

Prologue

Before the division of heaven and earth there is only one, which is round:

Universe has no name and appearance and the Light fills infinite time and space.

There are no Good and Evil in intrinsic nature;
The Holy and the Worldly are false names.
In front of the door is the quiet and illuminated land.
Spring has come, so grass grows.

This world in which we live consists of a bright side and a dark side, the sky and the earth,
a man and a woman.

There is both good and bad.

There is happiness and sadness.

There are the blessed and the damned.

It is time and space which control the Universe.

We are here and we are gone.

But contrary to what we think, though good and bad, life is what you make it.

The universe is empty, but full.

Infinity in time and an infinity in space which is definite.

When we are feeling we are not thinking, just learning.

All things that have appearances are transient.

If we view all appearances as non-appearances, then we will see the true nature of all things.

It is like that.

Does the dog have Buddha nature?

No.

Where are you going?

Where are you coming from?

How old are you?

Are the book and the pen alike?

If a person comes here smoking a cigarette, blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha, what can you do?

Does a statue cry?

Can a statue have a baby?

You can understand One, but you don't understand Two.

I killed all the Buddhas. What can you do?

Buddha says, "All things have Buddha-nature."

Do you have Buddha-nature?

Do you understand your mind?

Buddha is mind, mind is Buddha.

When you think, all people's minds are different.
When you do not think, all minds are alike.

When you do not think, everything is alike.

Everything in name and form is not alike;
In substance everything is the same.

Universal substance and your substance are alike.

“Like this” is truth.

Look. Hear.

See the moktak. Hear the sound.

You see clearly. You hear clearly.

Are the moktak, the sound, and your mind alike or not alike?

If you say they are alike, I will hit you thirty times.

If you say they are not alike, I will hit you thirty times.

Why?

I hit you thirty times with the stick.

Hold the stick and hit the moon with it.

The dog is running away with a thrown bone.

Rope becomes snake.

Scratching the shoe when the foot itches.

The sun sets behind the western mountain.

The moon rises over the eastern mountain.

Three times three equals nine.

Nine divided by three equals three.

One plus two equals three.

Three minus two equals one.

Whatever goes up must come down.

The willow is green; the flower is red.

Light on: light. Light off: dark.

An inch is short. A mile is long.

A crow is black. A seagull is white.

The open mouth is wrong.

Zen is intuition.

I am doing meditation.

The ground is not dark or light.

The tree has no roots.

The valley has no echo.

Why do you walk around pulling that corpse?

Long ago people came to see Master Dok Sahn. They asked him questions such as: “What is Buddha? and Dharma? and mind?”

He answered only with the blow of the stick, or with “KATZ!”

Are these answers alike?

Can you hold your mind?

What do I become? (I think therefore I am.)

Put it down (your mind).

Bring it here. (Bring me your mind.) (Bring your mind here.)

Is your answer the truth?

Is that all of your answer?

Do you have another answer?

Why does Amita sit in the East?

Cut speech and the mind does not move.

Where are you staying now?

Why did Bodhidharma come to China?

When autumn comes, wind blows.
When winter comes, snow falls.
When spring comes, grass grows.
When summer comes, it is hot.

religion
scholarship
art

pleasure seeking
fame-greed
power-greed

material greed
sexual lust
gluttony

The many green mountains are the home of Amita;
The great blue sea is the home of the Bodhisattvas.
Grasping things is no obstruction.
Look in the pine tree, where a few red-crested storks sit.

Where does Amita dwell?
In sitting, the high mind cuts all thinking.
Thinking leads to not thinking, and all is nothing.
Through the six doors, truth flows constantly.

Transmission is outside of the sutras,
Not relying on language,
A direct pointing of the mind,
See nature; become Buddha.

Which is the right answer?
Is that the right answer?

Four Koans

1

Under the sea, the running mud cow eats the moon.

2

In front of the rock, the stone tiger sleeps, holding a baby in his arms.

3

The steel snake drills into the eye of a diamond.

4

Mount Kun Lun rides on the back of an elephant, pulled by a little bird.

Of these four koans, one is good. Which one?

The birds fly in the sky, and the fish swim in the water.

The round satori mountain's Inner Way is not any more.
Up the mountain, a man is walking now.
Cluck, cluck, the shoe sound pierces past and present.
Crows fly up from a tree. Ga! Ga! Ga!

Why didn't Bodhidharma have a beard?

The fire god comes and wants fire.

P'ang and his daughter

Daughter: Why did Bodhidharma come to China?

P'ang: All grasses have Dharma-nature.

Daughter: This answer is no good.

P'ang: Why is it no good?

Daughter: Your teeth are yellow.

P'ang: Then, why did Bodhidharma come to China?

D: All grasses have Dharma-nature.

Blowing the flute without holes. Ka, ka, ka.

White clouds hold lonely rocks in their embrace.

A dragon's head and a snake's tail.

To work hard and accomplish nothing.

Don't be deluded.

A second offense is not permitted.

Watch where you step!

At every step, the pure wind rises.

There's no cool spot in a pot of boiling water.

A Zen Master was weighing cloth. A person came and asked him, "What is Buddha?"

The Zen Master said, "Three pounds of cloth."

Zen Master JoJu went to visit a student on a mountain and asked him, “Do you have?”

The student raised his fist.

JoJu said, “That answer is no good; you are very bad.”

He then went to another student on another mountain and asked him, “Do you have?”

This student also raised his fist.

JoJu said, “This answer is very good; you are very good.”

Why did JoJu say one student was good and the other no good?

Zen Master Man Gong walked up to a student sweeping the Zendo and said, "You are sweeping all the Buddhas away with this broom."

The student asked, "How can you sweep all the Buddhas away?"

Man Gong replied, "You are sweeping them away right now. Don't you know?"

To this, the student could not reply. Mang Gong grabbed the broom and hit him.

The four primary elements are different, one from the other, as in a dream.

The six spheres, the six minds, and the six consciousnesses are all essentially empty.

If you want to know the abode of the Buddhas and the patriarchs, then

The sun sinks down behind the West mountain, and the moon comes up in the East.

What is Buddha?

Zen Master Dong-Sahn: “Three pounds of cloth.”

Zen Master Un-Mun: “Dry shit on a stick.”

Zen Master Duck-Sahn: Hit.

Zen Master Im-Je: “KATZ!”

Zen Master Ku-Ji: One finger.

Zen Master Man Gong: A circle made with the fingers.

Zen Master JoJu: “Go drink tea.”

Zen Master Keang-Ho: “Did you wash your bowl?”

Zen Master Ma Jo:

1. “Mind is Buddha.”

2. “No mind is no Buddha.”

Zen Master Hea Jo: “Did you eat before you came here?”

I utter the Lion's Roar and kill all the Buddhas, all the eminent teachers, and all people. So all the mountains fall, and the seas become empty.

If this speech is true, then ride the wooden horse into the laugh of a flower, and the stone snake sings of the country, and I first attain.

Do you understand?

[Holds the stick high and hits the table once.]

"Tuh!"

Salt is salty and sugar is sweet.

Long ago, people came and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “In the Heart Sutra, it says, ‘There is no attainment, with nothing to attain.’ If there is no attainment, can one attain Satori?”

Soen Sa replied, “Where are you coming from?”

“I am from Boston.”

“Then, whose son are you?”

“I am Jones’ son.”

“Before Jones’ son was born, where was he?”

“I don’t know.”

Soen Sa hit him and asked, “Do you understand?”

The visitor could not answer.

Soen Sa said, “You must eat food to understand full.”

Long ago, someone from San Francisco came to the Providence Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim, “On one side of the earth, people sit upwards, and on the opposite side, they sit downwards. Which is the right way?”

Soen Sa said, “Do you ask me because you don’t understand?”

“What do you understand?”

“Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Thus, sitting upwards and downwards are the same. I understand that all the universe is empty.” Soen Sa asked, “Right now, are you form or emptiness?”

“I am emptiness.”

“You say emptiness. What is saying this?”

To this, the student could not reply, and so cut all thinking.

Soen Sa said, “If you do not know what is saying this, then, how do you understand ‘Form is emptiness?’”

“Then, how do I understand?”

Soen Sa hit him. “Do you hurt? You must catch the origin of hurt to understand.”

The student bowed to Soen Sa Nim, and with a joyful mind, went away.

One day, Vimalakirti was sick. Manjushri led the Buddha's best disciples to visit him. Vimalakirti said, "Welcome, Bodhisattvas. You who come in are not form. When I see you, I see no form."

Manjushri said, "That's very good. Coming is not coming; returning is not returning. Coming is not from anywhere; returning is not to anywhere."

Vimalakirti said, "This is the single Dharma gate. How can you all enter into this gate?"

In turn, each of the students answered the question, until only Manjushri remained. He said, "I think there is no speech, no explanation, no seeing, no consciousness, no question, and no answer. This is the single gate."

Then, all together, they asked Vimalakirti, "What is the single Dharma gate?"

To this, he sat in silence.

Manjushri said, "Very good, wonderful! This is the true single Dharma gate."

In the mountain of the five skandhas, the demon is strong, the Dharma weak. When these two fight, the Dharma will lose. All thinking remains, but is relaxed. Grasp the diamond-treasure sword, not thinking of appearance or killing. When only fighting, the body is not seen. Stars fly, fire explodes. Those who have merit are rewarded. Those who don't are punished. Reward and punishment are now clear.

You will say that today, I hit you. This is both a reward and punishment. If you penetrate this hit, you will understand black and white.

“See suddenly.” Zen Master Te-Gak hit the student Hung-a, and Hung-a suddenly saw the reason, and attained Satori.

Long ago, a person asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “To what is the Dharma transmitted?”

Soen Sa said, “The transmission is to the column.”

The student asked, “Does the column understand transmission?”

Soen Sa hit him and said, “The lion claws people. The dog runs away with the bone.”

Long ago, a person came from New York and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, "I killed all the Buddhas. What can you do?"

Soen Sa asked, "How can you prove this?"

The student shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa asked, "Is this answer truth?"

Once again, the student shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa said, "The head is a dragon; the tail is a snake."

Again, the student shouted, "KATZ!"

Soen Sa hit him thirty times and said, "A second offense is not permitted."

The student bowed and went away.

A person came and asked Zen Master Ko Bong,

From all ten directions, all people come together.
Each person learns the idle life.
This is the field of becoming Buddha.
The empty mind passes the test and comes back.

“Does this language help people or not?”

The Zen Master said, “It does.”

The student said, “Which of these sentences helps people?”

The Zen Master said, “Bring each sentence here.”

The student asked, “What is the first sentence, ‘From all ten directions, all people come together?’”

The Zen Master replied, “The dragon and the snake combine; Enlightenment and unenlightenment become mutual.”

The student then asked, “Which person learned the idle life?”

The Zen Master said, “The Buddha and the eminent teachers are swallowed; the eye links the sky and ground.”

The student asked, “What is the field of becoming Buddha?”

The Zen Master said, “From West to East, there are one hundred thousand, from North to South, eight thousand.”

The student then asked, “What is the last sentence, ‘The empty mind passes the test and comes back?’”

The Zen Master said, “In action and inaction, the ancient way appeared. The way is not dragged down into the chasm of turbulence.”

The student said, “Thus, in each speech, nature is seen. Each sentence is truth.”

The Zen Master asked, “What do you see and attain?”

The student shouted, “KATZ!”

The Zen Master said, “This is grabbing a stick and hitting the moon.”

Long ago, a person from Kingston came and asked Seung Sahn Soen Sa, “What is Dharma?”

“Where are you coming from?”

“I am from Kingston.”

“How old are you?”

“I’m thirty-eight years old.”

“Your body is thirty-eight years old, but how old is your body’s master?” asked Soen Sa.

“How old are you?” answered the student.

“Same as Buddha. Don’t you know?”

The student remained silent. Soen Sa hit him thirty times and said, “Why do you sometimes become Buddha, sometimes a person, sometimes are thirty-eight years old, and sometimes come from Kingston? You must understand that infinite time and infinite space are yourself. That is Dharma.”

The student bowed and left.

I. Transmission from Mind to Mind

One day long ago, Buddha stayed at Yung Che mountain, where one thousand, two hundred students were gathered together. Every day, he gave a sermon. One day, without speaking, Buddha just held up a flower. Of the 1200, only Mahakashyapa smiled. Buddha said, "I have transmitted the utmost Dharma to Mahakashyapa."

Thus, Mahakashyapa became the first patriarch.

II. Felling the flagpole at the front gate

After transmission, Buddha gave his gold kasha to Mahakashyapa. Ananda asked Mahakashyapa, “Buddha gave you the gold kasha. What did he transmit to you?”

Mahakashyapa said, “You must fell the flagpole at the front gate.”

Ananda did not understand, so he went to the mountains and remained standing with this question for seven days, without eating or sleeping. On the morning of the seventh day, he saw a star in the Western sky and understood, so he became the second patriarch.

III. Original Nature does not Appear nor Disappear

One day, Ananda said to Sangnafasu, “Before, you gave much money and many things to the temple to acquire merit. In the future, you must cultivate spiritual discipline and attain the utmost Dharma so you can help suffering people.”

Sangnafasu did this. One day, he asked Ananda, “Does the entire Dharma not appear nor disappear?”

Ananda did not say anything, just pulled Sangnafasu’s kasha three times. Sangnafasu did not understand, and asked another question. “What is all Buddhas’ nature?”

Ananda replied the same way, that is, by pulling Sangnafasu’s kasha three times. Instantaneously, like lightning, Sangnafasu’s mind opened. He understood that original nature does not appear nor disappear. He became the third patriarch.

Long ago, a person came from Washington and told Seung Sahn Soen Sa, "I have spent many years studying the Hinayana, and am now a master. The Buddha died 2500 years ago. The Hinayana follows what he said. The Mahayana follows what he did not say."

Soen Sa replied, "The Buddha is not dead. He is here now."

The man said, "This is the Mahayana. Hinayana teaches that he died long ago."

Soen Sa asked, "Are the Mahayana and Hinayana different or the same?"

"They are the same."

Soen Sa said, "You say they are the same, so why is Buddha dead? You understand the body of the Buddha, not Buddha."

"That's all right."

"What is it that's all right?"

"In the Hinayana, the Buddha still lives in his teaching, the Dharma. So, the Buddha is still alive."

"From what does the Dharma arise?"

"The Dharma arises from our mind."

"Then, is your mind Buddha?"

"Yes."

"Where is your mind?"

To this, the Hinayana teacher could not reply.

Soen Sa said, "In your mind, you have Hinayana and Mahayana, and all of the Universe. Quickly understand your mind, become Buddha, and save all people from suffering."

He said, "Thank you very much," and so saying, left the temple.

Nagarjuna was born six hundred years after the death of the Buddha. He was a very great Mahayana Master. Many people, both Hinayana Masters and people from other sects, came to debate with him, and he always won.

One day, one person said, "You always speak of Buddha-nature. I want to see this Buddha-nature."

"If you want to see Buddha-nature, you must first see emptiness."

Nobody understood this answer. The person asked again, "Is Buddha-nature large or small?"

"Buddha-nature is neither large nor small, neither wide nor narrow; it does not appear nor disappear, nor increase nor decrease."

All of a sudden, Nagarjuna's body disappeared, and all that was left was a bright orb and the sound of his voice. All who saw this entered into a realm of mystery. One person said in wonder, "This is Buddha-nature; this is the realm of emptiness. Buddha-nature is as clear as the full moon."

Through this, Nagarjuna was teaching the essence of Mahayana.

One day long ago, the seventeenth patriarch, Sanghanandi, went to the mountains. A small boy came up to him and bowed. Sanghanandi was quite pleased and said, "You are a good boy. How old are you?"

The boy answered, "I am one hundred years old."

"You are one hundred years old? That is quite amusing. You are a very good boy. Why are you a hundred years old?"

"The Buddha said, 'People may live one hundred years without understanding the Dharma, but it is excellent if they live only one day and understand.'"

"Very good. Would you like to visit my hut?"

After Sanghanandi taught him much about Buddhism, the child wanted to become a monk at his temple. Once, they both heard the wind-bell ringing outside. Sanghanandi asked him, "Is the sound you hear the wind or the bell?"

The boy answered, "This sound is neither the wind nor the bell."

"Then what makes the sound?"

"This sound is made only in my mind."

"This mind-sound you speak of is very amusing. What is your mind?"

"This mind is before the sky and ground split apart and is empty."

Sanghanandi said, "Oh, that's very good. You are ready for the transmission of the great Dharma. You are my only student." Then he laughed loudly.

The boy became the eighteenth patriarch, Gayasata.

A Hinayana monk came to the Providence Zen Center as a guest speaker. Soeng Gak, a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn, asked the monk to explain Nirvana.

The monk said, "Nirvana is the state in which all good and bad karma has been ended, and the mind can no longer be reabsorbed by a fetus and enter rebirth."

The student asked, "From what did this good and bad karma first originate?"

The monk answered, "This we do not know. The scriptures do not say."

The student asked, "A person who has attained Nirvana and whose mind can no longer be subjected to rebirth—where does his mind go?"

The monk said, "This is a foolish question and only a play on words."

The student said, "Who determines when the state of Nirvana has been attained?"

The monk answered, "When all craving has been ended, then Nirvana has been attained."

The student asked, "Who determines what craving is and is not?"

The monk replied, "This is determined according to reality, to nature."

The student said, "Who determined what is reality or nature?"

The monk replied, "These questions are foolish to ask and can never be answered. Nirvana is the emptying of all craving and of all self-motivation."

The student said, "Isn't this emptying a craving, and isn't it self-motivation?"

The monk replied, "The person who has attained Nirvana does not crave anything. Anybody can ask these silly questions."

Soeng Gak said, "If you would only see that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, you would realize that all karma arises only from your thinking and that you are infinite time and infinite space."

The monk laughed, and Seong Gak laughed, too.

After, Seong Gak made a song:

The bee sucks the honey
and the flower sighs with relief.
The rocks yawn with the morning sun.
A mushroom grows in the backyard.

(written by Seong Gak)

The Buddha proclaimed all the Dharma.
In so doing, he saved all minds.
If all minds are empty,
Why is the Dharma needed?

I killed my parents.
I now repent to Buddha.
If I killed Buddha,
Where will I repent?

(Perfectly clear.)

I read the Sutras for three thousand kalpas. I kept the precepts for three thousand years.
It is better to sit quietly for half an hour and see my own nature.

Long ago Bodhidharma was in China and met the Emperor, who asked him, "I have made many monasteries, images of the Buddha, and have clothed and fed many monks. How much merit have I gained because of this?"

Bodhidharma said, "You have none."

The Emperor got angry at this and asked, "What is the Absolute Truth according to the enlightened Dharma?"

Bodhidharma said, "There is no enlightened Dharma, only the clear sky."

The Emperor asked, "What are you?"

"Don't know."

Then, Bodhidharma went to Sorim and sat for nine years.