

MR. SNAKE CAME TO SAY GOODBYE

(The following excerpt is taken from an account of a several month trip through Thailand, Burma and India last winter by Dixie Lee Ray, a director of Chicago Meditation Center. Dixie, who has been studying Vipassana for 8 years, and her husband Bob, also a CMC director, accompanied Achan Sobin, a former monk from Thailand who teaches at CMC, and his wife Nanda, on this retreat and pilgrimage trip to Vipassana centers. Dixie looked for a place to do an extended retreat, and at the end of the tour chose the Boonganjaranam Meditation Center in Pattaya in northern Thailand, where she stayed for seven weeks.)

During the stay in Burma we found accommodations were quite comfortable in Western guest cottages, which were empty due to visa problems. Currently, a visitor to Burma can get a visa for only seven days. The two meals served every day were good and plentiful.

Meals are often given as a *dana* (offering) by lay devotees, who often have to wait for months for the privilege of donating food for the monks, nuns and yogis. Serving those who practice meditation is traditionally considered a way to gain merit. When the offering is given, large groups of people observe the meal. It takes some getting used to, especially since the Burmese do not see many Westerners. One must eat under the watchful stare of many pairs of eyes.

But because there aren't many Westerners, we received the royal treatment. This was also true in Thailand and India. The meditation centers were happy that yogis would come from so far away to practice meditation and endure the various discom-

forts and inconveniences. People tried to make up for this in every way they could. Except in Burma, there weren't many people practicing meditation at these centers. Even though Vipassana is a foremost ideal of these countries, few people actually do it, including the monks!

Thailand is a very beautiful country. Tropical climate—hot, humid and lots of rainfall makes for a lovely lush foliage and flowers, and also for a lot of human discomfort. The large temples and landscaped compounds are beautiful, well maintained and generously supported by the King as well as the laypeople of Thailand.

Boonganjaranam is a beautiful meditation center surrounded by coconut groves, mango trees and many other fruit trees and flowers displayed on sandy ground. The center has individual cottages where meditators live and practice. There is no group practice, so you practice according to your own schedule. Usually you go to see the teacher once a day for interviews and discussion. Meals are brought to your cottage and are very good. The people in charge were very helpful and attentive.

The teacher was Mr. Chau Jantrapon, a student and friend of the late Achan Naeb for nearly 30 years until her death last December at age 84. She was a highly respected Vipassana teacher in Thailand, which wasn't easy for a woman. She was the only woman teacher included in Jack Kornfield's book, "Living Buddhist Masters." Mr. Jantrapon and his wife had built this center about 20 years ago primarily for Achan Naeb.

I felt attracted to her method of teaching insight meditation, and wanted to learn some techniques little known outside Thailand. Mr. Jantrapon spent much time

teaching theory as well as the practical application. However, the day I arrived, the translator, Miss Vitoon, was taken to a hospital where she stayed until just a week before I left. Mr. Jantrapon's daughter, who had lived in the United States for 10 years, came once a week from Bangkok for two hours of discussion, but she didn't know Dhamma. I had more and more questions and doubts arising and no way to resolve them. This became quite a hindrance to my practice.

Another problem was that the method was presented as the only way, the correct way, and all other methods were wrong! This aroused quite a bit of resistance—another hindrance.

In addition, I had difficulty adjusting to the environment. It was very hot and humid. There were many insects, lizards and other creatures in great abundance. When nighttime came about 7 p.m., the whole area came alive both inside and outside the cottage. Though there were screens on all the windows and doors of this new cottage, insects, huge spiders and lizards would come inside through openings all over the cottage. Also the noise of the various creatures outside banging on the roof and screen doors was really loud most of the night. This was too much for me!

Initially I was full of fear and aversion. How could I practice with all this? Eventually I mustered enough courage to capture spiders in a can and put them outside, only to see another one—or was it the same one?—in the bathroom an hour later.

My experience was observing mental states of fear, aversion, anger, frustration, but according to the method, I was supposed to observe only matter and not mind. It was quite a test. I wanted to give up many times.

Not until a week before I left did I realize my expectations were too high and full of

ego. I hoped to learn the theory and application of this method and be able to do it as I knew it should be done, then perhaps teach others when I returned to Chicago. I couldn't do it, and it is fortunate that I couldn't. As Miss Vitoon aptly put it, "It is wisdom to know when you have failed." I felt a great relief.

The total experience was very beneficial. Through this difficult time I observed many unwholesome mental states and the suffering inherent in them. That's why I was there, as Mr. Jantrapon put it, "To observe suffering."

What is the cause of suffering? Desire—with unwholesome roots of greed, hatred and delusion. To come to an end of suffering, we must eradicate these defilements of mind. The way is to understand and practice the noble Eightfold Path.

My understanding of what I was doing generally deepened. I learned a new method of observation. Now it was time to leave. I felt grateful for the Experience. I had tried my best and had finally accepted the limitations of myself and the situation.

On the last day, after a parting discussion with Mr. Jantrapon, I was walking back to my cottage with an English-speaking friend, Suwaporn. Just short of the cottage she grabbed my arm and pointed. There, just ahead, was the white snake I had heard so much about—same color as sand, head erect, out in the open in the hottest noon-day sun. No one I talked to had actually seen one. Suwaporn had told me there was no antidote to this snake's bite and the poison slowly weakened the victim, so that it sometimes took three years for the victim to die.

There it was, just ahead!
I was stunned. It was a fitting climax to the whole experience. As we walked on, Suwaporn said, "Mr. Snake came to say goodbye."

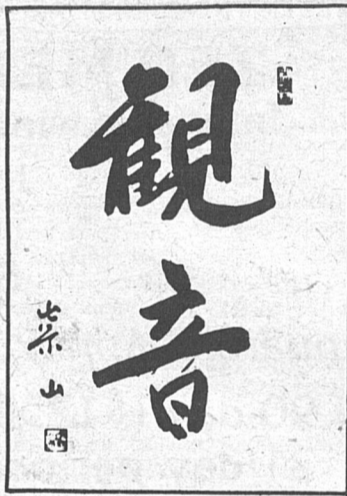
GIFT IDEAS FROM THE KWAN UM ZEN SCHOOL

GREETING CARDS

With "Perceive Sound" calligraphy printed on heavy stock, 4½x6¼ with envelopes. Set of five.



"Put It All Down"



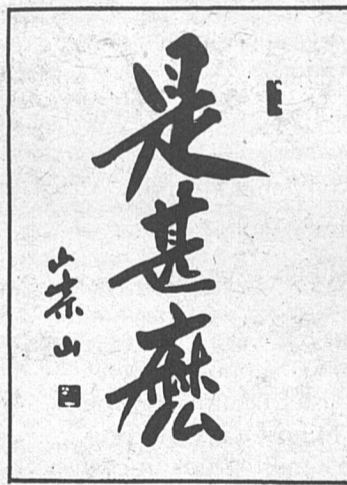
"Perceive Sound"

CALLIGRAPHIES

Calligraphies of famous Zen expressions, drawn by Zen Master Seung Sahn, excellent for framing. Offered in offset production on parchment 11x17, or an original print of "Put it All Down," silkscreened on 22x15 paper and signed in limited edition by Zen Master Seung Sahn.

CHANTING BOOK AND TEMPLE RULES

Includes all morning and evening chanting in regular use at Kwan Um Zen School, as well as kido and ceremony chanting, and the temple rules.



"What Is This?"

PHOTOGRAPHS

Pictures of Zen Master Seung Sahn, 3½x5 or 8x10. Soen Sa Nim wearing a hat (color), with a walking stick (taken in Korea, color), with a Zen stick (by Steven Silks, B&W), at the Dharma room bell (B&W).

BACK ISSUES OF THE NEWSLETTER

These spiral bound issues of monthly newsletters are treasure-troves of early Dharma talks, photographs and Zen Center history. The first five volumes, 1972/73 through 1977 are \$4.00 each. The second five volumes, 1978 through 1982, are \$8.00 each. (15% discount for the whole set \$51.00)

These items are now available from Zen Centers of the Kwan Um Zen School or may be ordered by mail from the KWAN UM ZEN SCHOOL, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864. Enclose your check or money order, made out to the KWAN UM ZEN SCHOOL. Include postage. **Canadian and foreign customers:** We cannot accept your personal checks unless they are drawn on a U.S. bank. Please send Canadian Postal Money Orders in U.S. dollars, International Postal Money Orders, or bank checks payable on any U.S. bank or banker's agency. Foreign orders are shipped surface mail. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

BACK ISSUES OF THE NEWSLETTER

The entire set is \$51.00

\$4 each	\$8 each	Specify postage
-72-73	-1978	(rates are per volume)
-1974	-1979	-1st class (\$2.40)
-1975	-1980	-3rd class (\$1.35)
-1976	-1981	-Book rate (.63)
-1977	-1982	

CALLIGRAPHIES

- Offset Print, \$5.00 each
- "Perceive Sound"
- "Put It All Down"
- "What Is This?"
- Original Silkscreen Print, \$25.00 each
- "Put It All Down"

GREETING CARDS, \$3.00 (set of 5)

Postage and handling for the calligraphies and Greeting Cards are .50 per order for domestic orders, and \$1.00 per order for foreign orders.

CHANTING BOOKS

\$2.50 per copy

PHOTOGRAPHS

- SSN wearing a hat (color)
 - SSN with walking stick (color)
 - SSN with Zen stick (B&W)
 - SSN at the bell (B&W)
- Please specify size. 3½x5 is \$1.00, 8x10 is \$5.00.

ORDER FORM

_____ total amount for newsletters
 _____ calligraphies
 _____ greeting cards
 _____ photographs
 _____ chanting books

Postage and handling for calligraphies, greeting cards, photographs and chanting books is \$1.00 per order (domestic) and \$2.00 (foreign) for orders under \$5.00. If your order is over \$5.00, please add \$1.00 (domestic) or \$2.00 (foreign) for every additional \$5.00 worth of items.

\$ _____ SUBTOTAL
 \$ _____ POSTAGE
 \$ _____ TOTAL