

# Inka Speech

*Judy Roitman, JDPSN*

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

When Buddha was born he said "in the heavens above and the earth below only I am holy." But William Blake said "Everything that lives is holy."

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

Bodhidharma said "No holiness, clear like space."

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

When holiness shatters and no holiness is eaten by dogs, how will you find your true home?

KATZ!

Here we are, sitting or standing in the dharma room.

On October 6, 1976, on Yom Kippur, twenty-one years and six months minus one day ago, I first came to the Cambridge Zen Center.

Yom Kippur is really special, really holy. It's the day when God decides who will live or die. We fast--no food or water--for over twenty four hours. We are reminded of how much suffering there is in the world, and recite long lists of sins over and over. Very impressive.

Even when I had essentially stopped practicing Judaism, I still tried to honor Yom Kippur. So, on October 6, 1976, I thought I'd check out Zen.

I expected a bunch of solemn folks with shaved heads. Instead, Mark and Dyan were in full dharma teacher robes, chasing each other around the house squirting water at each other from plant sprayers. Paul asked me if I practiced any form of meditation, and when I proudly said I'd been counting breaths for the last two years, Peter whirled around from the sink where he was washing dishes and said "how many have you counted?" There was a big temple bell, and during the first chant we did full prostrations like my father the cantor did every Yom Kippur.

It was like coming home.

Nice little story, that, but, you know, it's really completely bullshit. Whenever things are that comfortable, you know something's coming up.

So a month or so later I've been practicing pretty regularly and Mark tells me that this Korean Zen Master is going to give a talk a couple of days before a retreat. Wow! A Zen Master! (although since he's Korean I'm not really sure of that). So I go, ready to be enlightened. At any minute, in fact. And two things happen.

The first I've told a lot of people: I didn't understand anything he said. Not just the English pronunciation (although there were places where this was a problem) but even when I knew the words they didn't make sense. "Is this a watch or not a watch?" "It's 8:15." What was going on? For the first time in my life I couldn't understand a thing.

The second I'm pretty ashamed of, so I'll tell it. There was this woman in the front row who asked a question and Zen Master Seung Sahn said "You are a very good Zen student. You must come to this retreat." And I thought: No! I am a very good Zen student, you want me to come to this retreat.

*Call on me! Recognize me! Me me me!*

Between the two things I just flipped out. I called a friend and said "come meet me right away, I'm flipping out." So she met me somewhere and we walked the streets of Cambridge, my arm chopping the air while I said "I don't know anything. I just don't know anything." She got this bemused expression on her face and said "I had a friend who was hospitalized in Tangiers with a diagnosis of existential confusion."

So one type of sin we list on Yom Kippur--these are communal sins, no one can wiggle out of any of them--it's kind of hidden in the long lists, not in italics and boldface like it ought to be, is "the sins we commit by confusion of mind." This is very much like the first link in the chain of co-dependent origination: ignorance.

But this existential confusion, this is something else. We touch truth and it hurts. But once we've touched it we can't avoid it.

Because we really do know nothing, absolutely nothing. But who wants to admit that? So you taste that and freak out.

And when that me me me mind becomes so strong, somehow there is a taste of: wait a minute, this doesn't make sense, who is this "me" anyway? And when that question appears--well, that's it, you might as well spend the rest of your life practicing because it won't let you alone no matter how hard you try to avoid it.

Then what?

I know a man who is ninety-one years old. His goal is to live as long as possible. Why do that?

But when Su Bong Zen Master asked "What is the short-cut to Zen?" Zen Master Seung Sahn said "Not for me."

This "not for me" is very important. Why are we in this world? What is our purpose? Not for me.

So I would like to thank Zen Master Seung Sahn for his wonderful teaching, my husband and son for supporting my practice, and the sangha for everybody's hard training together.

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

Hui K'o, desperate, cut off his arm and gave it to Bodhidharma, saying "My mind is restless, please calm it down."

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

Bodhidharma said "Bring me your mind and I will calm it."

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

Hui K'o's mind and Bodhidharma's mind, are they the same or different?

KATZ!

The baby cries, the mother feeds her.

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