

The Teachings of  
**Zen Master Man Gong**

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## ***Dedication on the 5<sup>th</sup> Memorial Anniversary of the Great Zen Master Seung Sahn Haeng Won***

On November 30, 2004, Great Zen Master Seung Sahn passed away. This English edition of *The Teachings of Zen Master Man Gong* is dedicated to his memory and is a gift for all beings. Innumerable beings have benefitted from the teaching of the Buddha which has been handed down through many generations of teachers. The compassion and sacrifice of these teachers and practitioners naturally arouse in us a great sense of gratitude and humility. In presenting this edition, we would like to thank all those who made this publication possible, so this clear link to the Korean Zen tradition may be more widely experienced.

Zen Master Man Gong (1872-1946) received transmission for Zen Master Kyong Ho, and is one of the truly towering figures in modern Korean Zen. He and his students played a central role in re-establishing the Buddhist tradition in Korea after centuries of suppression during the Joseon dynasty and subsequently during the Japanese occupation (1940-1945). Zen Master Man Gong was the grand teacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn, and this lineage of live teaching continues to be transmitted worldwide.

Whenever a beloved teacher dies, many feelings arise in people. Some feel grief at the loss; some feel remorse because of efforts they did not make; some feel a sense of indebtedness and gratitude for what they have received. The most basic of this from a Buddhist point of view is gratitude and indebtedness. The gratitude we feel at this time is for our teacher's clear teaching and for giving his whole life to us. This is the greatest gift that anyone can give. Any time we receive the gift of good teaching, it comes with responsibility – a debt. As Zen Master Man Gong taught, "A practicing person should first try to find a good teacher. After completing your practice your obligation is to teach others."

Buddhism teaches us that there is nothing special, that it is only our like and dislike mind which creates our idea that something is special. Death is also not special however, it is our great teacher. Just before he died, Zen Master Seung Sahn was doing what he had always been doing, teaching us. The prospect of death can lead some people into a life of self-concern, but he always used his illnesses to teach us. During the more than thirty-two years that he has taught outside of Korea and Japan, his body was always quite ill, but this never hindered him. His job was to give, and he gave himself completely to others. No monument or sentiment can memorialize that.

A few hours before his death, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen in China, Hui-Neng, taught his students this way: "After my passing away, do not follow the worldly tradition and cry or lament. What you should do is know your own mind and realize your own Buddha nature, which has neither motion nor stillness, neither birth nor death, neither comes nor goes, neither affirms nor denies, neither stays nor departs. After my death, if you practice according to my instructions it will be as if I were alive. However, if you go against my teaching no benefit will be obtained, even if I were to remain with you."

So what are the teachings? Our teaching tradition has always been simple and clear. Zen Master Seung Sahn only taught one thing: don't know. Sometimes 'don't know' means 'just do it', sometimes it means primary point. Sometimes correct situation, relationship and function, sometimes 'put it all down' and sometimes great love, great compassion, the Great Bodhisattva Way. It comes in many boxes, with a wide variety of wrappings,

but the question is always the same, “What are you?” As Zen Master Seung Sahn said many times, “I hope that you only go straight don’t know, which is clear like space; try, try, try, for ten thousand years non-stop, soon get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering.”

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Fall 2009

## ***Translator's Preface***

When ancient Buddhist texts were first brought from India to China, the initial translation began at the hands of an expert in the Pali or Sanskrit language, then went through several stages of further refinement with either Sanskrit or Pali and Chinese scholars, and was finally edited by the wisest in the Chinese language who could frame the text appropriate for the audience of the time. The spreading of the Dharma happened slowly from one language to another, from one translator to another, without losing the bone of the teachings.

Translating *The Teachings of Zen Master Man Gong* in to the English language was only possible in the same spirit, which Zen Master Seung Sahn calls 'together action', a spirit that calls for a group of practitioners to work together and allow for the collective wisdom to bring about the best outcome for the benefit of all beings. As practitioners and translators, it is with great appreciation and humility that we have this opportunity to contribute to the spreading of the Dharma from the rich tradition of Korean Buddhism.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Dok Seung San (Mountain) family for permission to translate from the original Korean language version of the text. We wish to give special thanks to Soel Jeong Bang Jang Sunim of Sudoksa and Su Am Sunim of Hwagyesa for their generous support and assistance in this project.

We deeply thank Zen Master Dae Kwang for heading this translation effort. Without his wisdom and clarity, it would have no bone. Special thanks to Zen Master Dae Bong for the foreword and for giving us direction on this project, and to Zen Master Dae Kwan for her support and guidance. Thanks to the Su Bong Zen Monastery publishing committee for their assistance, to Ye Jin Sunim for her valuable assistance in the research and to Roger Keyes for his editing and moral support in the initial stages. The publication of this book was made possible by the generosity and support of the International Kwan Um School of Zen, Providence Zen Center, Su Bong Zen Monastery, Kyeryong Sahn International Zen Center Musangsa, Hwagyesa, and others from the North American and Asian sangha.

Zen Master Man Gong's teaching is direct, uncompromising and clear, and as any great spiritual teaching, it has the power of conviction that comes from direct experience, great compassion and wisdom. We hope our translation does justice to this text and transmits clearly its most important message for human beings to wake up. May all beings benefit from this teaching and attain liberation.

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## ***Foreword***

At the end of World War Two Zen Master Man Gong wrote the famous calligraphy, “The Whole World Is A Single Flower.’ Why? The end of the war marked the end of thirty-five years of oppressive occupation of Korea by the Japanese. This period was very difficult and painful for the Korean people. Zen Master Man Gong’s role during the occupation was very interesting. He wasn’t a monk who just stayed in the mountains, got enlightenment and enjoyed a good reputation through teaching people.

After 1912 the Japanese were trying to crush Korean culture, language, religion – anything that was Korean. Part of that strategy was to control Korean Buddhism since it was seen as a force of resistance. One way they did that was to call the abbots of all the governing temples. There were about three or four thousand temples in Korea at that time. They were all governed by twenty-five head temples. The governor general, a Japanese man who was in charge of ruling Korea, called the twenty-five abbots of those temples to Seoul to have a meeting together. Man Gong Sunim was the head of one of those temples so he was also called to this meeting.

At this meeting, the Japanese governor general said, “All Korean Buddhists follow you twenty-five great monks. My predecessor, the former governor general, only wanted to help Korean Buddhism. So for Korean Buddhism to become strong, Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism must become one school.” What that meant of course, was that they would follow the rules of Japanese Buddhism. These included allowing monks to marry, eat meat and drink alcohol, which is the rule in Japan. The Japanese authorities also wanted all the major temples to be headed by married monks. The penalty for not following the rules set forth by the Japanese government meant imprisonment or death.

After the governor general had finished speaking, Man Gong Sunim stood up, walked to the front of the room. Then he pointed at the governor general saying, “Do you know where the mountains, the rivers and the great earth come from?” Clearly this was a challenge, but the governor general didn’t say anything. He could have had him executed on the spot for talking like that.

Suddenly Man Gong Sunim shouted, “Katz!” He then pointed to the governor general’s mouth and said, “Then that mouth is the gate to hell. Your predecessor didn’t want to help Korean Buddhism, he wanted to destroy it. If you want to help Korean Buddhism, don’t touch it.”

Then he left and went back to Dok Seung Mountain. Six hundred monks and nuns refused to follow the Japanese style and the Japanese didn’t touch them. The rest of the monks and nuns went over to the Japanese style, and that’s why there is still today a small married monks order in Korea. The occupation continued until World War Two ended when the Japanese were finally forced to leave.

Then, Man Gong Sunim took a petal from the national flower, he dipped it in some ink and wrote, “The Whole World Is A Single Flower.” I always wondered why it’s kind of not really beautiful the way he wrote it, because it’s written with just a petal, not a brush. There’s no bitterness in that calligraphy. There’s no anger in that calligraphy. There’s no exclusion. Everybody, everything, is part of this single flower. That mind is already the end of all differences.

Whether he had attained nirvana or not, the moment he wrote with that mind, that is the end of all differences. You don't have to wait until your practice becomes ripe. One moment of truly open, wide, accepting, compassionate, inclusive mind is it. That's Buddha.

Zen Master Dae Bong

- Excerpt from a talk given at the Whole World Is A Single Flower Conference in Singapore, 2005.

## **Chapter I. What Am I? The Necessity of Finding Your True Self**

1. It is said that human beings are the most precious of all things because they can attain their true nature.
2. True nature means total freedom, being in charge of one's life, yet human beings are rarely free any time or place. They cannot control their lives because their deluded thinking (small 'I') becomes the boss while their true nature is just a slave.
3. The small 'I', deluded thinking, is the offspring of true nature. Deluded thinking arises from selfish desire. True nature (clear mind or bodhisattva mind) is correct mind, which has no beginning and no end; it has no existence or extinction, yet it lacks nothing.
4. How is a human being who has lost sight of his true nature any different from an animal which only pursues sex and food instinctively? No matter how great or famous you are, if you do not attain your true nature, you are just like a molecule, subject to the four types of birth and death and the six realms of existence (samsara).
5. In our world most people live together, sharing a lifestyle, mindlessly following their karma. Their lives just happen, without direction. They don't see the terrifying thing waiting for them. When death comes, they are blind to what lies ahead.
6. If I shout someone's name and they immediately answer, "Yes!" – that is true nature. True nature has no birth or death. It can't catch fire, get wet, or be cut with a knife. It is completely free and without hindrance.
7. Just like the prisoner screaming as he is dragged, twisting behind a horse, the chains of karma drag us down the road of suffering. Repeatedly, we follow the cycles of life, sickness, old age and death. Only your wisdom sword can cut these chains.
8. No matter how well educated or respected you are, if you haven't resolved the great question of life and death, you are like a person who has lost their mind.
9. When Sakyamuni Buddha was born, he pointed with one hand to the sky and the other to the ground and said, "Between the heavens above and the earth below, only 'I' am holy." This 'I' means the true nature.
10. Everyone already has Buddha nature (true nature) but they cannot become Buddha because they do not understand themselves.
11. Everything is true nature (big 'I'). If you apply effort to anything else other than finding it, even the smallest effort, is a waste.
12. Everyone has three bodies: a physical body, a karma body and a dharma body. For a true human being, these three bodies are not separate but function as one.



13. All action originates from the dharma body. Since the dharma body is not separate from the physical body or the karma body, all phenomena are also beyond life and death.
14. The place beyond life and death includes both the sentient and the non-sentient. Therefore, all the weapons of the universe cannot destroy the true nature of even one blade of grass.
15. In our world, there is a lot of teaching about how to find and understand our true nature. These are all just the understanding of the small 'I' from the point of view of our karma. Our true nature is inconceivable and beyond imagination.
16. True nature is an indestructible diamond body which cannot die. Beyond time, it has endless life. Each life and death of the form body is just like changing clothes; the true person is able to take off and wear the clothes of life and death freely.
17. The knowledge you get through seeing and listening will not lead to the attainment of your true nature. Thinking about true nature is already not true nature.
18. True nature can be only found 'before thinking' because the 'before thinking' world contains all existence and is already complete.
19. If a person attains final enlightenment while having the Buddha as a goal then one will find that they themselves are the Buddha. This means that you must find true nature within yourself.

## **Chapter II. Zen Practice: The Way to Find Your True Nature**

1. In our world there is no place to find your true self, nor a teacher to show you how. Only in a Zen Buddhist practice place can you find your true nature.
2. Zen practice means that everyone should clear their own mind. This is most urgent.
3. The study of worldly knowledge only serves this life and the delusions of the body. Zen practice leads to a wisdom which is beyond time and space, beyond our body, and even beyond this life.
4. The Zen hall is not the only Zen hall. For those who practice Zen, their own body is also a Zen hall. You can practice Zen nonstop, when you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down – even when you are silent or speaking. This means that one can always stay in the Zen hall.
5. You can never practice Zen alone. You shouldn't leave your teacher because only they can teach you, without hindrance, about life's concerns.
6. It is very difficult to hear even one word from a Zen teacher. It may only happen once in ten thousand kalpas. If you hear this one word and attain it, you can realize your true nature without practicing Zen.
7. Listening to a Dharma speech is like walking on thin ice; you must be very focused and sincere.
8. 'Zen Master' is not just a conventional title like doctor or teacher. They have mastered the principles of the universe and inherited a lineage of wisdom from the Buddhas and eminent teachers.
9. Theory and practice are part of one circle. No matter where you start, you will attain your goal. But, you cannot attain your true nature without a Zen Master's teaching.
10. Listening to a Zen Master's teaching without believing or acting on it will result in bad karma. Such casual disregard will make it difficult for you to ever hear this kind of teaching again.
11. The more that you believe in your Zen teacher, the more you will attain.
12. Anyone who knows that soy sauce is salty can practice Zen.
13. The reason that you have difficulties practicing Zen is because in your previous life you just played around. When you pay your debt for this, then you can get a result.
14. If you have great faith without doubt, your foundation for practicing the Dao is already strong.
15. When great faith, great courage and great question become one, then you can succeed in your practice.

16. If you have complete faith, then your clear energy can function correctly in any situation without hindrance.
17. If your mind is not touched by the Dharma speech, it will be very difficult for you to get a human body again.
18. A practicing person should first try to find a good teacher; after completing your practice, your obligation is to teach others.
19. The biggest sin of all is calling yourself a Zen Master and teaching others without authority from a keen-eyed lineage holder.
20. Dharma can only be found when language stops and mind is cut off. Dharma is inherited only through mind to mind transmission. Without a teacher's direct instruction, Dharma cannot be learned.
21. The basis of practice is beginner's mind. Practice has no particular limits. However, it is best to begin in your twenties.
22. Zen practice is not an ordinary term. It points to something outside the usual concept of what it means to study, because this way or path has no opposites. One should attain a state of practice where it becomes all consuming. Here, there is no room for even the tip of a single hair.
23. The result of one hundred years of worldly study cannot match the attainment of one moment of 'before thinking' mind.
24. All sentient beings result from attraction to the opposite sex. Because of this we become habituated to the principle of opposites, lifetime after lifetime. The greatest hindrance to focusing one's mind is reasoning (thinking) in terms of opposites. It is most important that practicing people stay away from the opposite sex.
25. Though you keep one mind and put down all thinking still one more step is necessary: forget one mind then you can find your true nature.
26. To attain the result of your practice, you must extinguish the small 'I'. You must stop checking and become like a rotten stump, then you can get rid of the 'I' that thinks that it exists.
27. There are three conditions which are necessary for you to find your true self: i) a practicing place, ii) a teacher and iii) a Dharma friend.
28. One must follow the way with sincerity and integrity. Even though there are slightly different teaching styles, the Way is one. If you are not sincere you will be wasting your time and suffer a mental loss.
29. You need a teacher to make something as simple as straw sandals. Even the common mushroom has its own place to grow. So, how could anyone who wants to attain the Way, which includes everything, not to have a teacher? How can there not be a special place for a person of the Way who has made universal energy their own? The influence of Dharma friends is stronger than a teacher's teaching.

30. If you practice Zen and resolve life's great question then all your bad actions and sins for many lives will be extinguished, and you will end the suffering of samsara.
31. While you are practicing, give up your function as a human being: become deaf, blind and stupid (not clever). If you don't attach to anything then the big 'I' appears by itself.
32. The practice of Zen has existed for a long time. In the last one thousand and five hundred years, eminent teachers developed a Zen practice based on the great question, which produced numberless teachers. There are one thousand and seven hundred kong-ans. When I first started practicing, I took up the question, "Ten thousand Dharmas return to the One, where does the One return?" This kong-an has two levels. The best question for a beginner is, "Ten thousand Dharmas return to the One, what is the One?" Even though you keep questioning, you should enter the place of no thinking, which is clear and calm. Here, when even the questioning has gone away, you will see your true nature.
33. The One neither exists nor does it not exist. It is not spirit, soul, or mind. Then what is it? As you question, keep your mind like a cat, single-mindedly watching a mouse. The question should be like water flowing, nonstop. If you keep the question sincerely, you will find the One, someday.
34. You will have great difficulty practicing Zen if you regret leaving behind worldly study and pride or if you are attached to some special talent. So, you should return to being a blank page.
35. If you can pay the price of a very restrictive practice, you will get great freedom.
36. In the old days there used to be people who would suddenly forget about life and death with just one word from a Zen teacher. Also, there were many people who got enlightenment after three or seven days of practice. However, people these days have very little patience and practice Zen as a sideline. Because of this, people who have practiced for even twenty or thirty years still have not attained Buddhism's great meaning.
37. When you eat rice yourself, you feel full. If you don't practice Zen yourself, even the Buddha and eminent teachers cannot help you.
38. If you want to practice Zen, first win the battle of the six senses.
39. Zen practice is very accessible; it's not dependent on any special circumstances. Because of this, practitioners can avoid being noticed by even the emissaries of the kingdom of hell.
40. When one thought appears, everything appears. When one thought disappears, everything disappears. The appearance and disappearance of one thought is the creation and destruction of the whole universe, even life and death.
41. The teaching phrase, "If you open your mouth, it's already a mistake!" points to the mind before name and form.
42. When you feel that your practice is going well, it has already gone wrong.

43. If you can practice even in a dream, you have made practice your teacher.
44. Even in a deep dreamless sleep you should know where you put your 'not moving' mind.
45. When awake, we wander through life controlled by our thinking. Dreaming originates from our karma body which imitates the past actions of our form body.
46. You should be able to practice as if dreaming and awake are one.
47. Consider this: are you able to keep your everyday mind even if your body is being burned by fire? If you cannot, know that when you pass from life to death, your path will be dark and you won't know what to do.
48. A practicing person should do the practice of non-practice. This is more difficult than what we think of as 'practice'.
49. Rather than worry about how well you are practicing, you should be building up strong faith.
50. A stormy life is necessary both before and after enlightenment.
51. Zen practice is like a blast furnace that melts all your karmic hindrances from past lives.
52. Treat people with compassion. However, when it comes to your own practice, you must be brutally uncompromising; otherwise you will never defeat the eighty-four thousand illusions of mind.
53. Just before their execution, a person may have some thinking but during practice, one should not mix in even the slightest glimmer of a thought.
54. During practice, the sleep demon should be more feared than a single thought. So, you must first bring this demon to its knees.
55. It is extremely difficult to get a human body, so don't waste the opportunity to practice hard. Once you miss this chance it will be very difficult to get it again.
56. If you don't attain strength in your practice, only your karma will remain when you die. At this time, even animals can appear to you as handsome men and women, leading you to an animal realm in your next life.
57. Time is of the utmost importance for a Zen practitioner – don't waste even one moment.
58. You are the most free and relaxed when using the toilet. If you have one mind, even at that time you can get enlightenment.
59. The reason why we delay practicing is because we always think that we have more time. When you wake up in the morning, you should always say to yourself, "I am still alive – I did not die. I should finish this great work. There is no tomorrow."

60. At night when you lie down to sleep, think about how much you practiced that day. If you spent more time thinking and sleeping than practice, then you should strongly urge yourself to practice more everyday and do it!
61. If illusions or sleep appear during practice, then recall that in this life you have not been free from life and death. This will help refresh your mind.
62. If you have even the smallest thought of self-concern when you die, then even the memory of practicing Zen will disappear.
63. If you are a monastic who has left home to get of samsara and you do anything other than keeping to the way of practicing Zen, you will only be strengthening the habits of life and death.
64. If you practice Zen thinking that you will get something special, you will fall into heresy.
65. Even though a person of the way may be capable of performing various supernatural acts or miracles (merely characteristics of the Dharma), one should never go down this path.
66. Faith is a stepping stone towards Buddha. Using this faith, which has no 'I', we must go beyond the Buddha to find our own true nature.
67. If you are a Zen practitioner, you should behave like one - don't be frivolous. Then you can teach others without opening your mouth.
68. There are four stages of attainment in practice: i) Knowing that there is no life or death, ii) Being in accord with the fact that there is no life or death, iii) Attaining no life or death, iv) Using the fact that there is no life or death without hindrance. When you attain these four stages, you will be a great and free person, with no hindrance in either theory or practice.
69. Don't try to understand anything during practice. If you attain strength in your practice, enlightenment will appear by itself.
70. If you become lazy in your practice because you think that you have gotten something, you will cut off your affinity for the Buddha Dharma.
71. The mind that is not attached to anything material can use emptiness to accomplish anything.
72. Mind creates the material world but without the material world the mind cannot exist or function.
73. Each thing in the material world has a function specified by its name. Mind has no name or form but is the source of all existence. Everyone already has the Mind which possesses an infinite capacity to accomplish anything. If you return to Mind, you can do anything.
74. Two actors; life and death, good and bad, use an infinite variety of forms to create a play in the theatre of the mind. Using the universe as a stage, they take turns creating comedy and tragedy.

75. Though a country may be highly developed culturally and economically, if it does not have a person of the Way, it will lack substance. If a country is poor but has a person of the Way, it is rich.
76. A person of the Way should not be a 'person of the Way'. You must attain the place before name and form. Don't idolize people of the Way and don't be hindered by your precepts or practice. Instead, become a completely independent person. If you do this, you can come and go freely in the six realms of existence and escape suffering.

### **Chapter III. Human Life**

1. A human being's life is no more than a short act in a play. When the act ends, our consciousness, which makes happiness, anger, sadness and pleasure, disappear without a trace. The flesh dissolves into rot. What kind of impermanent thing is this? Also, did you experience even one second of freedom during this brief moment of impermanence? Death comes suddenly. You may die before you swallow the rice that you are chewing. Due to fire, you may never enjoy the fancy house that you are building. This is impermanence. Is it not sad that people cannot even control their own lives and yet they go on to create groups and even nations? If you want true freedom, you must know its basis. People may clamor for freedom, but if they don't know its source, it is like talking about eating well without having any rice.
2. Life is like a ginkgo tree that sees its own reflection in a pond and thinks that it has found a mate and then bears fruit. Humans, just like this tree, cry and laugh in response to their dream world which is just a reflection of their karma.
3. Human life is not just a continuation of this life but a continuation of emergence and extinction (birth and death) over and over again. At the moment of death, humans forget about their previous lives and the suffering associated with entering the womb, gestation and birth. They only think about their present life through the limited understanding provided by the six consciousnesses. Visiting heaven and hell, having a human or animal body – all these lives come and go very fast. Just like a movie, the scenes pass by quickly.
4. In our life, we cannot bring back the past nor guarantee the future. There is only the present. If you completely attain this, then the past, present and future become one and you live in this oneness.
5. To live means living in the present, not in the past or the future. The present is a moment of passing between the past and the future which never stops flowing. In this moment you may feel life is not stable - this is not true life! The past, present and future are one because the present is the future of the past and the past of the future.
6. We are surrounded by high civilizations which are beyond our imagination. Below us are hells of unimaginable cruelty. Which one is the true world? To find the answer to this question is to attain the world of your true self.
7. Our present life is the whole world. If you don't get satisfaction in this life, you will not get it anywhere.
8. Every human being wants something good out of life but nobody understands that this wanting is the source of suffering.
9. The major dimensions of one's life: old age, sickness, death, happiness, anger, sadness and pleasure are just guests at a party celebrating your decline. They visit you out of habit. If you attain this, you can get out of life and death.
10. Numberless kinds of sentient beings populate our universe, each forming their own societies. As a result of the habits of many lifetimes, our six consciousnesses



become more and more fixed. Human beings cannot see or feel beyond these limitations so they have no way of understanding sentient beings of other realms, like heaven (gods) and hell (ghosts).

11. Each person's character is the product of habit. Genius and talent are the product of such habits over many lifetimes. Your karma is your habit.
12. Things are always combining and dissolving. The universe is created and extinguished over and over again through infinite time. The same is true of our lives; birth is always following death.
13. Sentient beings (humans, animals, worms etc.) have limited, self-centered lives controlled by their small 'I'. Having lost their freedom they are dragged around by their karma, wandering through the six realms of existence and reappearing through the four kinds of birth. Buddhas make the whole universe their own by becoming one with it. All sentient beings are the Buddha's body and the three thousand worlds are the Buddha's home. Buddhas are totally free to occupy or leave any body or home.
14. Since Buddhas have made the whole universe their own, they can freely use the world of name and form.
15. Everyone thinks heaven is the best place to go to and no one wants to go to hell, but the whole universe is just one body; heaven and hell are one home. Sentient beings are always splitting their world into two. They can even divide their bodies into two parts, sending one part to heaven and the other to hell according to their karmic affinities.
16. No one can attain true peace if they are controlled by their situation.
17. Because ordinary people consider this bag of blood and excrement their true body, they think that hot, cold, thirst and hunger are the only important considerations. There is no way for these people to get out of the suffering of samsara.
18. The perceptions created through the six consciousnesses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind) are always changing according to time and circumstance. How can we possibly grasp the original nature of life using these six consciousnesses?
19. Even though there are very advanced and profound worldly theories, they cannot solve your life's problems because all these theories are attached to name and form.
20. If there is a teaching that enlightens you to what theory cannot explain, then this teaching is the doorway to the Dao.
21. Those who talk about metaphysics and idealism are not aware that they themselves are not free from the material world.
22. In the whole world there is no one who speaks correctly or incorrectly.
23. Even though god presides freely, using supernatural power over the fortunes of human beings, it is nothing but a vice.

24. Those who deny the existence of god cannot escape stupidity; those who believe in god cannot avoid ignorance.
25. Human beings are proud of the infinite ability of modern science. However, if they use it incorrectly, it will create more harm than good. When egotism disappears and mind and matter become one, we will enter the age of true science, when humans can live in peace. True peace will come when a spiritual culture based on true nature is accepted by every human being.
26. We cannot subdue all of nature with the power of science, only part of it. Even if we could subdue it, it would just be the result of our human habits. We still would not have overcome our habits. Only after we have completely controlled our habits can we use nature and our habits as if they were our own car.
27. The scientist whose mind and the material world have become one is able to display his infinite ability forever.
28. People these days are concerned only with their own contentment. When they listen to a Dharma talk they don't understand, they don't listen carefully. They enjoy refuting its content without any reason or grounds. By doing this they go down a dark path.
29. Because of egoistic attachment our minds are limited by individualistic thinking. We don't understand that we and others are the same. This kind of ignorance only makes us smaller as human beings.
30. Sentient beings know that they must be good. They don't realize that they must find the self which makes them good.
31. People say that human beings are the most precious of all beings because they have the ability to think and speculate. Yet, they don't even try to understand what thinking and speculation are.
32. Even though sentient beings don't know their true selves at all, some pretend to be scholars or religious leaders, discussing life's great questions. This is killing life while trying to save it.
33. If you take even one step beyond theory and scholarly study then you can find your true self. Life's great questions cannot be solved before you find your true self.
34. Life's great questions cannot be solved through hope or feeling of sympathy for these questions. Attain your true self, then you can freely deal with life both in theory and your daily actions (karma).
35. Sentient beings only know how to know; they don't know how to 'don't know'.
36. In you know this 'don't know', then you truly know. The way of truly knowing is knowing how to not know. This is your true nature.
37. We are like brothers born of the same womb (mother earth) confronting each other with guns and swords. Who are we really going to kill by sharpening our swords? Who are we really killing by making arms? This is the human tragedy.

## **Chapter IV. Buddha Dharma**

1. If you say 'Buddha Dharma', already that is not Buddha Dharma.
2. Everything, as it is, is Buddha Dharma. If you get up on a soapbox to preach about the Buddha Dharma, the meaning is already lost.
3. Material things are to be used; Mind is the basis. When Mind and the material become one, this is the Buddha Dharma. If you don't attain the Buddha Dharma in this lifetime, there is no guarantee that you will find the path in future lives.
4. Buddha Dharma is appropriate for any historical period or human circumstance.
5. If your life is not touched by the Dharma, then you have already lost your human status.
6. Buddha is Mind; Dharma is the material. Before the Buddha Dharma appeared as name and form and even before the historical Buddha appeared, true nature existed. If you put down the small 'I', which is like a piece of unglazed pottery, then you will get a Dharma body which is like the seven treasures. (gold, silver, lapis crystal, coral, agate and pearl).
7. It is not the mouth which speaks; it is not the hand which works. When you find the one who really speaks and works, then you will become an authentic human who can truly speak and work.
8. Buddha Dharma is responsible for the body and the mind. A life where the Buddha Dharma is not charge is a life without purpose. Once you realize this you will return to the Buddha Dharma immediately.
9. Worldly principles and the Buddha Dharma are not two. Buddha and sentient beings are one. When you attain this 'not two' dharma, you will become a true person.
10. Someone who knows the Buddha Dharma is not attached to dualistic thinking (they have left home). If you haven't attained the Buddha Dharma, then you are just like a common worldly person.
11. To open different locks you need many kinds of keys. If you want to comprehend the numberless obscure principles of samadhi, you will need ten thousand wisdom keys.
12. Denying the Buddha Dharma is denying oneself. If you reject the Buddha Dharma, you reject yourself, because you are the Buddha.
13. Every sound is a Dharma talk and everything is the true body of the Buddha. But we always hear that it is very difficult to encounter the Buddha Dharma even once in ten million kalpas. This puzzling situation deserves our serious consideration.

## **Chapter V. Buddhism**

1. If you defend your theory of Buddhism, you are already going against its basic tenets because Buddhism's principles are beyond egoism.
2. The tenets of Buddhism say that we should not punish the bad or encourage the good because both good and bad are the Buddha Dharma. The pleasures of heaven and the suffering of hell are all created by oneself.
3. Nothing can be gotten without paying a price and there is no success without effort. This is the first principle of the universe.
4. Everything itself is Buddha so there can be no fixed rules or basic organization for teachers. Buddhism needs to be taught with patience, step by step according to circumstances.
5. The theory of Mind-only in Buddhism is not the opposite of materialism. Mind-only refers to the original Mind (true nature) where mind and matter are not two.
6. Space (true nature) gives birth to mind; mind gives birth to personality, which gives birth to action.
7. Usually people think that the terms, 'matter' and 'mind' completely explain the basic nature of the universe. However, the true nature of the universe lies somewhere else.
8. In Buddhism, the Dharma body is beyond spirit and the true human is beyond the soul. Attaining this is final enlightenment. The Dharma body is the root of the form body, spirit and soul. When the form body, spirit and soul lose their root, they merely move through life, continually replacing each other (samsara). This is our human world.
9. Buddhism is an educational system which teaches each person how to find their true nature. Other religions, too, are like a bridge to finding our true self.
10. Words cannot explain the hidden principle of Buddhism; however it is possible to transmit it from mind to mind. A teacher cannot teach it nor can a student be taught. Giving it and receiving it are not possible. This is the Dharma inherited by the Buddhas of the past and the future.

## Chapter VI. Monks and Nuns

1. Monastics exist before name and form appear – did you know that? They are the host for all beings, teaching even those in heaven.
2. Monastics, whose life is to practice, must give up their families (parents, mates and children), all their possessions and even themselves.
3. Monastics should not let their lives be controlled by fate. They should not fear hell or have their happiness be dependent on others.
4. Monastic discipline means keeping your true nature pure as a white lotus – don't attach to worldly things.
5. The completion of even worldly study can take half a lifetime, so how can we say it is boring to study for ten thousand years to find the way to infinite life?
6. Many feel the need for worldly education which isn't concerned with the wheel of life and death; imagine how much more we need the lessons of Zen practice, which cut the hold of life and death forever and allow us to realize our true nature.
7. Worldly people adopt the Dharma as a 'doing', but monastics learn the Dharma by 'not doing'.
8. Worldly people do everything with attachment, while monastics act through cutting attachment. Monastics should not even attach to Buddha or patriarchs.
9. The inheritance of worldly people is through blood lines, while the inheritance of monastics is through the enlightened mind, which is the Dao. The biggest sin for a worldly person is to interrupt the inheritance from their ancestors. For monastics, who are the students of the Buddha, there is no greater sin than not inheriting the Dharma.
10. In ancient times, older laywomen who understood the Dharma would often test monks. But these days, even monks who lead assemblies do not understand the Buddha Dharma. This is truly a time of darkness! How will we ever escape?
11. The fortune and misfortune of mankind are the result of ups and downs of Buddhism.
12. World peace always goes together with the flourishing of Buddhism.
13. The tattered clothes of practicing sunims are very precious, even the clothes of a king cannot compare. The clothes of a king cover a lot of bad karma but a sunim's tattered clothes take away karma and allow wisdom to grow.
14. If a monastic still envies a layperson's wealth and fame or is lonely and still feels sorrow, it is truly shameful.
15. A monastic is a person who has attained becoming one with the universe.

16. Monastics should not use anything for themselves even if it is gained through their own efforts, because everything they have is the property of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha).
17. If you receive an offering as a monastic and use it without practicing, you are a swindler.
18. If you are a monastic and do not function correctly, you sin against your family, country and sangha.
19. If a person becomes a monastic when they are young, before their true nature is tainted, and they function correctly their whole life, then the virtue that they create will cover both heaven and earth.
20. There are many monastics who waste lay people's offerings and don't practice sincerely. Because of this there are very few lay people these days to support monastic life. The effort that one makes for the Dao becomes the Dao, so you must practice bravely, even in very difficult situations.
21. The direction of your thoughts is determined only through practice. When you are able to choose the direction of your thoughts, then you can take the correct path and infinite life is guaranteed.
22. Worldly life allows for lapses of attention, but monastic life requires that practice be continuous, even in a dream. Even a small gap allows all kinds of hindrances to appear.
23. Even a murderer of ten million people who repents, pays homage to the Buddha and becomes a practicing monk, can take away the hatred of his victims and remove the bad karma they have created for infinite kalpas.
24. Because people attach to the false 'I', everything they see, hear and do become impermanent.
25. Sentient beings cannot escape the samsara of the six realms controlled by time and space because they are attached to living only in time and space.

## **Chapter VII. Rules for living in the Sangha**

1. Monks and nuns must live with the sangha and consider it a treasure.
2. Monastics should not create factions within the sangha. If one makes distinctions like 'us' then you have already violated the spirit of the sangha.
3. Monastics should leave behind the human world based on material values and live in a spiritually based community where you and I become one.
4. Serving the sangha is serving Buddha.
5. Having cut off their affinity for worldly living, monastics should respect each other as they clean their karma. They should love children and respect elders.
6. If one has already vowed to enter a student and teacher relationship, the student should respect the teacher and the teacher should lead and teach the student.
7. Monastics should first cut the mind that thinks in terms of right and wrong. If a quarrel arises you must examine yourself. If it is not your fault then just disregard it. Living this way will eliminate disputes and create peace.
8. When dealing with temple business, monastics should not be concerned with personal gain but should return the resulting acclaim or profit to the sangha.
9. Do not discuss the faults of your Dharma friend with others. If he's a true Dharma friend, then these faults are actually yours.
10. Monastics have taken on a difficult job for themselves, so always be helpful to others.
11. Mind is infinite, so too, the body, its emissary, is not limited.
12. Monastics should keep an open mind that is impartial and acts for the benefit of all. They should even treat insects with great love and great sadness.
13. If you gain an undeserved windfall, don't be happy because behind your gain may be the sorrow of someone else's loss.
14. The primary virtue for all monastics should be patience.
15. A monastic should be able to take all criticisms of the sangha upon themselves and be ready to give even his life for the sangha.
16. If each person does their tasks sincerely, then there will never be any disharmony within the sangha.
17. Avoiding difficulties and seeking gain from public affairs are sources of self-corruption.

**18. Do not complain about being asked to dedicate yourself to something which is beyond your reach. Thinking that something is beyond your ability comes from a weakness of spirit.**



## **Chapter VIII. Admonitions**

1. If you inhale one breath but cannot exhale, then you are finished! You will lose your human way if you do not attain strength in your practice because your mind will not be clear when your life's light ceases.
2. Wasting time and just playing around is the source of our bad karma.
3. If you don't practice to find your true self but just chase after wealth and sex, then even if one thousand Buddhas appeared, they could not save you.
4. Even saving a small country requires a great sacrifice, so getting back your true nature demands a very large payment from you.
5. Everybody recognizes that they have lost something, but no one knows they have lost their true self.
6. If you ignore the needs of even small beings, in future you will become one of them.
7. Giving benefit to others means a true benefit to yourself. Making offerings is like opening a high interest savings account for yourself.
8. The meanest thing that you can do is to blame others for your mistake.
9. One action is better than a thousand thoughts.
10. Playing around gives rise to many kinds of danger.
11. Always act before you speak.
12. It is not the gun or knife that shoots or stabs, the real perpetrator is one's karma.
13. The scariest place is not hell, but the mind which produces anger, desire and ignorance.
14. True work is done when there is no doing (wu wei). There is true goodness when one does not make compassion.
15. True speech does not come from the mouth.
16. The most frightening thing is empty space.
17. Can you show your thinking to others?
18. Have you experienced the 'bone of space'?
19. Have you seen the hair growing on a ghost's fart?
20. Can you hear the Buddha statue's Dharma speech?
21. Thinking itself is reality and the truth of existence.

22. When thinking appears, Dharma appears; when thinking disappears, all Dharmas return to emptiness.
23. Earth, wood, roof tiles and stones are themselves the Dao.
24. Suffering is the mother of Buddha.
25. You should find the Buddha in ignorance.
26. 'No mind' is the teacher of Vairocana Buddha.
27. When you cut off the desire to understand then you can understand everything, because everything is found in emptiness.
28. You should know that a scarecrow is more spiritual than a human being.
29. If you don't get anything then there is nothing to lose.
30. A useful person can never be idle.

## **Chapter IX. Final Words**

I have been teaching Zen students on this mountain for almost forty years. Many people come to visit me thinking they are visiting a Zen Master but they only see my form body, the house where my true nature lives. They don't see my true nature. That is not a problem but it means that they have not seen their true nature.

Because they haven't seen their true nature, they cannot see their parents, siblings, wife and children, or anybody. They wander through life in vain, like a crazy person. We have to say that this is truly a world of darkness. Students who receive my teaching must do it with sincerity and dedication, not forgetting the methods I used. Ultimately, being sincere and dedicated is paying back your Dharma obligation, so you will not waste your practice or suffer a mental loss.

You should always retain three things: a place of practice, a teacher and Dharma friends. Three thousand years after Sakyamuni Buddha, three bodhisattvas of the highest level will appear on Dok Seung mountain. Seven people of great wisdom and numberless practitioners who have attained the Way will also appear.

You should know that I am an eternal being, not dependent on a form body.

Even when my Dharma speech is not heard anymore, you should still be able to see my true face because it never disappears.

## Biography: Zen Master Man Gong

Zen Master Man Gong Wol Myon (1871-1946) was born in the province of Chollabuk-do in Korea as the second son of four children. Before giving birth, his mother had an auspicious dream of a dragon, which symbolizes a great being about to be born. At the age of two it was already perceived that he would become a great monk. At thirteen, upon following his mother to Keum Sahn Sa temple, he saw for the first time a Buddha statue and some monks practicing. This experience was pivotal in opening his mind and in the following year, he entered Dong Hak Sa temple in Gyeryong Mountain to train as a novice monk. He received the name Wol Myon and began studying sutras. During this period, Korea was in turmoil with factional and food was scarce. Monks, including young Wol Myon lived on what meager alms they received from day to day whenever they could. It was during this time that he met his teacher Zen Master Kyong Ho and followed him to Chun Jang Am hermitage in Chollanam-do Province.

At Chun Jang Am he practiced with two other disciples of Zen Master Kyong Ho, Su Wol and Hye Wol. The three became known as the 'Three Moons of Kyong Ho', wol meaning moon. Kyong Ho and his disciples turned it into the most powerful Zen practicing place of its time. When Wol Myon was twenty-four, he was tested by Zen Master Kyong Ho with various kong-ans, all of which he passed, and was given Dharma transmission and the name Man Gong. The story of Man Gong's enlightenment follows:

*Zen Master Man Gong, Seung Sahn Soen-sa's grand teacher, became a monk when he was a young boy, and for several years studied the Mahayana sutras at Dong Hak Sa temple. One day, when he was thirteen years old, there was a great ceremony to mark the beginning of the long vacation. The sutra master got up and said, "You must all study very hard, learn Buddhism, and become like great trees, from which temples are built, and like large bowls, able to hold many good things. The sutra says, 'Water becomes square or round according to the shape of the container it is put in. In the same way, people become good or bad according to the friends they have.' Always have the Buddha in mind and keep good company. Then you will become great trees and containers of Dharma. This I sincerely wish."*

*The next speaker was Zen Master Kyong Ho, who happened to be visiting the temple. He was already known all over Korea as a very great Zen Master and, clothed in rags, with long hair and a long, thin beard, he was a striking figure among the neat, shaven-headed monks. He said, "All of you are monks. Monks are free of petty personal attachments and live only to serve all people. Wanting to become a great tree or container of Dharma will prevent you from being a true teacher. Great trees have great uses; small trees have small uses. Good and bad bowls can all be used in their own way. None are to be discarded. Keep both good and bad friends. You mustn't reject anything. This is true Buddhism. My only wish for you is that you free yourselves from all conceptual thinking."*

*Everyone was filled with deep admiration. As the Zen Master walked out of the Dharma room, Man Gong ran after him and pulled at his robe. Kyong Ho turned around and said, "What do you want?"*

*Man Gong said, "I want to become your student. Please take me with you."*

*Kyong Ho shouted at him to go away, but the boy would not leave. Then he said, with great severity, "You are only a child. You are incapable of learning Buddhism."*

*Man Gong said, "People may be young or old, but is there youth or old age in Buddhism?"*

*Kyong Ho said, "You bad boy! You have killed and eaten the Buddha! Come along now."*

*He took the boy to Chung Jung Sa temple, introduced him to the abbot, and left him there. Man Gong studied hard for the next five years. One day, when he was eighteen, he heard the kong-an: "The ten thousand Dharmas return to the One: where does the One return to?" Immediately he was plunged into the great doubt. He couldn't eat or sleep or think of anything but that one question. All day long, and far into the night, he would keep the question in his mind, wherever he was, whatever he was doing.*

*One day, as he was sitting Zen, a large hole appeared in the wall which he was facing. He could see the whole landscape! Grass, trees, clouds, and the blue sky appeared through the wall with total clarity. He touched the wall. It was still there, but it was transparent like glass. He looked up, and he could see right through the roof. At this Man Gong was filled with an inexpressible joy. Early the next morning, he went to see the Zen Master, rushed into his room, and announced, "I have penetrated the nature of all things. I have attained enlightenment."*

*The Master said, "Oh, have you? Then what is the nature of all things?"*

*Man Gong said, "I can see right through the wall and the roof, as if they weren't there."*

*The Master said, "Is this the truth?"*

*"Yes. I have no hindrance at all."*

*The Master took his Zen stick and hit Man Gong on the head. "Is there any hindrance now?"*

*Man Gong was astonished. His eyes bulged, his face flushed, and the walls became solid again. The Master said, "Where did your truth go?"*

*"I don't know. Please teach me."*

*"What kong-an are you working on?"*

*'Where does the One return?' "*

*"Do you understand One?"*

*"No."*

*"You must first understand One. What you saw was an illusion. Don't be led astray by it. With more hard work on your kong-an, you will soon understand."*

*Man Gong came out of this interview with renewed aspiration. For the next three years he meditated continually on the great question. Then, one morning that was no different from other mornings, he sang the words of the morning bell chant: "If you wish to understand all Buddhas of the past, present, and future, you must perceive that*

*the whole universe is created by the mind alone." Having sung this, he hit the great bell. Suddenly his mind opened, and he understood that all Buddhas dwell in a single sound.*

*Dizzy with joy, Man Gong ran to the Dharma room and kicked the monk who used to sit next to him. The monk cried out and said, "Are you crazy?"*

*Man Gong said, "This is Buddha-nature!"*

*"Have you attained enlightenment?"*

*"The whole universe is one. I am Buddha!"*

*During the next year, Man Gong kicked and hit many other monks and became very famous. People said, "He is a free man. He has no hindrance at all."*

*One day, a year later, there was an important ceremony at which Kyong Ho was present. Man Gong went to his room thinking, "This Zen Master and I are the same. We have both attained enlightenment. He is Buddha, so am I. But since he was my first teacher I will bow to him, just as an ordinary monk would do."*

*After Man Gong had bowed, Kyong Ho said, "Welcome. It's been a long time since I've seen you. I heard that you have attained enlightenment. Is that true?"*

*Man Gong said, "Yes, Master."*

*"Wonderful. Now let me ask you a question." Kyong Ho picked up a fan and a writing brush and put them in front of Man Gong. "Are these the same or different?"*

*Man Gong said, "The fan is the brush; the brush is the fan."*

*For the next hour, with grandmotherly compassion, Kyong Ho tried to teach Man Gong his mistake. But Man Gong wouldn't listen. Finally Kyong Ho said, "I have one more question for you. In the burial ceremony there is a verse that says, 'The statue has eyes, and its tears silently drip down.' What does this mean?"*

*Man Gong was stunned. He could find nothing to say. Suddenly, Kyong Ho shouted at him, "If you don't understand this, why do you say that the fan and the brush are the same?" In great despair, Man Gong bowed and said, "Forgive me."*

*"Do you understand your mistake?"*

*"Yes, Master. What can I do?"*

*"Long ago, when Zen Master Jo-ju was asked if a dog had Buddha-nature, he said, 'No!' What does this mean?"*

*"I don't know."*

*Kyong Ho said, "Always keep the mind that doesn't know and you will soon attain enlightenment."*

*Man Gong understood what a great gift this teaching was. For the next three years, he did very hard training and always kept don't-know mind. One day he heard the great*

*bell ring and understood Jo-ju's answer. He returned to Kyong Ho, bowed, and said, "Now I know why the Bodhisattva faces away: because sugar is sweet and salt is salty."*

Upon receiving Dharma transmission, Zen Master Man Gong wrote the following poem:

*Empty mountain true energy without time and space,  
White cloud and clear wind come and go by themselves,  
Why did Bodhidharma come to China?  
Rooster crowing in the morning, sun rising in the east.*

Thereafter, he built a small hermitage named Keum Soen Dae near Su Dok Sa temple in Dok Seung Mountain, where over forty years, aspiring Zen practitioners flocked to hear his teaching and many attained enlightenment. As Kyong Ho's greatest and most well known successor, Man Gong carried out his teacher's wish for a larger community by teaching laypeople and nuns as well as monks, helping all who came with a sincere motivation to attain their true self.

Man Gong was known for his physical strength despite his slight figure and was also of the literati, often surrounded by well versed poets, musicians and artists. Famous figures sought him out and in their company he would perform on his own *geomungo*\*, a Korean six-stringed zither. The zither is now at Su Dok Sa Songbo Museum, where his celebrated calligraphy, 'Whole World Is a Single Flower' written upon Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945, is also on display. This commemorative calligraphy of four characters was written in ink with the petal end of the Korean national flower the Rose of Sharon.

Zen Master Man Gong was Zen Master of Su Dok Sa, Jung Hae Sa and Kyon Song Am, three Zen monasteries for monks and nuns on Dok Seung Mountain, and he taught countless practitioners, both monastic and lay. He gave transmission to Zen Master Ko Bong, teacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn, and several other students including four nuns. One day after his routine bath, taking a seat and looking at himself in the mirror, he said, "Now it is time for us to part," and entered nirvana at the age of seventy-five.

\* *Geomungo* is a Korean six-stringed zither, traditionally played by a man. This particular *geomungo* was given to Zen Master Man Gong by a prince in the late Joseon Dynasty. It was originally made for the last king of the Goryeo Dynasty in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.