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ON WORK

A SMALL NOISY ROOM WITH
NO WINDOWS

Los Angeles, California

May 3, 1977

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Three days ago I started a new job. I work with three women in a small room with no windows. Usually there is no work for more than two of the four of us. All day long they talk: they talk about sex, desires, angers. All day long the radio plays loud music about love and suffering.

What am I? I don't know. Still, what is reflected action? Am I to suffer every day, or can I reflect without "becoming"? Often I find the atmosphere—the "way it is" there—depressing. My bodhisattva mind keeps getting lost in fear and anger. The money is useful right now, but I fear becoming suffering.

OK, I have a lot of pride. Some friends of mine are now making a lot of money. I think often, "What do I do in this life?" I feel I waste myself at jobs like this one. Buddhist practice has almost literally saved my life. I know

the thoughts and feelings I experience are not my true self but are just coming and going, coming and going. Still, blue is blue, fear is fear, desire is desire.

What should I do in this situation?

Thank you,
Michael

May 13, 1977

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. How are you?

You say, "No windows . . . working with three women . . . all day long they talk of sex, desire, and anger." This situation is your best teacher. It is better than a Zen master, better than the sutras, better than the Bible. If you hold on to the actions of these women, then you will become a demon. But if you don't hold on to their actions by judging or giving in to them, then their moment-to-moment actions will make you wise.

An eminent teacher said, "Wisdom is ignorance; ignorance is wisdom." This means, how do you keep a just-now mind? Checking your mind is ignorance. If you don't check your mind, then you can see, you can hear, you can smell—all things, just like this, are the truth. Then not only sex, desire, and anger, but also a dog barking, a chicken crowing—everything is the correct Dharma.

For example, when you go to the movies to see a comedy, your mind and everyone else's mind is laughing. When the film is sad, your mind is sad. At that time, if you don't check your mind, then your mind does not

move. Then funny is just funny, sad is sad, good is good, bad is bad. Everything appears clearly. That is correct wisdom. If you can find correct wisdom, your mind will already be clear like space. Then, moment to moment, reflected action is possible.

The whole world is like a theater. If you don't check your mind and don't check your feelings, then everything is the sutras and the Bible. A small room with no windows is OK. Talking about sex, desire, and anger is OK. You will only ask, "How can I help them?" This is reflected action; this is the action of a bodhisattva who always has great love and great sadness for all beings.

I hope that you put it all down and don't check anything. Only go straight—don't know. Then your don't-know mind will become clear, and in any situation reflected action is then possible. Then you can finish the great work of life and death and save all people from suffering.

Yours in the Dharma,
S. S.

MEMORIES OF VIETNAM

Hartford, Connecticut
May 29, 1979

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have recently renewed my efforts to sit Zen in the manner taught by you and Kapleau Roshi in Rochester,

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