

Centre Zen de Paris is Growing Fast

By Do Mun Sunim, Abbot, CZP

This past year has seen the Centre Zen de Paris grow into an international Zen Center for practice and teaching in Europe. Starting with Dr. Danette Choi (Poep Sa Nim), three students and a small apartment in a quiet section of Paris, we now have a large center at a well-known address, 9 full-time residents, more than 30 regular committed members and hundreds of students who come from all over Europe. We have a yearly program that alternates three months of intensive teaching (including trips through Europe), with 1 and 1/2 or 2 month periods of quieter practice and work on the Center.

Extra practice, retreats, work projects and preparations for Soen Sa Nim's and Poep Sa Nim's visits are done during these latter periods. Classes, workshops, extended "Social Buddhism" retreats, a steady stream of visitors for counseling and healing with Poep Sa Nim, travelling, and the daily functioning of a Zen Center fill the periods when the teachers are in Europe. These alternating periods together have created a program of Zen practice strongly related to every day life.

Teacher trips through Europe by Soen Sa Nim and Poep Sa Nim, separately and together, continue to be an important part of the program. This fall we visited Norway twice, England, Spain, Italy and Belgium and set the stage for new centers in Barcelona (Spain) and Oslo (Norway). Soen Sa Nim also went to Poland and Russia. Over

50 people attended each workshop, with many people also seeing Dr. Choi individually. Most students understand our "primary point" teaching after one day of workshop and one interview with Soen Sa Nim. But Soen Sa Nim's and Poep Sa Nim's teaching of correct life—finding correct situation, correct function, correct relationship moment to moment—is new to them. These trips often result in people coming to Paris to spend time in the Zen Center, to see Dr. Choi and to deepen their connection with the teaching and practice.

Many people in Europe practice healing, psychic reading, astrology, etc., and Poep Sa Nim's fame as a clear and profound healer, counselor and advisor continues to spread. She is becoming known as "the healer's healer" and "the psychic's advisor." People come from many countries to see her. In early November she held a special 3-day workshop, introducing these people to practicing. Daily, the Zen Center has taken on the feeling of a doctor's office, as people wait to see her.

She also gave a 7-week program of healing for Parisians, with everyone feeling a great improvement in their health and general vitality. While students in many Zen schools in America find it necessary and valuable to see psychologists, Poep Sa Nim's counseling ability and deep understanding of practice has been filling that need effectively and much more quickly here in Europe. I hope that sometime, students in the United States can meet with her again and work more closely with her.

The Centre Zen de Paris is a combination of our [Kwan Um Zen School] more or less

monastic Zen style and the more "social Buddhism" of Dr. Choi. We rarely have formal meals, and informal parties are frequent. People enjoy hanging out together, but a lot of work always gets done. The family room and the meditation room both function as the centers of the temple. However, all residents, including new students, do individual practice, usually bowing, sitting or Soen Yu [Zen Wind, a series of breathing and movement exercises], before going to bed. The warmth and family feeling of the Zen Center is somewhat unusual for a practicing center here, and combined with the strong practice and the clear teaching and direction, makes a powerful healing environment.

Many people who might not be normally interested in practicing come to spend one or two weeks, one or two months, to practice and live together with others. During October and November, when Soen Sa Nim and Poep Sa Nim were both often in Paris, there were regularly 15 or 20 people living at the Center. Dr. Choi also speaks before groups of psychiatrists and psychologists, and the entry of our teaching into the social life of Europe grows.

The Centre Zen de Paris and Hawaii Dharma Sah have made a close connection, with Hawaii Director Randy Koseki and Head Dharma Teacher Jim Pallet both visiting Paris this past year. Poep Sa Nim also now offers three week vacation/retreats twice yearly in Hawaii (August and December) and students from Norway, Switzerland, France and the United States have traveled there to participate this past year. Students who know both teachers say



Dr. Danette Choi

that living with Poep Sa Nim is like traveling with Soen Sa Nim—exciting, fun, sometimes like a retreat, you cannot hold on to your opinion—and it is relaxing as well.

Do Ryun Sunim has taken some time out of Korea to come to Paris for three months, where he has been a great help with the teaching and running of the Zen Center. In November, 16 French students took Five Precepts and Daniel Friart and Catherine Praslon (from France), and Pedro Pomar and Pilar Barcelo (from Spain), became Dharma teachers. Daniel and Catherine are our first two French Dharma teachers!

Two of Poep Sa Nim's mottoes are "loose but tight" and "you don't have to leave your everyday life to practice, practice, practice." Our teaching in Europe continues to grow and we hope the exchange of students between Europe, the United States, Poland and Korea continues to everyone's benefit. □

Soen Sa Nim Goes To Moscow



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government pass. So I talked to the doorman and explained that these were Buddhist students who needed to talk with me, and he let them in. My clothes were very interesting to people, especially my black [knitted] hat. This hat, which is a Korean monk's winter hat, is Mongolian design. They thought I was a high Mongolian official.

The next day I went sightseeing around the Kremlin, Red Square, Moscow University, downtown, Lenin Library, and a big Russian church. I took the subway, it was very beautiful, the most beautiful subway in the world. Stone mosaics on the floor, walls and ceilings, big sculptures everywhere, just like a palace.

We went to find a restaurant. Very difficult. There are coffee shops, but very few regular restaurants. The working people have little money, so there is not much need for restaurants. Most of them are government restaurants. Walking around was no problem. I could go where I wanted, except some places where a policeman barred the way.

The Buddhists were very warm and open, they had strong human love.

ES: Do the Buddhists practice together?

Soen Sa Nim: No, they practice alone. In the south of Russia, I heard there were some Tibetan Buddhist centers, but there is nothing in the north.

I also talked to Korean government officials while I was there. One day I was supposed to meet a Polish student at the airport, but he did not appear. So I had no camera and could take no sightseeing pictures. [Editor's note: the Polish student also had a time-limited visa, and as the train trip from Poland took two days, when he got to Russia he could only stay one hour and had to turn back.] So I went to a big department store and bought a \$55 camera, but it broke after only two pictures. The next day I went back very early to the store and bought an \$80 camera, which worked. I couldn't bring it home, so I gave it to a student.

On the 22nd in the morning I went sightseeing and took pictures. Then in the afternoon I flew to Paris.

My feeling about the Russian people is that they have two minds. They are interested in knowing about Western style freedom. On the other hand, Russia is a big country and it helps many poor countries, which is very wonderful, so they are proud of their country. They read that America makes poison, so they feel it's not such a good society, not helping very much.

I may go back next year. There is a karate school I would like to visit, if I can get a government pass to see it.

(Soen Sa Nim then described briefly what he said to one group that he met with during his stay.)

(1) Philosophy and Zen.

What is the relationship between philosophy and Zen? Philosophy means understanding emptiness and existence, but it doesn't understand where these come from. They come from thinking, which comes

from the mind, which comes from the true self.

(2) Psychology and Zen.

It's very important for psychologists to unconditionally reflect. In Zen, we unconditionally reflect. Zen means in everyday life, moment to moment, keeping our correct situation, function, and relationship.

(3) Scientists and Zen.

Physicists used to say that time and space, cause and effect are absolutes. Now they say that time and space are only subjective. Without thinking, there is no subject, no object. Without thinking is beyond time and space, cause and effect. Then controlling time and space, cause and effect is possible. Everything is created by our mind alone.

(4) Energy and Zen.

Original energy = space energy = great energy = universal energy. Without thinking, breathe in, breathe out, slowly. Then you connect with universal energy. If you get universal energy, you can do anything. Your center becomes stronger, stronger. Finally, your energy is clear like space. Which means, no subject, no object, universal energy and you become one. Then helping other people is possible.

(5) Biology and Zen.

Inside everyone is an automatic system. Outside is the nervous system. The nervous system is very strong and pushes on the autonomic system, then any kind of sickness appears. For example, anger. When we are angry, the blood rushes to our head and stays there. It doesn't come down. Then the heart doesn't work correctly, the stomach doesn't work correctly. Then pain appears, and sickness. Legs, back, head, heart, any-

place in pain. So correct practicing means controlling the nervous system so that it does not push the autonomic system. Controlling the intellectual, the emotional, the physical centers means putting them in balance.

If you want to control the nervous system, put down your opinion, condition and situation. Then you can see clearly, hear clearly, smell clearly, taste clearly, act clearly and think clearly. The sky is blue, the tree is green. The dog is barking, woof, woof. Sugar is sweet. Just like this is the truth. Then you can attain the correct way, truth, and correct life. Moment to moment, keeping your correct situation, function and relationship is possible. That name is great love, great compassion, the great Bodhisattva way. Zen is not special, just everyday life. Everyday mind is the true way. Then help other people.

But all this is only understanding, only thinking. Zen does not mean academic study, does not mean religion, believing or not believing in God or Buddha. Only attain your true self and completely become independent.

(6) How to attain the true self.

Then I taught the group how to sit, how to breathe in and out slowly, how to perceive mind through kong-an practice. Try, try, try, then your center will become stronger, stronger, then you can completely control your functioning, condition and situation. Then you can believe in yourself 100%. That is Zen practice. After that, I taught then Soen Yu [Zen Wind, a series of exercises coordinated with breathing]. They liked this very much, and asked me to come again next year. □

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