

# PRIMARY POINT

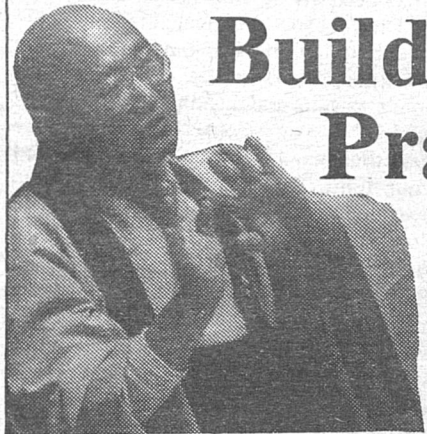
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## Soen Sa Nim's New Teaching in Europe:

### Four Posts to Build a Strong Practicing House



Zen Master Seung Sahn

by Do Mun Sunim,  
Abbot, Paris Dharma Center

Photo by Do Mun Sunim

The Buddha used expedient means to enlighten all beings. In 1972, when Zen Master Seung Sahn first came to the West, he adapted Korean Buddhism for the minds of his American students. On recent trips to Europe, he has been changing his teaching style to meet the needs of European students, and to reflect the changing condition of human beings and the world. He calls this "the teaching of the Four Posts" and has called upon the abilities of Dr. Danette Choi, founder of Hawaii Dharma Temple in Honolulu, and an American Kwan Um Zen School monk, Mu Sang Sunim.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's style has always been to first teach students their correct direction, then help them develop a strong personal center. In the past, if someone asked Soen Sa Nim (which means "honored teacher") about practicing the martial arts to make one's center strong, he always said, "That's only technique. Why you do it is most important."

Soen Sa Nim is very proud of the School's teaching which unites formal practice, kong-an study, and everyday life, not only in theory and formal practice, but also in the very structure of life at the School's Zen centers. In Dharma talks and interviews, he teaches correct cognition. But he has always said, "Only understanding cannot help you. Getting a strong before-thinking center is necessary. In the past, a person could hear one word, go to the mountains and just sit for three years and attain true nature. But nowadays human beings' minds are too complicated. Also this world is very complicated and changing very fast. It is not possible to just sit and become clear. If you want to attain true nature, if you want to change with this universe, you must find a way to quickly connect your energy and universal energy."

In 1982 Soen Sa Nim started a very strong regime of doing 1000 bows a day and getting up every night from midnight until 2 a.m. for special practice. During that time he developed Soen Yu (Zen Wind) and Soen Pung (Zen Dharma play). He has been refining and elaborating these ever since. They are a series of exercises designed to

quickly cut thinking, connect our energy with the energy of the universe, and help us return to our true nature. They are like old Taoist practices, but the direction is to learn how to use this energy. Kwan Um Zen School monk Mu Sang Sunim has been studying and practicing these techniques for the past four years with Soen Sa Nim and is now master of Soen Yu. Last fall Soen Sa Nim asked him to teach these practices in Europe.

Many people experience deep blockages in their lives and practice, blockages that are physical, emotional, spiritual and in relationships. Soen Sa Nim has been encouraging Dr. Danette Choi (see the previous issue of *Primary Point* for an article on her background) to spend more time in Europe teaching people. This past fall, in all of the School's workshops and retreats in Spain, England and France, the first unified teaching of the Four Posts was offered, as Soen Sa Nim said, "to build a strong practicing house."

The Four Posts were (1) Mu Sang Sunim teaching Soen Yu and Dharma play; (2) Dr. Choi giving Dharma talks, personal coun-

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## NANCY WILSON ROSS 1901-1986

The internationally acclaimed editor of *The World of Zen* and author of numerous books and articles on Buddhism, Nancy Wilson Ross (who was known to many people as Mrs. Stanley Young) died in Vero Beach, Florida, on January 18. She was 85 years old.

The famous Buddhist scholar Sir Herbert Read said of *The World of Zen*, "This is the book we have been waiting for—one that would gather into a single comprehensive volume the main features of an Eastern philosophy that is becoming a creative force in the Western World. Zen is a way of life, of universal relevance, and this volume, which makes it accessible, is likely to have a wide influence on our culture."

A member of the board of the Asian Society of New York City, Ms. Ross was the author of *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom and Buddhism: A Way of Life and Thought*, in addition to a number of novels including *The Return of Lady Brace*. She wrote an introduction to Yukio Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, a novel about a Buddhist priest.

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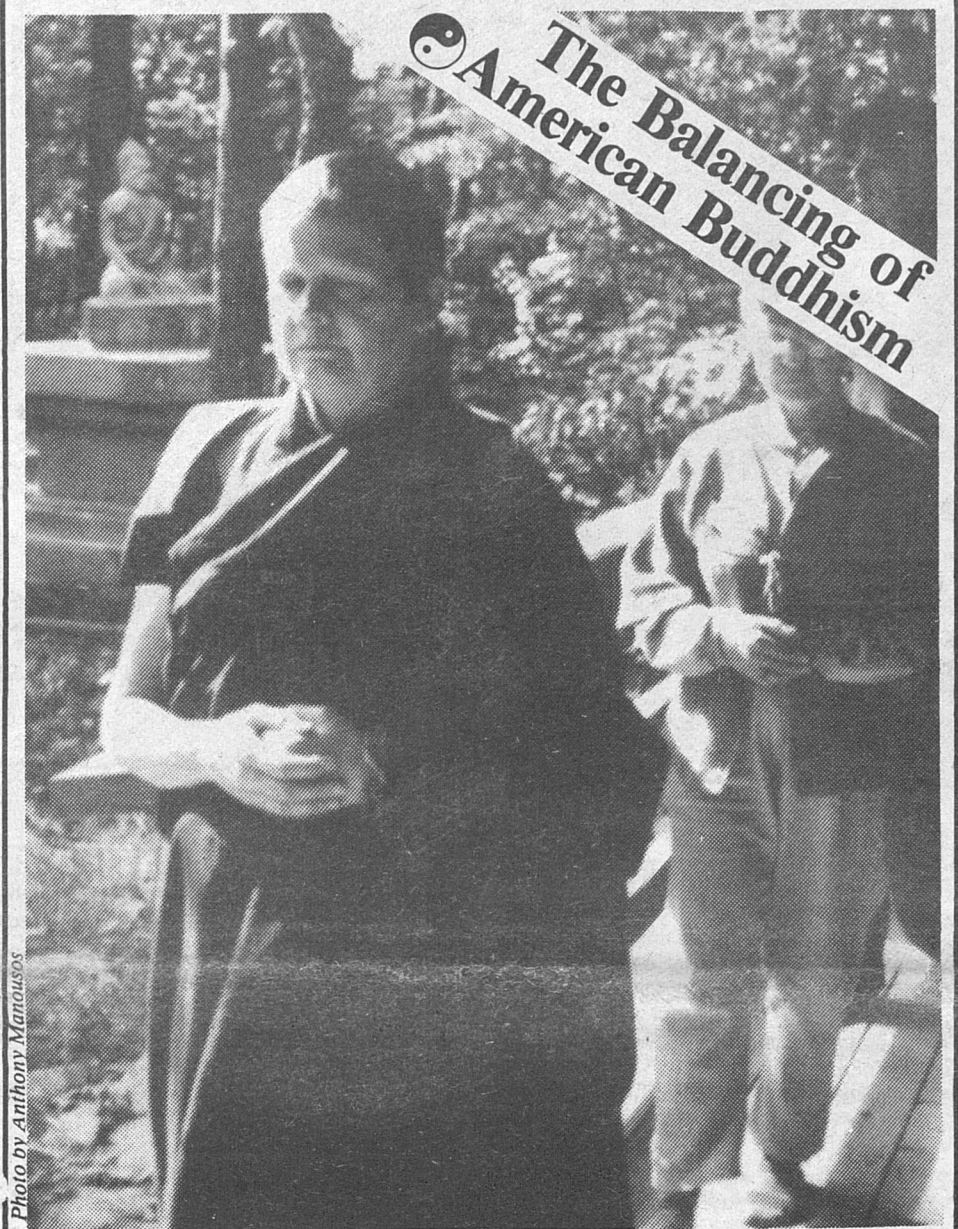


Photo by Anthony Manausos

PEMA CHODRON leading walking meditation at the September conference.

Four noted American women Buddhist teachers explored the changing face of American Buddhism in a conference entitled "The Balancing of American Buddhism" held last September at the Providence Zen Center in Cumberland, RI. The conference, the third in an annual series focusing on women Buddhist teachers, drew over 120 participants for the weekend of talks and discussions. Preceding the conference, Maurine Myo On Freedgood, Roshi, of the Cambridge Buddhist Association, led a three day Zen meditation retreat attended by 45 people.

In this issue of *Primary Point* we present three of the talks and a sizeable portion of the lively Saturday night panel discussion with all four teachers. Unfortunately, transcribing and editing were not able to be completed on Ruth Denison's talk in time for this issue. It will be included in the May issue. Complete transcripts of all the talks and panel discussions may be ordered at \$2.50 each from The Director, Providence Zen Center, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864.

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# FOUR POSTS...

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seling and Zen energy healing; (3) Tony Sager (Providence Zen Center Director) and Do Mun Sunim (Paris Zen Center Director) teaching the formal practice style of the Kwan Um Zen School (chanting, bowing, sitting and together action living) and "don't know" mind; (4) Soen Sa Nim giving interviews, Dharma talks and the overall direction.

they are a well-known meditation training center and model for spiritual communities throughout Spain. Twenty children, including toddlers, live together in a separate brightly colored building. They have their own complete house, shared 4 children to a room, eat together, have a large bathroom with little sinks and toilets, and are taken care of by 2 or 3 young adults who live with them.



Soen Sa Nim, Dr. Danette Choi and Joan Insa teaching at Arco Iris ("Rainbow Path"), Spain, in October 1985.

Soen Sa Nim's teaching is very wide and simple. But in just sitting, he says, people get caught between repressing their karma and acting it out. "Vacillating between the two," he said, "you cannot get anywhere. So the Four Posts are necessary. Soen Yu exercises are simple but powerful. Dr. Choi's perception of people is deep, meticulous and has the direction of helping people find their true nature and save all beings. Our School's great together-action teaching always connects kong-an study, formal practice, and everyday life. The Enlightened action of a Zen Master is the embodiment of a simple clear mind."

## Teaching in Spain

Europeans have a long intellectual history and are very sophisticated spiritually. Many people are now deeply dissatisfied with their tradition and are turning to Buddhism in its many forms. Along the way, we met many people who are studying Buddhism, have founded centers or communities, and are hungry for spiritual practice and good teaching.

After visiting West Germany and Poland in October, Soen Sa Nim, Mu Sang Sunim and Tony Sager flew to Palma de Mallorca, Spain. They were met by Dr. Choi and myself, who had arrived from Paris a few days earlier. Dr. Choi had spent busy days giving personal counseling and had led a long Dharma play session for Zen Center members in a beautiful house in the mountains above Palma which belonged to Pilar Barcelo and Pedro Pomar.

With Joan and Antonio Insa and other members of the Palma Zen Center, we held a large retreat. Mu Sang Sunim taught Soen Yu. Soen Sa Nim and Dr. Choi gave two public talks followed by healing sessions. In the crowded quarters of the Zen Center, about 140 people attended each event. A Sunday visit to the house in the mountains ended late at night, with lots of talk about kong-ans, and lively Dharma combat in Spanish and English over wine, cheese, almonds and olives.

After a week in Palma, we flew to Barcelona and drove up the coast to Arco Iris, "Rainbow Path," a meditation community in the mountains 3km from the sea. Forty adults live together in an old Spanish mansion. Living, eating and working together,

The community also built a large simple Dharma room, divided into two sections by a movable wall. You enter a room lined with 40 or 50 mattresses for sleeping during retreats, and then continue on into the meditation room. All the adults had moved up to the Dharma room to do a silent 3 day retreat, in anticipation of our coming.

We opened with a workshop and a talk on our practicing style, followed by a full morning of sitting. Soen Sa Nim gave interviews to about 50 people, with Joan Insa translating. Soen Sa Nim said, "Everyone got 'primary point' during the first interview," so the afternoon Dharma talk by Dr. Choi and questions answered by Soen Sa Nim was quite lively. They taught everyone the "second course," correct function and correct relationship.

Dr. Choi explained Zen energy healing and demonstrated it. People would come up to her and bow one time, then sit down in front of her. She would tell them such things as "You have a back problem," or "Your energy gets stuck here," or "You get headaches all the time," or "You have a thyroid problem." Then she would give them energy, and often advice. People were struck by her ability to immediately perceive where their problem was, and seemed quite relieved by her help.

Mu Sang Sunim taught everyone the beginning Soen Yu exercises, then led the group in an hour of kido chanting (repetition of the Bodhisattva Kwan Seum Bosal's name). He gave a closing talk. People seemed sad to see Soen Sa Nim and his company leave.

We headed deeper into the mountains that night and arrived at Comunidad Ahabad (Arabic for love), a community of 20 people who practice together in an old stone farm house. They hold meditation retreats attended by people from all over northern Spain. The community has a large barn housing many animals, including a herd of goats. From the milk of the goats cheese is made and sold to support the community. Recently a large cinder block Dharma room was built below steeply terraced gardens. Many Ahabad members originally practiced at Arco Iris and had learned of Soen Sa Nim from Joan Insa, when he traveled around Spain a few years ago giving talks and leading workshops. Eight Ahabad

members had traveled to Palma Zen Center to practice with Soen Sa Nim on his previous visits.

Soen Sa Nim was impressed with the setting and said it was one of the strongest geographical locations he had seen outside of Korea. Of course, he told the Ahabad members to move their new building a little to the left! He also said the animals took too much energy. "Before, the animals all practiced together as human beings, but now they are living here together as animals. So correct practice, correct direction are necessary."

Ahabad had no electricity and only wood heat. The Dharma room had no heat at all. The 50 people who came for the three day retreat stayed together in the Dharma room. Everyone looked like monks or yogis, wrapped in blankets during meditation. Spanish people keep very still while sitting. Mu Sang Sunim had taught Soen Yu the first day, and both nights you could hear people practicing the exercises in the dark, before going to bed.

We all arose at 4:15 am so there would be time to trek up to the main house and the large communal bathroom. Later in the quiet starry morning and cold mountain air, people went up the paths and dirt steps of the garden, in groups of five with flashlights, to see Soen Sa Nim for interviews. Pedro and Pilar helped it run smoothly and Joan Insa, as always, translated.

A small gasoline generator far out in the fields gave us dim light for chanting. The Heart Sutra sounded beautiful in Spanish. Later, meals in huge pots were brought down from the main house in the back of a car.

## Dr. Choi's Style of Teaching

During the retreat, Dr. Choi answered questions after a Dharma talk. One student said, "I live alone and have a 15 month old son. I am terrified to be with him. I keep wanting to hurt him. Why is this happening? What can I do?" The girl became quite emotional.



ZEN ENERGY HEALING is demonstrated by Dr. Danette Choi, her back turned to the camera

Dr. Choi told her to come up front and whispered to her, through the translator. She said, "I wasn't planning to do this, but this girl wants me to help her, so I will show you." She turned to the girl and said, "When you were 3 and a half years old, your family situation became very hard. You were very insecure and began to make many problems for your family. This lasted a long time." The girl nodded. "When you were 14, you had to make a big decision. But you made the wrong one and went the wrong way. You have been suffering more and more ever since."

The girl began to cry. "It has been getting worse the last three years," Dr. Choi continued. "Now you are scared to be with your child. You are almost completely lost, but a little part of you wants to find help. That's why you came to a retreat like this. It is very important that you make this part of you stronger. While you are here, try very hard to learn everything."

"Learn how to practice. This can help you fix your problems and care for your child. If you want, we can talk more later, privately. Also, I hate to tell you this, but in a past life you abused a lot of men. That's why you find it difficult to find love in this life. So practice hard, then you can eliminate this karma." The girl looked much calmer and smiled.

Dr. Choi is becoming very well known for her ability to perceive people's karma and her personal counseling and healing. She has been giving Dharma speeches, teaching Dharma speeches, teaching Zen meditation, and helping the Paris and Palma Zen Centers grow. But she says perceiving people's karma and healing people is not special. "If your consciousness is very clear, other people's karma is just reflected in your mind. Then how you use this is very important."

"Only perceiving karma is like fortune telling. You must use it to help people attain a great question—'What am I?' When I was a child, I could perceive people's karma. But I understood that that wasn't enough, so I went to look for a good teacher to study Buddhism and attain True Nature. When someone comes, I tell them what their problem or pain is, how they got it, when it appeared, why and what their karma is and how to fix it. I want to give them relief and fix their problem, but also I want them to understand what this life is and teach them to eliminate karma, to find True Nature and the correct function of this life. Then moment-to-moment, they can help themselves and save other people."

"If you are practicing, you can see your karma and fix your problems. But many students don't practice correctly, even older students. They get stuck, then they can't believe their practice. That's a mistake. Also, many non-practicing people do not want to find their true self. They just want to feel better or have a better life. So first you must just help them. Then you must wake up their practicing mind. Then you can teach them correct practice and correct life."

Many people in Paris and Palma practice mantra at home and then come to the Zen Center for together action and teaching. In particular, Dr. Choi has helped many people with their marriages. People say she is easy to identify with because she is a layperson. She lives a social life and understands their lives. Soen Sa Nim says her teaching style is very important and different from most people who perceive karma or do healing. He added, "Also much more meticulous and correct than psychiatry or psychology. She teaches not only how to fix lives, but also how to eliminate karma and get enlightenment. That means clearly perceive and help them find their direction. Pain and problems all come from karma. If we make karma clear, pain and problems disappear."

Thus Soen Sa Nim's current teaching in Europe proceeds. In the same manner as in Spain, two-day workshops followed in October and November in London and Paris. On Nov. 16 in a rented room, the first Precepts Ceremony in France was held, officiated by Soen Sa Nim, Dr. Choi and Mu Sang Sunim, who conducted the whole program in French.

People came from Spain, England, Germany, Poland and the south of France to participate in the workshop and take Precepts. Thirteen students including a father and daughter came from these countries and the United States and Cameroon, to take Five Precepts, the first five lay vows of Buddhism. Darek Gorzewski of Poland came from Germany (where he was working), to take Bodhisattva Monk Precepts.

With so many people from different countries staying in the small Paris center, helping through the busy weekend and connecting with one another, a strong feeling of European sangha has appeared. □

Photo by Do Mun Sunim

Photo by Do Mun Sunim