

Foreword



*W*hack! I was hit so hard on my shoulder with the long, hard wooden paddle that the pain radiated into my neck and back. I could hardly breathe as I waited for the sensation to subside.

“God, that hurt! Why did he hit me so hard? Does he dislike me that much?” I thought to myself.

Then a more reasonable part of myself jumped in. I reminded myself that I had moved into a Zen Buddhist monastery to find enlightenment and part of the practice involved Zen discipline. In this particular type of Buddhism, the Zen master hits the Zen students with a stick (called a *kyosaku* stick) while the students are meditating... as a way of encouraging a focused awareness. The sound of the stick swiftly coming down on a student’s shoulder can seem deafening as it echoes off the silent *zendo* walls and the pain is often searing. The idea is that it spurs the student on to reach enlightenment (or at least not fall asleep while in meditation for up to 16 hours a day).

I reminded myself that getting hit had nothing to do with being liked or not. It was used as a compassionate method of encouraging a flagging Zen practitioner to go deeper. (And actually it was a much better method than the older Zen ways of chopping off a finger or hand to encourage enlightenment.)

Although I lived in the Zen Buddhist monastery for over two years, I never reached enlightenment, but I was able to reach a kind of quietude of the soul. It was also one of the best times in my life. I loved the profound stillness that filled me as I watched a shadow of leaf slowly travel across the wall. It seemed as if time stood still in those moments. (I also learned how to pad my shoulders so that when the *kyosaku* stick struck the bones of my shoulder, the blow was muffled. This was a secret passed down through the centuries from the older students.)

I had moved into the monastery as an indirect result of a dramatic near-death experience when I was 17 years old. I had been seriously injured after being hit by a car while on my motorbike (as well as further injuries) and had found myself in an emergency ward. While the doctors were frantically trying to revive me (they thought I had gone into cardiac arrest) I found myself whisked out of my body and into a radiantly beautiful dimension of golden light. I knew that I was home... and it was all so familiar. I knew that I had been there before. I never wanted to

leave, but I found myself being pulled back into my very damaged body with only a memory of what I'd experienced. I desperately wanted to go back. I intuitively knew that there was a way to get there; I simply had to find it.

From that point forward I was on an odyssey to make my way back to that heavenly place, but without having to die first. The Zen monastery was the first part of this journey. (I had heard that when one reached enlightenment they entered into a land of golden light, so I thought if I reached satori that I could get back there.) After not finding enlightenment in the Zen monastery, my quest eventually led me to train with elders in native cultures around the world. I intuitively felt these people with ancient traditions could provide answers for my long-sought questions. At every juncture in my journey I asked the questions "Who am I? What is truly important in life?"

Eventually the answers began to emerge. For example, I learned that the soul loves the truth and that it's really important to live authentically in accordance with the dictates of your soul and not try to always please others, to the detriment of yourself. I began to share everything that I was learning through seminars I taught and books I wrote. Eventually I distilled what I had learned on my journey into the Soul Coaching® program, which is a certification program that trains people to work with clients one-on-one and also work with groups of people. It was a training that came out of a dream that was born during my years in the monastery.

When I was meditating for long periods of time in the Zen monastery there were times when – instead of focusing on my breath – I dreamed about my future. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit this because we were never supposed to visualize anything. In fact, we were supposed to sit with our eyes half-open to prevent visualizing. (Alas, maybe that's why I got hit so many times.) However, I found that visualization helped me move beyond the pain in my knees from sitting in the lotus position for so many hours. I dreamed about traveling to exotic countries around the world.

I also imagined being a part of a remarkable community of people that wanted to make a difference in the world. And in so many ways, these dreams came true. I did travel the world eventually. And also I did find a loving, gracious community of people who were dedicated to making a difference. The Soul Coaches in this book are a part of that community and it is an honor and delight to have them in my life.

When I'm asked about how I choose who attends my Soul Coaching® program, I answer that it's easy because God only sends me the very best people. You'll find in this collaboration that each of these women stands remarkable in her own right. Indeed the Creator has sent me the best people in the women who are represented in this book. I love these women deeply and profoundly.

Their stories of triumph over adversity and their gracious communications from the soul are moving and heartfelt. Within this book is ancient wisdom as well as modern day solutions to every day challenges. It is an honor and a privilege to

share the same pages with these remarkable Soul Coaches. I didn't find enlightenment in the walls of the monastery, but I did seed a dream that blossomed years later... and I'm so thankful.

DENISE LINN
Founder of Soul Coaching®

Launching Your Journey

*AFFIRMATION: I am an
intrepid traveler, sailing forth
into the Universe.*

*Inner and outer travel are ahead.
Get ready, for you are about to
embark on a journey. This could
be an inner sojourn, a voyage to
distant lands, or even a project
or idea that is coming to life.*