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WOODFISH

The Diamond Sutra's Elimination of Karma

(Hits floor with Zen stick)

The speech and words of all Buddhas, Boddhisatvas, and great masters come from this point.

(Hits floor with Zen stick)

All Buddhas' and Boddhisatvas' and great Zen masters' speech also returns to this point.

(Hits floor with Zen stick)

Speech and words and this point, are they the same or different?

KATZ!!!

In the evening a wooden chicken is crowing.

In the sky the bright moon is shining.

I thank you all for coming.

Tonight we will take a look at case ninety-seven in the kong-an collection called the Blue Cliff Record. The title of the case is "The Diamond Sutra's Extinction of Sinful Karma." The case itself says:

"The Diamond Sutra says, 'If one is scorned and disdained by others, this person has made sinful karma in previous lives, which will bring him down into the evil realms, but because of the scorn and disdain by others in the present life, the sinful karma of previous lives is thereby extinguished.'"



Zen Master Wu Kwang

The kong-an is a direct quote from the Diamond Sutra. It refers to three things: karma, an allusion to the Diamond Sutra itself, and the transformational power of insult.

The word karma is connected with action—action and reaction, or, cause and effect. This notion of cause and effect is based on the concept of dependent origination: the origin of all things is dependent on many other things.

The simplest formulation of dependent origination is "Because of this, that. Because of that, this." Whatever we encounter is dependent on many other things. For example, if you look at a flower, the Diamond Sutra states "A flower is not a flower and therefore we can call it a flower". This is because the flower is made of many non-flower elements such as the sun, the earth, the water, the gardener who tended it, and so on. Previous conditions generate the flower.

In Buddhism, you can find two ways of representing things. One is that everything is changing moment by moment. The other is that everything is complete as it is. If you watch a movie, it *appears* that there is movement going on, but if you stop the film you see just a series of individual complete representations or images, one frame at a time.

The "movement" representation is connected with dependent origination. Some past something gives rise to something in the present, that gives rise to something in the future. If you plant corn seed this year, corn will come up next year. The second "complete" representation means that each thing is just as it is, and is not dependent on something else that has changed into what is now. Moment by moment, each thing is complete and is an expression of original nature.

If you can look at something, and view it from both perspectives, then you see the whole truth. But if you only see form and movement, then you miss the completeness of each moment.

What we do now gives rise to certain conditions and causes. Because every primary cause is not necessarily going to bear fruit in a short period of time, the notion of reincarnation emerges: many causes will take many lifetimes to come to fruition.

continued on page 2

Elimination of Karma *continued*

There is value to that way of looking at things: if you see that what you do now is the cause of what you reap later, then you are responsible for yourself. However, just because karma implies self-responsibility, it doesn't mean you look at someone else's suffering and say, "Well, that's their karma and I've nothing to do with that." *Your* karma at that moment is that causes and conditions have generated the interaction with this other suffering or needy being. The question is, how will you respond? So this section of the Diamond Sutra (used as a kong-an here) is referred to as the section on transforming wrongdoing and becoming enlightened.

Based on this section of the sutra "if one is scorned and disdained by others", if you receive all

kinds of insults from others, "this person has made sinful karma in previous lives", which should make you be reborn as less than a human being. "But because of the scorn and disdain of others in this life, the sinful karma of past lives is extinguished." You are free.

The sutra keeps referring to karma. This section says, "...has made sinful karma," "sinful karma will be expiated," But the essence of the sutra is that all forms are empty. So, karma is also empty.

If karma is also dependent on many other things and is empty of its own self-nature, then just now, where does karma come from?

Open your mouth, already a mistake. ■



MEMORIAL POEM TO ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR DEATH

Buddha saw a star and got enlightenment.
You on the other hand went to Ma Gok Sa temple,
Sought out a small hermitage on a high mountain,
Ate pine needles and practiced the Great Dharani
for One hundred days non stop.
(How foolish! You could have injured your body
or lost your mind.)

Thank you.

There you got something and never looked back.

For fifty years you offered Jo Ju's tea
Carried Unmun's shit stick,
Shouted Lin Chi's Katz,
Administered Dok Sahn's thirty blows and only
Taught Don't know; resting the minds of numerous students
East West North and South.

It's hard to believe you've been gone for a year.
Sometimes I think of your smile or the various hats you wore, or your warm
sense of humor, or your unique use of the English language
and I smile and shed a tear.

But tell me, Where did you go?
KATZ!

In the heat of a Singapore afternoon and the cold of the early
morning frost at Providence Zen Center, Your teaching is ever present.

With gratitude,

Wu Kwang

First Anniversary Memorial Poem

Now that you're gone
When I have a question
I ask a tree
How have you been
Spending your time?
Leaves return to earth
In crisp November air

Ken Kessel

► *From The Editorial Cushion*

Our center is located above a busy intersection in New York City. It can be beset by loud noises not only from the street, but also from within the building itself. At times, even aviation noises can be heard clearly and they also may seem loud and intrusive. The din can be decidedly alarming.

In addition, there are also smells that waft up invitingly from the bagel shop downstairs. All the senses seem to be assailed while we silently sit. Sometimes, after visitors from other Zen Centers practice with us, they comment on the apparent difficulties of practicing in a big city, on how hard it is to sit still in such surroundings.

Our practice consists of "moment-to-moment just-do-it". Although to those used to the quietness of "country" meditation the center may appear detrimental to the practice, it represents the reality of the big city and, as such, offers many opportunities to confront the question "What am I?" When we leave the center we come face to face with ourselves in an almost constant stream of opportunities.

If "Zen mind is everyday mind", then the minutiae of our practice appears in many ways, some of them very clear and "in your face", others subtle and even mysterious. These chances can be our startled recognition that we missed our train stop because of day dreaming; of confronting "Great Wisdom, Great Compassion" when we are approached by an obviously demented person; of encountering living kong-ans that demand a commitment to an immediate clear response.

How do we keep moment-to-moment "Don't Know" mind, correct relationship, correct function and correct situation? New York City can be a great teacher because its teeming life intersects our own in a constant stream of teaching, sometimes easy, at other times stressful if not downright harsh. We are lucky, of course, that we live at a time and in a place where extremes of violence or severe distress are relatively rare for us and our loved ones. However, as 9/11 proved, our lives can be swept up in incomprehensible and incredible events. This fact begs the question of how Zen practice approaches extremely difficult situations, such as found in war zones or natural disaster areas. Is it the same or different?

We are, for better or worse, stuck in New York City. Is it our karma that landed us in this cauldron? Is this why I can't cross First Avenue because a timorous driver insists on damming the stream of pedestrians with his SUV? Yo, big guy! Close your eyes and go!

Here are some examples of our members' experiences.

Guillermo Echanique

When my oldest son Micah was very small, my family went to Richard's house for a meal. Afterwards, Richard and I went out with my son, in a front-pack, and his son David, then about 13, to look for a pair of sneakers for David. We found a skateboard store on the way to the West Village that had a pair of checkered Converse sneakers that caught David's eye but nothing else, really, and David decided they were kind of weird, so we pressed on. We went through the East Village, the Lower East Side, the West Village and part of Soho, in and out of every sneaker and shoe store that we ran into. David got to pick the stores, pick the shoes, look at them and decide about them. Naturally, none of the stores had

exactly what he wanted. We walked around like this for hours, and finding nothing, eventually headed back home. I was impressed with Richard's attitude about this and happy for the company and something different to do, but I wondered, when my son got to be that age, if I'd be as patient about the whole thing. We also both knew on some level the potential for the whole thing to make us both crazy, and somehow, we were able to laugh about it. On the way back, we passed by the skateboard store, and David asked to go in again. Naturally, he was interested in the checkered Con's again, and naturally, within five minutes, we were walking out of the store with them.

Ken Kessel

FY Bosal

Several years ago, I did Kwan Seum Basal mantra practice whenever I walked around New York City, to help me stay focused, and to take advantage of this "unused time" to save all beings from suffering. One day as I was absorbed in my chanting practice, I stepped into a busy intersection, and a cab driver (who understood his correct job) sped into the intersection and nearly ran me over. Without missing a beat in my chanting, I handled the situation in true New York style: "Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, F*** YOU BOSAL, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal . . ." At that moment, I had a sobering insight into the depth of my loving intentions towards all beings. However, with time I have come to understand this incident a little differ-

ently. I have realized that in a tense, overcrowded city like New York where inadvertent collisions are commonplace, F*** You Bosal (FYB) performs an important function. The ritualized shouting of FYB's name provides a satisfying release of anger, which allows us to walk away from situations that could otherwise escalate into more serious confrontations. Of course, as with any practice form, skill is needed to use FYB's special method to help all beings. For example, if you observe closely, you'll see that New Yorkers usually cast a quick glance at their intended target before invoking FYB's name. If the offending party is six foot seven, muscular, and covered with tattoos, a different style is invariably used.

Paul Majchrzyk

I was sitting on the subway once on the way to the Zen Center. There was a man in the corner of the car, apparently homeless. He was wearing a ragged overcoat and dirty shirt and pants and had a scraggly beard. He was muttering to himself, staring at the ceiling. I thought that I shouldn't judge, but he seemed unfortunately to be mentally ill.

Then he pulled a pen and small notepad out of his coat pocket and started to write. There, I thought, I was right not to judge him. He is probably a sensitive thinker despite his sad situation. He went on muttering, stopping occasionally to write energetically,

squeezing his pen hard against the notepad, pounding a period down every now and then.

As the train continued, he tore off one page after another. What could he be writing, I wondered? Was it poetry, a journal, his thoughts about the homeless life? How far he now seemed from the crazy person I at first thought him to be. But we shall never know the content of his writings, because after filling three pages, he stuffed them into a little ball and plopped it into his mouth and began chewing. I got off soon after.

Jan Potemkin

I was eating in the coffee shop next to our Center when a woman came in, hopping on one foot. “I just came off the bus and hurt my ankle,” she said, “it really hurts.” Because I am a physical therapist, I immediately started a quick mental evaluation of her problem. “It probably is an anterior talo-fibular ligament sprain. It could also be a fracture but did I see her step on the foot or not? If she cannot step at all it

is probably a fracture, etc.” The woman was still complaining: “It hurts, I gotta go to the emergency room.” I speculated this was a good idea because she would get an x-ray, be casted if needed and given crutches. Just then, a man who had been sitting nearby got up, picked her up and took off in the direction of Beth Israel’s ER three blocks away. “Wake up, Willie!”

Guillermo Echanique

Meditating in the city has its natural and necessary place for New Yorkers like me. What else is there for us except to wash our bowls as the fire engines howl by? Rural retreats are not as quiet as photos suggest. Squirrels quarreling on the roof and blue jays squawking are not pleasing to me, a city boy.

At six AM, the city is usually quiet except for the occasional car alarm or backfiring truck. I cannot see the difference between natural and man-made distractions most of the time. Sometimes these ‘distractions’ are what wake me up from my own inner distraction or nodding off. The jolt or annoyance is, to me, a sign that I was not really paying attention to the acceptance of the man-made sounds of my self and the town.

City sitting can also be quite delightful. The source of this attitude came from my own practice. During an intense Japanese Rinzai retreat in a quiet area of Philadelphia, every afternoon the mailman signaled his coming and going by whistling show tunes. His warbling was as delightful as any birdsong heard on a rural retreat.

On my return home from that retreat, I was exhilarated. No one was home so I pulled out a cushion. Upon resuming my sitting, I entered into a deep concentration. As I sat there, the summer neighborhood noises entered the wide-open window. The sound of the boom box was in the air and that warbling, too, entered. A convertible with blaring speakers now came by with its super-thumping bass. I was ready to get annoyed as my perfect sitting was about to be disrupted.

Then, somehow, a merengue dance beat began to measure my breathing. Probably one of the beats in the tune matched my breathing. Whatever happened, merengue became part of my meditation. If a student complained to me about most city sounds, my reply would be, “Learn how to dance.”

Perhaps American Zen will provide us with city kong-ans: A garbage truck collecting a 30-story building’s garbage and your mind, same or different?

Richard Kahn

It was a chilly, “NYCity gray” day less than 5 days into Spring. When my turn came and I went into the interview room. ZM Wu Kwang asked if I had a question. In the Dharma combat spirit I asked, “It is Spring so where is the grass?” referring to ZM Seung Sahn’s saying, “Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.” Soen Sa chuckled in his inimitable way and

said, “In the Park.” I laughed, “Oh, I have not been to the park.” On the way home, I walked through Union Square Park and low and behold, there were not only new sprigs of grass but daffodils as well. Only in the concrete canyons of New York City could we have had this conversation.

Trish O’Sullivan



When I look back on the life in the New York City Zen Center, the Center reminds me of Zen Master Seji's very long sitting (probably 30 years). It seems to me that Zen Master Wu Kwang gave a Dharma talk about him or perhaps I read the story somewhere.

Zen Master Seji was asked to establish a monastery in a remote mountain that was donated by a prominent layperson. By the time the Zen Master arrived, there were already several monks in the mountain. Ironically, as time passed, most of monks began to leave. Why? It was because they didn't understand how wonderful Zen Master Seji's teaching was, not because he was not a great teacher.

Han Shan Downtown

Whoever takes 14th Street
Takes a street that never ends:
Garbage bags spill across sidewalks,
Puddles of slush, buses salty spray:
It's not the icy wind
That makes you pull the cap around your ears
It's not faraway fires
That make sirens scream.

Who will get past the tangles of the world
And sit with me,
In the air conditioner's hum?

Richard Kahn

Finally, the last disciple left him as well. Zen Master Seji decided to leave the mountain because the precepts prohibited him from practicing alone. At that very moment, a tiger appeared and asked him to stay and teach, because he (the tiger) was also a sentient being. Some years later, people gathered like clouds to watch the miracle of a monk practicing with a tiger.

Likewise, practicing like rock and mountain, keeping the Great Question like a flying arrow, we will see clearly the blue mountain of New York City while we sit with a tiger.

Okhee Kim

Untitled

In the city:
Blaring sirens,
Honking horns,
Roaring engines,
Everywhere people.
So...
How do you practice?

In the country:
Singing birds,
Rustling leaves,
Silent clouds,
Nowhere people.
So...
Why do you practice?

Colin Beavan



Happy Birthday, Steve! And thanks for your teaching.

Steven Cohen MD, is abbot of the Chogye International Zen Center of New York. He has been a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn since 1974.

Before moving to New York in 1984, he was a founding member of the New Haven Zen Center where he served as administrative director (1975-79) and head dharma teacher (1979-84). He became a senior dharma teacher in 1999 and received inka on April 6, 2002, certifying him as a Ji Do Poep Sa Nim. Cohen JDPSN is Professor and Chief of Dermatology, Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Steve and Phyllis Cohen have been married for 37 years; they have two children.

Twice National Champion (1966-67) and a member of the US Olympic Team 1968, he was inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame in 1991. In February, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education held a ceremony in Chicago at which Steve became the first dermatologist ever to receive the Parker J. Palmer "Courage to Teach Award."

60th Birthday Poem for Steve Cohen, JDPSN 4/28/06

Willie ordered a poem
For the abbot
On short notice

If it can't be said immediately
It can't be said

The man who never sleeps
Doesn't need to wake up
If you can get him to nap
You have true power

Ken Kessel

Photo: Guillermo Echanique

ROBO BUDDHA

When Providence Zen Center sent out an e-mail asking if any Zen center was interested in a large Buddha, I immediately responded, saying yes, the Three Treasures Center of Oneonta would love to have a Buddha. I soon received a message back from Ji Hang Su Nim, stating I was too late. The Buddha had been given to the Cape Cod Zen Center, but there might be a chance to get another one, just like it. That one was broken, but would be repaired before I picked it up. Was I interested in having it? I didn't hesitate in answering, "Oh yes, oh yes, please!"

We planned on meeting at the Cambridge Zen Center where she would give me directions to Wellsley College, which is where the Buddha was being stored. I was so excited! I tried to picture what this Buddha would look like. Did he or she represent Shakyamuni Buddha, Kwan Seum Bosal, or perhaps some other gold-leafed beauty? Several members of the sangha wished to see the Buddha, so off we went. We arrived at the college and after a brief tour, we went to the chapel. There sat a large Buddha, in a cardboard box covered with plastic.

I looked at the unwrapped Buddha and then, at all the people who had come to see it. I saw looks of disappointment and then humor. I said, it must be Robo Buddha! I had never seen such a harsh looking Buddha. He had really sharp angular features with high cheek bones and hollow cheeks. Someone turned to me and said, "Don't leave him on the side of the road anywhere near here!" We laughed and packed the Buddha in the car, placing a seatbelt on him, and off we went

Suddenly, at some point in the trip, I realized I had a strong attachment to pretty and ugly. I looked in the rear view mirror and tears came to my eyes. My friend said, "This Buddha has good energy," and I

agreed. I realized I had a great teacher sitting in the back seat of my car.

When we arrived home we took the Buddha out of the car and placed him in the garage. I began to wonder what I was going to do with my new Buddha as we do not yet have a permanent home for our center. It seemed disrespectful to leave the Buddha in the garage, until I could find the right space.

There is a Tibetan Buddhist Retreat Center near my house with several resident monks and nuns, and a very kind elderly Retreat Master. I really like going there. Within a few days of my return from Cambridge, I went to the retreat center. Outside of the Lama House I saw a large stone platform that was adorned with coral and flowers. I asked one of the monks what the platform was for. He replied that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, the Retreat Master, had just built it, and said he was waiting for the Buddha to arrive. Bingo! Hey, the Buddha has arrived!

A week later, I delivered the Buddha. The monk and I unloaded the Buddha and placed him on the stone platform where he fit perfectly. When the Rinpoche saw the Buddha, he lit up like a Christmas tree and placed a ceremonial welcoming silk scarf around the Buddha's neck.

A few weeks later, a large group of Chinese students came to the retreat center to receive teaching from the Rinpoche. When they looked out the window they saw the Rinpoche painting the Buddha in the snow. He was using gold paint which had been left over from painting a temple roof in Tibet. He completed the adornment by painting the head precious lapis lazuli blue. Such a beautiful Buddha now - always adorned with flowers and gifts!

Michael O'Sullivan

Last Word New York City Kongan (dealing with sharp-witted urban kids):

Head Dharma Teacher Paul Calls Daughter

One day Paul saw his eight year-old daughter sitting by the window. He called out to her twice, "Hey beautiful" and she made no reply or acknowledgment. He called out a third time "HEY BEAUTIFUL!"

"Yes?"

"Not you! I'm calling that beautiful bird on the windowsill next to you."

"Tweet, tweet" replied his daughter, without hesitation.

1. *One time is enough. Why call three times?*
2. *If you were Paul, what could you do?*

Upon hearing of this, Ken Kessel composed the following gatha:

Daughter has emerged from her shell
Daddy is looking for feathers
If you don't know your child by now
How will you know her song?

Paul Majchrzyk and Ken Kessel



The Altar, CIZCNY

Chogye International Zen Center of New York was founded in 1975 by Zen Master Seung Sahn, who is addressed by his students as Dae Soen Sa Nim. He is the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West, and has established Zen Centers in Europe and Korea as well as in the United States. Together, they form the Kwan Um School of Zen.

Our Program: Daily practice, including: chanting, bowing and sitting meditation; extended sitting practice on Wednesday evenings; monthly talks on Zen, study groups; Sunday evening introductions to Zen practice, two- and three-day retreats, one-day sitting intensives, and traditional Zen interviews.

Teacher: Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe), named Zen Master by Dae Soen Sa Nim. A Zen practitioner since 1966, he received formal inka (certification) from Dae Soen Sa Nim in 1984 and is authorized to perform all formal teaching activities. He holds an MSW plus a BA in music, and is a practicing psychotherapist.

Retreats and Special Events

One-day Meditation Retreats: Sitting and walking meditation, interviews, circle talk and vegetarian lunch; \$30 for non-members; \$25 for members. Saturday, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Two- and Three-Day Retreats: Sitting, chanting and interviews, formal meals and work periods. \$40 daily, non-members; \$30 members. Thursday or Friday 6:30 p.m. to Sunday 4 p.m.

Dharma Talks by Zen Master Wu Kwang: One Friday each month, 7:45 to 9 p.m. Suggested contribution, \$5 for non-members.

Consulting Interviews with senior dharma teacher: Thursday evening practice.

Daily Practice Schedule

Morning practice: Sat., 8 – 10 a.m. 108 bows, sitting meditation, chanting, Zen interview (\$5 suggested contribution for non-members)
M-F, 5:20 – 7:15 a.m. 108 bows, sitting meditation, chanting

Evening practice: MTF, 6:30 – 7:40 p.m. Sitting meditation, chanting
Wed., 6 – 8:00 p.m. Two periods of sitting, chanting
Thurs., 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Two periods of sitting, consulting interviews

Introduction to Zen: Sun., 6 – 8 p.m. Chanting, guided sitting, meditation, Dharma talk, Q&A (Recommended for first visit: \$5 contribution)

Calendar of Events: June – September, 2006

June. **3-Day YMJJ Retreat**—Thurs. 15th, 6:30 p.m. thru Sun. 18th, 4:00 p.m.,
Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)
Dharma Talk—Fri. 23rd, 7:45 p.m.,
Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)

July. **1-Day Retreat**—Sat. 8th, 8:45 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Steve Cohen, JDPSN
Dharma Talk—Fri. 14th, 7:45 p.m.,
Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)
Sangha Weekend—ZM Seung Sahn's Birthday
at Providence Zen Center—Sat. & Sun. 29th & 30th

Aug. **Dharma Talk**—Fri. 11th, 7:45 p.m.
Steve Cohen, JDPSN
1-Day Retreat—Sat. 12th, 8:45 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Lincoln Rhodes, JDPSN

Sept. **2-Day YMJJ Retreat**—Fri. 8th, 6:30 p.m. thru Sun. 10th, 2:00 p.m., Ken Kessel, JDPSN
Dharma Talk—Fri. 29th, 7:45 p.m.,
Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)