

## Buddhism in Poland Today

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More than 12 years has passed since the first Buddhist group was formed in Poland, the group practicing under Philip Kapleau Roshi. A lot of things have changed. Now in Poland it is estimated there are about 5000 people practicing in various schools of Buddhism. (Poland is a very small country by American standards. It is as big as the state of New Mexico, and has a population of about 36 million people.) The three main Buddhist traditions, gathering in the vast majority of Polish Buddhists, are: Tibetan school of Karma Kagyu (Karmapa lineage); Japanese Zen Buddhism (Kapleau Roshi's students and the Soto school of Maezumi Roshi, represented by Genpo Sensei); and Korean Zen Buddhism (the Kwan Um Zen School of Poland, founded by Zen Master Seung Sahn).

All the Buddhist sanghas cooperate very closely and have from the very beginning. Every two or three months there are meetings of representatives of all the Buddhist schools. These meetings were informally called "Intersangha" in the beginning, but after a few months somebody started calling them "Mahasangha"—the Great Sangha. Meeting together and on a regular basis helps us do a lot of together action. Every year we organize together the Buddha's Birthday Ceremony. Last year over 500 people came to celebrate it. Buddhist teachers and monks coming to Poland are invited to share their Dharma with different Buddhist groups, not only the group which originally invited them. In Polish circumstances, close cooperation and helping one another, regardless of which Buddhist sect we belong to, is necessary.

All Buddhist groups in Poland contributed recently much effort and energy towards organizing an interfaith peace pilgrimage. For the first time in Poland, we had prayers and meditations together in which representatives of almost all religious groups existing in Poland took part. Last year in February Polish KUZS Abbot Andrzej Czarnecki was invited to take part in the Asian Buddhist Conference in Peace which took place in Ventianne, the capital of Laos. Representatives from most of the Asian Buddhist countries (not only Communist ones) participated. From Eastern Europe came Buddhists from Hungary (Tibetan tradition) and Poland. It's worth

noticing that Laos is at the same time a Communist and Buddhist country—Buddhism is the official religion of the state.

The Buddhist movement in Poland is the strongest and most developed among all the socialist countries in Europe. There is some interest in Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, USSR and Yugoslavia. Different Buddhist centers in Poland very often have visitors from other socialist countries interested in practicing. The growth and development of Buddhist practice in Poland has had a big effect on the growing interest in Buddhism in other European Communist countries.

Many things happened in the Polish KUZS in the course of last year. Despite the well-known difficulty of finding enough living space in Polish Zen Centers, we managed to organize two long group retreats—21-day winter and summer Kyol Ches. We didn't have a teacher to lead the winter Kyol Che, but it was amazingly well-attended. Altogether about 60 people sat either the whole retreat or at least one of the 7-day periods.

In Poland there are very limited possibilities for meeting with Master Dharma teachers or Soen Sa Nim. Usually we have either two or three visits a year. Of course the most important time for us is when Soen Sa Nim comes. Whenever there is that rare opportunity that a teacher visits Poland, it generates a lot of interest among Polish people. At those times, of course, people are much more interested in sitting retreats, which are then led by teachers. Since Jacob Perl became a Master Dharma Teacher and formally president of the Polish KUZS, everything started to improve. Polish Zen students are now very happy. A good situation appears. We are worrying a bit about that.

In the early spring, a Japanese Buddhist monk and Soto Zen teacher Ven. Muhen Rosli visited a few of our Zen Centers. Ven. Muhen did long and arduous solo retreats in the mountains of Japan and in the

Himalayas when he was young. As a result, he got some strong energies which have made it possible for him to heal people of many complicated and serious diseases, for example, cancer. Healing sick people was the main purpose of his stay in Poland. Now in his late 70's, Ven. Muhen took part in everyday formal practice and also gave several Dharma talks.

After one of his talks, somebody asked him if the special practice with mantra would cause change in our lives or fulfillment of our wishes due to Kanzeon (Kwan Seum Bosal) energy generated by such practice. His answer was, that of course our wishes get fulfilled, because Buddha is full of love and wants to help us. But usually we are not getting what we asked for, because Buddha using his all-penetrating wisdom wants to offer us something much more precious. Hearing this, everybody laughed loudly, because it was nothing else than one more way of encouraging us to practice, and expressing how valuable is our everyday and special practice.

In June, Genpo Sensei, a Dharma heir of Maezumi Roshi and founder of the European and Polish Kanzeon (Kwan Seum Bosal) sangha, stayed at Warsaw Zen Center. He visits Poland (and WZC) every year. We've had friendly relations with Kanzeon Sangha in Poland since its inception, and help each other a lot. During the June visit we had a several day retreat with Genpo Sensei giving interviews and Dharma talks.

Last year we had two visits from Master Dharma Teacher Jacob Perl. He led 60 people in a retreat in Warsaw, but most of his time in Poland he spent travelling around the country and visiting those cities in which our Zen Centers and groups are located. Besides meetings and practicing together with sangha members, we organized public meetings with Jacob in bigger cities. Some of these meetings drew several hundred people each. Jacob, being of Polish descent, can speak Polish fluently and knows the customs and mentality of Polish people very well. The political and economic situation of Poland has recently been very difficult and complicated, so a person such as Jacob is very precious. He helps the development of Dharma in Poland a lot.

During the summer, Master Dharma Teacher Lincoln Rhodes finally came to Poland after two previously unsuccessful attempts to get a Polish visa. The Polish authorities finally agreed to give him a visa, and Polish students enjoyed learning from him. Linc spent most

of his time in Warsaw Zen Center, leading two weeks of the 21-day summer Kyol Che retreat. During his stay, Linc also took part in ceremonies which took place in the head center of Kapleau Roshi's sangha in Warsaw.

Thanks to the personal help of Soen Sa Nim, Jacob Perl, and many other friends, we were able to purchase the house next door with a small piece of land for the Warsaw Zen Center. Now the land belonging to the Center is twice as large as before. Last year we also managed to finish construction of the wooden cottage for the families. Nowadays, Warsaw Zen Center consists of two dwellings, a family cottage and a Dharma room completely done in wood.

By Polish standards, the Warsaw Zen Center is the big one. In Poland over the last 40 years we've been having a shortage of apartments and houses. If you find something to live in, it's usually very expensive and average people cannot afford to rent a whole apartment for themselves, not even to speak about buying one. The Warsaw Zen Center now has 15 adult residents and 6 children. In the near future, we plan to build one or two more cottages and start the construction of a new big temple (Dharma room). We need a room for Dharma talks and other formal gatherings which will accommodate about 300-400 people. Nowadays, very often 200 or more people come for talks, practice and ceremonies led by Soen Sa Nim and other Zen teachers. Many more people are interested

in taking part in such events, but we have to put some restrictions on the number of participants, because our present Dharma room isn't big enough (about 72 square yards).

Continuing on construction topics, the Gdansk Zen Center recently bought a piece of land in the city. Perhaps this year they'll start to build a Dharma room and other buildings for their Zen Center. Everything depends on money.

In Poland there is great interest in the practice of chanting the mantra (Kido). Last year we had four kids at Warsaw Zen Center. Each one was attended by 35-50 people of different ages. It is also worth mentioning that many students of other Buddhist traditions took part in these. Andrzej Czarnecki also led several kids in other places—several Zen groups and a psychotherapy center.

The last and biggest event for us in 1986 was Soen Sa Nim's visit in the fall. He led a 3-day retreat at Warsaw Zen Center. About 140 people from all over Poland came to sit—in our small Dharma room, adjacent robe room and hallway. And we continued the good Polish retreat custom of controlling our physiological needs—all these people had to share one bathroom. Nobody died in the course of the retreat and it ended with a good, strong spirit. A Precepts Ceremony followed it, in which almost 50 people took Five Precepts and over 20 became Dharma teachers (Ten Precepts). We also had an open public meeting in the Zen Center. More than 200 people came to listen to Soen Sa Nim. Of course, not everybody could fit into the Dharma room; some of the audience had to stay outside looking in through the open windows. What is worth mentioning is that the only information we gave outside about this meeting was an oral one among sangha members and their close friends.

Soen Sa Nim also went to a few cities to visit Zen Centers and groups. We organized public meetings for him in those places. In Warsaw he took part in the opening of the Zen Calligraphy exhibition in the Warsaw Art Gallery. Most of the pieces shown in this exhibit were done by him. It was the first exhibit of its kind in Poland. During the opening ceremony Soen Sa Nim gave the Dharma talk and answered questions. The exhibit, consisting of about 50 calligraphies was prepared by the Polish Kwan Um Zen School Publishing company.

Soen Sa Nim also accepted the invitation of Polish students of Kapleau Roshi and visited their Head Zen Center in Warsaw. For this meeting came many students of Kapleau Roshi, Genpo Sensei and of Soen Sa Nim. He answered questions. For most of the Kapleau Roshi students, it was the first time they were able to meet with a Zen Master other than the one they study with.

The year 1986 was also the year of many changes, troubles and new experiences for the Polish sangha. Many Dharma teachers "slowed down" in their practice; some took leaves of absence. The result was that mostly younger Zen students were participating in Kyol Che and other retreats. The publishing company, which was supposed to publish many books, didn't manage to edit any of Soen Sa Nim's books, and is having organizational and financial troubles. Another and one of the most interesting changes is that more and more middle-aged and older people come to our centers. Well, we are getting older.

But there is also something young and new—many new Zen groups were established around the country. At the end of 1986, the Polish KUZS consisted of 4 Zen Centers and 10 Zen groups. Two more groups are in the process of forming. Another new feature of the Polish sangha is its monastic branch. Andrzej Czarnecki, Abbot of the Polish KUZS, was ordained as a novice monk during the December Precepts Ceremony at Providence Zen Center in the United States. Do Am Sunim (his present name) is the first celibate (bhikku) Zen monk in Poland.

The Polish sangha is very grateful to Soen Sa Nim, Jacob Perl, all Master Dharma Teachers and all our American friends for their tremendous help, support and promotion of Dharma in Poland. We hope that Polish Zen students of Soen Sa Nim soon will be able to pay it back, helping the Dharma develop in countries other than Poland. □

### 2000 people attend closing meeting

## Polish KUZS Organizes Historic Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage

*Inspired by Soen Sa Nim's activity for world peace, and especially his letter to Pope John Paul II, Master Dharma Teacher Jacob Perl conceived the idea of organizing an interfaith peace pilgrimage in Poland. Most of the organizing work was done by Do Am Sunim and the Polish KUZS sangha, with the crucial cooperation of many Catholic priests. Their efforts succeeded and the pilgrimage took place in Poland in late 1986, exactly at the same time as the inter-religious prayer meeting for peace (organized by the Pope and the Catholic Church) held in Assisi, Italy.*

*The pilgrims visited the most famous and important Catholic monasteries in Poland. Among the participants of the pilgrimage were representatives of all Buddhist groups, Raja Yoga group, Catholic priests and monks, and laypeople of other religions. At various points they were joined by representatives of the Jewish religion, Islam, the Christian Orthodox Church and other Polish Christian churches.*

*Group prayers, meditations, chanting, sermons and Dharma talks took place at two monasteries most famous in Polish Catholicism: Czestochowa in the Bright Mountain, and Tyniec, near Krakow. The Bright Mountain monastery, famous for its Black Madonna ikon, is a place of particularly great worship, the "primary point" of Polish Catholics. This was the first time in its long history that Buddhists had visited it. We chanted Kwan Seum Bosal (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) in the monastery church for over an hour.*

*For the past 1000 years the Benedictine monastery in Tyniec has been a model of Christian contemplative, monastic, and intellectual life in Poland. It has always*

*attracted outstanding theologians, philosophers, and Catholic scientists who had chosen to live the monastic life. In this vibrant and powerful place there were prayers, meditations and chanting together, and talks by Buddhists, Hindus and Catholics. Most of the pilgrims stayed in the monastery for a few days. Every morning the Buddhist practices of bowing, meditation and chanting were held in the chapel at the same time that Holy Mass was being celebrated next door in the monastery church.*

*A public meeting with the representatives of the pilgrimage took place in Krakow in "The Club of Catholic Intelligentsia" - a club of both laypeople and intellectual priests. Three people spoke: Halina from the Raja Yoga group, the Jesuit priest Father Andrzej, and Master Dharma Teacher Jacob Perl. Several hundred people overcrowded the main room of the club.*

*The closing meeting of the peace pilgrimage took place in one of the Catholic churches in Warsaw. It was a huge ecumenical gathering - over 2000 people of different religions participated in prayers, chants, meditation, sermons and Dharma talks. There are plans to make the pilgrimage a yearly event, in commemoration of the inter-religious prayer meeting at Assisi.*

*This pilgrimage was a good lesson for everyone. It taught us how we - by putting down our opinion and attachments - can try to act together and make peace and harmony among us, here and now - something people need very much in today's world.*