

DR. DANETTE CHOI TEACHES IN PARIS AND SPAIN

Dr. Danette V. Choi, who founded Hawaii Dharma Sa in Honolulu nine years ago and who has known Soen Sa Nim for many years, recently began teaching at the Paris and Palma de Mallorca Zen Centers, at Soen Sa Nim's request. This gifted woman, whose teaching is from the *Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law*, has drawn large crowds attracted by her energy and psychic gifts. Taking time out from a busy schedule in Hawaii, she spent much of the summer giving talks and personal counseling in Paris and Spain, and is credited by Palma Zen Center Abbot Joan Insa with revitalizing that center. Since she started teaching with Soen Sa Nim several years ago, she has traveled extensively with him, especially in Europe and South America.

A native of Korea, Dr. Choi was able to predict the future at the age of five. Because of this gift, her parents, who were Christian, supported her search within Buddhism for answers. Unable to find a temple that would take her spiritual search seriously, she went into the mountains during her high school years. Upon her return home, people began seeking her out for personal counseling.

She came to Hawaii in 1967, married and worked in various businesses for 10 years. In 1977 she founded the Dharma Buddhist Temple and held several large, traditional Buddhist ceremonies such as the Festival of Land and Sea to let the people of Hawaii know that the temple existed.

In 1982 three hundred people gathered at Kapiolani Park for a World Peace Ceremony. Among the distinguished guests were Soen Sa Nim and Aitken Roshi. In 1983 Dr. Choi conducted a joint workshop and Precepts Ceremony with Soen Sa Nim and his students. She received her Dharma Master Certificate in 1981 in Korea from the denomination which follows the Lotus Sutra. In 1982 in Los Angeles she received a PhD in Religious Science. She gives spiritual counseling to people in all walks of life.

Although her personal style of practice differs from Soen Sa Nim's, she emphasizes the great value of his teachings and has incorporated such forms as the 108 prostrations and living in Zen centers into her own teaching. This article is drawn from an interview conducted in July in a Palma de Mallorca restaurant between Dr. Choi, Joan and Antonia Insa (Abbot and Head Dharma Teacher at the Palma Zen Center), and Do Mun Sunim, a Kwan Um Zen School monk who was former Vice-Abbot of the Providence Zen Center and is currently helping develop the Paris Zen Center as the Vice-Abbot there.

J: Maybe you can say something about how you know Soen Sa Nim, when you met him.

DC: I know him from a long time ago, but officially it's four years ago. We had a Land and Sea Ceremony in Hawaii and I invited him. I've practiced Zen and the Dharma for years. Ever since I was

young, I could perceive people's karma.

J: What was your idea in starting Hawaii Dharma Sa?

DC: When I was 18, I decided to leave Korea and live a social life experience for 10 years. So at 19 I went to Los Angeles and then to Hawaii, where I have lived for 20 years. There were already 10 Japanese temples and a Zen temple in Hawaii. I got married and gave birth to a child. I was involved in various businesses: a restaurant, a jewelry shop, a gift shop, import-export and real estate. So for 10 years I learned what life is all about. Truth by itself cannot give the truth of human life, so during those years I did that, attained what is human suffering, what it is to feel human. Now when people come to see me, attorneys, or waitresses or electricians, I can understand their feelings. That 10 years was my great experience, better than my PhD experience.

J: Are Korean Zen and Japanese Zen different?

DC: There's no difference. Zen is Zen, ok? Why make a distinction? You only make trouble. Zen is Zen. Find your true self. Some people say, "I am a strong Korean Zen student." Or Soto Zen, or Rinzai Zen. If you really attain truth, you'll never call it Korean or Japanese or Soto or Rinzai Zen. That's just style. If you say that you are making yourself stupid. When you attain Zen, you don't care who you are. You're white or black or rotten, it doesn't matter.

J: Do you see a difference between the karma of different countries, like Korea, America, France and Spain?

DC: That's interesting, Karma is all the same. In this whole world everybody is the same. Today you are Spanish, but when you are reborn you may be Korean. I can't make a distinction. As long as we are human beings we are the same. I don't understand people saying, "I am Soviet, I am Communist" or "I am American, I am great." They are only talking about this life.

DM: One time you said to me that a monk's job is compassion. But sometimes when I practice hard and cut into my karma, it's difficult. Then maybe I'm too strong on the outside. Can you give me any advice on that?

DC: Monks are supposed to be compassionate and have great loving kindness. When some monks practice too hard, their center gets strong and they think they should act harshly on the outside. But that's not a great monk's job. Better they go cut wood or clean the toilet. Even though you have a strong center, you must have great compassion.

Soen Sa Nim already told you, you must have correct function in your life and loving kindness. Just acting strong on the outside means you don't have a

strong center. Your practice is only building up an ego I not your Big I. Whether you're a monk or not, you need compassion and loving kindness so you can save all beings. You must have a wide open door and not hold your condition. When you hold your condition and your opinion, you can never be a great monk. Open the door wide. No condition. It's like using a mixer. Put in all the carrots and potatoes and everything, and come out with soup. So a monk's job is being a mixer. If you hold your condition, the mixer is going to break. Then you cannot grind the carrots and potatoes.

J: What is the function of Dharma teachers in Palma?

DC: Both of you (Joan and Antonia) are already doing a great job. Teaching new people how to sit, how to chant, how to practice together. That is already doing great Bodhisattva action. You say, "I'm not enlightened so I shouldn't be a Dharma teacher." Don't say that. You are gaining enlightenment together.

Dharma teacher is very important. Without Dharma teachers we cannot train people. A Master can only tell you so much. Dharma teacher is just as important as Master. More important. We hold the fabric together. Not only you and I holding, but anything in a Buddha's disciple's life we have to hold together. Together action is very important.

DM: What is the correct function of a layperson?

DC: The correct function is great compassion and loving kindness. Monk is monk, layperson is layperson. In great compassion there is no monk, no social person, no you, no I, only great love. Love is round like the world turning. Don't make distinctions. You're a monk, your condition is monk, your karma is monk. I'm a social person, but you and I are no different. We are not different. You like being a monk. Fine, don't eat meat. Another person, he can eat meat and still do great action. Nothing is higher or lower.

DM: You mentioned some of Soen Sa Nim's teaching: correct situation, correct function...

DC: Correct situation, correct function, correct relationship, and moment to moment: that is nirvana. That's great teaching. That's why I like and respect him. When he came to Hawaii four years ago, he talked about those four things. When you attain those four things, you attain nirvana, you don't have to live in a Zen center.

In this society we live by groups. When you exist, I exist. When you don't exist, I don't exist. When I'm by myself, one whole world. Why do I need Buddhism, why do I need practice? Because you need them. That's why I'm here. We rub



against each other, that's why we need religion, philosophy, Zen centers. This is a great opportunity to share.

But I'm not like Soen Sa Nim. He has great together action and group teaching. I can help the individual but I'm not into group activity. A long time ago one Zen Master went around talking a little and helping people. I have that kind of karma more than teaching groups. I'm happy with what I am. If I can help, or if they don't need me, that's ok.

DM: What do you think about someone practicing and staying at a Zen center for a long time?

DC: That person wants to eliminate their karma. I like to call the Zen center a "Dharma bath." When you're in the Dharma bath, you can wash your dirt off faster than if you're by yourself.

DM: So you think it's a good idea to stay at the same center for a while?

DC: Yes, it's good experience. Because when you live in a Zen center or community, you can't just prop up your own situation. You have to understand others more. Practicing by living together is very important. Nowadays people value themselves more than others, so they don't know where they're attached or how to get better. Together action and together living is very important. You can attain truth, Big I, faster than living outside. First you must find your strong center.

J: Many people practice Zen because they want to become like Buddha or like Soen Sa Nim or like you. But that's not what they're aiming for.

DC: Well, if they want to become like Buddha or Soen Sa Nim or me, that's a great desire. You can't say that's bad.

J: But that's not what they're really after.

DC: The problem is, they don't know what they are. Once they find out, then they will understand. They can become Buddha or whatever. But they only have desire I, small I, which wants to become like Buddha or Soen Sa Nim or me. Once they attain Big I, which is true self, they will already know what they should do and they won't have to ask that kind of question.

SPREADING THE DHARMA IN EUROPE

Soen Sa Nim has been visiting Europe annually since 1978 and feels there is a lot of energy for spiritual practice there. There have been inquiries for him to visit many countries, including Italy, Greece, Sweden, Norway, and Egypt. Each year he makes his European tour a little longer,

to include places where people are practicing and have asked for him.

This October he led workshops, retreats and gave talks in Paris, West Germany, Poland, Spain and London, following a 3-week trip to mainland China. In addition to the steady growth of the Polish

sangha, Soen Sa Nim is nurturing the development of two new centers, one in Palma de Mallorca and one in Paris.

The first stop on Soen Sa Nim's European tour this fall was the Zentrum for Buddhismus and Bewusstes Leben in Kemmenau-Bad Ems, 75 kilometers from Frankfurt.

Organized by Paul Koppler of the Zentrum, the retreat attracted over 25 participants. The most recent news is that the group may wish to become an Affiliate of the Kwan Um Zen School, meaning that Soen Sa Nim would lead retreats there when his schedule permits. Welcome to our new sangha members!

In Poland during October 16-24, Soen Sa Nim was accompanied by Mu Sang Sunim and Providence Zen Center Director Tony Sager. Over 50 people took the Five Precepts in a large Precepts Ceremony, 10 people became Dharma Teachers, 2 or 3 became Senior Dharma Teachers and one person became a Bodhisattva monk. Master Dharma Teacher Jacob Perl has just returned from several weeks in Poland, during which time he closed the 90 day Kyol Che retreat. Genpo Sensei, a leading student of Maezumi Roshi, was a visitor at Warsaw Zen Center and gave a talk during the last part of Kyol Che. The Polish sangha is planning a three week Kyol Che for this winter.



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