

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**Kong-an Practice in America**

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# PRIMARY POINT

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Some of the attendees at "The Global Conference of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival" which was held April 11-15 in Oxford, England.

(European News)

## Poep Sa Nim Attends International Conference On Human Survival

by Do Mun Sunim & Do Haeng Sunim

Our European sangha has continued to grow this past winter and spring with regular retreats in nine countries. The majority of the activity has been guided by Dharma Master Ji Kwang Poep Sa Nim. Her emphasis is on finding practice in the situations and responsibilities of everyday life (monk and lay life). Her efforts in helping individuals to learn how to do this touches many people and has created a large and ever-growing practicing sangha. In addition to leading many retreats and seeing many people in personal consultation, she has recently been interviewed on French radio (an excerpt appears on page 9), appeared as a guest

on an important national television program in Spain and, most significantly, was an invited participant at an international conference held at Oxford University in England.

"The Global Conference of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival," held for five days during the week of April 11-15, 1988, brought together 100 spiritual leaders drawn from all the major religions and 100 lawmakers serving in governments in all the world's major regions. They were not there to represent their churches or their govern-

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*SPECIAL ISSUE*

## Kong-an Practice in America

(Editor's note: Kong-an is a Korean word. In Japanese, it is "koan", in Chinese, it is "kung-an".)

What is a kong-an? Are kong-ans necessary in our practice to attain clear mind? Are kong-ans merely another attachment for the mind to grasp?

In the accompanying interview, Toni Packer raises these issues provocatively, arguing that the traditional use of kong-ans has become the means to some end, a sort of magical formula that one simply does to reach Enlightenment or an entangling system that becomes just another place to be stuck.

The first part of this interview was published in the February 1987 issue of Primary Point. To accompany the publication of Part Two, the Editors of Primary

Point invited commentaries from several Zen teachers in America who currently use kong-an practice in their teaching.

We asked them to comment on their use of kong-ans. What are kong-ans? Why, how and when do they use them? What is their relevance to modern America?

Master Dharma Teacher Barbara Rhodes, Daido Looi Sensei, Jan Chozen Bays Sensei, and Zenson Gifford Sensei have responded with stimulating essays.

Zen Master Seung Sahn was also asked some of the same questions. His responses are recorded in the interview which begins on this page.

The kong-an articles begin on the next page. We trust you will find them quite thought-provoking. We invite our readers to comment.

## Kong-ans:

### Mind-to-Mind Connection

An Interview with Zen Master Seung Sahn

PRIMARY POINT asked Zen Master Seung Sahn (Soen Sa Nim) to explain his system of Kong-an practice and its applicability to contemporary American minds. Mu Soeng Sunim conducted the interview on behalf of PRIMARY POINT.

PRIMARY POINT: What are kong-ans? How did they become part of Zen practice?

SOEN SA NIM: Kong-an means public case, or public exchange, public situation, or public document. In old China, when they made copy of a government document, they put a "chop" or seal on the copy in such a way that half of the seal was on the original and half on the copy. So when they had to verify the authenticity of the copy all they had to do was to match the two halves. In Zen tradition, kong-an means student's understanding of a question is one-half and matches the teacher's understanding of the same question which is the other half. When student and teacher share the same understanding, it is called *mind-to-mind connection*.

If you want to practice correctly, you must ponder over old Zen masters' enlightenment stories. If you understand their mind at the moment of enlightenment that means your kong-an practice is correct. Nowadays, all Zen Masters use these old Zen masters' enlightenment

stories to teach their students. This is kong-an practice.

In the beginning there was no kong-an practice. Then the future seventh patriarch, Huai-jang came to visit Hui-neng, the Sixth patriarch. Hui-neng asked him, "Where do you come from?". Hui-jang replied he came from Sung Shan mountain. Hui-neng asked again, "What is this thing that has come here?". Huai-jang could not answer. That became the first kong-an in Zen tradition--"What is this?" It became a big question for Huai-jang and it took him eight years to understand.

Also, even before that there were situations in Buddhist history which became the basis of reflection by future Zen monks. Buddha sat down under the Bodhi tree with a big question: "What is life? What is death?" When Bodhidharma came to China, the future second patriarch came to visit him. Bodhidharma would not talk to him. To show that he was sincere in his quest, the second patriarch cut off his arm and presented it to Bodhidharma. Seeing this, Bodhidharma asked him, "What do you want?" The second patriarch said, "My mind is not rested. Please pacify it for me." Bodhidharma said, "Bring me your mind and I will pacify it." The second patriarch was

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tested about it before being allowed to take precepts. There might be a yearly training course for all Dharma Teachers, followed by an exam. Saturday afternoon the small groups each had time to meet with Soen Sa Nim to discuss issues more privately. The Saturday afternoon large group session was productive, with several concrete plans and changes adopted:

1) Soen Sa Nim agreed to give a series of talks on *Compass of Zen*. The transcribed talks will be edited into a training manual for Dharma Teachers.

(Editor's note: Soen Sa Nim has already given these talks, and the transcribing is underway.)

2) *Dharma Mirror* will be revised and updated. It will have some additional teaching, be generally livelier, and an index will be added.

3) The currently available translations of the chants will be checked for accuracy and revised as necessary. The English translations will be added to the back of the new chanting books.

4) There will be an annual Dharma Teacher Yong Maeng Jong Jin. Next year, it is scheduled for March and again at Kansas Zen Center.

5) The Dharma Teacher Association governing board will be drawn from Dharma Teachers attending the annual Dharma Teacher Yong Maeng Jong Jin and will be composed of three Master Dharma Teachers and four Zen Center Head Dharma Teachers. The membership will rotate regularly. The current body is composed of:

**Bobby Rhodes-Providence Zen Center, Richard Shrobe-Chogy International Zen Center, Judy Roitman-Kansas Zen Center, Nina Davis-Chogy International Zen Center, Robin Rowedder-Seattle Dharma Center, and Jonathan Bowra-Empty Gate Zen Center**

Saturday night, everyone (thirty-two people) went out to dinner at a local Chinese restaurant, which was great fun, and then returned to the Zen Center to sprawl on the floor and watch a video (Star Trek IV).

Sunday was a crazy high energy day. The final morning session offered a dharma talk by Richard Shrobe on the "Dropping Ashes" kong-an and on connecting

kong-ans with our daily lives. Soen Sa Nim again stressed the role of Dharma Teachers in keeping Zen practice vital by ensuring its involvement in everyday life. There was a closing circle talk and lunch and many people had to leave to catch planes. For those who stayed, the activity was non-stop for the rest of the day. There was a precepts ceremony in the early afternoon. Ron Sutherland and Hui-chi Yang were married by Soen Sa Nim in a well-attended, Buddhist ceremony at a local country club and then gave a talk at the Kansas University campus in the evening.

A terrific amount of work was accomplished during the retreat. That it was so productive owes a lot to some of the intangible aspects of the weekend. A warm, family-style atmosphere prevailed: a strong unbroken sense of sangha. There was plenty of free time for relaxing, taking walks or talking with old friends. One of the small groups walked downtown Saturday afternoon, shopping for gifts, visiting a bookstore and eating ice cream. The retreat was simply a lot of fun and very energizing.

Many people worked hard to pull off the weekend so successfully. It was wonderful that Soen Sa Nim came with his usual humor, clarity and energy. With so many events scheduled, particularly on Sunday, it was taxing, and everyone was grateful for Soen Sa Nim's effort and teaching. Richie Streitfeld, Bobby Rhodes, Nina Davis, Karen Ryder and Stanley Lombardo all worked very hard organizing the retreat, setting an agenda, and generally making an idea real. Many thanks also to the Kansas Zen Center members who gave their time, work and rooms as needed. Particular thanks go to Carole Hojun Welker and Marla Wambsgans who spent the weekend cooking up terrific meals. Finally, thanks to everyone who attended and made the retreat happen. The Kwan Um Zen School is a far-flung entity and it's often easy for individuals or whole Zen Centers to feel isolated. There is inestimable value for all of us in getting together face to face for whatever reason and realizing that Sangha is more than just a word.

*Dennis Duermeier is a Bodhisattva Monk and Director of the Kansas Zen Center.*

### Human Survival Conference

(Continued from page 1.)

ments, but as individuals representing the human family. The goal of the conference was to create an interaction and on-going dialogue in order to enlarge all of our capacities to deal with global, life-and-death issues.

The selection of participants was guided by the desire to bring together leaders known for their dedication, enthusiasm, integrity and courage. Participants included the heads of the Church of England, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church; emissaries from various churches of the United States; a representative of the Pope (who was the organizer of the World Interfaith meeting at Assisi last year); Mother Teresa; prominent leaders of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism (including the Dalai Lama); and leaders of the Hopi Indians of North America and native religious groups of Africa. Political leaders included the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, American congressmen and former ambassadors, and former presidents and parliamentary leaders of governments from all over the world. There were also international media leaders and scientists from England (James Lovelock), Africa (Wangari Maathai--Kenya), the U.S.A. (Carl Sagan) and the U.S.S.R. (Evgueni Velikhov--Vice President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences). Poep Sa Nim was the only female Buddhist master at the conference.

The entire assembly convened each morning in the beautiful Oxford Town Hall for speeches and discussions on various current topics. In the afternoon participants broke up into small working groups in order to enhance personal contact. In these working sessions each participant was invited to speak. One person

said that in this age we should all follow women. Poep Sa Nim responded by saying, "in the absolute world there is no woman and no man. In one life we may appear as a woman, in the next life maybe as a man. Because of that we should not attach to our form. Not only man and woman, but also with countries, religions, etc., we should not attach to our form or situation. If you attain the absolute world, from which we all came, your actions and speech will automatically help others. This is the basis of human survival.

"We all have 10,000 intelligent ideas and have been talking a great deal. If we cannot harmonize together, how can we help and lead others? Why don't we all stand up, hold hands and practice together so that we can share energy, let down our barriers and attain this absolute world." The whole group then did as she asked while chanting "Om Nam" together, raising and lowering their arms, chanting fast and slow.

Afterwards, there was a lot of animated discussion and a relaxed atmosphere among the participants. During a tea break and at dinner that night, many people expressed their appreciation for this practicing. People were able to taste the one mind and energy which appears when barriers are let down.

On the way home Poep Sa Nim was asked for her observations on the participants of the conference. She said, "generally speaking, the political people are more open than many of the religious people. They are looking for solutions to serious everyday problems and are more open to experience, energy and new ways of looking at things. Religious people tend to protect their ideas and positions more. Often they are following someone else's idea or their own beliefs and are less open and less able to go before-thought. That's not good and cannot help this world."

## Dharma on French Radio

by Poep Sa Nim

*In February of this year Poep Sa Nim was invited to talk on a radio show in Paris. The following talk is a partial transcription from that event. The questions were telephoned in by people listening to the show.*

**Question:** I don't know much about the Asian religions. What is Buddhism?

**Poep Sa Nim (PSN):** Buddhism is not a religion. We practice Zen which means finding your true self. Because of that, I cannot say that Buddhism is a religion. Everyone would like to find themselves, who they really are. Buddhism appeared to show people the way to find truth, which, in fact, exists prior to and independent of any religious form. This means not following someone else's idea.

We have many lives, not only this one. For most people, when they exist, their human body is their world. We forget our true self and we attach to this present body, present form. This form is made up of the six senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. People think only of and do action only through these six senses. We follow the senses and then, when we get old, we don't know why we have lived this life. Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Many people have these questions. So, Buddhism is to show you where

you came from, where you are going and how to live this present life correctly, without having any objective or subjective conditions.

We receive this human form and it is built by the four elements. We form this body and then forget what nature wants us to do. We only attach to our body. When you attach to this body it has objective and subjective conditions, which means like and dislike, right and wrong, good and bad. If you keep following like/dislike, right/wrong, and good/bad you only follow objective things. That's what human society is fighting about. Right and wrong, good and bad. But Buddhism means, conquer this objective/subjective action to find what is before this condition. This means that before-thinking is our true self. This before-thinking does not have any condition; there is no attachment. Your mind is clear like a mirror. When your mind is clear like a mirror you see things as they are. For example, when someone appears before you, because your mind is clear like a mirror, it reflects that person and you see their mind—their before-karma, present-karma and future-karma. But, only perceiving is not enough. This before-thinking is absolute energy or what I call complete energy. As you know, right now you are listening to the

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