

Photos Courtesy of
Lexington Zen Center

New Retreat Center to be Built in Kentucky Mountains

After years of search, a beautiful mountain property in Kentucky has been found for the site of a new retreat center for the Kwan Um Zen School. Robert Genthner, Abbot of Lexington Zen Center, recently purchased the 110 acre site, located on one of the highest elevations in Kentucky. The land consists of fields, woodland, streams and springs, and cliffs from which spectacular views of the Kentucky countryside may be seen. Unoccupied for 20 years, the property has long been recognized by local people as a site of natural beauty and power. Zen Master Seung Sahn declared that he had never seen a more perfect place. "Many great men and women will be born from this spot," he said.

Soen Sa Nim held a dedication ceremony on March 29 for the new retreat center, which will be called Kwan Seum Sang Ji Sah, or "perceive world sound high land temple." Planning for a retreat building is already underway. The following account was sent to us by Bob Genthner.

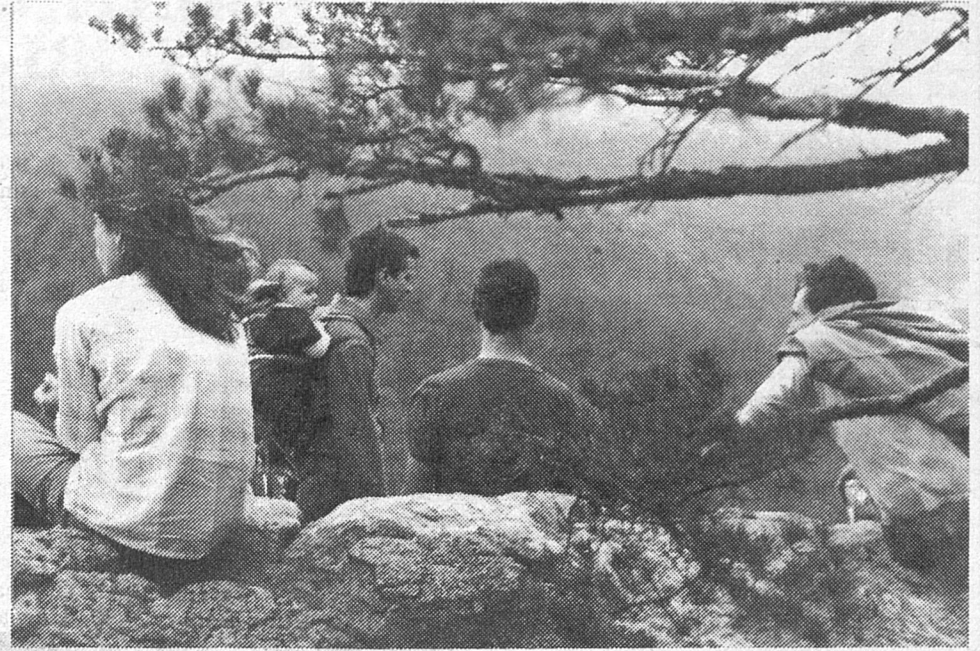
Sitting here on the edge of a mountain. Buddha fairies masquerade as dogwood blossoms flickering everywhere. Do Haeng Su Nim and I are sitting in the "Nest." The spring sun is warm and golden. Above we can hear the sound of Buddhas rappelling off the cliffs of "Amitabul Rock." They are hanging like children on the clothes of their parent.

We are somewhere in the bowels of America, deep in Kentucky in what is called southern Appalachia. Concern has rung across America, not because of its spectacular springs, dogwoods, redbuds and fruit trees that rival any Asian ritual, but because of its poverty, mountain people, Appalachians children. Here we sit on the edge of it in the Golden Chicken's Nest. Welcoming Spring and ourselves. Welcoming our true selves in this wonderful power spot.

On March 29, Soen Sa Nim and 20 of us dedicated the land by chanting Kwan Seum Bosal into the Pure Land. The Pure Land traditionally is West, which is the direction that the great Amitabul Rock faces, looking down a long valley and overseeing the great Power Spot.

Korean geomantic lore [geomancy is the study of wind and water geography] says that power spots must have certain ingredients. Like the human body, mountains and geography have meridians that work to protect the "womb of power," the Tandien. Arms, legs and body trunk all support the "energy garden" from which new life is created and born. In geomancy, the head is called Turtle (Amitabul Rock), the north arm White Tiger, and the south arm Blue Dragon. In the distance a mountain called Red Bird holds the energy in, with Golden Chicken hatching Golden Egg in the womb-nest of his multi-armed, multi-legged earth beast.

What is wonderful about this land is that



it has all the essential ingredients prescribed by geomancy for a power spot, with its many mountains near and far supporting this one spot. Residents of this area already know its power and hold it in reverence. People visit the rock regularly since the land has been mostly unoccupied for 20 years, and they are happy that we will not restrict their coming to visit. Public access to the top of the rock does not cut through the farm so it should not interfere with retreats.

Soen Sa Nim named the land Kwan Seum Sang Ji Sah (Perceive World Sound High Land Temple). In the headdress of statues of Kwan Seum Bosal is Amita Buddha, the Buddha of the Pure Land (High Land). Also in this land a huge rock sits in the crown of the mountain farm below.

On the farm is 110 acres of fields and woodlands. There are some old outbuildings and a small log cabin. Caves and cliffs

where American Indians roamed are abundant and there are lots of trails with spectacular views. "This land is very holy," Soen Sa Nim said, "a very special place. We must build a temple for people to come and get energy, not just for sitting and formal practice but for healing of all kinds: psychotherapy groups, a school for children, workshops for the sick and dying, and so forth."

So this has become our vision and direction to use the land for others. Currently the cabin, equipped with electricity and free natural gas (the land has its own well), is habitable. We are clearing land for the temple site, fixing the road and improving the water system. There are several natural springs. Solo retreats are possible and camping sites abound. Currently we are planning to build a retreat structure in the Nest. Please come and visit if you can. □

Kwan Seum Sang Ji Sah Temple Dedication Poem



Great Energy,
No name, no form.
Only follow situation. Make everything
The sun, the moon, the mountain appear.
Earth, Air, Fire, Water merge.
Dharma appears.
Name and form appear.
Energy, name and form interpenetrate.
Energy coming, going.
Everything appears, disappears.
Big energy, great things.
No energy, nothing.

Turtle, White tiger,
Blue dragon, Red bird,
Golden chicken hatches golden eggs.
Big energy comes, get enlightenment.

Where is big energy?
Do you understand?

KATZ!

Kwan Seum Sang Ji Tah Temple
In Kentucky.
Tree grows up, water flowing.
Just Do It!

Zen Master Seung Sahn
March 29, 1987

The Third Interview

by Jerry Shepherd

My heart is pounding in the palms of my hands as I come into the interview room, make my bows and take my place before Zen Master Seung Sahn.

Entering my third and final interview of the retreat with this man, I am again stricken with awe and, this time, something more: Fear. Fear of failing a test I have read about but never faced...till now.

I settle my legs, calm my hands, take a deep breath, and wait.

"What is your name?" the Master says.

My third interview came on the second full day of a three-day Zen retreat that a friend and I attended—the first full retreat for either of us. Wendy Swenson and I had been sitting weekly with an Indianapolis Zen group for three years; but that did not prepare us for the remarkable experience we were about to have...an experience that for me would climax in that third interview.

We had arrived Friday evening at Bob and Mara Genthner's home, which serves as the Lexington Zen Center.

When we arrived the others had already begun the evening chanting. Knowing nothing about the rituals, practices and protocols of this particular group we went down the stairs and took our places, trying to be unobtrusive.

It was then that I saw Zen Master Seung Sahn for the first time.

The Master was seated on his red mat, eyes closed, singing powerfully, his face gleaming with sweat in the warm room. He accompanied the singing with a percussion instrument that he struck with such skill that he made the sound come and go in waves, ebbing, flowing, and reverberating through the room. I was moved by the sound.

The Master was seated at one end of the room, facing the figure of the Buddha at the other. Between these two spiritual poles, lining each wall in rows facing each other, sat some thirty retreatants, all chanting.

We were handed chanting books and joined in, watching everyone else to know what to do.

I was struck by the chanting, and as the

days passed I came to appreciate its beauty more and more.

After chanting we meditated for two hours in 40-minute sittings. During our sitting meditation the interviews began. As the Master's bell sounded from the interview room we left the room (called the Dharma room) one by one in a prescribed order, to meet him. Interviews continued through the retreat.

That evening during meditation I tried to calm my mind amid the tempest of new sensations and experiences, both within and without me. So much was new, so much was different....

After meditating, we had a brief orientation; then it was time for bed. We made our beds wherever we could. Lights went out at ten; then all I could hear was the soft breathing in, breathing out of the other retreatants throughout the house.

Just breathe in, just breathe out, breathe in, breathe out, in, out....

"What is your name?" he asks as my third interview continues.

I hit the floor as I have learned to do in the earlier two interviews: An action to cut off thought at the moment it arises.

"Only that?" he asks.

"Jerry Shepherd."

"How old are you?"

I hit the floor.

"Only that?"

"Thirty-eight."

He nods. Clad in his robes, seated on his red mat and cushion, he is a powerful, imposing man—centered, solid, resolute. He has been sitting here, legs crossed, for nearly two hours.

Before him on the floor lies a varnished gnarled wooden stick, a foot and a half long. To the right, in front of the stick, sits his bell. His hands are poised, one on each knee.

He now picks up the stick and holds it before him.

"Unnum* said the Buddha is a dried shit stick," he says. Then he points at the stick. "Is this a dried shit stick?"

*Zen Master Unmun (c = yun-men: 862-949)