

PRIMARY POINT

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SOEN SA NIM GOES TO CHINA



Soen Sa Nim and Chinese Zen Master enjoy a round of Dharma combat on Puto Shan Island.

by Diana Lynch

In September Zen Master Seung Sahn became the first Korean Buddhist monk to go into China since the Communist takeover. South Korea has had no diplomatic relations with China since then, and perhaps Soen Sa Nim planted some seeds of reconciliation and trust that the political people have not been able to. Traveling with him on the 3-week trip were 20 people, including monks and laymen, Koreans, Canadians and Americans, old students and new.

We visited temples that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and which were now being rebuilt by the government: an amazing statement about death and re-birth, about change. We met with old monks who not only had been forced out of their temples to work in factories or fields for up to 20 years, but also to give up their identification as monks and any semblance of formal practice. Yet you could see in their calm and smiling faces that they had attained what real practice is about.

The pilgrimage began with long train rides through the south of China, from Hong Kong to Canton, then to Shao Guan where Nan Hwa, the Temple of the Sixth Patriarch is located. We passed rivers, often with water buffalo cooling off in them, and lush green rice paddies interspersed with taro and vegetable. We saw peasants working everywhere, mountains poking straight up exactly as in Chinese paintings. The magnificence of the country transfixed us all.

In this early part of the trip we got acquainted with the excellent guide supplied

by the China Youth Travel Service, Mr. Zhao, who was very open and knowledgeable about his country's good and could-be-improved-upon parts. He was very helpful to us because few of us knew very much about China, except for John Chan, (an American born Chinese from Berkeley who is writing his PhD thesis on the history of China and who worked out much of our itinerary), and Jon Solomon (a young Zen student from Cambridge who had learned fluent Chinese at Brown University and from having lived in Taiwan and visited in

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A GENTLE RAIN: The unremarkable visit of Thich Nhat Hanh

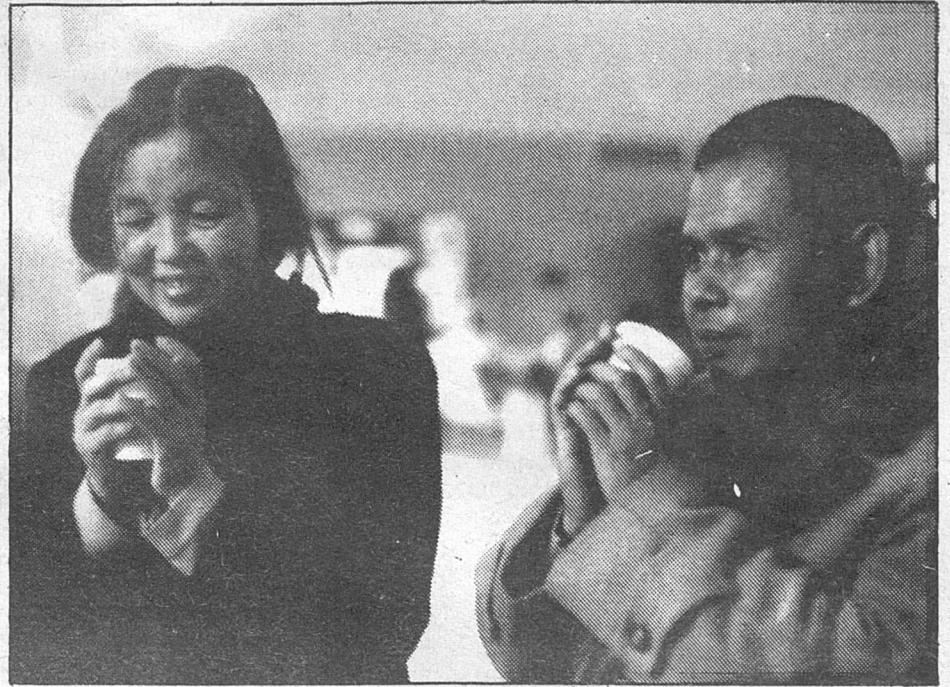
by Ellen Sidor

For seven days in September the hustle-bustle of the Head Temple of the Kwan Um Zen School where some 40 Zen students and their families live and train, was subject to the gentle influence of Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, the renowned poet, scholar and peace activist. Providence Zen Center, his East Coast host for this rare visit to the United States, provided the setting for a 4-day mindfulness workshop and several public talks. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship coordinated his travel schedule.

Living in exile in France since 1966, the slim, collected Zen Master has been an untiring advocate of peace through a change of hearts and minds. He is the leading voice of "Engaged Buddhism" and a founder of the Tiep Hien Order, the Order of Interbeing. About 45 people attended his 4-day workshop, held in the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery on the PZC grounds, in which he taught mindful walking meditation and how to use mindfulness in everyday life. He held tea ceremonies and a precept ceremony to which many children were invited. During his stay, he also gave a scholarly talk on the Heart Sutra.

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Photo by Ruth Klein



THE SWORD THAT KILLS AND THE SWORD THAT GIVES LIFE:

Finding balance in Zen practice

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

The following talk was drawn from a lively question and answer session between Soen Sa Nim and his students at the 3rd Kwan Um Zen School Congress. Master Dharma Teacher George Bowman was the moderator for this session. The School Congress, which takes place every July at the Providence Zen Center, is a major gathering of Soen Sa Nim's students from all over the

world for several days of teaching, School reports, and ceremonies.

GB: Last night we met in small groups to discuss the most important issues of our practice. The major issue was balance: how to find it in the midst of formal practice as Zen students, families, jobs, relationships, etc.

There are two formal aspects to Zen practice: the killing sword and the sword that gives life. The killing sword means how do we give ourselves to the situation? How, without repressing, do we let go of our condition, opinion and situation and really offer ourselves to what's going on in the moment? For most of us that requires a fair

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The next issue of PRIMARY POINT will focus on the "Balancing of American Buddhism" conference held at the Providence Zen Center on September 14 and 15. Included will be talks by Zen Master Prabhava Dharma, Ruth Denison, Ana Pema Chodron, Dr. Joanna Macy and excerpts from the lively Saturday night panel discussion.

The following talk was taken from the opening speech at the summer Kyol Che (a 19-day intensive retreat) held at Diamond Hill Zen Monastery on July 30. Lincoln Rhodes, who is Abbot of the Kwan Um Zen School, supervised the design and construction of the monastery, a process which started in the winter of 1983-84 when the first trees were cut to clear the building site.

It's a treat to be up here, because I will finally be able to use this building in the way it was intended. For several years we've been building it, so it's very wonderful to be leading a retreat here.

Whether you've been a student of Soen Sa Nim's for a long time, or even if you just came here this weekend, you've all heard a few talks about Zen. "Zen mind is everyday mind." "Only pay attention." "When you're washing dishes, just wash the

dishes." "When you're doing something, just do it 100%."

If that's all Zen is, why go to the trouble of building a monastery? We did go to a lot of trouble to build it, for instance, just getting 34,000 pounds of roof tiles up on the roof! Why do that if Zen is just paying attention to everyday mind? I see a lot of you came from places like Kansas or Toronto. You can wash dishes in Kansas. You can pay attention in Toronto. Why come this far?

The Buddha was a very high-class teacher, so he said it was because human beings have desire, anger and ignorance. I'm not so high-class, so I would say we come here because we're crazy or dumb. The Buddha was a much better diplomat than I am. Saying we're dumb doesn't sound nice.

About five years ago I was really dumb. I went on a 100-day retreat by myself in a cabin in the woods for the winter. Many things happened on that retreat, but coming up here to speak tonight reminded me of

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A GENTLE RAIN

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Thich Nhat Hanh was accompanied by his student, Sister Phuong, director of Plum Village, a peace community which Thich Nhat Hanh established in the south of France. About 10 people live there pursuing mindfulness practice. Plum Village is open to visitors only one month during the year. In a talk to the PZC community, Sister Phuong spoke of her experiences during the Vietnam war and her ongoing efforts to feed and educate the refugees, especially the children, from that and subsequent conflicts in Vietnam. Sister Phuong is a lay member of the Tiep Hien Order.

Thich Nhat Hanh's attendant for this American visit was Arnie Kotler, a Berkeley Zen student who was secretary to Richard Baker Roshi. Arnie explained that Vietnamese Zen "is a complete blend of mindfulness practice and zazen."

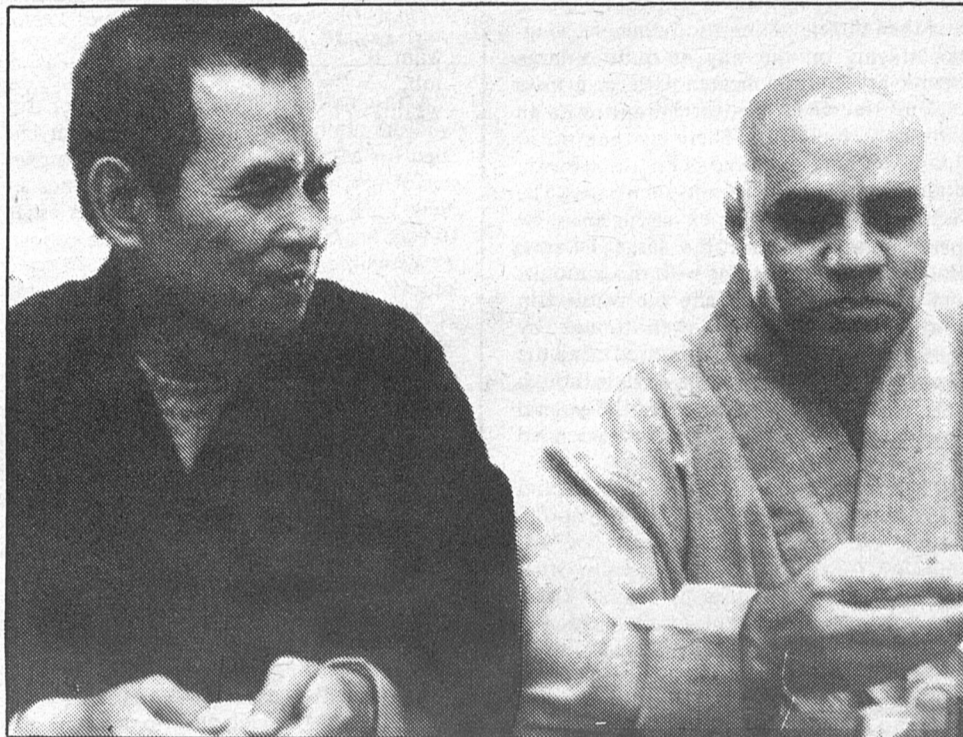
In a talk at PZC, Thich Nhat Hanh discussed the practice of Buddhism in America.



CZC resident VanLoc Tran and Sister Phuong discover that they have the same Dharma name—"Barefoot Sister."

"I think most of the Americans who come to Buddhism are intellectuals, young people. And the door to enter the Dharma is not the door of faith, but the door of psychology." He noted that in looking at the encounter between Buddhism and Western civilization, people often speak "as if the West has never had Buddhism. Therefore it is interesting to see what is Buddhist in non-Buddhist traditions. That way we can better understand (both) Buddhism and Western civilization. I think that the encounter between Buddhism and Western civilization is a very exciting event in our century. Something important might happen because of that.

"A number of you who have come to Buddhism seem to have rejected everything that is faulty in Western civilization. It is courageous to abandon everything in order to engage oneself in the search for



Thich Nhat Hanh and Mu Soeng Sunim, director of Diamond Hill Zen Monastery.

enlightenment or liberation. And you practice very hard. Many Asian Buddhists have great respect for that kind of courage and frankness.

"Buddhism is not one; there are many kinds. And there will be a truly American form of Buddhism, which many of us look forward to seeing. It is possible that Buddhism will get a fresh start in America, because America is still very young and vigorous."

In discussing the alienation from Western society that many American Buddhists seem to have, Thich Nhat Hanh said, "It is like a plant pulled out of the soil, which cannot be replanted. Even if you try, the plant itself resists. The soil does not seem to be fit for the plant. I think something is wrong with the soil, and something is also wrong with the plant. Meditation is to find out, in order to make a compromise."

Using the analogy of a tree, in which we are leaves being nourished by the roots, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke of the activity of the leaves which is necessary to nourish the roots.

"All of us are not only children of society, we are the mothers of society. We have to nourish society. But how can we do that if the stem linking the leaf and the tree no longer exists? Society needs us, especially when we have an insight that can help change society, make it into a more livable place. Therefore, trying not to be alienated from society is very important."

In his recent book, *A Guide to Walking Meditation*, (available from Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 27, Nyack, NY 10960) Thich Nhat Hanh says, "The practice of walking meditation opens your eyes to wonders in the universe. It turns Samsara into the Pure Land. It lets sorrow and worry fall away, and brings peace. But walking meditation also helps us to see pain, anguish and suffering. When we are aware we can see clearly what is happening in life. I often tell meditation students, 'If you can't see

what is happening in front of you and around you how can you understand your true nature?' It is not by closing your eyes that you see your own nature. On the contrary, you must open your eyes wide and wake up to the real situation in the world to see completely your whole Dharma Treasure, your whole Dharma Body. The bombs, the hunger, the pursuit of wealth and power—these are not separate from your nature."

"Every path in the world is your walking meditation path. Once you are awake, you will not hesitate to enter these paths."

"When I returned to Europe after trying to help the boat people, I felt that Western life was not life. It seemed strange to me. After seeing refugees who had suffered so much to survive at sea, I landed at the airport in Paris, and driving home I passed cities and supermarkets with colorful lights. It was like walking in a dream. How could there be such disparity? Here people were seeking pleasure with liquor under neon lights. There people on the sea were pursued, robbed, raped and killed. Aware of suffering, I rebelled against the superficial way of life."

Thich Nhat Hanh's visit seemed to have a profound impact on students who attended his retreat and talks at PZC. Buddhist Peace Fellowship board member, Ruth Klein, a long-term PZC resident and coordinator for his East Coast visit, noted inclusion of women in everything. "There was a clear, conscious pattern of referring to men and women in his speech. I asked Sister Phuong if he had had to work on that and she said no, he had always been (aware) that way." In discussing the retreat (in which she acted as liaison between Thich Nhat Hanh and PZC and Diamond Hill Zen Monastery), she said: "It was clearly designed to be accessible to families, and to be re-

spectful to men and women in their family responsibilities." Ruth said that Thich Nhat Hanh makes no distinction between monks, nuns and laypersons. "Your status in the Tiep Hien Order does not depend on whether you are celibate or not."

A Zen student who was born in Vietnam, worked in Cambodia and lived at PZC, becoming Head Dharma Teacher before she moved, Van Loc Tran said, "Thich Nhat Hanh's gentleness and humility has reached the very depth of my being. I still feel a lot of joy and sadness at this moment. A retreat can be done in a family, among friends. A teacher is not very necessary. The commitment to practice mindfulness, understanding and love is sufficient for a good retreat. There is nothing such as 'personal.' Everything is 'inter-being' with each other. What we do will affect other people, trees, animals, in a word, the whole universe. This helps me be more and more aware of my actions and words."

Jim Doran, Director of Cambridge Zen Center, said of the retreat: "I saw how a different form of practice (mindfulness) opens different perspectives. When you met somebody or were just walking by another person, you came to a complete halt, looking at the other person, haphchanged (palms together) and smiled, then continued on your way. After several days of this I got a tremendous hit. I was so used to our Zen style of avoidance in which if you're practicing hard on a retreat, you avoid making eye contact with the other participants. Here the practice was the very opposite. You were supposed to make eye contact, smile, and as you haphchanged, say to yourself, 'A lotus for you, the Buddha to be.' So with this form, other people became an opportunity to practice, instead of being a possible hindrance or distraction (that would) water down your retreat."

"The qualities of joy and ease were built into the forms or the retreat and even the schedule. I saw in mindfulness practice a more flexible form for family, career, regular lay life."

Several people who came to the retreat from other Zen schools were angered by the relaxed style and left, one immediately following the orientation. Thich Nhat Hanh had asked people not to get up earlier than the scheduled time (of 6 a.m.) in order to do their own practice, but to follow his form. After training in the Kwan Um Zen School for a number of years, Ruth Klein noted that she found it even more demanding and disciplined to relax, go slower, to take time to breathe and be mindful. At one point Thich Nhat Hanh observed, "Many people seem to view their practice as an obstruction to their lives." Ruth reported that he often said "Practice is joyful. If it is not, you are doing something incorrect."

Following this East Coast visit, Thich Nhat Hanh and his attendants went west for public talks and workshops in Colorado, Texas and California, leaving many people with "new appreciation of the richness of mindfulness practice and walking meditation." As Ruth Klein said, "I experienced him as a gentle rain that slowly seeps in." □

Photo by Ruth Klein