

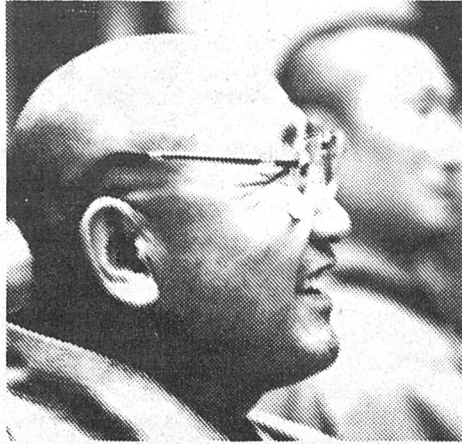
FIFTH ANNUAL SCHOOL CONGRESS and SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION for Zen Master Seung Sahn

By Sid Kemp

"For he's a jolly-good Zen Master, which nobody can deny." The weekend of July 31st, the Kwan Um Zen School gathered for its annual School Congress, and to celebrate Soen Sa Nim's sixtieth birthday. In Korea (Zen Master Seung Sahn's birthplace) the sixtieth birthday is a special time, because it signifies the completion of one's life work. Over 350 people gathered to commemorate this event, approximately 200 Americans and 150 Koreans.

The 75 of us who arrived by Friday evening, were lucky enough to be welcomed by a saxophone solo by David Mott. Moving beyond simple sounds into an exploration of mental states, Mr. Mott used his virtuosity to take us from an African plain in "Tiger Running . . . Nearer Breathing" to the celestial realms in "Regarding Starlight," and deep into ourselves with "Old Ghosts, New Demons." The last piece alternated between sections that sounded like something fluttering and dying, with the saxophone's valves audibly sounding its last heartbeat; and sections of more traditional melodic segments and riffs. In the climax, the two wove into one, unifying new and traditional musical forms. The audience responded with rapt attention that created a unified mind that remained for the entire weekend.

Friday evening and Saturday morning, we broke up into small groups to share our experiences of the past year, using the theme of giving and receiving to help focus our discussion and understand ourselves. My group was led by Nina Crumm Davis from New York City. We used the time to



Zen Master Seung Sahn.

The first was a discussion of "What is Working in our Zen Centers." The panelists were Bob Genthner, Lexington Zen Center; Susan Phillips, Empty Gate Zen Center (Berkeley); Bob Aili, Cambridge Zen Center; Ellen Sidor, The Meditation Place (Providence, RI); David Jordan, North Florida Meditation Center; Bruce Sturgeon, Asheville (NC) Zen Circle; and Vivion Vinson, Providence Zen Center. While some panelists focused on ways to draw new members, others noted that, especially in rural locations, a small but dedicated group was enough. There was a discussion of whether bringing noted speakers for talks on a variety of topics, as is done in Cambridge, was useful as it helped establish an identity in the community, but had not necessarily drawn people to the Zen Center practice. Networking with local adult

The panelists were Jeff Kitzes, Abbot of Empty Gate Zen Center; Jacob Perl, Master Dharma Teacher and School Abbot; Richard Streitfield, School Director; and Dennis Duermeier, Director of Kansas Zen Center.

In addition to discussions of financial security and organizational structure, some special concerns arose. These included the diversity of Zen Centers and groups, the high costs of having such a relatively small number of people spread out around the country, and the dynamics of how the individual centers and groups relate to the School administration.

After lunch, the birthday ceremony began. Master Dharma Teacher Lincoln

In Won Sunim of the Buddhist University in Seoul gave a short speech in both Korean and English, and led us in singing Happy Birthday. Master Dharma Teacher Richard Shrobe gave a formal dharma talk praising Soen Sa Nim as "a worn out Zen master with worn out students," and thanked him for his one-word teaching: "Try."

Soen Sa Nim's sixtieth birthday poem and a kong-an challenge (see box on page six) came next. Ven. Mahaghosana, the internationally known Cambodian monk, thanked Soen Sa Nim for helping him settle in the United States when he first arrived here as a refugee. Jae Won Sunim of Washington State gave a congratulatory talk.



A MOTLEY CREW From New Haven Zen Center performing their singing skit.

Rhodes gave an opening talk recalling one of Soen Sa Nim's first birthdays in America, when Linc had opened a door to a neighbor angry about the noise. Linc thanked Soen Sa Nim for helping him open so many doors over so many years. Tetsugen Glassman, Sensei, of the Zen Community of New York expressed his appreciation for Soen Sa Nim's vigorous style and work for world peace, as well as his creation of a dynamic sangha in America.



MASTER DHARMA TEACHER
George Bowman.



TWO GOOD FRIENDS during the Congress weekend were Jamie Highsmith, son of Bill and Nancy Highsmith of Cambridge Zen Center, and Micah Kessel, son of Ken and Kim Kessel of New Haven Zen Center (formerly many years at Chogye International).

create metaphors from our own growth and transformation during the year, and explored how Zen practice had supported our lives in Manhattan or Kansas City or San Francisco, in Zen centers, or at home with our families.

In the breaks between events, things were really hopping. People were greeting old friends in the hall as others ran by carrying carefully balanced pyramids of fruit to set before the Buddha. The dharma room was transformed about four times a day, with stages, chairs and cushions flying in and out as it went from meditation hall to conference center to birthday celebration. A crowd of dedicated volunteers led by David Gibbs prepared the meals. All meals were served in both Korean and American style, with the Korean food being prepared in the traditional way by the Korean women who had come for the ceremony. For those who wanted to escape the bustle inside, the outdoors provided a warm lawn for naps, and paths for relaxing walks. The sun cooperated by blessing the weekend with its light and warmth.

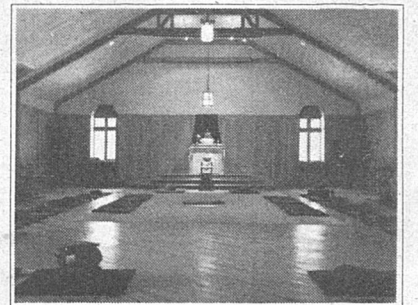
The remainder of Saturday morning was taken up by two roundtable discussions.

education and religious organizations was also discussed, as were methods of gathering financial support.

The second panel was a presentation of a new process that the School Council has begun, of reevaluating its goals and purposes with the aid of a management consultant.



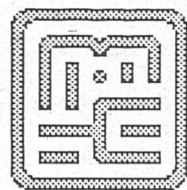
ZEN MOUNTAIN MONASTERY



"Our practice is alive, working, functioning, laughing, crying, dancing Zen, this very life Zen—the only kind of Zen there is. It's not an activity that takes place in the world, it's the activity of the world itself."

—Rev. John Daido Looi

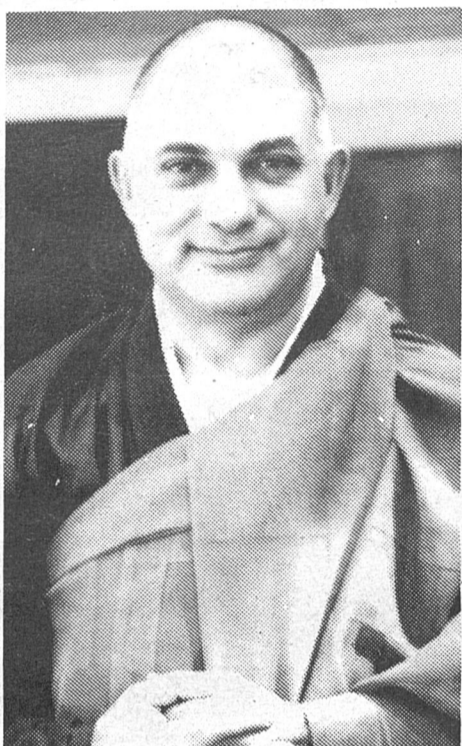
- *Zen Teacher John Daido Looi in full-time residence
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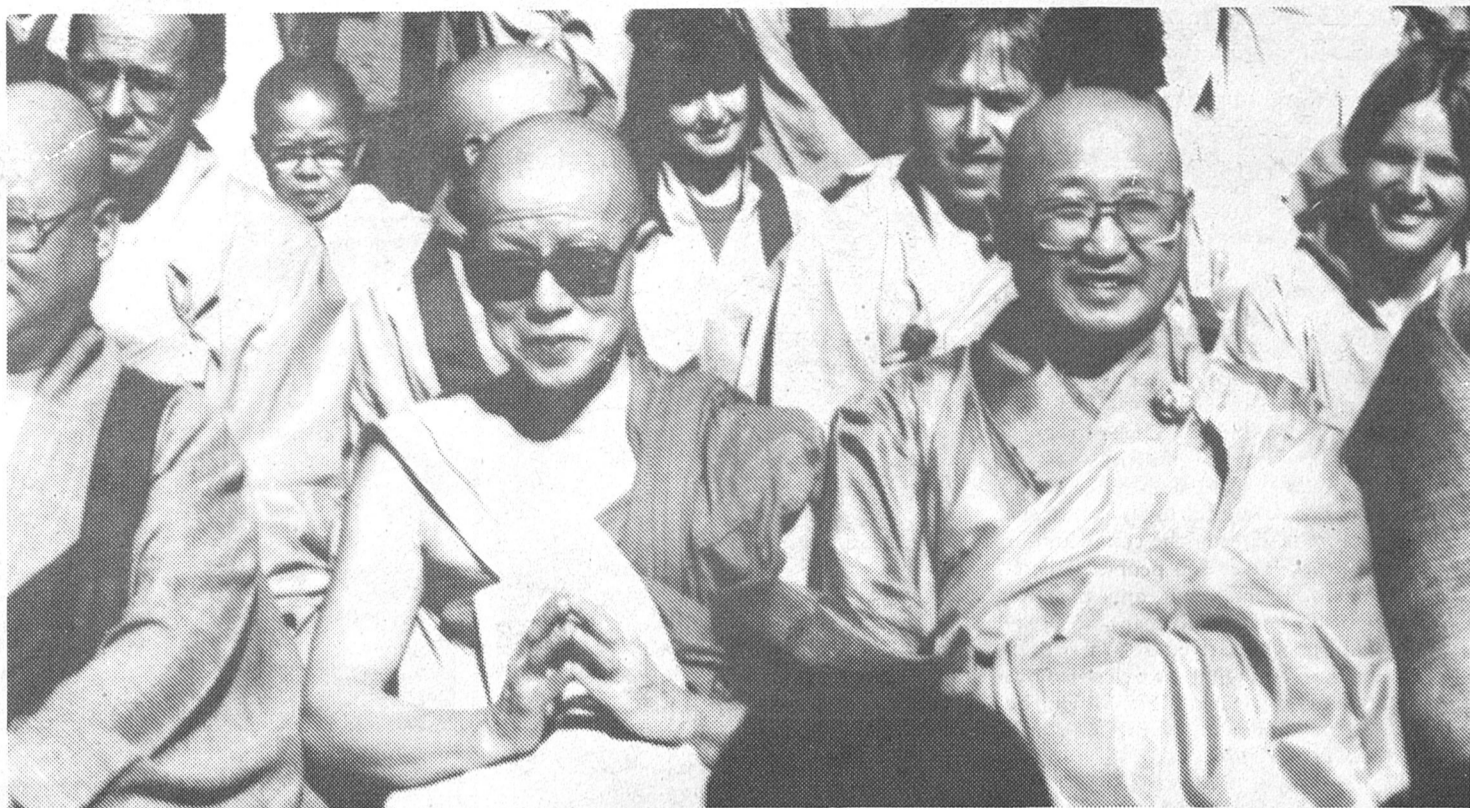
The evening featured lively presentations from 20 different Zen Centers and groups, all in tribute to Soen Sa Nim. Do Ryeon Sunim sang the traditional Korean freedom song, "Arida"; the Warsaw Zen Center offered a traditional Polish song; and greetings came from centers in Western Europe.

After two poems by Robin Rowedder from the Seattle Dharma Center, things really began rocking with the "Bodhi Rhythm Bills" from Empty Gate Zen Center, who gave new meaning to songs like YOUR LOVE KEEPS LIFTING ME HIGHER and YOU SAY IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY. More music was provided by



TESTSUGEN GLASSMAN SENSI - Abbot of Zen community of New York, was a featured guest and speaker during the Congress weekend.

a barber shop quartet from Chicago. A parody of the Heart Sutra, called the "Subway Sutra" came from New York City. Soen Sa Nim himself was parodied in a masterful performance by David Mott from Ontario Zen Centre, complete with rubber chicken-Zen stick, a calculator that didn't understand Zero until it was crushed with a mallet, and the "traditional" Shit-on-a-hat. Another parody of Soen Sa Nim's teaching came in the form of a Southern Fried Dharma Bar and Grill, in which a sweet young woman hits a man who is trying to pick her up, and says, "I didn't ask your name, I asked, Who Are You?" New Haven Zen Center interrupted its own



VEN MAHAGHOSANANDA renowned Cambodian monk joins Soen Sa Nim during the birthday ceremonies.



KOREAN FAMILIES enjoy being with Soen Sa Nim.

beautiful presentation of a poem with a delivery of a fifty-pound drum of Kimchee to "Mr. Nim."

A slide presentation of the new land purchased in Kentucky, where Soen Sa Nim has plans for a retreat center, was accompanied by a tape of Korean chanting and narrated by Robert Genthner, Abbot of Lexington Zen Center. A humorous and surreal film about daily life at the Cambridge Zen Center followed.

Late night entertainment featured Myung Sook Chun and her troupe of professional dancers who offered traditional Korean religious and court dances. One was a beautiful fan display representing butterflies, and another was a vigorous drum dance in which five standing drums were pounded by the dancer. Maynard Silva and Mark Herz closed the evening with a lively blues jam session of guitar and violin.

Sunday morning, there was a panel talk on "Buddhism in America," with Tetsugen Glassman, Sensei, of the Zen Center of


New York, and his wife Helen, Master Dharma Teacher Barbara Rhodes of Providence Zen Center, and Joseph Goldstein, a co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA. Glassman Sensei discussed the transformation beginning in his community as it plans to move into an abandoned school in Yonkers and provide housing and rehabilitative training for the



JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN, a Vipassana teacher and co-founder of Insight Meditation Society in Barre, MA, is an old Dharma friend of Soen Sa Nim.



A TRADITIONAL KOREAN DANCE performed by Myung Sook Chun.



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MORE OF THE SCHOOL CONGRESS

homeless of Westchester County, New York. This led to a lively discussion on the role of direct action in Zen and in Buddhist tradition, and an exploration of what it meant to challenge our clarity of mind by bringing it into the world to be used and tested. Joseph Goldstein discussed the way in which Vipassana was offering an approach to enlightenment for Americans, and cautioned about the dangers of losing the concept of enlightenment as Buddhism is translated into American terms.

Soen Sa Nim led a wrap-up discussion before lunch, answering questions about practice.

After lunch, there was a too-brief meeting of the Dharma Teachers Association that raised questions about how the association could help train dharma teachers and provide them with more support in teaching the practice. The day closed with a Precepts ceremony, in which 13 people formally became students of Soen Sa Nim by taking the Five Precepts, 13 more became Dharma Teachers, and two men, Jim Binger of Kansas Zen Center (monk's name: Do An Sunim) and Joe Donovan of Dharma Sa in Los Angeles (monk's name: Do Shim Sunim) had the last hair cut from their heads by Soen Sa Nim and became monks. In his Dharma talk, Soen Sa Nim said that it is very easy to become a monk, but very hard to decide to be one.

A special thank you to School Congress weekend photographers Paul Stevenson, Rick Schneider and Jeff Vandergriff.

*Very soft is true strength.
With harmony comes luck.
Goodness brings you virtue.
Follow situation then get happiness.
Forebearance will make you a great man.*

Zen Master Seung Sahn

The Kong-An Challenge

Typical of Soen Sa Nim's playfulness was his offer to give Transmission to anyone who gave the following Kong-an poem a correct last line. Some of the many answers received are listed. After reading them, Soen Sa Nim declared that there were "no keen-eyed students yet."

The Kong-an poem is as follows:

*"10,000 Dharmas return to one
Where does the one return?
It is not one, not zero*

*10,00 Dharmas return to "Only Do It"!!!
No one, no 10,000, only don't know.
One Dharma returns to 10,000.
Your mother would be proud of you.
Zero, zero, one one.
How may I help you?
One has never left, why will it return?
Because it exists, wash rice before you boil it
and knead bread.
Ate good one today, now should return to Cape Cod tonight.
10,000 guests return home. See you later SSN.*



ZEN MEDITATION Intensive Winter Sitting Retreat

January 2-April 1, 1988

*led by Master Dharma
Teacher Barbara Rhodes*

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The traditional Korean-style monastery has a spacious, airy meditation hall overlooking a small pond. Here, in silence, retreatants will sit, chant, bow, eat and work together. Bobby Rhodes will offer guidance, personal interviews and Dharma talks on a regular basis.

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THE FIRST KNOT IS THE HARDEST...Do An Sunim (formerly Jim Binger) from Kansas Zen Center, shortly after becoming a monk. Helping him is Mu Soeng Sunim, Abbot of Diamond Hill Zen Monastery.