

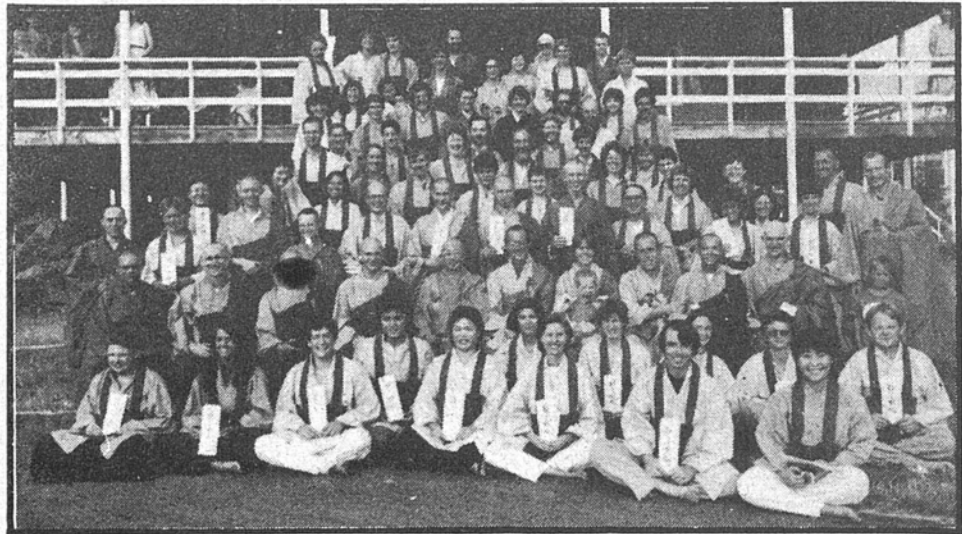
Creation of the Kwan Um Zen School

The first annual congress of the Kwan Um Zen School in July, 1983, at Providence Zen Center, was an occasion for celebrating many events: Soen Sa Nim's birthday, the taking of precepts, seeing old friends, and the establishment of a new school of American Buddhism.

Officially created on Friday, July 29, 1983, the Kwan Um Zen School was the culmination of half a year of study and planning to answer the demands of a rapidly growing network of Zen Centers and affiliates under the direction of Soen Sa Nim. In January of 1983, the Dharma Teachers Association (DTA) governing board appointed a study group to consider a reorganization of the existing school structures. By April, after several all-day meetings, extensive research, and with the help of Jay Voght, an organizational consultant, the study group produced a series of major proposals creating a School organization aimed at relieving the Head Temple of sole financial responsibility for

On the weekend of July 29, 1983, over one hundred visitors from Zen centers and affiliates all over North America and from several foreign countries assembled for the first annual school congress. The new School, named the Kwan Um Zen School by Soen Sa Nim, was formally approved and began its first year of operation. Soen Sa Nim, in his opening talk on Saturday morning, described the school as a very heavy baby born after a long and difficult labor...the baby was born fine and cries 'Kuaah!' ('Save me please!'). But Kwan Um Zen School shouting is not 'kuaah' but 'kuyoh', 'save you'. The energy and strength of the baby were apparent in the speeches that followed.

The panel on the creation of the Kwan Um Zen School featured Soen Sa Nim, Abbot Linc Rhodes, Director Mu Guk Su Nim, and Financial Manager, Shana Klinger. Abbot Linc Rhodes explained that the school was created as the central coordinating organization to support the



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the growing school, clarifying school-wide decision-making, and creating an organization to support Soen Sa Nim, the Master Dharma Teachers, and the Zen centers and affiliates in their work of spreading the Buddhist teaching and practice throughout the world.

The proposals were approved by Soen Sa Nim and then discussed at length by the governing board of DTA at a meeting at Providence Zen Center on April 9. The board, represented by the seven North American centers, created an interim school organization until July, with an executive council composed of the Master Dharma Teachers, one representative from each Zen center, and a representative from DTA, Bodhisattva Monks Association, and the traditional monks. Chaired by Master Dharma Teacher Lincoln Rhodes, this council met monthly to discuss school-wide issues, to resolve basic issues in the creation of the school, and to propose a one-year plan for the school's operation, August 1983-July 1984. Representatives explained to their respective Zen centers the new organization which would depend strongly on members' commitment. Mu Guk Su Nim was elected as the School Director, to supervise office operations and administrative support.

teaching of Soen Sa Nim and the Master Dharma Teachers, and to support and communicate with all the groups connected with his teaching, which includes Zen centers, Buddhist temples, groups, and affiliates.

Kwan Um means perceive world sound, taken from the name of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kwan Se Um Bosal (Avalokitesvara). Soen Sa Nim told the sangha, "If you perceive, that means *only* perceive. You must be able to hear any sound. Then you must use your correct job, your correct speech, to save all beings in the world. That is our school; our school becomes harmony."

The school council will be the main governing body under Soen Sa Nim, meeting quarterly to decide policy issues for the school. It will be composed of the Master Dharma Teachers and representatives from the Zen centers and school organizations.

The School office will be located at the Providence Zen Center in Cumberland, RI, with several volunteer staff travelling with Soen Sa Nim or living on the West Coast. The office will arrange the teaching schedule of Soen Sa Nim and the Master Dharma Teachers, who lead retreats throughout North America and Europe. The office will also oversee the publication of newsletters, newspapers, pamphlets, and books.

Mu Guk Su Nim explained that the creation of the school will allow the Providence Zen Center to become another Zen center in the school and more fully develop its role as a retreat and training center. DTA will be able to concentrate on its role of authorizing and training Dharma Teachers.

Throughout the rest of the weekend, people enjoyed a variety of workshops, talks, and the celebration of Soen Sa Nim's birthday. On Sunday morning Master Dharma Teacher Linc Rhodes spoke about "Families and monasteries and everything in between." He recalled the changes that have occurred over the years in Zen center living. "Bodhisattva monks, traditional monks, Dharma Teachers, people who live and work outside Zen centers; hopefully we'll have all these ways." That hope was confirmed in the precepts ceremony that afternoon when 28 people of all ages and life situations took five, ten, 48, and novice monk precepts. ■

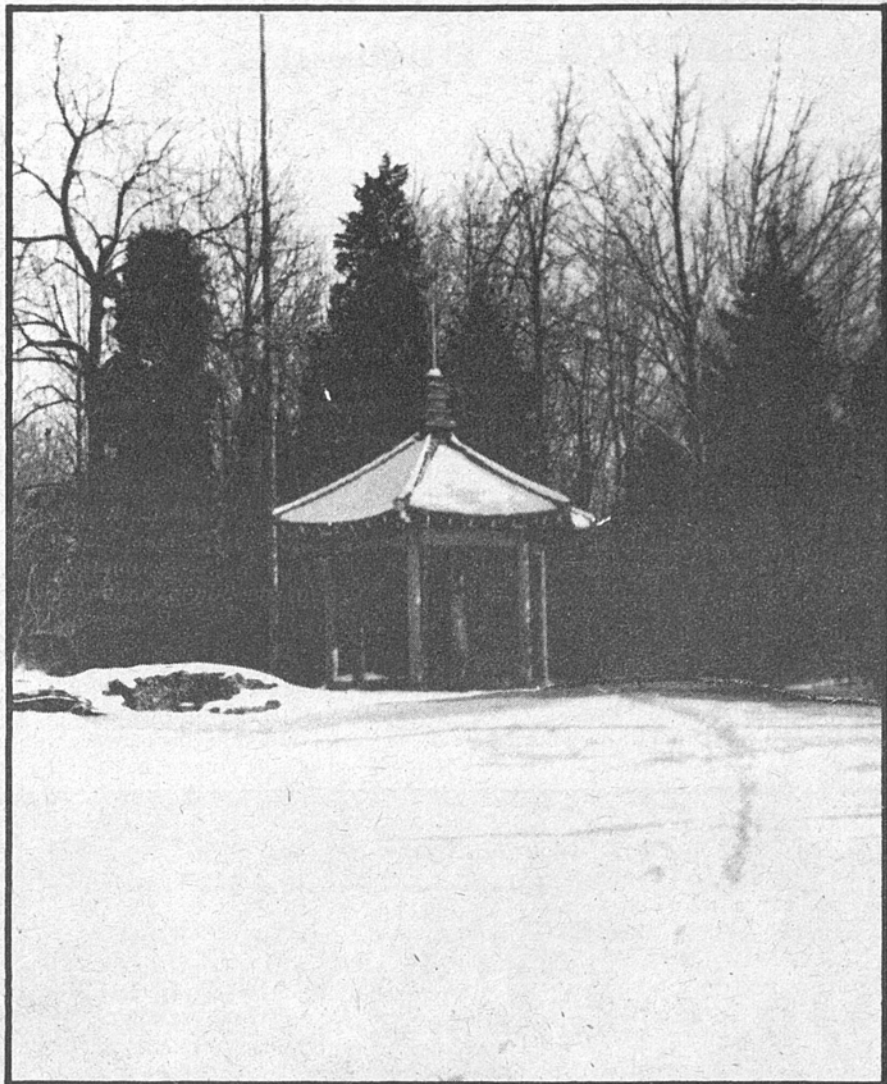
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