented toward the Rinzai or Soto approach to Zen?

April 21, 1977

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You said you have been sitting for over three years – that is wonderful. Also, you visited one of Kapleau's workshops so you could correctly understand zazen. Also, you wrote to Aitken Roshi and you are reading *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. All those things are wonderful.

First, why do you sit Zen? What is the purpose of your life? What are you? Do you understand these three things? If you don't know, only go straight – don't know. Checking, checking, checking your mind, checking, checking your feelings, checking, checking all the books, checking, checking Zen Masters is no good. If you don't lose don't-know mind, any action is no problem.

Maybe you don't know, so I will explain to you. Sitting is cutting off all thinking; not-moving mind is correct sitting. Some people say zazen is correct body sitting. This is important, but *most* important is how you keep just-now mind. Zazen is part of Zen, not the whole of Zen.

There are three kinds of Zen: first, sitting Zen; next action Zen; third, lying-down Zen. Any position – no problem. How do you keep just-now mind? That is very important. When you drive, how do you sit Zen? You cannot sit zazen. If somebody asks you, "what are you?" you don't know. Then you must keep this don't-know mind. Then this don't-know mind is driving. That is *just driving*. This is driving Zen. Next, eating Zen, playing tennis Zen, watching television Zen, talking Zen: only go straight – don't know. This is correct sitting.

Next, what is Zen? Zen means don't-know mind becomes clear. So, to *sit* means to make meditation; meditation becomes samadhi. Zen means when don't-know mind becomes clear, then cognition appears, and cognition becomes wisdom. Then sitting Zen means samadhi and wisdom.

But those are all teaching words. If you are attached to these words, you will have a problem. Put it all down. Only go straight – don't know. Don't make anything. Don't check anything. Then you will get everything.

So, I ask you:

Somebody asked Dong Sahn Zen Master, "What is Buddha?"

He said, "Three pounds of flax."

What does it mean? If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything. If you correctly understand the meaning of three pounds of flax, then answer me. If you don't understand, only go straight. Thinking, thinking is no good. Put it all down.

I hope you are always keeping don't-know mind, then become clear, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. The name of our school is the Chogye School. The Chogye School is before Rinzai, before Soto.

P.P.S. I am sending to you our newsletter. All our Zen Center information is in this. After you read this, then you can decide about coming here. Also, sometimes we have a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Chicago. You write to our Zen Center Director, Louise Stanton. She will help you. Also, if you would like to have the newsletter every month, tell Louise.

April 22, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I thank you for your letter to me – it made me feel very good. But this letter is “just news” and *please* do not answer it! You are too busy, and you will be coming to the West Coast soon.

I thought you might be interested to know that Joan stayed with us for the last two weeks!! She had with her a wonderful old Indian Shaman named Don José and his student, Prem Das (who was at Esalen a year ago – you may remember him). It was very good to be with Joan. She is fine, better than before – doing what she feels is right for her now. Her path is truly very exciting and varied. She tries many spiritual practices, involves many people in them, then moves on. Her energy is seemingly boundless. I admire her very much. I am also very grateful to her for making it possible for us to meet you. When she left, she gave us a beautiful peacock feather fan to go behind the Buddha – you will see it when you come.

We already have registrations filled for the Yong Maeng Jong Jin May 12-15th. Some very special people are coming – very close friends of mind who have been interested in experiencing Zen. Some of the Wednesday night “regulars” are helping with the food. Everyone is looking forward to being with you, and to sitting together.

Last weekend I had to go to Big Sur for a professional (Gestalt therapy) workshop, and so called Linc and asked if I could stop by Sambosa to see if I could help with plans for their Yong Maeng Jong Jin. He said O.K. – so I did on Friday. Satam Su Nim was very nice to me – but said he did not want to talk to the abbot about renting the room – he seemed to be confused about whether he or the abbot or we should be in charge of it, etc. It seems there are a number of young people living there now – but most do not practice. After a while he asked if I would go with him and talk to the abbot – on Sunday when he would be there. I said yes, as long as he did the talking – since it was to be *their* Yong Maeng Jong Jin. So – I came back on Sunday after my workshop, and Satam said he had *already* asked the abbot (which I was happy about), but he had said no – he did not want the Yong Maeng Jong Jin, that the sleeping and kitchen problems would be too great since they have “students” there now, etc. Satam seemed (to me) a bit disappointed. He is a very nice person – gave me a wonderful thick piece of bread he had made to eat on my drive home. So – no Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Sambosa I guess.

Oh – on my weekend I also saw Jo – she gave me lunch, and I got to know her in a new way. She is a very interesting person, also a fine artist. We sat and looked down at the ocean for quite a while together – it was very hard to leave!

I have gotten to know so many beautiful people during the past year. It feels very good. So far no one has dropped any ashes on the Buddha, only flowers! And peacock feathers! Thank you for telling me my homework again – some day perhaps a “good answer” will happen. Now I am finished writing to you – and send you my love.

See you soon –

Diana

Perhaps Linc is coming up this weekend!

I hear Paul became a monk! I am happy for him. Send my love to Bobby, Jim, and him –

Kwan Sae Um Bosal!

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for your letter. All is “enough” with my family and me.

My answer to the correct master kong-an is: (He is) “writing this letter.”

You said that I said “hit,” “bow,” “bow,” etc. I said no such thing. You must have me mixed up with some other fellow.

Bob

April 27, 1977

Dear Bob,

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

You say already enough – that is wonderful.

Next, to the correct master kong-an, you said, “writing this letter.” This is *your* master. What is just-like-this master? I ask you, *just-like-this* master.

Next, you say you did not say, “hit,” “bow,” “hit,” “bow,” etc. You don’t remember your previous letter. In your previous letter, you said, “When I saw you, you told me to watch Jerry bow to learn the correct way. I watched! I saw nothing so I hit you. I also bow to you. I hit you, I bow to you; you hit me, you bow to me; this is the correct way.”

What does it mean? Again, I tell you, don’t make hit, don’t make bow, don’t make nothing, don’t make correct. If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times. Only go straight – don’t know, O.K.?

I hope you always keep don’t-know mind, soon finish your homework, become a great man, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

April 19, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Good morning! It is always a good morning somewhere. I am in the morning sun just outside my door, feeling the warmth and the breeze.

New Moon Ocean rolls in and springs onto the rocks. Birds passing through stay a while, singing their very own songs. Others build nests to continue birds. Springtime it is and always is somewhere, like the sun is rising while it's setting and setting while it's rising. Life to death and death to life. Coming or going is all the same.

Dear Soen Sa Nim – your letter is making me very happy. Thank you deeply for giving me so much. I bow to you.

Ever since sitting this morning I have felt like talking with you. It came to me that the man who is putting ashes on the Buddha is no other than ME – J – EGO.

You say that I must teach him to make him see his bad actions – to make him realize. So, I must teach me to be aware of my own actions – “watch my step.”

And this J or ME which is watching is *HIT*.

This man has been around for eons of time. His name is Karma – my Karma. I need to help him do as my Zen Master says: “Always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.” Thank you, Soen Sa Nim.

This morning Soe Am Su Nim from Sambosa Temple called me. He would like me to read his manuscript and make questions. Yes, I like, but need time. Am very slow reader and just now have very painful left eye.

Sometimes my thoughts go to Mu Gak.

I hope to be with you in all three Yong Maeng Jong Jins. My house watcher is going to Europe – hope to find a new one so I can come.

Diana came to my house Sunday. We had lunch and a very fine time together.

April 20, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim, please, forgive this long letter. I would like to tell you about tonight's sitting. 45 min. Always when I light the candles, offer incense, and bow to Buddha before sitting, I begin to hear the sound, a steady HUM – Coming through the sound, a rhythmic chime of a bell – not high, not low, on the right. On the left an orchestra – sometimes voices – more chanting than singing, all coming from far away through the sound. Tonight I really listened – so – *very little thinking*. Thinking is no more than acknowledgment of a happening – like – my house doing creaks – or Brindle barking quietly in his sleep. I was aware of the mudra of my hands and no body – sometimes I felt the “feeling good” without going into it – it didn't matter. My breathing must have been very slow – I cannot remember breathing out, and I usually count my breaths.

It was not “white space” like during Kido – maybe because I did not fully enter into *this* space.

It feels to me that I have found a way which helps me to cut down thinking. Would this be attachment to sound? It would be *listening* to sound instead of making sound like in Kido. If listening to this sound is attachment, then Kwan Sae Um Bosal Yom Bul would also be attachment. Yes – while I am saying this, I do sense a difference. Like in Kido I am driving the vehicle, while in listening to the sound, I follow. I am not confused by this, but also not clear, and would be grateful for your help, Soen Sa Nim. I know how much you do always, and hope that this unusually long letter is not a burden to you.

Thank you, dear Soen Sa Nim for all you do and all you do for me.

I bow to you and send my love,

Yours,

Jo

April 27, 1977

Dear Jin Uwal, Jo,

How are you? Thank your for your *beautiful* letter. You talked about the morning. How are you this morning?

The Diamond Sutra said, “All formations are transient. If you view all appearance as non-appearance, you can see your true self.” This means, in your mind, don't be attached to anything. Then you can see, you can hear, all, just like this, is truth. You say, “birds ... build nests to continue birds. Springtime is and always is somewhere, like the sun is rising while it's setting and setting while it's rising.” So finally you said, “Like life to death and death to life. Coming or going is all the same.” The name for that is Nirvana. So, you already got Nirvana. How happy does this make you?

Next, your cigarette man answer is wonderful. But, how do you fix his mind? How do you correct him? This is only Bodhisattva action. You already understand your true way, but this man has a long way to go. So you must correctly teach him.

Soe Am Su Nim asked you to read his manuscript and make questions, and also you think about Mu Gak Su Nim – these things are wonderful.

I hope you soon find someone to watch your house so you can come to the Yong Maeng Jong Jin with us. You said Diana came to your house and you had a good time – that is also wonderful.

Next, you said you heard these sounds next to your body, and next you could not remember your breathing, and next you did not enter into this space. If you do not attach to this style feeling, then that is samadhi play. If you are attached to this feeling, you will go to the demons' place. So, don't worry, which means don't make anything; don't check anything. Moment to moment, you must correctly keep don't-know mind. Then no problem.

Also, those feelings sometimes help your practicing, but if you are attached to what I am saying, you will also have a problem. So I say to you, you must believe in yourself 100%. This is very important. If you believe in yourself 100%, then any action, any sound, any feeling is no problem.

So, I hope you always keep a 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,

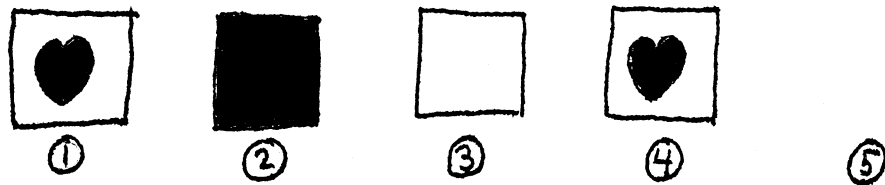
S.S.

April, 1977

dearest Soen Sa Nim, dearest teacher –

You are often in my thoughts, in my heart. I send you much love.

Ruth



May 12, 1977

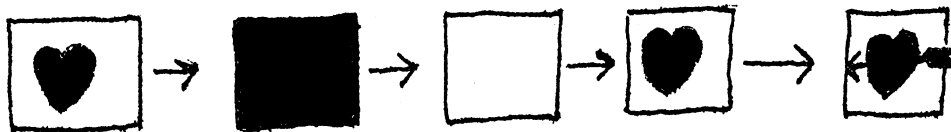
Dear Ruth,

Indelibly in my mind student Ruth: How are you? I was glad to receive your beautiful letter. You make me so very happy.

I send you great love and happiness.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.



April 26, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Receiving your teaching and participating in the March Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Allston was a great experience for me. Thank you for being here at this time and for allowing me to enter into the Dharma through your teaching. I am grateful to you.

I am going straight ahead in my attempt to keep don't-know mind and am working on my homework – “Why did Bodhidharma come to China?” (hanging by my teeth) – but have no answer for you yet. Each morning I bow 108 times and twice daily, I sit for 40 minutes. For the time being, I am chanting in my own makeshift fashion but hope to order the tape soon so I can learn your chants. (I am chanting a different translation of the Heart Sutra.)

My wife and I intend to move to the Boston area the end of the summer, enabling me to join the Cambridge Zen Center – at last, after two years + of practicing alone, I'll have a community to practice with.

I hope you are well and not overdoing your part in spreading the Dharma. Tentatively, I plan to participate in the July Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Allston and hope to see you then. Perhaps I will see you before then if I get to Woodstock to help refurbish the retreat center.

Again, many thanks,

Ralph

May 12, 1977

Dear Ralph,

Thank you very much for your card and letter. How are you and your wife?

In your letter, you mention the last Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Allston, and that you bow 108 times in the morning and sit twice daily. That is wonderful.

You say that you do not yet have the answer to your homework. Don't worry about the answer; only go straight – don't know – then, some day, you will understand. But, most important, from moment to moment, how do you keep just-now mind? You must believe in yourself 100%. Then, you will get enough mind. Here is a poem for you:

Mind follows situation around and around everywhere.
That “around” place is already all truth.
If you perceive moment to moment the situation,
Not good, not bad, everything is perfectly complete.

I hope you always keep a don't-know 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. I am now in Berkeley for Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

May 2, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Many times you ask me a question and I open my mouth. Afterwards I hit myself 30 times. When I am not thinking, my actions and words are my true self. When I am thinking, I can not express true self.

You have given me the name Ja Soeng. Tears come and I bow as I realize Great Love Nature has always been my self. This is the true nature of everything.

Thank you for the very beautiful precepts ceremony and the two-day Kido and all of your teachings. Thank you for helping all people. Now I must do my work and practice hard, so when I open my mouth, you will hear Ja Soeng. I must believe in myself 100%.

Have a good stay out West.

Love,

Judy

May 12, 1977

Dear Judy,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am now in Berkeley for Yong Maeng Jong Jin, having passed through Toronto and Los Angeles. Twenty-seven students have come here to sit with us.

You say the Kido was wonderful. I also had a good time. Everybody had an especially interesting experience. At that time, lost mind, one mind, and clear mind are very clear. Lost mind is lost sound; one mind is into the sound; clear mind is perceiving the sound. In other words, lost mind is demon; one mind is Buddha; clear mind is great Bodhisattva.

So, your name is Ja Soeng, which is great Bodhisattva. You said, "I must believe in myself 100%," which is also called Ja Soeng, the nature of great love. Great love is great Bodhisattva. Here is a poem for you:

Ja Soeng is clear anywhere.
The mountain and river always radiate truth.
Spring comes; all flowers bloom;
Butterflies and bees fly, fly love to them.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

That monk's bowl is still too dirty. If he cleans it, tell him to go beg for rice.

A monk with no bowl eats with his hands. What does a monk with no hands do?

Reach down here from Providence and test me with your Big Stick!

Thank you for your letters. Keep having a nice Spring.

Love,

Dale

May 12, 1977

Dear Dale and Linda,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. Your answer is 90% O.K., but you must give me a 100% answer.

If you have a bomb, and the fuse burns only 90% of the way to it, then stops, the bomb cannot explode. If the fuse burns 100%, then BLAM!

Kong-ans are also like this. If you completely understand, 100%, then your mind will explode. If your mind explodes, there is no mind, which is clear like space. Clear like space means clear like a mirror – red comes, red; white comes, white. So, when you are hungry, only eat; when you're tired, only sleep. Just like this. Very simple. Not complicated. Your answer is very complicated, so I hit you 30 times.

I ask you again, "What did the monk attain?" Many words aren't necessary, only one point, just like this.

I hope that you only go straight – don't know, don't make anything, don't check anything, then you will get the correct answer.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Three days ago, I started a new job. In a small room with no windows, I work with three black women. Usually, there is no work for more than two of the four of us. All day long they talk. They talk about sex, desires, angers. All day long the radio plays loud music which also talks about love and suffering. Already, all this is checking checking.

What am I? Na nun mo rum ni da (I don't know). Still, what is reflected action? Am I to suffer every day, or can I reflect without "becoming?" Often, I find the atmosphere the "way it is" there, depressing. My Bodhisattva keeps getting lost in fear and anger. The money is useful right now. I fear becoming, becoming, becoming suffering. Again checking.

Okay. I have much pride. Some friends of mine are now making much money. Often the thought for me, what do I do, in this life? I feel I waste myself at jobs like this one. Buddhist practice has almost literally saved my life. I know the thoughts and feelings I experience are NOT SELF, coming and going, coming and going. This letter could not be written any time but now. Still, blue is blue, fear is fear, desire is desire. Michael comes, dropping ashes on his practice; what do you do? Already Michael has been checking his checking, little mind, funny mind.

If every time mouth open is wrong, no teaching, no Buddha. Often I have desires for things I do not enjoy. Sometimes funny, sometimes not. Okay ...

Thank you,

Michael

May 13, 1977

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. You say, "No windows ... working with three black women ... all day they talk sex, desire, anger." but they are your best teacher, better than Zen Masters, better than Sutras, better than the Bible. If you hold their actions, then you become a demon, but if you don't hold their actions, their moment-to-moment actions make you wise.

So, an eminent teacher said, wisdom is ignorance, ignorance is wisdom, which means, how do you keep just-now mind? Checking, checking mind is ignorance; not checking your mind, then you can see, hear, and smell, all just like this is truth. Not only sex, desire, anger, but also a dog barking, chicken crowing – everything is correct Dharma.

For example, if you went to the theater to see a comedy, then your mind is funny. If the picture is sad, then your mind is also sad. At that time, already you don't check your mind, so funny is funny; sad is sad; good is good; bad is bad. Everything clear appears. That is correct wisdom. If you get correct wisdom, your mind is already clear like space; moment to moment, reflected action is possible.

So, the whole world is like a theater. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings. Then, everything is Sutra and Bible. "No window" is O.K.; talking about sex, desire, anger is O.K. Only how can you help them? That is great Bodhisattva action. Therefore, great Bodhisattva always has great love and great sadness for all beings, which is reflected action.

I hope you put it all down, don't check anything, only go straight – don't know. Then, this don't know will become clear. Then, in any situation, reflected action is possible. Then, finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Master Seung Sahn,

Thank you for your response to my earlier letter. I feel a great loss when I say I have experienced little since I last wrote. I feel more and more compelled towards what I believe is possible to achieve through Zen practice, although my singular effort seems futile. I realize that hope and faith are important, yet I feel the constant impulse for the guidance of a Zen Master.

Although I would forsake everything for my Zen practice, I am uncertain about my future course of action. Shall I travel to experience your wisdom, or shall I travel to Japan? I don't speak Japanese, and I have little idea what to expect, or even if I will be accepted as a student at a monastery.

I would appreciate and benefit through any comments and information that you can offer. I shall patiently await the wisdom of your decisions.

Sincerely yours,

John

May 13, 1977

Dear John,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. First, I ask you, "Why do you want or need a Zen Master? Why do you want to go to Japan? Why do you want to come to Providence?"

What is the purpose of your life? This is most important. If you have no direction, you cannot believe in yourself, so, there is much thinking and indecision. That is your karma. So, this is very important: First, you must make your karma disappear.

If you want to make your bad karma disappear, you must go to any Zen Center and practice together with others. This is very necessary.

"Together action" means, "my opinion," "my condition," "my situation" disappear. Then, moment to moment, keeping clear mind is possible. If you keep clear mind, then correct opinion, correct condition, correct situation appear. When you see the sky, it is blue. When you see the tree, it is green. When you are hungry, eat; when you are tired, sleep. Everything, just like this, is the truth.

So, you must come to a Zen Center. Together action is very important. If you want to come to Providence, that is wonderful. Our Zen Center always has open doors.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

[This postcard, with a picture of "Two Boys Herding Water Buffalo Under Willows," accompanied letter 577]

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for a wonderful Yong Maeng Jong Jin, the chance to study with you and practice with the New Haven Sangha.

I think of you, then press "C".

The beads you gave William and me that last day are on our shrine. Thank you again.

Gassho,

Dana

We hope you'll come to Hawaii sometime soon.

May 4, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Now you're on your way to the West Coast, and we missed you and the Kido in New York, which is a real disappointment. We got back from New England just before the weekend, and I woke up, the morning we were planning to come over to the center, with a fierce headache, the prelude to an attack of some short-lived but extremely heavy-handed flu, or something of that nature, that apparently has been going around. Better now, but by the time the Kido was over (I certainly didn't want to call the center while it was going on) and I called and spoke with David, you had gone. "That's karma," David said to me. Of course it is – whatever that is. The disappointment at not seeing you again is obviously that, too, and is also thinking – but there it is; it's there. It's part of the thinking at the moment.

We both wanted to tell you again, in person, as well as on paper, what a joy it was meeting you, and being able to work with you for those three days in New Haven. Perhaps it is not for me to say how much those few interviews with you have helped me, then and since, but they do seem to have helped practice, both immediately, and in the two very busy weeks since we left New Haven.. Though of course, there is no way of comparing, is there, since there's really nothing to compare! But once again, I'm deeply grateful to you for that chance, brief though it was, to study with you, and hope it will be the first of many. And grateful for those parting gifts of yours, and the manner and spirit in which they were given .

I told you that there was a little book I wanted to give you, and here it is. You know, perhaps, that there once was a great contemplative tradition in the West. For the past three hundred years it's been discouraged, neglected, starved out – to the point where it has become itself, something remote and exotic to the very religious institutions that once housed it (one reason why growing numbers of Christian monks and nuns have turned to Zen practice!). But this is a small work on contemplative prayer, from the period, five or six hundred years ago, when practice was a living thing, in pre-Protestant England. I thought that the title, and what the title refers to, both, might be of some interest to you, and some passages in the book I've found, for years, very beautiful and instructive. I think of them as part of the karma that led to our meeting in New Haven two weeks ago, and so I want you to have them for that reason too. Much of the work may seem strange from the point of view of Zen – but then again, who knows? Don't know. Hit the floor.

Then, I wanted to tell you that the part of the country where you have bought the house, for intensive practice, is very near to the place that seemed a great source of magic when I was a child: just across the Delaware into Pennsylvania. I'm told taht you feel strongly about that region, as the Indians are said to have done (that was always important to me too), and I hope that is one more link.

Others: I've heard from both Maezumi Roshi and the Aitkens since we saw you, and it's good to know that you may all be seeing each other, this month, and maybe even laying plans for a visit to Maui.

These weeks have been full of travel. First to New York State, for a reading at a college. Then through New England: three more readings, and the meetings with students that go with them. We practiced as and when we could, and I held your words up and tried to become one with them, to the point where they and I would disappear together. Don't know. That's where the homework is at the moment, and I don't say that with apology. That's the answer to the ash-dropping question, right now. I've thought I had answers to it from time to time – but I was *thinking*. Not attached to the answers, but still attached to the thinking. So I don't know.

Please take good care of yourself, for the sake of all beings (speaking from my own don't know mind.) Have a good summer.

Hapchang,

William

We hope to be in New York for the rest of May. From early June to early October, we will be in France.

(will you come and help spread the Dharma in France one day?) Then back here, we hope. And in due course, the L.A. Zendo and Maui Zendo again.

June 5, 1977

Dear William,

How are you and Dana? Thank you for your letter and also for the book. I am sorry that I am so late in answering; your letter was forwarded from Providence only a short time ago, and then I have been very busy with a big Buddha's Birthday ceremony and Yong Maeng Jong Jins here and in Berkeley.

You say you were disappointed to miss the Kido. I missed you too. So I was a little sad. This is also my karma. Now I know why you couldn't come. I hope you recovered quickly from your headache and flu. You mustn't be concerned about your karma. Moment to moment your karma controls you. But if you keep a clear mind, you can see your karma. If you can see your karma, it is possible to control your karma. The karma is truth. Then there is never any problem.

You said that the interviews maybe helped you, but it is not for you to say how much. When you say, "It is not for me to say," this is a wonderful moment. If you completely understand, there is nothing special. It is like drinking pure water: no taste. Not sweet, not bitter. Our practice is nothing special. Many people want to get something special from Zen practice. But if you want something special, already you have made a mistake.

Buddha said that someone who brushes against you in the street does this as a result of sharing karma with you for 300 lifetimes. So our three days together, practicing, eating, and living together, mean that we have met and continued to meet for many many lifetimes – very strong karma. And this will not stop in the future. We will meet again and again, into infinite time. But you and I and all our Dharma-friends, what is our direction? This is very important. You and I and our friends sharing the same karma means that our direction is attaining Enlightenment, finishing the Great Work of life and death, and saving all beings from suffering. This is our great vow. And as space is infinite, all beings are infinite. Also our great vow is infinite. The name for this is the great Bodhisattva way. So together we have entered the ocean of the great Bodhisattva way.

You talked about the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Yah, some Christian mystics have spoken in a way similar to Zen teaching. But most Christian mystics cannot break the wall between God and humans. Some say, “Throw away God and all things.” This style speech is a little close to Zen. But one more step is necessary. I have a student who is an Episcopal priest at the Washington Cathedral. He sometimes comes to the Providence Zen Center to sit with us, and I have sometimes taught at the Washington Cathedral. Many ministers came for sitting and interviews. Some talked about God and their true self becoming one; some talked about throwing away God. But I said to them, “If you cannot kill your God, you don’t understand the true God. The true God has no name or form, no speech or words. Many people make God in their minds, so they cannot understand the true God. So you must kill your God. Then you will understand the true God. Then Zen and Christianity are the same.” So I tell them to take one more step.

We have a kong-an which is a very high-class just-like-this kong-an. It was made by the great Zen Master Ko Bong, who lived in China 700 years ago. He made three gates to test his students’ minds.

The first gate is: “The sun in the sky shines everywhere. Why does a cloud obscure it?” If you understand this kong-an, you understand everything. This means Buddha, God, truth, life, karma, etc.

The second gate: “Everyone has a shadow following them. How can you not step on your shadow?” If you understand this kong-an, with any action of yours, there will be no problem.

The third gate: “The whole Universe is on fire. Through what kind of samadhi can you escape being burned?” If you understand this kong-an, you can go anywhere or stay anywhere – no problem.

This is a famous kong-an. If you have time, please check it. I hope that you send me a good answer.

Aitken Roshi and Maezumi Roshi visited me at Tahl Mah Sah two weeks ago. We had lunch together, good talk and a good time. We mentioned the possibility of my coming to visit your Zen Center, and also of Aitken Roshi’s visiting our Zen Center. I will send you a photo of this visit.

You are a very busy man, with your travels and readings. But don't lose your head. If you want to find your head, you are a fool. You wrote that you try to become one with my words. This is already a mistake. Here is a good kong-an for you:

When the great Zen Master JoJu was a student, he asked his Master Nam Cheon, "What is the true way?"

Nam Cheon said, "Everyday mind is the true way."

"Then how can I keep it?"

"If you try to keep it, already you are mistaken."

"But if I don't 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 true way of not thinking, it is clear and empty as space. So why do you make right and wrong?"

Upon hearing this, JoJu was suddenly enlightened.

What did JoJu attain?

Put it all down. Zen Master Mumon's poem about this kong-an is as follows:

Flowers in springtime,
Cool breeze in summer,
Moon in autumn,
Snow in winter.

If you don't make anything in your mind,
For you it is a good season.

Homework: You said only don't know. This don't know of yours is better than Aitkin Roshi, better than God or Buddha. Only go straight ahead, don't know. Then you will soon finish your homework. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything; only go straight ahead. I hope you always keep don't-know mind, soon get Enlightenment, become a great Bodhisattva, and save all beings from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Spreading the Dharma in France is a fine idea. Maybe someday we will teach together there.

P.P.S. Mu Gak Su Nim sends his warm greetings and says he will write soon.

P.P.P.S. Dana, thank you for the beautiful card. I hope you soon find your ox. Then you will be able to save all people.

May 4, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have sown the seed of peace.

Time for the children.

You might want to visit Findhorn, but better to wear ordinary clothes.

Ron

June 5, 1977

Dear Ron,

Thank you for your letter. How are you lately?

You said, "I have sown the seed of peace." So I ask you: Where did you find the seed of peace? If you understand, please tell me.

You invited me to Findhorn. This is wonderful. Maybe I will visit you next year. So next year, you must invite me again, correctly.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon find the seed of peace, plant it in the mind ground, and bring peace to the whole Universe.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 5, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope the sunshine of California and the light of those that love you keep your body warm and strong.

On the way to pick up Mu Bul Su Nim at the airport, you, Bobby and I were discussing various jobs for bringing money to the Zen Center. Although I was considering returning to my old line of work, it would demand a definite commitment of my time on a daily basis (eight hours or more a day), and on a duration basis (one or two years on the job). You said that staying at the Zen Center and occasionally helping Mu Bul Su Nim would be good. I assumed most of my time would be spent keeping areas clean and organized, be it in the kitchen, office, or bathroom. Place makes no difference, only what you want.

Now, Mu Bul Su Nim says he talked to you at the Kido, and you said working for two or three years to being in money would be good. Also, having Mu Bul Su Nim and myself work full time would be good. So, I ask you, what do you want? If I worked in a restaurant, I could work full time, part time, and even quit with little notice. That style is O.K. But, if I work at my previous job, that style is not correct. But because you say working full time for two or three years is good, there is no problem.

The point of this letter is to let you know that there is no problem. High class job, low class job, taking care of Zen Center, working full time and taking care of Zen Center, all are possible; only tell me what you want.

Nowadays, I am trying to keep the kitchen neat and clean, and helping with laundry and other work as people asked me. Also, I am helping the food co-op with their bookkeeping and will soon be responsible for handling the orders. There is also a class two nights a week that teaches using the sun's energy, which interests me a little. This knowledge might be useful at Woodstock and it might not; I don't know about the sunshine there. Nor do I know about the plans for the retreat center – how soon we move in, how many people will be staying there for how long, etc. But this Woodstock planning is not my job, so I put my concern down.

Please help me see clearly what my outside job should be – working, not working; full time, part time; high class, low class – I only want to help you. Please tell me the best way.

Thank you

Mu Ryeom

June 5, 1977

Dear Mu Ryeom Su Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am sorry this answer is a little late. We had a big Buddha's Birthday ceremony and Yong Maeng Jong Jins in Berkeley and here. So I have been very busy.

You talk about your job. There are two kinds of jobs: inside job and outside job. You are a monk, so you must understand what a monk's job is. This is very important. Getting money is O.K., high or low class work is O.K., long or short term job is O.K. What is important is don't lose your original job.

I say original monk has no outside job, but P.Z.C. nowadays has a difficult money situation. So only get a little money and help the Zen Center. Soon, we will begin a retreat center in Woodstock. It is very necessary for you to stay there. So, if your former job requires a commitment of one or two years, this is not possible. Earning less money is fine. Part-time work or restaurant-style work, which you can leave and come back to, or quit on short notice, would be best. But don't worry. Always, for Mu Bul Su Nim and you, together action is necessary. So put it all down; don't make anything; only go straight ahead.

I hope you always keep don't-know mind, moment to moment follow your correct situation, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 13, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I first met you at the Cambridge Zen Center in March, 1975. I had been sitting daily for two months, and Mu Gak (gathering people for the New Haven Zen Center) suggested I try sitting at Yong Maeng Jong Jin. During the interview, I told you I had recently taken LSD and that I wanted to understand what had happened. You showed me the Zen circle and asked me several questions. I ended up telling you, "I don't want to be enlightened," and that I'd come back to see you in twenty years. You looked into my eyes and burst out laughing, and I started laughing, too, because I thought you understood me, and I felt warm.

Last fall, I went visibly insane as a result of the way I had been living the past few years of my life. I trusted Mu Gak more than I trusted psychiatrists and I'm afraid I imposed on his goodness and time quite a bit. It became clear to me I should sit daily once again.

In January, I moved to New York city, began seeing a psychiatrist twice a week, and began working in my father's company. I have very strong family karma – my psychiatrist says that I have chosen to remain a child rather than to stand up to a father whose influence is so strong that I choose to remain bound, despite the large degree of surface freedom he allows me.

At the April precepts ceremony, I was torn between doing something my parents would consider extremely bad – denying my Jewish heritage and accepting the lay vows of another religion – or taking the precepts. In effect, I had more faith in my parents' ignorance and prejudice than in my own experience and need.

I often do not relate openly to people – it almost seems I don't know how.

I have wanted to write you for a long time, but I feel so ego-bound that it always seemed an impure desire. Why reveal how rigid and full of fears I am? You would see my lack of compassion and how locked I am into my own little world.

My question is this:

You gave me "Clear mind, clear mind, clear mind, don't know →" If I try this during the day, I often get depressed. It's just like checking my mind and finding it wrong because invariably I don't keep to the chant. I work during the day, and it often seems chanting gets in the way. How can I trust myself, not check my mind, and yet *continue* to chant? Should I *only* chant no matter what obstacles I face?

I know you don't like long wordy letters.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Samuel

June 5, 1977

Dear Samuel,

Thank you for your letter. I received it only recently, since it was forwarded late from Providence. So my answer is very late. I am sorry.

In your letter, you understand your karma, which means you are checking yourself and can't strongly keep don't-know mind. This happens not only to you. Everyone who begins our practice has this problem. The most important thing now for you is to practice everyday: every morning and evening, you must sit, and every morning, you must do 108 bows. Don't skip even a single day! Then your don't-know mind will grow and grow. Then it will be possible for you to control your karma. This means that your small I will gradually disappear and your Big I will gradually grow. And then it will be possible for you to believe in yourself 100%.

Many people worry about themselves. This mind is very bad. I always say: Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything; only go straight ahead – don't know. Then you will get everything. Worry-mind means you are very attached to small I. Also, there are strong likes and dislikes. So you must make strong likes and dislikes disappear in your mind. Then worry-mind will disappear.

But many people have different karma. For some people it is very difficult to keep the kong-an. So I give them mantras as their practice. Now I will give you a mantra. Maybe this will help you more than "clear mind, clear mind, clear mind, don't know." You already know this mantra; it appears in the Heart Sutra:

Gate, gate, paragate, parsamgate, bodhi swaha.

Only repeat this mantra over and over, let thinking come and go. Then there will be no conflict between your practice and your work. Then you will soon get transcendent wisdom and attain your true self. Don't check your mind or your feelings. Only go straight ahead with the mantra.

I hope you practice every day without fail, soon finish the Great work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. You must come practice at our New York Zen Center. Together action is very important, and this will help you very much.

May 19, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I was at the Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Diana and Ezra's house last weekend. I am the woman who typed your letters and who has a snake. Do you remember me?

Diana told me she and Ezra are going with you to Korea and Japan next fall, and that you said she could bring ten people. I would like very much to go. Is it all right with you?

Here is a story about what happened to me since I started doing Zen 3 months ago up to last night.

A woman was running across a plain, pursued by a tiger. Ahead of her, she saw a mountain. Someone had told her that on this mountain you were safe from tigers. She was desperate and had nowhere else to go, so she ran to the mountain and started to climb it. All around her, she saw beautiful fruits, and she tasted one, and it was delicious. She walked through fields of soft clover across clear streams. The air was pure. Looking up, she saw that higher up the mountain became even more beautiful.

Suddenly, she heard a snarl from below. She looked around and saw the tiger gazing at her from the foot of the mountain. Then it turned and walked away, and she saw it disappear in the tall grass.

Will the woman continue to climb the mountain?

Will the sprouting seed continue to grow?

I get up every morning at 6:00 now and bow and sit. See you next month at the Kido. I bow to you 30 times.

Maggie

June 5, 1977

Dear Maggie,

Thank you for your beautiful letter. How are you?

Of course I remember you – the snake woman.

You want to go to Korea. Wonderful! I like you very much, so I am happy that you will be coming with us.

Next, your situation story. Very wonderful. But I always tell you: don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything; only go straight – don't know. Who made the tiger? Who made the mountain? Who made the woman? You know the kong-an about Soeng Am Zen Master. He used to call to himself every day:

“Master!”

And would answer, “Yes!”

“You must keep clear!”

“Yes!”

“Never be deceived by others, any day, any time!”

“Yes! Yes!”

Two minds. Which one is the correct master? You already understand. What is mountain? What is tiger? What is woman? Don't make mountain, tiger, or woman. Hit, become one. This is very necessary. If I were a Sutra Master, then I would say your story is very wonderful. But I am a Zen Master. So, I hit you thirty times. Put it all down. Only go straight – don't know. This is before thinking. Before thinking, there is no mountain, no tiger, no woman. What do you see now? What do you hear now?

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, don't make anything, only go straight, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 20, 1977

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

I'm sure you are doing well and sowing good seed. God bless you!

Concerning the "cat-bowl" kong-an: "Pick up the pieces."

I am trying to keep the "don't-know mind," as you call it, but I constantly forget. I am dreadfully asleep nearly always, but I thought for a second I had an answer to the kong-an. Ha! an answer is no answer. I know this but obviously I don't.

Tell me, would it be helpful to come to the Zen Center to do training for a year or better to stay where I am and keep don't-know mind. Who can say? I tell you and when you have time drop me a thought. Keep up the good work and keep down the good man!!!

Amen

Steve

P.S. *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* sparkles. Thank you.

June 5, 1977

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

In your letter, you say you can't keep don't know mind. I don't understand your present situation. So I ask you, what are you doing now? Don't-know mind is just-doing mind. Just-doing mind is clear mind. So don't-know mind is clear mind.

Again I ask you, what are you doing now? If you are doing something, you must do it. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check anything; only go straight ahead. This is Zen mind; this is don't-know mind; this is the true way.

You ask if you should come to the Zen Center for a year. This is the best way. Together action with other Zen students will help you very much. So I hope you can come live at Providence Zen Center. If possible, come. If this is not possible, then you must practice every day by yourself. This is very important.

I hope you can find your true way, control your karma, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 23, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

During the Cambridge May Yong Maeng Jong Jin this weekend, I was reading books on Japanese Zen. They put great stress on Enlightenment.

What is the place of Enlightenment in our practice?

What is Enlightenment?

Sincerely,

Judy

P.S.I hope you are well. If I don't see you in California, I will pop up at a Yong Maeng Jong Jin this fall back east, so if you have too much to do, please don't answer this letter.

June 5, 1977

Dear Judy,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

First, I hit you thirty times. The Heart Sutra says there is no attainment, with nothing to attain. You must attain no attainment. That's all.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 28, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

My dear friend and Teacher, I am very glad that we are eager to invite you to Chicago to conduct another Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

We are looking forward to your coming June 23-26. There will be a few more people this time and I think it will go well.

I heard you were ill and I have been worried about that. I keep thinking of giving you advice on conserving your energy and health, but then I laugh at my presumption. But please take care of yourself.

I just finished reading *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* again. After the third reading I still do not understand kong-ans and the answers to the people, etc. Nobody in the book had a *really* good answer. Anyway, I shall just put it aside and do my bows and my sitting and hope for the best.

We are keeping in touch with Louise to work the details for the Yong Maeng Jong Jin. Hope to see you soon.

With love and bows,

Harrington

June 5, 1977

Dear Harrington,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

I like Chicago Yong Maeng Jong Jin. But somebody told me there are not enough students, so I told Providence I will visit only for a lecture. If somebody from Chicago wants to attend a Yong Maeng Jong Jin, they must go to Toronto in Mid-August. Ask Louise at PZC.

I am fine, not sick. Don't worry.

You said you finished *Dropping Ashes* for the third time. Wonderful. But if you don't keep don't-know mind while reading the book, then the book will read you. If you keep don't-know mind, you can soon finish your homework. Also, if you want to finish your

homework, that is already a mistake. Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; only go straight ahead. Then some day, the kong-an and your mind will become one. Then your homework will disappear.

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

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 30, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I think of you often these days. Everyone in the New Haven Zen Center family is hoping you are taking good care of your body. Please rest.

On Thursday night, I finished my Dharma room retreat. There were many demons in those three weeks. I am growing to understand the purpose of our practice. Thank you very much.

I have a question for you about my practice. Last year, when I started to do mantra, you suggested I do the Heart Sutra mantra, "Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi swaha." Then I just did a Kwan Sae Um Bosal retreat. So now, Kwan Sae Um Bosal is very strong in me. Which should I do? I don't care which. Sometimes, when I wake up, I am doing one and sometimes the other.

The New Haven family is well. Now we have five children. Bob and Marilyn had a baby girl who at birth looked like you. Jonathon moved in with Ann. He's nine years old. Sometimes he chants with us. At first, he didn't like the Zen Center. We've been making a room for him, getting to be friends. He likes it more; I like his being here. It's fun having children here.

I don't have a homework answer to send to you.

I hope everyone in California is well. Please give my love to Jim. Again, I hope you are taking care of your body.

Much love to you,

Hapchang,

Andrea

June 5, 1977

Dear Andrea,

How are you? Thank you for your beautiful letter.

You said you hope I am taking good care of my body. Thank you very much. Don't worry about my body. I am very strong.

You finished your retreat. Wonderful! You understand your demons and correct practice . This also is wonderful. Retreat means understanding your karma. If you understand your karma, you can control your karma. Then you will get Dharma energy. If you get Dharma energy, you will get correct wisdom; then it is possible to save all people from suffering.

You say nowadays two mantras appear, Gate, gate and Kwan Sae Um Bosal. Both are okay. But one way is necessary. So only try Kwan Sae Um Bosal.

You say Bob's baby girl at birth looked like me. Maybe you are wrong; maybe she looked like Kwan sae Um Bosal. Her father tried Kwan Sae Um Bosal very much. Also, it is wonderful that Ann's son sometimes tries chanting.

Your homework answer is very clear. No answer is big answer. I like this. Only go straight ahead.

Jim is well.

Mu Gak Su Nim just finished his 100-day retreat. He said it was very difficult, but he finished. I hope he got strong Dharma energy. Maybe. Some day, he will visit the New Haven Zen Center.

I hope you always go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal, soon become a great Bodhisattva, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 5, 1977

Dear Housemaster Bobby, Louise, and Mu Bul Su Nim,

How are you and all the family? We just finished a big Korean Buddha's Birthday ceremony and Tahl Mah Sah Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

Louise and Bobby, thank you for your letters. I already sent \$300 to Korea. I asked them for 30 robes. Maybe this was not enough money, but I think they will send the robes. Money is no problem.

Mu Bul Su Nim, I hear you have been doing hard training painting the house. Thank you very much.

Here is a kong-an for you:

“WOOF! WOOF!”

“YOU ARE BETTER THAN JOJU ZEN MASTER”

After a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Berkeley, Seung Sahn Soen Sa returned to Los Angeles with three of his students. On the way, he stopped off at Jo's house in Big Sur. Jo has a good dog named Brindle. This dog is very clever, always pays attention to Jo, obeys commands, and acts immediately. After being introduced to him, Soen Sa asked him, “Do you have Buddha-nature?”

Brindle said, “Woof! Woof!”

Soen Sa said, “Very good dog! You are better than JoJu Zen Master!”

I think the title for our next book should be: “Woof! Woof!” “You are better than JoJu Zen Master.” How do you think about this? Please ask everybody what they think. Our first book is called *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. This is hitting primary point and teaching like this, just like this. This title means: In America, many Zen students are attached to the Mu kong-an. So many go the wrong way; they don't understand just like this. So, hitting JoJu means hitting the Mu kong-an, becoming clear, just-like-this way. So I think this title is wonderful. If everybody likes it, we will use it. If not, that's O.K.; I don't care.

I hope everybody goes straight ahead, doesn't make anything, then soon finishes the Great Work of life and death and saves all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Louise, you talked about the white house. You must first visit the owner. Next, depending on lawyers is very bad. We must find a real estate agent, give him \$3000 and tell him we must have the deal closed before August. Then he will work hard for us and soon contact the owners. Michael often mentioned a young Woodstock real estate man well thought of there; he may even have worked for us. If you or David can talk to him, that would be best. Now we are dependent on David's lawyer and the owner's lawyer – very bad.

Krakow, May 3, 1977

Venerable Seung Sahn,

Best Wishes from Poland. We got a sunny and warm spring this year.

Seems to me that I'm performing my everyday doings with less thinking mind. Understanding that there is no Buddha, The Way, holy scriptures, Zen Masters, and that there are them all – Zen Masters, holy scriptures, The Way, Buddha. They are all not; they all are glorious.

There is now a little Buddha altar in my house, warming the atmosphere of my sitting and performing actions.

The other change is my new-born son – Martin.

I've not finished yet your kong-an book.

There is a lot of work for you in States, but maybe one time you can come and visit us in Europe. We are very happy and thankful for your interest shown to our Zen group. Andrei – the leader, showed me a letter from Jacob telling that you are sending a moktak and tape. Wonderful.

Months, years, maybe kalpas, does it matter the time we will meet in “Buddha Land”?

Please tell Jacob, Jerry from New York, and Linc from Boston my “hello!”

Sincerely yours,

Anthony

June 6, 1977

Dear Anthony,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your family and your new son?

You say that nowadays you are thinking less while doing your everyday activities. This is wonderful. You also say that there is no Buddha, no Way, etc., but that there are Buddha, Way, etc. So I give you a new kong-an, #27 from the *Mumonkan*.

A monk once asked Zen Master Nam Cheon, "Is there a Dharma beyond speech for all people?"

Nam Cheon said, "There is."

The monk said, "What is this Dharma beyond speech for all people?"

Nam Cheon said, "It is not mind, not Buddha, not anything."

So I ask you, What is it? If you open your mouth, I will hit you. If you keep your mouth closed, I will still hit you. What can you do?

Thank you for your invitation to Poland. I want to visit Europe next year, with my students. Please send me a formal invitation then. I am looking forward to seeing you and your Zen group.

You like the moktak and tape. I am glad. If you want us to send anything else, we would be happy to help you. Jacob and some of my other students want to meet you. When will you come to America? Many people say there is not so much freedom in your country. So how is religion and Zen practice possible? I am interested in this.

I hope you always keep a 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.

May 8, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you for seeing me two weeks ago at the Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Allston. Before you left the Center, I went upstairs to ask you a rather dumb question.

I'm writing now – a few days before my departure to Naropa Institute – because I suddenly realized something of great value that you said to the group. You were talking about the three levels of ability in Zen: the low class, which needs the support of a group in practice; the middle class, where one is able to practice by oneself (on a mountain, as you said); and the high class, where methodical practice is no longer needed.

I realize that discipline, or self-discipline, is the issue. And without it – as I've learned from many years of experience – I've never gotten past the “sphere” of my lower mind temptations: the programmed or conditioned desires and aversions. I knew a dozen years ago that I wanted to enter Zen practice, and was never willing to throw aside my fearful resistance and go straight forward.

I guess when you deny your own way, you're destined to return to the gate of entry again and again. And so it is. It is late in life for me to begin self-discipline, but I'm sure it can be done. I plan to contact your new center in Berkeley, California after summer sessions at Naropa. I continue to sit on my own – not-knowing.

Also, I want to thank you again – in spite of my 2-week communications lag – for teaching me about discipline. Others have taught me before, but I was not at all ready.

I wanted to meet you, because I felt so much in tune with certain things you said in the book (and that very beautiful story of the Boat Monk). It was very enjoyable to be with you in Allston. Thank you again.

Yours,

Sheldon

P.S. May I be on the newsletter mailing list?

June 6, 1977

Dear Sheldon,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I am now in Los Angeles and didn't receive your letter until recently, so my answer is a little late. I am sorry.

From your letter, I understand your situation and your karma. But what is most important? You say you wanted to begin sitting a dozen years ago, but you couldn't. This is your bad karma. If you think something is bad, you must cut it off. This is very necessary. If you die tomorrow, then what? Nobody can guarantee your life. What are you doing now? How are you keeping your just-now mind? If you want to practice, you must come to the Zen Center and practice together with other Zen students. Time will not wait for you. Hurry up! Hurry!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

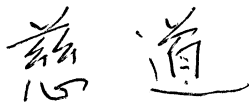
P.S. If you want to receive our newsletter, please ask Louise Stanton, director of the Providence Zen Center, to put you on the mailing list.

May 14, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope this letter finds you well and happy.

Thank you for giving me the five precepts and my new Buddhist name – Ja Do – on May first. I appreciate your acknowledgement of the name Reverend Nakajima had given me:



This morning after meditation and breakfast, Jerry taught me Dharma play. It was the second session we have had together, and he says that now I can practice on my own. I hope it will aid me in my practice, and plan to use it first in helping me concentrate – become one-pointed.

Will the Korean woman who danced ecstatically at Kido now be better able to help others?

Respectfully yours,

Ja Do (David)

June 6, 1977

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter. How are you?

You like your Dharma name Ja Do. This means that great love is the true way. So I ask you: What is great love? What is the true way? If you understand, understand. If you don't understand, don't understand. This is Ja Do. O.K.?

Next, Dharma play is controlling one's consciousness. If you have consciousness, Dharma play may help you. But if you have no consciousness, Dharma play is not necessary. Only you must learn Dharma play technique. There are people who don't understand Zen, but like Dharma play. In that situation, you can use Dharma play to show them the true way. But if you are attached to Dharma play, you have a problem. Don't make anything; don't check anything; only go straight ahead. You want concentration. If you only go straight ahead – don't know, this is already concentration. But if you have much thinking, much

bad karma, Dharma play will help you. Then the thinking and bad karma will disappear. But it cannot help you attain correct wisdom. You must understand this.

This woman who danced at the Kido is still helping you. But don't hold on to her. O.K.?

I hope you always go straight – don't know, then soon finish the Great Work of life and death, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S

May 25, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope you are taking care of yourself and resting sometimes.

I just wanted to write to say hello. I am fine. Kwan Sae Um Bosal is helping me everyday.

All the Providence family is well – everyone sends their love. Nowadays, Providence Zen Center is very strong.

I'm looking forward to seeing you in July. I miss you.

See you then.

Love,

Lynn

June 6, 1977

Dear Lynn,

How are you? Thank you for the beautiful card.

You worry about me. I am very strong. So don't worry.

Before I got many letters from you. But this letter is best of all. Just like this. Each word is wonderful and the truth. I read your letter and understood the PZC weather. So you are the PZC weatherwoman. So your mind, your actions, and your face are very important. You are already a great Dharma teacher. If you make something, you have a problem. But now you are very strong. You say Kwan Sae Um Bosal is helping you. This is correct. Only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal. Then no problem. You will get everything, and always, everywhere, you will get happiness. Then your mind light will shine everywhere and you will save all people from suffering.

I hope you only go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and become a great Bodhisattva.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 25, 1977

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

Very simply, I need your assistance. I am considering working on a Doctorate thesis dealing with the 26 healings by Jesus Christ in the *New Testament*.

There are some who suggest that Jesus healed people by allowing each to realize that all their aspects were in harmony. And that through Jesus' sharing and love, each was able to recognize and achieve wholeness. I think so often of Katherine Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, and others who are in the healing ministry. So often people, just as the 26 healed by Jesus are suddenly fully cured. I'd appreciate your comments about the idea present – i.e., how Jesus healed (above). I'd especially appreciate your concepts for healing. I need your sharing of experiences, other books and a listing of others in the ministry with whom I might also communicate. I believe that psychology, philosophy and science are all inter-related, all aspects of the total, and they all agree.

I am listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in Religion*, writer of short articles in varied international journals dealing with the triune of psychology, philosophy and science.

I sincerely value your input. And later, if other ideas or contacts or references are suddenly remembered, please just jot them down and send them to me.

I sincerely look forward to your ideas, suggestions, directions. My best to you in HIS ministry.

Peace, Love, Joy of Christ,

Ron

June 6, 1977

Dear Ron,

How are you? Thank you for your interesting letter.

You ask about healing. Oriental medical books say that if you want to cure the body you must first cure the mind. If you understand the sickness, it is possible to give the proper medicine. So you must understand the source of the sickness.

500 years ago in China, there was a famous doctor named Pyon Ja. He performed many complicated operations without the use of anesthetics (there were none at that time). He

would take the patient's consciousness, put it into his mind-closet, then cut into the body, take out the organs and fix them, put them back, take the consciousness from his closet, and put it back into the patient, who would awaken totally cured. All this he did without medicine; he only need his mind light.

The doctor said that there are three kinds of disease. The first is when a demon enters someone's consciousness, then the body becomes sick. The second is when the mind is broken, so the body is sick. The third is simple bodily illness. For this kind, a purely medical cure is possible. For the second kind, if the mind is fixed, then there is no problem. For the first kind, if the demon cannot be taken away, then a cure is not possible. Demon means that another consciousness has entered the body, so there are two consciousnesses at work in the same body, and sometimes great conflict; sometimes the alien consciousness controls everything, as in the movie *The Exorcist*. So if you correctly understand the kind of sickness and its source, you can cure the body.

When Christ did his healing, his mind energy shone into the minds of the sick people. Everyone has karma. There are two kinds of karma: bad karma and good karma. Some people are born with black skin, some with yellow, some with white; one person is the son of a king, another the son of a thief, another the son of a fool. Who made this? God? Buddha? If you understand this, healing is no problem.

Somebody dies in childhood; somebody else lives too long, so suffers greatly. One person is very rich; another person is a pauper and lives in a state of starvation all his life. Why do things happen this way? This second person may not be a bad person, his mind may be very pure and clear, but his life is misery. Why doesn't God help him? Who made this?

But this is not God's mistake, not Buddha's mistake. All people's lives are made by themselves, from their past lives. So black, yellow, white, rich, poor, long life, short life – all these are caused by actions done in previous lifetimes. Also body sickness, mind sickness, and demon sickness are caused by past actions. People have already planted seeds in the mind garden, and now these seeds have sprouted and come to fruition, so these sicknesses appear. If you have special energy like Christ or Buddha or Pyon Ja, you can understand all people's karma.

Bad karma comes from ignorance weeds in the mind garden. If you pull out the ignorance weeds, then body and mind can easily be cured. Most people don't understand primary cause, dependent origination and result. But if you understand cause and effect, you will be able to fix the whole universe.

So there are three kinds of cure. If you have special energy, medicine is not necessary; you can heal people with your mind power. Next, if you understand the correct way, then you can teach people how to make their bad karma disappear; then they themselves can heal their own bodies. Next, if you neither have special energy nor understand cause and effect, then you can only use medicine. This is not complete; sometimes it works, sometimes not. If you want to understand completely, you must understand what is human, what is truth, what is correct direction.

So I give you three phases:

1. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.
2. No form, no emptiness.
3. Form is form; emptiness is emptiness.

Are these the same or different?

If you say they are the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will still hit you thirty times. What can you do?

If you find the correct answer, you will understand how Christ or Buddha or Pyon Ja could heal people.

I hope you first understand your true self, soon attain Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. From Tahl Mah Sah secretary - There is a chapter in the Zen Master's book (*Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn*, Grove Press, 1976) which discusses miracles and healing – it may interest you to look it. Around #50, I think – a letter called “Miracles.”

Also the proper salutation in letters to the Zen Master is, “Dear Soen Sa Nim.”

Big Sur, May 27, 1977

First day of Yong Maeng Jong Jin in L.A. and Tahl Mah Sah

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

At 5 o'clock this morning, I bowed to you and was with you all there in my thoughts. I am going on feeling close. Now they are chanting – now they are sitting – now Dharma talk is finished – I wish I could be there.

On Wednesday, the day after you had left my house, I came down with a cold. Eight days very, very bad. Could barely take care of myself. Since yesterday, I get up from bed more often. Slow, weak and sweating, but getting well again. I will be strong again for the Kido. I am very grateful to see you and be in your presence once more before your return to the East. Thank you, my friend, my Zen Master, for all you do for us – for me. It was wonderful, your coming to my house with my friends – your students. (I hope the same can happen between the Kido and your return to Los Angeles. I will get a pass for the sulphur baths for us.)

Many things have passed my mind while I was lying here with the fever. I could accept any way this state I was in was going. The knowing of the constant change – everything passes – is liberating. And yes, I experience such knowings in “sections” now and then. It doesn't come together fully for “good” – I mean, for all the time – Enlightenment.

In fact, I am going through deep depressions during the recovery process. What bothers me much, the attitude of Stan. That I cannot trust him. He said, “It suits me fine not to have a good relationship with you” (me). And he is doing bad things to put in the way of a fair resolution of the borderline problems. He is cheating and lying, and entirely suiting himself regardless. And misinterpreting everything I do. – I go on telling myself that it will pass – but man – this is difficult while it lasts. It's been going on for three years.

Like several others in Big Sur, Stan is an “Untouchable” – this is tough territory to live in for a woman who feels responsibility for what she is entrusted with, and yes, some fear to be beaten up again as happened before to me by a neighbor. Sometimes, I want to drop it all and leave. But this is not a way out. It's like taking one's own life. It will pass – of course! It is passing. Bad karma. I have payed heavy karma debts while living on these acres. I wonder what I have been up to in my past lives? – Putting ashes on the Buddha.

Thank you, Soen Sa Nim, for asking me to go to Korea with you. I would like to very much, and I think I will go with you.

How wonderful to see you soon!

Take care of yourself, please!

deep bow to you

Love, Jo

Love to Mu Gak Su Nim, to Linc & Jim & all other friends.

June 6, 1977

Dear Jo, Jin Uwal

How are you? Thank you for your letter. Your stationery is very beautiful.

You said your body was very sick, but now better. I was very happy to hear that. You must take good care of your body. Linc, See Hoy, and Jim enjoyed visiting your house very much. So I thank you again. We just had a big Buddha's Birthday celebration, also Yong Maeng Jong Jin. So I have been busy.

I think you are very strong and a wonderful woman. Also, you are a great Bodhisattva. Many times in lectures to the Korean people here, I tell your story. All Koreans are very afraid of Yong Maeng Jong Jin and Kido. So I say to them, "My students Jo is 67 years old, but she has no problem with young people. Her great faith, great courage, and great practicing is better than the young people's. This is also possible for you, but you think only in your small I. So you are scared and you can't practice. You must learn everything from Jo." So they are very happy. Next Kido, some old Korean women will practice with us. Maybe five people. So your actions are already great Bodhisattva actions. Therefore you are a wonderful student and I am very grateful to you.

Stan and you have a problem. This is not your problem; it's Stan's. So don't worry. If you keep great love and great Bodhisattva mind, then if you see Stan, the mind of great compassion will appear. So slowly, slowly you will be able to give him your great love. Then his bad karma will slowly disappear and the relationship between you will slowly get better. You already understand his karma. So it is possible for you to help him. No problem. You must take away the bad things in his mind. This is correct practice and the great Bodhisattva way.

You sometime check yourself. So your bad karma appears. If you don't check, your bad karma doesn't exist. So I say to you: Only go straight ahead. Don't check your past karma; don't check your future karma; don't keep your present karma. Then this mind is infinite time and space, complete freedom, complete equality.

Here is a kong-an from our visit:

Once, after a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Berkeley, Seung Sahn Soen Sa returned to Los Angeles with three of his students. On the way, they visited Jo's house in Big Sur. Jo has a dog named Brindle. This dog is very clever, always pays attention to Jo, obeys commands, and acts immediately. After being introduced to him, Soen Sa asked him, "Do you have Buddha-nature?"

Brindle said, “Woof! Woof!”

Soen Sa said, “Very good dog! You are better than JoJu Zen Master!”

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon finish your homework, get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

See you soon.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

May 31, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope you are well and somewhat rested – although I heard that you were up until 11:30 every night of the Berkeley Yong Maeng Jong Jin! I hope you are having a good time with our West Coast family. I know how much they love having you there.

We are all fine. The house seems very strong now with Mu Bul Su Nim and Larry painting the house, Mu Ryeom Su Nim working in the kitchen, and Ken helping in the office. Georgie is working very hard at his job, and he works in the garden and helps paint the house on weekends, so he is very busy, everyday. Kim and Drew are also working very hard at their jobs - walking to and from school by themselves, doing their homework, and each week learning more correct action. Now their rooms must be clean before breakfast, their faces washed before dinner, and they are using four bowls at the Zen Center, and have come to chant and sit for ten minutes on Sunday evenings, before the talk.

I am writing to you to tell you that I will stop being Secretary on June 18, when I will leave for a three-week retreat at Jan's cabin. I was going to wait until you got back, but now I am leaving so late in June that it seems silly not to have Ken be the official Secretary while I'm gone (Louise said you said Ken is good). He is already helping Louise in the office, and I am showing him about the kong-ans, but I feel that it is my job to finish the kong-ans I started, so I will type and have printed those from January through April before I go. Please tell Linc that they are coming!

Merrie was here for a visit this weekend. She flew up from Washington on Friday night and left Monday afternoon. She spent most of her time working on the newsletter, typing kong-ans, and reading the new kong-an books. She likes it here very much. She asked if she could have copies of all the new kong-ans, and it struck me that she is so good at editing and typing them that she would be a perfect person to work on the second book. I said something to this effect, but that other people were working on it. She said if you wanted her to, she would be glad to work on it on weekends, and fly up here every now and then to confer with us about it. I think this would be very good for the Zen Center – she would do it, probably within six months, and she understands both your style and correct English. What do you think? I am not sure who is working on it now – Jacob? This is, of course, up to you.

I am very grateful that I have had the opportunity to work with you over the past two years – thank you very much. And I am also grateful for our practice. Lately I have been having bad dreams in which I see all my bad karma, so now I know that I must try, every day, to wake up.

I will be on retreat when you return. I look forward to seeing you when I get back, about July 10. Please take care of yourself.

Respectfully,

Suzie

June 6, 1977

Dear Suzie,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and everyone? In your letter, you said that Mu Bul Su Nim, Larry, Mu Ryeom Su Nim, and Georgie are doing hard training working. This is wonderful. Also, Kim and Drew are doing hard training and coming to Sunday practice. Wonderful. This means you are a good mother.

You are stopping as secretary. So I am a little sad. But I understand your situation. So it's O.K. You have worked very hard, and helped the Zen Center and me very much. I am grateful to you. Thank you very much. About Ken's becoming secretary. This is not for me to decide. You should decide on the next secretary at a directors' meeting. This is my idea.

You say that Merrie likes working on the kong-an book. That's O.K. But I have checked many people as editor of the second book. If there were only the second book, there would be no problem. But there must be continuity between the two books. This is very important. When I return to Providence, we will discuss this at a directors' meeting.

You said that nowadays you are having many bad dreams and also you understand your bad karma and the importance of our practice. That's wonderful. An eminent teacher said, "Good and bad are both my teachers." Also an Oriental proverb says, "If you have a bad dream, you will get happiness." So you will get much happiness. Maybe.

Your retreat is a very good idea. First clean your mind, next disappear your mind. Then get clear mind; then become a great Bodhisattva.

We just had a big Buddha's Birthday celebration. Maezumi Roshi came and gave a congratulation speech, also someone from the International Meditation Center, also the Korean Ambassador, Mr. Pak Sang Doo, a famous man. About 500 people came. This is a small temple, so there was a problem. Big lunch. Now we finished Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

Also, big news: Mu Gak Su Nim is here for a few days after finishing his 100-day retreat; he will return to Berkeley, stay there for a few months, and do another retreat. He stayed in a teepee about three hours north of San Francisco, in the woods. He says he was very cold; then, when the warm weather came, also big biting flies came. So it was hard training with all attachments to comfort. Also, he slept just four hours a night, but this was not so difficult after the first month. He saw all his karma, so it was a powerful experience. Maybe he got great Dharma energy.

I hope you have a good retreat, soon attain Enlightenment and finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

See you soon.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Mu Gak Su Nim says hello to you and Georgie and all the PZC family. Also all the Tahl Mah Sah family say hello.

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Thanks much for your letter. I am very well, confused about the future, but very well.

I could not figure out if I was the same as a tree or different, so finally I went outside (I was on R&R) and asked a tree. No answer. So I went to another tree and asked. Green needles, gray bark, spring mud.

There is a possibility that I may get a teaching position at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, in the fall. One of the courses I would be required to teach is "The Hindu-Buddhist Tradition," and I am much concerned with how to present Buddhism. Buddhism is primarily an "experience," yet a vast literature has grown up within and without Buddhism. Much of it is very powerful (at least, I find it so). Yet, I don't want the students to become ensnarled in this "finger" and miss the moon. I am not a Zen Master (I am not even a Buddhist?), so I cannot enlighten them or show them the tanglings of their minds. Do you have any suggestions as to how I should approach the topic? So far, I have settled on an historical approach, emphasizing the life of the Buddha as the fountainhead of all Buddhism.

Enclosed is the promised tape of "Tundra." It is only on one channel (the other channel was accidentally erased), but since the piece is for two to five performers (any instruments), the one-channel version is as legitimate as a two-channel version. This recording uses a 'cello and tenor recorder.

I want to take the five precepts because I believe it will help me become a Buddhist, will help transform my character and therefore the universe at large. One has to begin somewhere. I find that most people who try to help others more often than not do great harm. But, perhaps, I can begin helping others by seeing more clearly things as they are. If the above sounds confusing, it is because I *am* confused. I don't know exactly what to do, so how can I "go straight"?

The Heart Sutra is marvelous. Thank you for sending it. I read it every day, sometimes several times. Often, I chant it (a chant simply occurred to me one day while reading it).

Yours in Dharma,

James

June 6, 1977

Dear James,

How are you? Thank you for your letter and the wonderful tape. I heard your tape and understood your mind and your karma.

In your letter, you said you are confused about the future but very well. Next, you asked the trees about same or different. But you don't understand what is human, what is tree, what is future. So I will tell you. The Heart Sutra says, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." If you completely understand this, then you will understand future and human and tree. Then is the tree form or emptiness? Are you form or emptiness? Is the future form or emptiness? If you say form I will hit you. If you say emptiness, I will still hit you. What can you do? This is the first course.

If you don't understand Buddhism, then being only a tape-recorder style teacher is good. If you understand Buddhism, then giving your students the experience is possible. Most university professors are like tape-recorders. Many books into their minds, turn on the switch; the books come out. But if you want to teach correctly, first you must understand your true self. So I ask you: What are you? If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know, always and everywhere.

You want to take the Five Precepts. That is a very good idea. Please ask our Providence Zen Center director, Louise Stanton, to send you information.

You like the Heart Sutra. This sutra is the essence of all sutras. In English, there are many words to it, but in Chinese, it is only 260 characters long. The meaning of these 260 characters is the meaning of all the sutras. You must correctly understand the Heart Sutra's meaning. If you don't understand, again ask a tree. The tree will teach you the Heart Sutra's meaning. Only understanding the words is no good. You must understand the true meaning. This is very necessary.

I hope you always go straight – don't know, keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get a correct answer from a tree, finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 16, 1977

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

Thank you for your last letter. You were able to understand that much from a short piece of music? At first this surprised me, but then I realized that I probably know more about what kind of person J.S. Bach was by listening to his music than I know about Aristotle by reading his *Metaphysics*.

I will work on your question. I must admit to being stumped. So for now, I'll just let it rest in my mind, relax with it.

I am presently working on a setting of the “Fire sermon.” I plan to use the *Heart Sutra* simultaneously during the work.

The teaching position at the University of Alaska fell through due to lack of funding, and I’m glad. I will be moving to Seattle in July, where I have been accepted for post-graduate work at the University of Washington. I will be majoring in Asian Languages and will be studying Japanese intensively for a year.

Are you still going to Korea in the fall? Sounds wonderful. Hope you have a great time.

Yours in the Dharma,

James

P.S. I have written to Ms. Stanton. Thank you.

June 3, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I'm writing because I feel really awful. I feel like a monster, crawling with karma. What can I do? If sitting Zen is correct practice, then why am I so miserable?

Should I continue to sit? I am skipping a lot now, and when I sit, I am full of anger and venom. The anger makes my performance stronger, but it is anger, not me, that is doing that, so it is not satisfying.

Someone once said that ignorance is bliss. Maybe blissful ignorance is not such a bad deal. I have contempt for ignorance because I want to be smart. Maybe sitting Zen is just me trying for ultimate smartness and I should give the whole thing up.

I am hoping that all this pain means that I am making great progress, but I don't believe it. And what is progress, anyway? Out of a whole mountain, maybe two or three shovelfulls gone? I don't know. And it's not even correct

DON'T KNOW 

it's just *don't* KNOW.

Your student,

Sheldon

P.S. You probably don't know me by name, so I'll describe myself: I sat at the last two Yong Maeng Jong Jins in New Haven. I wore blue pants with YALE on them, and you asked me to work on your tapes (I am doing that). I am a young man with brown hair. I am tall. We have corresponded once before about the kong-an of the man in the tree (I have no answer now). When you write back, please let me know if it's necessary for me to continue describing myself if I write to you again. For me, it's no problem to do it.

Your student,

Sheldon

June 14, 1977

Dear Sheldon,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I know you. You are the young man from Yale, who helped very much at the Zen Center in New Haven. We just finished a three-day Kwan Sae Um Bosal Kido at Big Sur. It was very wonderful. Everybody got special energy and became pure and clean.

In the last letter I told you don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; then, you can see your karma. But if you check your mind, check your feelings, then your karma controls you. That is very important. If you don't check anything, then you can see your karma. Then, your karma becoming clear is possible. If you can see your karma, then your karma becomes small, small, small, then becomes clear. If your karma becomes clear it is possible to help other people, so your karma must change to great Bodhisattva Karma.

You don't know sitting Zen, so I say to you: Only go straight. This is correct Zen. This means: cut everything, keeping non-moving mind is sitting; getting clear mind is Zen. Maybe you are attached to body-sitting, so sometimes you are angry. That is not correct sitting Zen. Any body position is no problem. Moment to moment, how you keep, keep just-now mind is very important. Ignorance, anger, desire, coming or going, you must not worry about it, you must perceive. Don't touch your karma; don't hold your karma; only go straight – don't know.

I ask you: What is don't know? You already understand. Don't make anything; then you will get everything. You must soon finish your homework. That is very important.

I hope you always keep don't know everywhere, make your karma clear, soon get enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 11, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope your visit in California is going well. We all miss you and look forward to your coming back. As you can guess, I'm not on my retreat yet. I found out yesterday that the nursing home will not have a place for my mother until July. Since they keep on changing their plans, I cannot make solid plans for the next couple of months.

I wrote to David Gerber yesterday and asked him for the letters he has for your second book. I will simply do what I can until I can go to my retreat.

Soen Sa Nim, it's been raining every day for the past few days. The local farmers are very happy. See you soon.

Love,

Jacob

June 19, 1977

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your mother? In your letter, you said your mother cannot go to the nursing home until July. That's O.K. Retreat or no retreat, your mother going to the nursing home or not going to the nursing home, don't worry. What is important is moment to moment, how you keep just-now mind.

Did you get the third degree belt from the Shim Gum Do School? I know your hear and your words and your action. Everybody has opinions, speech, and action, but some persons' actions are separate. Then, we say that those persons are persons with much thinking. For another person the three actions become one. Then, we say that those people are not thinking and are simple persons. If you become a simple person then in any place, any situation, there is no problem.

Nobody guarantees your life from moment to moment. If you keep only go straight, that is true retreat, true helping your mother, true helping other people. Its name is great love, great Bodhisattva way.

Did you finish your homework? If not, you must do it! 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.

June 15, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you very much for your reply to my letter. It was a great unexpected gift.

I am fine, and I hope you are quite well, too.

My just now mind is a little rounder and softer than it used to be, and I sit fairly regularly. There are many distractions here in Boulder, and I am not yet as self-disciplined as I should be. I understand to some degree what you said about the presence of death, and I realize there is no choice any more doing Zazen.

Diana, whom you also met in Cambridge, and I both miss the Zen Center there, where we stayed for only one week. She is now in Oakland, and I will be there, too, after summer. I'm glad there is a new Zen Center there, and I hope you will be able to visit sometimes. But all this is future; I apologize.

I am studying at Naropa Institute here in Boulder, where there is much talk about Buddhism. Many people seem to be fascinated or confused or both. Tibetan Buddhism is very colorful and "interesting." And the attempt to fruitfully link Buddhist understanding with our Western psychology and psychotherapy is very interesting to me. But there is also very strong emphasis on meditation practice and being responsible for one's own karmic situation.

If I may say so, Soen Sa Nim, there is one thing that bothers me. There is so much wondering about various gurus and masters. Is so-and-so really enlightened? Is such-and-such Buddhist teaching – which sounds like absurd nonsense – really true? – such as Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*. There is much pain in this understandable search, though somehow it might be better just to sit.

I am anxious to practice with other Zen students, but in the meantime, I will do my best to keep a dragon's eye on my affairs and be kind to myself and others.

Thank you for being here.

Sheldon

P.S. My practice, which you gave me in Cambridge, is to realize "clear mind" on the in-breath, and "don't know" on the out-breath. I will continue with this unless you should tell me otherwise.

June 19, 1977

Dear Sheldon,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? You said in your letter there are many distractions in Boulder and you said you understand that you have no choice but to do Zazen. That is wonderful! An eminent teacher once said, "Our mind goes around and around and around. That 'around' place is truth." If you don't check this "around place" and you perceive your true nature, then there is no good or bad. This is bliss. So you must not worry about anything. Only go straight.

What is Zazen? Za means correct sitting. Correct sitting means to cut off all thinking. Keeping not-moving mind is sitting. Zen means to become clear. So sit means correct meditation; Zen means becoming clear and having true cognition. Correct practicing is when correct meditation and correct cognition become one.

Since Diana is now living in Oakland and you will also be moving there after the summer, you might be interested in knowing there is a group of people in the Berkeley area who practice regularly and are contemplating starting a Zen Center. A current newsletter will be mailed you with their address.

Also, you said that Tibetan Buddhism is colorful and interesting. Is this correct? Tibetan and Korean Buddhism are similar. There are four gates. First, there is the Sutra Gate; second, there is the Yom Bul Gate, which means repeating the Buddha's or a Bodhisattva's name. Next, there is the Mantra Gate; then, there is the Zen Meditation Gate.

Each gate is different, but inside the gate, if you find the Buddha Hall, the direction is the same. But many people are attached to the gate and cannot find the Buddha Hall and the correct Buddha. All the gate is is first keeping one mind, next attaining one mind, next throwing away one mind. Then you can see, you can hear that just like this is the truth, so you don't need Buddha Hall, don't need Buddha. Then it is possible to help other people.

Also, you said in your letter that the link between Buddhism and Western psychology is very interesting. Yah, this is correct, but most important is from where does the primary point come? So, an eminent teacher said, "Ten thousand dharmas return to one." This means any Western philosophy or psychology, Eastern philosophies, all religions come from one, but where does this one come from? This is most important. If you don't understand ONE and say it is only interesting, you are attached to this word and don't understand the true meaning. So I ask you: That Original One, from where does it come?

You said all the wondering about correct teachings, various gurus and masters bothers you. What are you? If you don't understand, only go straight – don't know. Always and everywhere, this don't-know mind is better than a Zen Master, better than Buddha. If you want the true way, this is already a mistake. In Buddhism, there is no true way. Any religion cannot help you. Moment to moment, how you keep just-now mind is very important. Put it all down; only go straight – don't know. Then this don't know has already cut all thinking, is before all thinking. Then your mind is clear like space. If your mind is clear like space, it is clear like a mirror. Red comes; there is red; white comes; there is white. Only just like this. When you see the sky, only blue; when you see the tree, only

green. There is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Inside and outside become one, so the sky is blue; the tree is green; just like this is truth. This truth you already have, but if you make something, you lose your way. So don't make anything; then you will get everything. So I say to you: Only go straight – don't know! Don't know is better than Buddha, better than God, better than all Zen Masters, better than everything.

I hope you always keep don't-know mind, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

June 17, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Just a letter to thank you again for a fine Kido and for sharing our house with us afterwards. I love you dearly. The Korean ladies were a joy also.

We had 21 people come Wednesday night and Mu Gak Su Nim gave a good Dharma talk. He is a good teacher – a monk – I don't know yet.

Diana certainly did a fine job of organization, and we had a lot of good help from Gillian, Chris, and all the participants of the Kido.

I don't know what will happen in the future, but the path I'm on seems right to me and I'm just following my commitment. I have fears of being a Dharma Teacher – that I'll hit the moktak at the wrong time or forget the words of the chanting or that I'm not serious enough. These are hindrances that I know I must put down.

Diana seems to get concerned that something more definite isn't happening, while I feel it is just a matter of time and involving whatever it is that is happening at our house.

Mu Gak Su Nim and Ben Williams are planning to rent the apartment downstairs when it becomes vacant August first, and that will be a help.

Speaking of August first, that is your birthday – fiftieth, I believe? An auspicious birthday, one's fiftieth. Diana gave me a surprise party and rounded up a lot of old friends, etc. I will never forget that one! I don't think we'll see you then – but who knows? Have a good one!

I am looking forward with eager anticipation to visit Korea and Japan with you and hope that we will be able to visit and stay at temples as planned. It will be quite an experience.

I will keep on with my practice and homework and say goodbye for now.

Ezra

June 21, 1977

Dear Ezra,

How are you? Thank you for your beautiful letter. I also think we had a very good Kido. The Korean students loved your family and your house, so they say, "Thank you very much."

It is wonderful that 21 people came to sit and that Mu Gak Su Nim gave a good Dharma talk. In the future the Berkeley Zen Center will become famous. It is already famous. I tell other people that Ezra and Diana practice hard and have made their home a Zen Center. This is great faith, great courage and great practicing. So I say to you, you are a wonderful man!

It is wonderful that Diana does a good job and that you are thinking of becoming a Dharma Teacher, but don't be afraid of becoming a Dharma Teacher and don't think about moktak practicing. Only go straight; then there will be no problem. Using the moktak and being a Dharma Teacher are not difficult. If you find it difficult, you must only Try, Try, Try, then automatically the moktak and your chanting, being a Dharma Teacher and your actions will become one.

Diana's karma and your karma are very good. Diana has quick and strong karma; you have slow and complete karma; thus both coming together makes for a very good job. Mu Gak Su Nim's staying downstairs is not good, not bad, but sometimes a good situation cannot help everyone.

Thank you very much for wishing me a good birthday, but you made birthday, so you have birthday. I was never born, so I have no birthday. You already understand.

I also hope we'll have a good trip and share many good experiences in Japan and Korea.

You must keep clear mind, only go straight, soon finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Saturday, June 18, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Enclosed are copies of the letters I have just sent to Mr. Park of Global Travel and to the list of people you gave me who wish to go on our trip with us. As you will read, I have asked for sizable deposits by July 15th, so that we can know exactly who can go, let the waiting list people know, etc. These are the people I have sent them to: Dave, Andrea, Tom (New Haven), Maggie, Jo, Sherry and Lawlor, Ezra and me. That comes out to ten, with you. Jo says that you mentioned to Dr. Lee about coming and someone mentioned Semi, plus there is Jim and his brother. I am therefore enclosing extra copies (5) for these people for you to give or send them if you wish. Do you still want me to contact Joan? If ten is the best number so that we can stay in the temples, then this must be decided first.

I am also enclosing the three rolls of prints plus all the negatives. They came out very well, don't you think? Even the ones I thought I had ruined because I did not set the "A" and "M" button! When you have finished with the negatives, could you send them back to me so that I can make some prints for our scrap book?

Thank you so much for all the ways you have been with us during the past weeks. The Kido was wonderful (I hope Kwan Sae Um Bosal has given you back your voice by now!), and it was a special privilege to share that and Monday with the Korean women. Please give them all my love. I hope Dr. Lee can come on our trip!

So many good things have happened in our lives since meeting you – I feel especially grateful for all the ways you have given me to function, to work, to put my energy.

I hope you have a good and relaxing summer and that Louise and Bobby really do make you rest!!

My heart is very full. You already understand!

Love,

Diana

P.S. Ezra and I are going on a trip to Oregon Monday (June 20) and will return next Sunday. Part of it will be spent on a raft going down a river!

KWAN SAE UM BOSAL !!

June 22, 1977

Dear Diana,

Thank you for your letter and the pictures. Your organization for the Korean trip is very wonderful and it is good that you sent out copies of the information to everyone. I'll give Dr. Lee and Semi the information, but I don't know where Jim is, so when I meet him, I'll give it to him. We'll decide on the exact number of people going after July 15th.

The Korean people like the pictures very much and want many. I'll be going to Providence Saturday (first to Chicago). I'll have the prints made in Providence, so it will be a little while before I can return them to you. I also thought that one roll of film was ruined, but all the rolls were good. You are a great camera-woman; thank you very much.

All the Korean people liked your home, and because of your kindness, thank you very much. They would like to have a Kido again together.

You always try Kwan Sae Um Bosal, so already my voice has returned. Thank you very much. You said you and Ezra are going to Oregon and will spend some time on a raft going down the river. Have a good time!

I think the Korean and Japan trip is wonderful and we'll have many good experiences. I have a good feeling about it, and many people are excited. I will return to L.A. approximately August 20th.

Tahl Mah Sah is moving the end of July, hopefully to a house on 6th and Hobart costing about \$185,000. It is very high, so we would like to lower the price. If we move there, the Korean Dharma Room and the Zendo will be separate, so in the future, Yong Maeng Jong Jins at Tahl Mah Sah will not be a problem.

I hope you always go straight – Kwan Sae Um Bosal, soon get special energy, finish the Great Work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

KWAN SAE UM BOSAL

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. When I return to the East Coast, I will say hello to everyone for you.

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

I met you briefly at the Buddhist Institute at Esalen Institute last year. In seeking to know who *I* am, I have experienced a something like a skin falling away, receding from my vision. This dis-discovery of my *I as an Eye* is both en-lightening and disorienting. A person told me this is a direct experience of the globular eye and an attribute of the Buddha. I do not know about such things.

I experience myself as becoming invisible, disappearing, becoming no-thing. I am about to vanish all the time. When people are talking to me, I don't know who they are talking to, because there is no one there in the space they are talking to. I want to give them the love, compassion, and understanding they long for, hoping that someone is listening, but there is no one here.

I find it difficult to accept my "en-lightenment" – the greater Eye that I am – and am torn between this new "Eye on the world" and others, and my need to survive in accord with the game of life as it is played by others and the world. Who are these people and the world? I don't know what to do with myself – the new one or the old one. Who is it that knows? I don't know. Please answer me – I need some help.

Yours in eternal ignorance,

Neil

P.S. Will you come to Maui and give a retreat for us?

P.P.S. Please send me your newsletter.

July 7, 1977

Dear Neil,

How are you? Thank you for your letter.

I know you; I heard about you from Diana Clark. I have not seen you in a long time. Many of the Jin family have come to the Providence Zen Center. Also, I have gone to Big Sur and done chanting retreats with some of them. If you have time, I hope you will come practice with us.

You say you have had an experience in your practice. Your practicing is not good, not bad. Don't check your practicing. This means don't check yourself, your mind, your feeling. If you check, you have a problem. If you have a problem, it is not the correct way.

Many people have a feeling like skin falling away. It is like an onion: layer after layer falls away, then finally nothing. But being attached to this feeling of nothing is very dangerous.

If you have nothing, then what kind of “Eye” do you have? Eye comes from where? There are three kinds of eyes: form eyes, karma eyes, and Dharma eyes. Form eyes can only see and understand color. Karma eyes are globular eyes, understand-the world eyes, and like-and-dislike eyes. Dharma eyes are your original eyes. Original means no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. It is like camera lens eyes. You can see just this is truth. When you see the sky, only blue; when you see the tree, only green. No feeling, no globular understanding the world; inside and outside become one. You and the universe become one. So no feeling is big feeling. Understanding cannot help you. You must attain your Dharma eyes.

So I ask you: There are three kinds of eyes: form, karma, and Dharma eyes. Are they the same or different? If you say same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say different, I will hit you thirty times. What can you do?

If you practice a lot, you can perceive your experience just like drinking water. When you drink water, you can understand if it is hot or cold. So you understand the feeling. But if you become attached to feeling, it is very dangerous. So I say to you: Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check your practicing. Only go straight – what are you? If you don't understand, only don't know. Always, everywhere.

So I give you homework.

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

JoJu said, “Have you had breakfast?”

“Yes, I have,” the monk replied.

“Then,” said JoJu, “wash your bowls.”

The monk was enlightened.

What did the monk attain?

If you understand, no problem. But if you don't understand, then only go straight – don't know. Don't make anything; don't hold anything; then you will get everything.

I hope you always keep 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. Aitken Roshi, my good friend, is teaching in Hawaii. His address is R.R. I, Box 220, Maui, Hawaii 96708. Sometime, visit his Zen Center and practice with them. He is a good Zen Master.

P.P.S. You have been put on the mailing list for our Newsletter.