

Inka Speech

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

On August 6, 1998, Andrzej Stec JDPSN received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn at the Seoul International Zen Center.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dead words are live words, live words are dead words.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

No live words, no dead words.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Live words are live words, dead words are dead words. Of these three statements, which one is correct? If you find it, this stick will hit you thirty times. If you don't find it, this stick will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

KATZ!

Drinking Joju's tea and receiving Dok Sahn's blows for fifteen years. The stick is brown, the tea is hot.

Today during the circle talk marking the end of our three month retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn told us about using words in Zen. As you all know, Zen started on Vulture Peak. Buddha pick up a flower and Mahakasyapa smiled--no speech, no words. Two minds connected. Later, during the T'ang dynasty in China, speech and words appeared in Zen. Sincere questions met simple, directly pointing answers.

Today we also heard about Zen Master Dok Sahn. Whenever someone asked him a question, he would only hit the student with his staff. Before becoming a Zen Master, Dok Sahn was a "dead words" man. He had studied the Diamond Sutra for ten years and because of his knowledge he was called "Diamond Chou."

One day he heard about monks in the south of China who only sat in meditation facing a wall. They didn't study any scriptures, yet they claimed to have perceived their true selves and become Buddhas. When Dok Sahn heard this he got angry; he packed his commentaries on the Diamond Sutra, picked up his staff, and headed south. On the way he got hungry. The old lady who owned the tea house took away not only his hunger, but also his pride, when he could not answer her "live word" question with his "dead word" understanding. Following her suggestion, he went to visit the Zen Master of Dragon Pond Monastery. They talked late into the night. All that time Dok Sahn was still using the "dead words" of his understanding. Finally the Master said: "It's getting late, why don't you go rest?" and handed him a candle. When Dok Sahn reached out to take the candle, the Master blew it out. In complete darkness Dok Sahn perceived his true self for the first time. The next morning he took his commentaries to the front of the Buddha Hall and burned them all.

Imagine a monk who had studied sutras for ten years and was so attached to them that he carried them on his back throughout the whole of China. Something had changed. There he was, standing in front of the fire, watching the ashes of the Diamond Sutra flying up in the air. His past was gone; all that remained of

his former life was a monk's staff. For the rest of his life he used that staff to teach Zen. Those were his "live words."

There is another famous story about live and dead words. This time it took place at the Wi Sahn School's monastery. One day Zen Master Wi Sahn received a monk who had studied under his late master. "Oh, I recognize you," Wi Sahn said. "When somebody asked you a question you gave ten answers, when somebody asked you ten questions you gave one hundred answers. This was possible because of your smart and discriminating mind. Now! Give me some 'live words' about your real face before you were born." Hyang Eom, who was that monk, was completely stuck. He ran back to his room and checked all his scriptures. All that he found were "dead words" written on paper. He came back to Wi Sahn and said, "Please teach me."

"No, no, no, I cannot teach you that," the master replied. "If I tell you about it, later on you will scold me. After all, this is your business, not mine!"

Hyang Eom became very upset; weeping, he returned to his room, took his books and burned them all. Then he resolved: "In this lifetime I will only care about finding my true self. I won't care about sutras, I won't care about anything! I'll become a 'rice bag' (a wandering monk who only eats rice and gruel.)" Later he found an old temple which he decided to restore. One day as he was working in the garden he picked up a broken tile and tossed it away. When the tile hit a bamboo tree--TOK!--his mind opened. He bowed in the direction of Wi Sahn's monastery and said: "Your compassion is bigger than my parents' compassion. If you had told me about it when I asked you, this wouldn't have happened." Those were his first "live words." Later he created the famous kong-an, Hyang Eom's "Up a tree." Maybe some of you are still hanging there...

During the T'ang Dynasty many interesting and lively dialogues appeared in Zen: Dong Sahn's "Three pounds of flax", Jo Ju's "Cypress tree in the garden." They were just reflecting truth words. But for students who were attached to words, it wasn't enough: Why did Jo Ju answer "the cypress tree in the garden"? What does "three pounds of flax" mean? So, many second-rate questions appeared. Not only that, during the Sung dynasty things got even more complicated. More words, more speech. There were dragons and wooden chickens flying in the sky and stone girls dancing at night.

One of the most famous Zen Masters of that period was Won Oh Sunim. One day he received an interesting book, a collection of one hundred Zen stories, with commentaries which were like the legs of a snake. To inspire Zen students he decided to add his own comments to each case. That's how the Blue Cliff Record was born. His number one disciple was Dae Hae Sunim. He was famous for spreading the "Mu" disease throughout China. When he read the Blue Cliff Record he burned it, because by this time the snake legs even had socks on! Unfortunately, somebody already had made a copy of it and the whole collection was passed down through the generations to us.

In our school we emphasize kong-an practice. Sometimes, when we are going to have an interview, we feel like we're taking an exam or even entering an execution site. But actually this is a resurrection time. A time when teacher and student have a job to do: to bring the "dead words" of an old saying back to life. When we read a kong-an in the interview room we might start to think of an answer: "What should I say?" This is only making the situation dead. Zen Master Lin Chi called that kind of person a "third-class student who cannot even save himself." Other times we might be like Hyang Eom Sunim when he left Wi Sahn. We completely put it down. We give up any hope or desire of giving an answer. Without checking anything, we hit the floor [hits] and become clear. Then, at that moment, inside the "dead words" we perceive the "live word," the heart of the kong-an. We can then experience how our clear mind can function without any effort or expectation. Outside the interview room we are surprised: "Wow, what was that?" But back on our cushion we start to think again. It's like being a "second-class student," a person who has experienced a taste

of being clear. The "first-class student" is one who, facing the kong-an, not only has a clear answer right away, but this experience becomes part of his life. This is attaining the kong-an. Anytime, in any situation, he can "just do it."

When I look back at why I was told to drink "Jo Ju's tea" so many times, it's only because I wasn't always sincere during my interviews. Do stories like "Hyang Eom's up a tree" have something to do with my life? That kind of checking mind is the very "dead word" itself. "Good" or "bad" answers don't matter. What matters is an experience that can be used in our everyday life.

So, today this monk is getting a new job, but actually we are getting this job together. This "inka" is for all of us. Our job is to make these old sayings of our tradition live again. It is not just for our good feeling, that we have an answer. There is something inside each of them that is always alive and can be used to help others. All I wish is that you will never miss a chance to have an interview. Completely put it all down and only do it. Do it with a clear direction: this job is not for me, but for all sentient beings.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dok Sahn burned the Diamond Sutra and picked up a Zen staff.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Hyang Eom burned his sutras and heard the sound of tile hitting bamboo.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dae Hae read the Blue Cliff Record and with disgust burned it. Are the flames which burned the Diamond Sutra, Hyang Eom's books and the Blue Cliff Record same or different?

KATZ!

The candle is white, the flame is yellow.