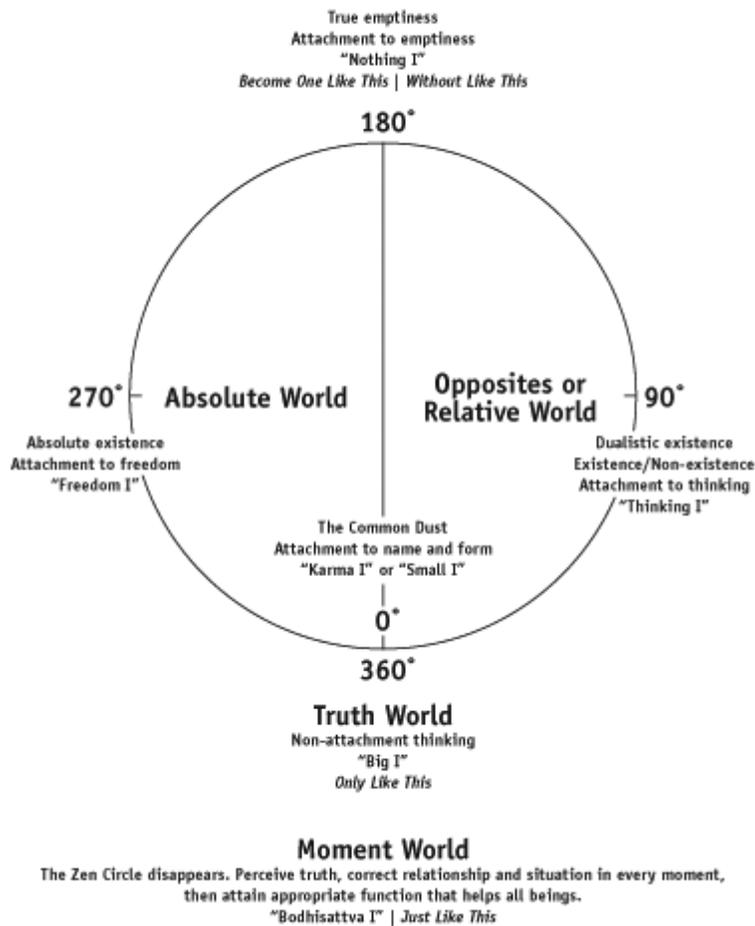


The Zen Circle

Commentary by Zen Master Ji Bong

Zen Master Seung Sahn's Zen Circle



The Zen Circle is a teaching/learning tool developed by Zen Master Seung Sahn and it serves as a mnemonic for understanding the various aspects of the Four Worlds.

On the circle the right half represents the *relative truth* and the left half represents the *absolute truth*.

The circle begins in the area between 0 degrees to 90 degrees – the first half of the **Relative World**. This is the area of "Small I" ("Karma I") with its attachment to name and form.

Proceeding around the circle past 90 degrees is the area of “Thinking I” (“Consciousness I”) with its deep attachment to thinking and conceptualizing. At 90 degrees the *Heart Sutra* teaches “form is emptiness and emptiness is form.”

At 180 degrees, there is no thinking at all. This is because this point is *before thinking* or *without thinking*. This is also the beginning of **Absolute World** which extends to 360 degrees. At 180 degrees there is a Janus-faced relationship between “without like this” and “become one like this.” They are two manifestations of the same attainment. Here the *Heart Sutra* teaches, “no form, no emptiness.”

At 270 degrees is the area of “Freedom I” and it is the realm of “magic and miracles.” It is the third condition of Absolute World.

Finally at 360 degrees is **Truth World**. This point is actually the same as 0 degrees. We arrive where we started, where we have always been. But here there is non-attachment thinking. This is “Big I.” Here the *Heart Sutra* teaches, “Form is form and emptiness is emptiness.” Zen practice is reaching 360 degrees.

When we reach 360 degrees, all degrees on the circle disappear. The circle is just a Zen teaching device. It does not really exist. It is a tool we use to explain the teaching and to test a student’s understanding. Therefore, we can attain our correct situation in the Truth, our correct relationship to the Truth and consequently our correct function moment by moment. This is **Moment World**.