

Zen Master Seung Sahn's Temple Rules

As Used In Our Zen Centers

1. On Keeping the Bodhi Mind

You must first make a firm decision to attain Enlightenment and help others. You already have the five or ten precepts. Know when to keep them and when to break them, when they are open and when they are closed. Let go of your small self and become your true self.

In original nature

There is no this and that.

The Great Round Mirror

Has no likes or dislikes.

2. On Mindfulness

Do not cling to your opinions. Do not discuss your private views with others. To cling to and defend your opinions is to destroy your practice. Put away all your opinions. This is true Buddhism.

Do not go where you have no business. Do not listen to talk which does not concern you.

Do not make the bad karma of desire, anger, or ignorance.

If in this lifetime

You do not open your mind,

You cannot digest

Even one drop of water.

3. On Conduct

Always act with others. Do not put yourself above others by acting differently. Arrogance is not permitted in the temple.

Money and sex are like a spiteful snake. Put your concern with them far away.

In the Dharma Room always walk behind those seated in meditation. At talks and ceremonies, keep the proper posture and dress. Do not talk or laugh loudly in the Dharma Room.

If you have business outside the temple which causes you to miss ceremonies or meals, notify one of the temple officials before you leave.

Respect those older than you. Love those younger than you. Keep your mind large and open.

If you meet sick people, love and help them. Be hospitable to guests. Make them welcome and attend to their needs.

When respected people visit the temple, bow to them and speak considerately to them.

Be courteous. Always let others go before you.

Help other people.

Do not play games with other people.

Do not gossip.

Do not use other people's shoes and coats.

Do not cling to the scriptures.

Do not oversleep.

Do not be frivolous.

Let older and more respected people be seated before you.

Do not discuss petty temple matters with guests.

When visiting outside the temple, speak well of the temple to others.

Drinking to produce heedlessness, or acting out of lust will only make bad karma and destroy your practice. You must be strong and think correctly. Then these desires cannot tempt you.

Do not delude yourself into thinking you are a great and free person. This is not true Buddhism.

Attend only to yourself. Do not judge the actions of others.

Do not make the bad karma of killing, stealing, or of lust.

Originally there is nothing.

But Buddha practiced unmoving under the Bodhi tree for six years.

And for nine years Bodhidharma sat silently in Sorim.

*If you can break the wall of your self
You will become infinite in time and space.*

4. On Speech

Your evil tongue will lead you to ruin. You must keep the stopper in the bottle. Only open it when necessary.

Always speak well, in the manner of a Bodhisattva. Do not use vulgar language in the temple.

If you come upon two people fighting, do not provoke them by angry speech. Rather use good words to soothe their anger.

Do not make the bad karma of lying, exaggerating, making trouble between people, or cursing others.

Once a man spoke incorrectly and was reborn a fox for 500 generations. After he heard the correct speech, he lost his fox's body. What is correct and incorrect speech?

If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.

If you close your mouth, I will still hit you thirty times.

You must grab the word-head (kong-an) and not let go.

The dog is barking. Wong, wong, wong!

The cat is meowing. Meow, meow, meow

5. On Eating

An eminent teacher said, "A day without work is a day without eating."

There are two kinds of work: inside work and outside work. Inside work is keeping clear mind. Outside work is cutting off selfish desires and helping others.

First work, then eat.

Eat in silence. Do not make unnecessary noise.

While eating, attend only to yourself. Do not be concerned with the actions of others.

Accept what is served with gratitude. Do not cling to your likes and dislikes.

Do not seek satisfaction in eating. Eat only to support yourself in your practice.

Though you may eat good food all your life, your body will die.

The Great Way is not difficult.

Simply cut off all thought of good and bad.

Salt is salty,

Sugar is sweet.

6. On Formal Practice

During formal practice act with other people.

Do not be lazy.

During chanting, follow the moktak.

During sitting, follow the chugpi.

Perceive the true meaning of chanting and sitting and act accordingly.

Understand that you have accumulated bad karma which is like a big mountain. Keep this in mind as you bow in repentance.

Our karma has no self-nature, but is created by our mind. If our mind is extinguished, our karma will be extinguished. When we see both as empty, this is true repentance. We bow to see true nature and help others.

Shouting into a valley

Big shout: big echo.

Small shout: small echo.

7. On the Dharma Talk

When you listen to the words of the Zen teacher, keep your mind clear. Do not be attached to the words. Cut off all thought and pierce the true meaning.

Do not think, "I already have great understanding; I have no use for this speech." This is delusion.

If you have a question, put it to the Zen teacher after the dharma talk.

If a snake drinks water, the water becomes venom. If a cow drinks water, the water becomes milk. If you cling to ignorance, you create life and death. If you keep clear, you become Buddha.

In the great work of life and death, time will not wait for you.

If you die tomorrow, what kind of body will you get?

Is not all of this of great importance?

Hurry up! Hurry!

Blue sky and green sea

*Are the Buddha's original face.
The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song
Are the great sutras.
Where are you going?
Watch your step.
Water flows down to the sea.
Clouds float up to the heavens.*