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WOODFISH

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Dharma Talk, Zen Master Wu Kwang

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Student: *I want to ask you if you can say anything about mantra practice, because I have been doing it lately, not having done it before. I find that sometimes I can just say the mantra but at other times I notice all the other things my mind is doing and it is a real struggle to bring my attention back to just the mantra. Therefore, I raise the question if mantra practice is really about just saying the mantra or if it is some kind of technique to drop other things and come back.*

Zen Master Wu Kwang: Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal... Kwan Seum Bosal. Did I say enough?

One of the Sanskrit words for mind is “*manas*”. The word mantra is sometimes translated as “that which makes the mind steady.” To continuously repeat a mantra is an easy and effective way of making your mind energy steady. If you repeat over and over again “Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal...” or any other mantra, that begins to set up a certain kind of rhythmic vibration in your system which gradually harmonizes your mental energy and physical energy. Then, at a certain point, your energy and universal energy—*ptchh*—interfuse. At that point,

the mantra and universal energy waves come together. You could say, by analogy, it is something like tuning a radio to get a particular frequency: the music or whatever is on the radio at that frequency is experienced. Ultimately the mantra should help you to drop small “I” and—*ptchh*—connect with

everything, with Big Mind. That is the function of mantra practice. However, essentially to do that is not to make anything that you do not already have. Your mind energy and the universe’s energy are already interfusing and interpenetrating, but because we are somewhat scattered we do not recognize that. Mantra makes your attention steady so that—*ptchh*—you can perceive that.

In terms of practicing mantra, you can practice chanting aloud, even quite loudly if you need to make yourself pay attention. You can repeat in a whisper; you can repeat it silently but still moving your lips, and ultimately your mind will repeat it without any physical action at all. That does not mean that one form is better than another is.

From a Zen standpoint one thing is very important: as you repeat the mantra there should be a sense of questioning connected with it. At a certain point, especially as your attention begins to settle down a little bit, the direction of Zen practice becomes “I want to understand myself and help all beings.” That is the fundamental direction, vow or intention: to raise the mind of enlightenment: “I want to understand myself and connect with this world.”

Therefore, if we are sitting there practicing a mantra, we are not just doing it to calm down, settle our attention and get a particular kind of good feeling. That can happen of course, but our ultimate aspiration is to perceive or understand experientially the kong-an “Who is practicing this?” We know it is us, repeating the mantra. It is not that we are confused about who is practicing. Nevertheless, the exact nature of “us” is a big question “What am I?” or “Who am I?”

Now that does not mean that continuously you keep asking yourself mentally “Who is repeating this? Who is repeating this? Kwan Seum Bosal. Who is repeating

(continued on p. 2)



Zen Master Wu Kwang

this? Kwan Seum Bosal....” There is a feeling or attitude of questioning towards your mantra activity. The attitude is “Who is doing this?” What is the actual nature of this person here? Therefore, that is the direction of the mantra.

Dae Soen Sa Nim’s practice was the Great Dharani. Those of us who spent some time with Zen Master Seung Sahn would see that whenever he was not talking his mouth would be moving silently and if you asked him “What are you doing?” he would say, “I am repeating the Dharani.” Non-stop, he would always repeat the Dharani. One time after I had been practicing with him a few years, I said to him, “My practice seems to be like this: If I am using a mantra to practice with, after a while as I settle down I come to a place where thinking is coming and going and it is not a hin-

drance to me, like clouds passing in the sky. If I come to a place like that then the mantra that I am repeating kind of dissolves.” I was a little confused about this and I wanted to hear what he would say, because I could see that he was always repeating. So he said to me, “At that point repeating, not repeating does not make any difference.” Which was interesting because his way was to always repeat, but he was not attached to it “Repeating, not repeating, the same at that point.” In some traditions, they would say the mantra is repeating itself at that point. So it does not make any difference: do not check, do not be too worried about the whole thing, just do it. It will take care of itself, little by little by little. However, three things are important: to have some confidence in the efficacy of the mantra, to constantly do it as much as possible and to have a sense of question or inquiry- a sense of direction. ♦

From the Editor’s Cushion

by Willie Echanique

Two events stand out since our last edition: our first seven-day meditation intensive or Yong Maeng Jong Jin (November 11 – 17, 2006), and the unexpected death of John Holland’s son (Benjamin Lloyd Holland) and its 100-day ceremony (November 19, 2006.) I find the two events inextricably tied together. If, during the Seven Day sitting our practice became white hot with the relentless minute to minute inquiry on the meaning of our finite lives, then an actual death reminds us, perhaps brutally so, of the urgency of the quest.

In our practice, unlike in some of the great religions, we do not deny death’s immediacy. There is no heaven or paradise to give meaning to our lives in a glorious afterlife. We must find our life’s meaning now, this moment, right now.

Some speak of reincarnation, which is life after life. Unfortunately, according to this view, we will not be reborn in some land of milk and honey, devoid of suffering. Instead, we will be back to the here-and-now of common earthly life, replete with credit card debt and other calamities. To complicate matters even further, even if we could perfect ourselves and transcend this earthly realm, we Zen students must choose to stay here to help save all sentient beings.

In this edition of *Woodfish*, we remember both aspects of our practice: the intense demands that we choose to endure and the background of intense suffering against which they take place. Perhaps one day we will attain “no life, no death.” Perhaps even “life is life, death is death.” In the meanwhile, my knee hurts during long sittings, I grieve with John. ♦



Chronicle of a Seven-Day Yong Maeng Jong Jin

Early in 2006, we knew we had a seven-day intensive sitting (YMJJ) scheduled. We knew it would be an unusual experience, difficult due to its intensity and intimacy. However, it was not until after it took place that we realized something extraordinary had happened. Some thought that the experience resembled nothing less than life in a submarine, immersed in the practice, defined by a confining and confined space. Others thought it resembled a dance, ruled by the rhythms of sitting and walking meditation, meals, work periods, rest and hygiene. For others, the part timers, it meant a constant struggle to retain the effort of the practice while we went to our respective occupations during the workday. In the end, all agreed that it was indeed a transforming event, maybe pivotal for some in their understanding of the practice. Here are some thoughts on the First Annual Chogye International Zen Center Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

Willie Echanique



This was my first longer retreat, and I stayed for the first three-and-one half days. I remember Zen Master Wu Kwang advising us at the beginning that if we felt the urge to just leave the retreat, which was possible, we should still try to stick it out. Certainly that was the most needed advice, I found out later, when I could not stop my thinking and neither could I let go of the frustration about it (ah, the beginner's misery!); it was only those words that kept me from packing up. Well, that and seeing everyone else continue, for that matter (thank you everyone!). Nevertheless, I felt stuck and helpless. Then during the last work period, while I was cleaning the fridge, a question occurred to me out of a single quiet moment: "Why on Earth are you squeezing/trying so hard?" ...Aha! Then, not only did I understand what I have been told before, namely that you should not be trying aggressively to stop your thinking, but also that sometimes one just needs to hear the same message again and again, and when the moment is ripe, it will be finally digested and integrated into one's whole being. This allowed me a wonderful morning practice, and as a result, when I walked away from the center, there was no difference between sitting at the center, and being in everyday life.

Zsuzsa S

On our seven days retreat, sometimes I thought, "I have done enough. Let someone else serve the food."

Then, while I sat on my cushion letting other people serve the food, I noticed that this person or that person seemed to be the first to get up and serve the food at every meal no matter what.

I would think, "Who does that person think they are, getting up and serving the food every time? They think they are so virtuous. They think they are getting some sort of merit. Hah! That silly person doesn't understand Zen the way I do!"

However, before long, my thoughts began to change. I found myself realizing that the all-the-time-server deserved a break and I would rush to be the first to serve so that they did not have to. Somehow, by their demonstrating their willingness to serve, I suddenly found myself infected with the same willingness.

That "serving others" idea, it is like a highly infectious virus!

I hope that now that our recent retreat is over, we can all keep our Bodhisattva vows and be of service, that we will go out and infect everybody with the same highly infectious virus, and that the whole world becomes sick with the same "how-can-I help" bug that we all came down with during Yong Maeng Jong Jin!

Colin Beavan



It was as though we were being cooked in a pot. Just when it started to feel comfortable, the Zen Master and Steve would give us a stir (announcing midnight practice). Occasionally we heard people outside who seemed to me very free, or at least not being cooked in the pot. Someone was learning to play the recorder (Hot Cross Buns); another was talking in Korean on a cell phone (her life story, Sookyong told me later). It felt like when I was sick as a child and had to stay home from school and, lying in bed, I listened to weekday sounds I did not usually hear waft up from the street. Even the dharma room's mechanical hums and whirs sounded different after a few days. Their changing rhythms became more distinct and a beautiful circular melody

(continued on p. 4)

came out of the ceiling fan. One afternoon when the windows were open, sun was on the floor, and our sitting was very still, it felt as though my hearing extended out into the room and reached for the sounds, which were warm, light, and hanging in the air. Then we were done. We ate lunch and had our ice cream. There was a bit of shoptalk about how to hit the bell. Heaven!

Clare



Though it always seems difficult to clear out an entire week for a retreat, I decided right away I did not want to miss this opportunity for an extended period of practice with the support of friends and the guidance of our teachers. At the same time, I wondered what it would be like to spend seven days and nights in our small dharma room, with little space or privacy and, as I imagined it, a sense of "nowhere to hide." I also felt rather daunted by the job of Head Dharma Teacher, which I had not yet done for a retreat this long or this complicated, with arrivals and departures changing the makeup of the group several times every day.

Therefore, after doing some of this not-so-helpful thinking in advance, it was very interesting to find out that the retreat itself was no problem. In fact, having little scope for changing the particulars of the situation, I found myself letting go, returning to each moment, and seeing what was happening right then. In addition, with a large group in a small space, it quickly became clear that the actions of each person affect everyone else, showing that practice is not just for us but also for everyone.

The strength of everyone's effort was supportive, and with everyone's hard work, the logistics of the week ran smoothly. Walking out onto 14th Street at the end of the retreat, the first thing I noticed was how much unhappiness was visible in the faces of people passing by. It was startling to realize that I usually do not notice this, no doubt because I am often caught up in the same suffering. However, I am finding that clarity and compassion revealed in formal practice inevitably carry over into everyday life, and actually there is no separation. I think we are very fortunate to have a place where we can do intensive practice, and where we can benefit from the support of sangha and from teachers who

give so generously of their time and guidance. Thank you, everyone.

Karen Spicher



Compounded Things

For our first 7-day YMJJ, I volunteered to make lunch and dinner for one day. I figured the food should be tasty, nutritious and easy to prepare and thereby made the task harder than necessary. All I had to do, according to Zen Master Wu Kwang, was to make some simple lentil soup, serve some bread and a simple salad.

However, I could not stick to that simple menu. I made some extra work that turned out to be popular. The result was two Korean sauces that go very well over soft tofu but not the firm or extra firm variety. One sauce, yangnyeumjang, is mildly spicy and balances the blandness of the tofu. For those so inclined, Yangnyeumjang goes nicely over shrimp, chicken and rare meat with plain white rice. You will have a thick, red sauce that keeps in the fridge for about 2 weeks so you can make a big batch. The recipe below is enough to cover one pound of tofu. Feel free to add more garlic. Grind the toasted sesame seeds in a mortar and pestle, coffee grinder or a suribachi. From *Authentic Recipes from Korea* by Injoo Chun.

Yangnyeumjang for 4

Tofu

1 lb. Silken or soft tofu, chilled and cut into pieces to your preference

Chopped scallions and minced cayenne for garnish

Yangnyeumjang

1 tbl. soy sauce

1 tsp toasted sesame oil

1 clove of garlic

1/2 red chili, minced, optional

1 tsp ground red pepper, available in Korean and Chinese groceries

1 tsp water

2 tsps ground toasted sesame seeds

2 scallions minced

Want more? The second sauce also goes great on

soft tofu and it turns blanched watercress into a treat. Koreans call the dish minarinamul, watercress salad. First, place the cress in boiling water until it softens after a few minutes. Next, drown the greens in cold water. Mix up all the ingredients for the sauce. Just before serving, squeeze the watercress in your hands until it is a tight, bright green rope. Cut into 1 ½-inch sections. Douse the greens with the sauce right before serving. You have just made one of those welcoming little vegetable dishes, namul, that feature in Korean homes and restaurants. Both sauces were big hits during the 7-day YMJJ- and in my house. Still want more? Pick up *Flavors of Korea* by Marc and Kim Millon.

Minarinamul for 4

Watercress (minari)

2 bunches of watercress-about ½ pound

Sauce

2 tbs. of soy sauce

1 tbs. of toasted sesame oil

1 tsp. of sugar (I like brown)

1 garlic clove, finely minced

2 tsp. whole toasted sesame seeds

Richard Kahn

Sharing the Loss of John Holland's Son Benjamin Lloyd Holland

100-Day Ceremony Dharma Talk for Benjamin Lloyd Holland (Excerpt)

Zen Master Wu Kwang

There is a profound teaching that arises in the experience of sorrow. Once I had a talk with Zen Master Seung Sahn during which I told him that although I had been practicing meditation for many years, there remained a deep sense of sadness in me. He remarked, "Sadness becomes compassion, happiness becomes love." These two are the Bodhisattva Way. "This sadness," he said, "is universal sadness." When one experiences sorrow and loss, there arise feelings of sensitivity, compassion, and kindness toward all those who are in pain. We feel a sense of deep kinship that in circumstances that are more ordinary is often overlooked.

When Benjamin died, John sent an e-mail to all members of the Kwan Um School of Zen informing us that Benjamin had "died by his own hand" and requested us to chant Ji Jang Bosal on behalf of Benjamin. I was caught by the phrase "by his own hand" and wondered if this was one of John's British expressions for our more customary "took his own life" or "killed himself." "By his own hand," suggests, however, less the choice of free will. The actual pain and darkness of mental illness as experienced from within must be contrasted with whatever we might think from the outside.

One must question what kind of free choice exists when it is made through a glass, darkly.

It must be said that various religions have severe ideas related to suicide. In my opinion, these ideas are to some extent appropriate to before the fact. For if someone is thinking about ending his or her life you can either offer him or her hope or reason for living, or you may be able to scare them out of taking such an action. However, if there exists a loving God or the Spirit of universal compassion, we must view a death of this kind as having some other meaning that is beyond the scope of judgment.

We wish John strength and courage on the path toward acceptance, and hope that this ceremony helps Benjamin in his journey from life to life.



100-Day Ceremony Dharma Talk for Benjamin Lloyd Holland (Excerpt)

Steve Cohen, JDPSN Steven Cohen, JDPSN

Just as we say that Zen Buddhism draws us to seek an understanding of our True Self, "What am I?" so we are drawn to ask about Benjamin or the loss of any loved one, "Who was that?" "What was that?" The same "Not-knowing" state that flows from all of these questions is the state of intimacy and love. This "Not-knowingness" does not worry about the time that has gone by, or the future, or reason, or choice, or practicing or not practicing. There is a story in *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* about a

(continued on p. 6)

grandmother-Zen Master who was crying for her dead granddaughter. Somebody checked her because she was a Zen Master. "You're a great Zen Master, why are you crying? She answered, "My tears send her to heaven." That means: Love just flows. You send it to the departed - to Benjamin.

Robert Aitken Roshi, wrote a gatha which seems particularly fitting for our Guest Master whose love of people prompted his being selected to host everyone who comes through our doors:

*Whenever I am feeling discouraged
I vow with all beings
to take my cue from the thrushes
who sing to the gloomiest sky.*

We join with you, John, in singing about the life and loss of Benjamin:

Ji Jang Bosal, Ji Jang Bosal

This great compassion and great love is the same as your own.... and shows Benjamin the light which he brought into this world." ♦



Trying - A Memorial Ceremony

Not so many of us knew his son.
But for sweet John the place was full,
and, because of the shock of the idea
of suffering beyond control,
we stumbled through the ceremony,
clockwise, counterclockwise, all mixed up
bow this way or that, no one got it all right.
In the litany, who are all these cosmic and spiritual figures?
they are
absent from our plain practice
but none of it mattered one bit.
When John addressed us, and his voice cracked,
our minds were held together in a common and universal grasp,
by our own hands.

– Jan Potemkin

Sangha Goings On

Congratulations to the following members who took Five Precepts in 2006:

Eunjoo Ha (Kwan Hae), on July 29th; M.K. Babcock (Wu Ryong), and Zsuzsanna Sidlo (Wu Hwa) on December 2nd.

Also congratulations to the following members who took 10 precepts:

Chris Cheyney (Kwan Haeng) and Nick Gershberg

(Do Am) who, on December 2nd, took Ten Precepts and became Dharma Teachers In Training!

Welcome back to Larry Lee after his long absence from the NYC area. Welcome Soo Young Lee who changed his membership to the CIZCNY and Alicia Morrissey who has become a student member. We wish all the best to Susan Baer, Senior Dharma Teacher who relocated to the Cambridge Zen Center. ♦

Indra's Net

by Michael O'Sullivan

Recently when giving meditation instruction in an adult education class in Richfield Springs, NY, I was asked why we sit on cushions. The interrogator wanted to know why she could not sit on a chair. In answer, I said that she could sit on a chair if she needed to, but that sitting on a cushion frees up the energy that circles one's body. I went on to ask her to remember, during the ten minutes sitting, all the nuns and monks who sit for hours on end for months at a time. My interrogator then asked me why they were sitting for all that time. I deftly (or so I thought) responded with our standard answer, "For you!"

"Why me?" she asked me just as deftly, "I don't know them, and they don't know me! So how can they be doing it for me?"

On my drive home, I contemplated her questions.

During the ensuing week, I sat with the questions: "Do nuns and monks sit for themselves?"; "Is it a selfish act or a great bodhisattva act to do so?"; "How can it be a bodhisattva act?"

Then an answer appeared. It was so clear!

The following week I said to the woman, "I have an answer to your questions. There is a deity named Indra who has a great net that circles the universe. In each corner of each segment of the net, there is a jewel that reflects on others, which in turn reflect on others. Nuns and monks practice meditation in temples for six months of the year, usually at three-month intervals, so that they can reflect great love and compassion on each of us: How can I help you?" ♦

Michael O'Sullivan is the Abbot of the Three Treasures Zen Center in Oneonta, NY

Steve Cohen, JDPSN celebrated his 60th birthday on April 28th, 2006. A couple of weeks later, we held a grand rooftop celebration for our indefatigable Abbot and teacher. Congratulations Steve. Thank you for your teaching

THE JOY OF STEVE

[on the occasion of his 60th Birthday]

Isn't it obvious Steve works tirelessly?

Steve works! Steve works!

Steve works! Steve works

tirelessly. Tirelessly

Steve works. Steve tirelessly works.

Steve works

without tiring. Without tiring

Steve works.

Steve, without tiring, works.

Steve is tired.

Steve is drained. Steve is what you would call exhausted.

Parts of Steve

variously and at the same time

hurt! Steve—he

wishes for a break. Whew!

Someone give Steve a break!

Steve, asleep in a chair.

Steve works.

Steve works.

Tired, Steve works.

Eugene Lim

The Chogye International Zen Center of New York is a non-profit Buddhist organization founded in 1975 in New York City. CIZCNY is part of the Kwan Um School of Zen following the teachings and guidance of Zen Master Seung Sahn, the first Korean Zen Master to teach in the West. Through our Zen practice and personal lives, we do our utmost to develop compassion

and insight, and to save all beings from suffering.

For more information please call 212-353-0461 or visit CIZCNY.org or KwanUmZen.org. For a schedule of special events (Meditation Retreats, Dharma Talks, and Special Occasions) please visit www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=cizny.sangha%40gmail.com

Teachers: Zen Master Wu Kwang • Steve Cohen, JDPSN



The Altar, CIZCNY

Chogye International Zen Center of New York was founded in 1975 by Zen Master Seung Sahn, who was the 78th Patriarch in his line of Dharma Transmission in the Chogye order of Korean Buddhism. He was the first Korean Zen master to live and teach in the West, and established Zen Centers in Europe, South America, and Asia as well as in the United States. Together, these centers 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 1975, 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.



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