

# PRIMARY POINT

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## THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN BUDDHISM

By Zen Master Seung Sahn

(This article was drawn from a talk given at the end of the Second Annual Congress of the Kwan Um Zen School in July 1984.)

Thank you very much for coming here to the School Congress. This is the second year of our new school. We are planting seeds in the ground, the seeds of American Buddhism. It has taken twelve years to make this particular form of American Buddhism, so it's important for people to understand the significance of this new school. The Kwan Um Zen School represents the correct roots of Bodhidharma's teaching. As the School grows up, and as American Buddhism grows up, many other forms will appear: one, two, one hundred flowers. But these different forms will be no problem as long as we keep the original roots.

Twelve years ago Korean Buddhism came to the United States and our new school appeared, a type of Zen school that does not exist in China or Korea or Thailand. In Korea, celibate monks control Buddhism, and lay people follow their ideas. The Kwan Um Zen School, which has created many different positions within it (Master Dharma Teacher, Senior Dharma Teacher, Dharma Teacher, Bodhisattva monk, single monk) is not just a monk's idea, but a human idea. This is the American style, but it has the original roots.

Our school has branches in many different countries: Poland, Spain, Brazil, Canada. If we just brought an American idea to them, they wouldn't necessarily like it or accept it. Our School is not just an Ameri-

can idea. The correct American idea is that when you go to another country, you must understand that country has its own idea of what is correct for it. American Buddhism is like Buddhism anywhere; it is universal.

Many people have fixed ideas about what is American, but in fact there are countless ideas. Some of these ideas lead to difficulty, and some help many people. If we cling to one idea of what is American, we become narrow-minded and the world of opposites will appear, just as communism and capitalism appear in the political realm. The true American idea is no idea. The true American situation is no situation. The true American condition is no condition.

When any religion is brought into the United States, it's digested, and a new style appears. For example, Hare Krishnas do not exist in India. Indian Hinduism came here and an American style of Hinduism developed. This is true of any religion, philosophy, or business that comes to the United States: it mixes with what's here and a new style appears. The correct idea, situation or condition in any country doesn't matter; it's all the same. The direction and meaning of our school is to let go of your opinion, your condition, your situation. Practice together, become harmonious with each other, and find our true human nature. Find our correct direction, truth, and correct life.

So these are our new seeds, just planted. In the second year some growth has appeared, and next year the plant will grow

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Bodhidharma, brush painting by Pom Ju Sunim, famous artist-monk and former Abbot of Tahl Mah Sahn, Los Angeles.



## FORMAL OPENING OF DIAMOND HILL ZEN MONASTERY

On July 28 opening ceremonies for the new monastery were held. Honored guests included Mrs. Joen Bok Sil, whose generous donation made construction of the monastery possible. She has known Soen Sa Nim for 16 years, and lives in Kyoto with her husband and five children. The new monastery has the formal name, "Joen Bok Sil Kwan Um Soen Won" in her honor. Its common name is the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery.

Other honored guests included Yanasae Roshi, Abbot of Hoto Zenjin Koenji Tem-

ple in Saidama (50 miles north of Tokyo), who became a monk in the Rinzai tradition at age 30 and received transmission from Kozan Roshi; Wol Chu Sunim, the ex-president of the Chogye Order (Korean Buddhism); Bo Soeng Sunim, ex-abbot of Song Gwang Sa, the premier temple in Korea (where the late Ku Sahn Sunim was the Zen Master); Po Bon Sunim, Abbot of Won Gak Sa in New York, and ex-vice president of Dong Guk University in Seoul, Korea; Kwang Ok Sunim, Abbess of Bul Kwang Sa in Toronto, Canada; In Hwan Sunim, ex-abbot of Dae Gak Sa in Toronto, Canada, and now professor of Buddhist studies at Dong Guk University in Seoul; and Sung Hae Sunim, Abbot of Chogye Sa in New York and ex-abbot of a temple in Cheju-do, Korea.

Soen Sa Nim gave a formal Dharma speech in which he said that both having and not having an opening ceremony were mistakes. He asked, "What is a correct opening ceremony?" Bill Highsmith, foreman of the construction crew building the monastery, spoke about the challenges and hardships involved. Mrs. Joen Bok Sil offered flowers and incense to the Buddha and gave a short talk. Soen Sa Nim and Kwan-



Photo by Mike Olak

Ribbon cutting ceremony on July 28 opening the new monastery.

Um Zen School Abbot Lincoln Rhodes presented her with a plaque for her strong devotion to Buddhism.

The monastery is scheduled to be occupied in early December in time for the opening of its first winter Kyol Che, a 90-day intensive meditation retreat starting December 9. The monks have begun gathering supplies to set up household in their new

quarters. They need everything from pots and pans and cleaning supplies to maintenance tools, bookcases, shelves and other household furnishings. If you would like to donate any items or find out what is needed, please contact Mu Guk Sunim or Do Mun Sunim at the Kwan Um Zen School, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864 (401) 769-6476. □

### In Our Next Issue:

On September 14, 15 and 16 The Providence Zen Center hosted a well-attended conference on "Women and American Buddhism" featuring six of the most notable women teachers of Buddhism in this country. The conference combined lectures and workshops as well as working and practicing together, with periods of sitting. The proceedings of this unusual gathering, which attracted over 100 registrants, will be printed in the winter issue of PRIMARY POINT.