



Conversation 11: Lotuses & the Four Guardians

Luca: Please tell us about the symbolism of the lotus growing in a pond.

Sunim: The mud is our minds which are often filled with bad thoughts: jealousy, anger and ill will. The result is that our words are often not as good as they could be and our actions... As we learn about life and how to live well, then we indulge less in these bad ways and more in good ways until finally we truly understand and burst into the sunlight of enlightenment.

Sara: Sounds difficult as I often get angry...

Sunim: We will discuss all that later. For now, here we are at the second gate: the Four Guardians' Gate.

Sara: Wow! Look at them! They look fierce and they don't look Korean at all.

Sunim: You are right. They are originally four gods from India who defend the Dharma and...



Luca: (*interrupting*) Dharma? What is that?

Sunim: The Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha; it is the explanation of reality. It is all the philosophy that he taught for 45 years after his enlightenment. People asked questions and he would answer them. Also slowly he attracted followers and often he instructed them. The whole of these instructions is known as the Dharma. Later on it was written down.





Conversation 12: The Four Guardians' Gate

Luca: So these statues are guardians? They seem to be dressed for battle and each one carries a different object in his hand. What does all that mean?

Sunim: Well, the four guardians are ever ready to defend the Dharma, to trample the opponents of Buddhism under their feet. Look down there, you can see evil being crushed! Each one represents one of the cardinal directions.



Sara: Oh, look, that one is carrying a tower.

Sunim: That's a pagoda. He is Damun Cheonwang, the guardian of the north! The pagoda was used for keeping remains of the Buddha and so symbolizes death. Then there is Jeungjang Cheonwang, the guardian of the southern quarter. See he holds a sword poised for action? He is reputed to have the power to multiply his sword so that he can always outnumber his opponents.



Sara: You didn't tell us about the east and the west!

Sunim: You are right! Jiguk Cheonwang guards the east. He is easily spotted by the lute he holds, the strings of which control wind, thunder, hail and other weather phenomena. The guardian of the west, Gwangmok Cheonwang, holds a dragon in one hand and a jewel in the other. We don't know why.





Conversation 13: The Four Guardians

Luca: Oh, let's try and guess. What about the dragon for power because it can breathe fire and the jewel for wealth?

Sara: I don't think that can be right! I heard that the dragon is the symbol of royalty and the jewel might be the jewel of wisdom. What do you think, Sunim?



Sunim: What you say, Sara, sounds as if it might be right.

Luca: They look a bit like warriors! They have fantastic armor, too.

Sara: Oh, look over there, I can see guardians again. They seem to be everywhere!



Sunim: Smaller temples will have only two guardians painted on a gate. They are a little different and are called Heung and Ha. They send out deadly



rays of light, one from his nostrils with the sound “heung” and one from his mouth with the sound “ha.”

Luca: So the temples are well protected.

Sunim: I suppose so, but it is more the Teachings that are being protected as they are so precious.



Conversation 14: Guardians & The Gate of Non-duality

Sara: But I thought that temples are peaceful places. These statues of warriors with terrible facial expressions and weapons seem out of place.

Sunim: That's true. However, we must never forget that good is always in danger. The main job of the guardians is actually to guard wisdom against ignorance. Think about this word "wisdom," What does it mean? We will return to it later.

Luca: Here is another gate; you have a lot of them. I suppose that is because it really is difficult to go from the ordinary world to the spiritual world.

Sunim: Yes, Luca, you are right. So here is the Gate of Non-duality. Now the visitor knows that there is no duality in the world and his mind becomes clear and one with the universe.

Sara: What does "no duality" mean?

Sunim: It refers to an important teaching about



learning not to differentiate between things. Not to always have opinions, not to separate things, for all is one, all is interrelated. This is the way life is.

Luca: (*getting impatient*) Oh, come on, let's talk philosophy later, please.





Conversation 15: Crossing the Stream

Sunim: OK, then. So now, as we are going from the mundane world, the ordinary world where we live, into the spiritual world, one in which we can purify and improve ourselves, we must cleanse ourselves.

Sara: Sounds very grand! What do you mean?

Sunim: Well, look here, this is typical of most temples (*showing the stream*). We usually walk over water, a stream or a pond, on the way to the main temple compound. This is a symbol of purification, as we use water to clean ourselves externally reminding us to leave ugly emotions like greed and hatred behind.





Luca: Do you mean we have to go swimming?

Sunim: Oh, no! It is a symbol of cleaning, it represents us being cleansed. It means that we try to change our bad habits and characteristics. It means we want to learn how to be really happy.

Luca: That's a relief! So why do we need to be so clean?

Sunim: Because we have to start changing ourselves in some way if we truly want to be happy. So we start by washing away dirt.

Sara: I hope I can learn to be really happy.

Sunim: Of course, you can. But you do have to make some effort and persevere.



REVIEW 3

A. Questions

1. What does the lotus in the pond symbolize?
2. Why do the guardians look fierce?
3. How long did the Buddha teach? What happened to the teachings?
4. What would you ask the Buddha if you met him?
5. Why do we walk over water on the way to a temple?

B. Try these Expressions for Yourself!

1. To indulge in less / more
 - i) If you indulge in more ice cream, you are going to be sick.
 - ii) People should indulge in less wasteful ways of living.
 - iii) To indulge is to live well! Agree?
2. It is typical of
 - i) It is typical of Koreans to be generous.



- ii) That's a typical Buddha statue.
- iii) He's a typical scholar with a book under his arm.

3. That's a relief!

- i) "My cold is gone." "That's a relief!"
- ii) "My cat came home safe and sound." "That's a relief!"
- iii) "The weather is getting warmer." "That's a relief!"

4. I thought that...

- i) As the weather is fine, I thought that we would take a picnic.
- ii) Somehow, I thought that you would be taller.
- iii) I thought that it rains all the time in England but actually it doesn't.

5. To be the symbol of something or someone

- i) A jewel is often a symbol of wisdom.
- ii) A wedding ring is a symbol of the vows two people take.
- iii) The symbol of a king is his crown.