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PERCEIVE UNIVERSAL SOUND

An Interview with Zen Master Seung Sahn

This interview with Zen Master Seung Sahn appeared in "The American Theosophist" (AT) in May 1985. It is reprinted by permission of the Theosophical Society in America, Wheaton, Illinois. The interviewer is Gary Doore. Zen Master Seung Sahn is now referred to by his students as Dae Soen Sa Nim. (See note on page 3)

Gary Doore: What is Zen chanting?

Seung Sahn (Dae Soen Sa Nim): Chanting is very important in our practice. We call it "chanting meditation." Meditation means keeping a not-moving mind. The important thing in chanting meditation is to perceive the sound of one's own voice; not hear, but perceive.

AT: Are you using the word "perceive" in a special sense?

DSSN: Yes. Perceiving your voice means perceiving your true self or true nature. Then you and the sound are never separate, which means that you and the whole universe are never separate. Thus, to perceive our true nature is to perceive universal substance.

With regular chanting, our sense of being centered will get stronger and stronger. When

we are strongly centered we can control our feelings, and thus our condition and situation.

AT: When you refer to a "center" do you mean any particular point in the body?

DSSN: No, it is not just one point. To be strongly centered is to be at one with the universal center, which means infinite time and infinite space.

The first time one tries chanting meditation there will be much confused thinking, many likes, dislikes and so on. This indicates that the whole mind is outwardly-oriented. Therefore, it is necessary first to return to one's energy source, to return to a single point.

AT: In other words, one must first learn to concentrate?

DSSN: Yes. Below the navel we have a center that is called an "energy garden" in Korean. We eat, we breathe, and this area becomes a source of power. If the mind becomes still, this saves energy. The mind, however, is constantly restless. There is an endless stream of desires for various kinds of experience; sights,

(continued on next page)

Mt. Fuji in the Mist and Rain

by George Bowman, Master Dharma Teacher

This talk was excerpted from a Dharma Talk given at the Providence Zen Center in January 1988.

During this retreat we have been sitting short, twenty minute rounds with the intention of not moving. Ordinarily, we sit much longer and allow people to stand behind their cushions when they are in great pain or uncontrollable sleepiness. Perhaps we have been fearful of scaring new students away from their cushions when they feel overwhelmed with pain or boredom. There is, however, great wisdom to be found in stillness.

Before each round of sitting we are vowing not to move, to sit with whatever appears in this moment and to relate to it as our teacher and friend. Of course, some friends are quite challenging, but nevertheless we are committed to a full relationship with them!

Why should we try this experiment? We can enjoy the flowers only if we stop long enough to look at them. What stops moving? First, our body stops moving; next, our scattered thinking stops moving; then, our dispersed and confused awareness stops moving; and finally, we come into full relationship with this flower. This full relationship and clear experience of the flower is not a meditation upon something that is separate from us. Rather, in stillness, we forget ourselves and become intimate with the flower, we enter the boundless world of prajna.

In sitting still we are able to receive what this moment has to offer. We see that this moment, regardless of what our idea about it may be, is entirely trustworthy—not only can we trust it, we are it. So we are not trying to amputate pieces of ourselves to fit some arbitrary image of what is acceptable. (That would be

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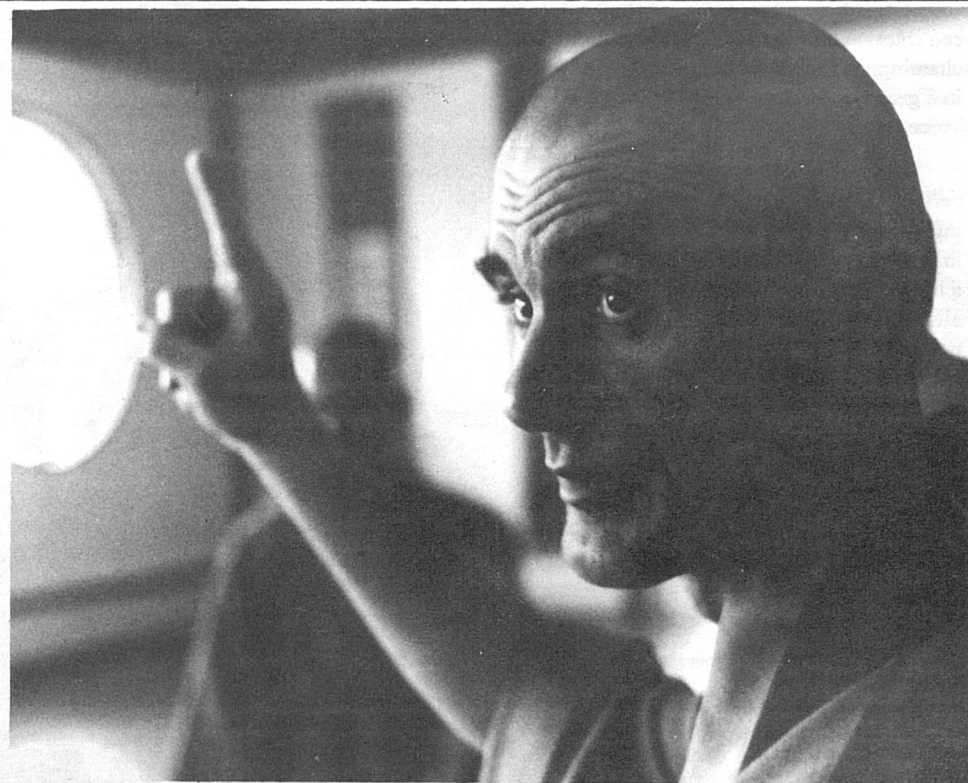
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Master Dharma Teacher Do Am Sunim

Do Am Sunim Becomes Poland's First Master Dharma Teacher

Zen Master Seung Sahn is now referred to by his students as Dae Soen Sa Nim. (See note on page 3)

[Editor's note: excerpts from the inka ceremony given below were translated by Dorota Krzyzanowska and edited by Susan Phillips.]

On June 4th of this year Do Am Sunim became the first Master Dharma Teacher of Kwan Um Zen School of Poland. Over one hundred fifty people came to the Warsaw Zen Center to see Dae Soen Sa Nim give inka—the authority to teach kong-an practice and lead retreats—to Do Am Sunim. The inka ceremony took place one day before the Polish Sangha's ten year anniversary celebration. Master Dharma Teacher (and honorary Polish KUZS President) Jacob Perl joined Dae Soen Sa Nim there for these major events. Representatives from all the Buddhist sanghas in Poland attended, reflecting the very close ties that the groups have.

The Polish Sangha had its beginnings in 1978, when Dae Soen Sa Nim and Jacob Perl visited Poland at the invitation of a former member of Chogye Zen Center in New York who had returned to his native land. During that visit, Dae Soen Sa Nim and Jacob first met Do Am Sunim or, as he was known at that time, Andrzej Czamecki.

In 1978, Andrzej was a self-employed artisan producing mosaic tiles. After the visit he became deeply involved in Zen practice and started a Zen Center in his home in Krakow. A couple of years later Andrzej moved to War-

saw, and, as often happens among Zen students, he switched careers: his experience with Zen practice enabled him to use meditation techniques to counsel drug addicts.

In Warsaw, Andrzej started a second temple which was given the name Do Am Sa, from its founder's Dharma name, Do Am (Sa means temple). The Polish Kwan Um Zen School was formed as a separate entity from the North American Kwan Um Zen School. Andrzej has been Abbot of that body since its inception. As Dae Soen Sa Nim often tells his students, the Polish school is very strong and is growing. In addition to the centers in Warsaw and Krakow already mentioned, there is a center in Gdansk and approximately fifteen affiliated sitting groups throughout Poland.

In December of 1986, Andrzej took traditional monk's precepts at Providence Zen Center, and would thereafter be called Do Am Sunim. Now, less than two years later, he would participate in another momentous ceremony that would profoundly affect his life.

Traditionally, inka ceremonies include an explanation of the procedures to the audience, a period of Dharma Combat in which members of the audience challenge the initiate, a speech by the new Master Dharma Teacher, and congratulatory speeches. In this the first Polish inka ceremony, Jacob Perl, who was born in Poland and speaks the language fluently, explained the ceremony and invited members of the audience to engage Do Am Sunim in Dharma combat. The following are excerpts from the Dharma combat exchanges, Do Am Sunim's Dharma Talk, and congratulatory speeches by Jacob Perl and Dae Soen Sa Nim.

(continued on page 4)

Do Am Sunim Becomes Poland's First Master Dharma Teacher

We Expect Something Special

Dharma Talk by Master Dharma Teacher Do Am Sunim

[He hits the table with his Zen Stick: Hit!]
"This stick is sky, sky is this stick. Is this true?"

[Silence. He hits the table again with his Zen stick: Hit!]

"There is no stick, there is no sky. Is this true?"

[Silence. Then once again — Hit!]

"Stick is stick, sky is sky. Is this true?"

[Silence.]

"KAAATZ!! Sky is blue."

Questions often appear about what we attain after a certain period of practice— what is enlightenment, what is it like? Since I completed my 100 day retreat I've been asked many times what I attained. I always say: "Nothing special. When I was bowing, I was just bowing. During chanting, I was just chanting sutras. During sitting, I was just sitting. During meals, I was just eating. And during rest period, I just rested." But I noticed that no one really believed me. People would say, "Didn't you have some kind of special experience at least once? Maybe during the night?"

Other people asked me why I spent all that time just sitting there doing nothing. They wondered why I didn't work, or help other people. So again I would go back to what I said before: "When it was time to sit, I just sat. When it was time to bow, I just bowed. When it was time for meals, I just ate." But they would not believe me. We expect something special; we have the idea that our direction is to attain enlightenment, so we may help other people. No doubt this is a much better idea than most ideas, but it is still just an idea. Our teacher reminds us frequently that it is quite easy to attain enlightenment; the difficulty is keeping it, moment after moment after moment.



First Dharma Speech by Master Dharma Teacher Do Am Sunim

When someone asks what this practice is for, or wonders what enlightenment is like, it is worth realizing that each moment of our lives is a great enlightenment. The sky is blue. The wall is white. This light is shining straight into my eyes and I am blinking. Nothing else. But in order to learn to function at this moment with full harmony and peace, we need to make some effort. The practice gives us the op-

portunity to make this effort— it doesn't matter whether this effort is in formal practice or outside of the Dharma Room.

As Dae Soen Sa Nim has told us many times, what is important is try mind, from moment to moment. If we make a mistake, then we must perceive it. Then correct it, and try again. And we must remember that we practice not only for ourselves but for all people and it is nothing special.

On the one hand, sitting, bowing, and chanting is just the same as playing, working, and eating or whatever. But, on the other hand, during formal practice, it may become clear why we do this. The answer may suddenly appear: 'To help others.' To help others is also just an idea, but of all dualistic ideas that we can create in life, it is the best.

"People would say, 'Didn't you have some kind of special experience at least once?'"

Through persistent practice, which is not really special, our try mind slowly, slowly gets clearer. When our mind is clearer, we perceive every situation more clearly, our perception becomes wider. At the same time, we learn to act to help others. And after awhile these words become truth, because we experience them more and more ourselves. We begin to experience that this world and we ourselves are not different. How can we say that this world and we ourselves are separate? How can we

keeps telling us it is nothing special, always there are a lot of mistakes, struggles. . . Maybe we will have to spend all our lives like this but in ancient times — BOOM!! One moment and that was it! [Enlightenment was attained.]

First of all, part of the stories is usually missing. These tales were first told long ago when people had very simple uncomplicated minds. It was not necessary to explain that such and such a fellow who stumbled over the stone merely loosened his mind for a second, long enough to feel— 'Oh! Everything is clear'; nor that the fellow might later make a mistake, and have to say, 'I am sorry,' and continue his struggle to be enlightened.

So certainly today is an important day for me; but, in just a short moment this day will be even more important and in the next moment even more important still. So I think that for at least the next 10,000 years, we will have better and better days— all at one instant. Let's understand finally that there is no time, no space. There is only: Hit! [He hits his Zen stick on the table.]— this one moment. This moment has already died.

But: [Hit! He again hits his stick on the table.] "The next one is alive!"

"And this one has died too!"

"No problem. That which has been, that which is going to be is only this moment."

[Hit! Again he hits his Zen stick.]

"Next, how to help at this moment? Whether we succeed or not it does not matter. Only be [Hit! The Zen stick pounds the table]— in this moment. Only help!"

Now I will say something about one of the dangers in our practice— which is creating the idea of enlightenment — in the form of three questions:

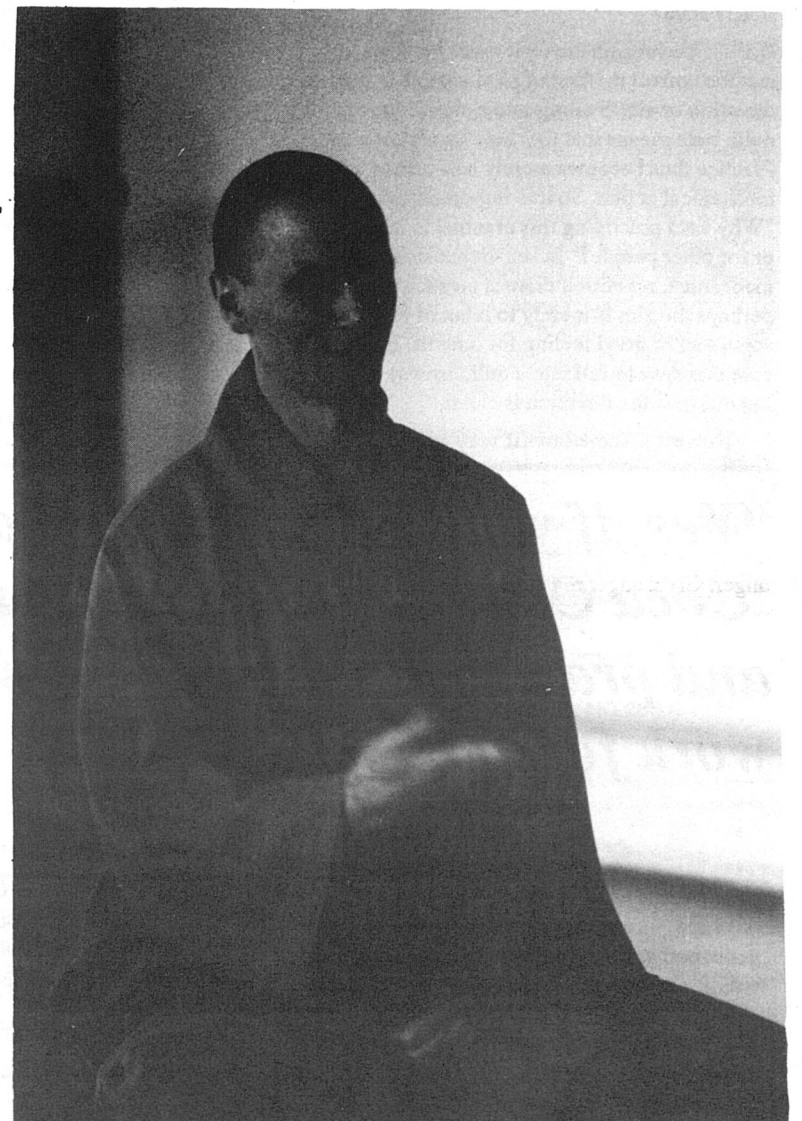
[Hit! The Zen stick hits the table.] "Someone said that enlightenment is very easy! Is that true?"

[Hit! The Zen stick hits the table.] "Someone said that enlightenment is very difficult! Is that true?"

[Hit! The Zen stick hits the table.] "Someone said that enlightenment is neither easy nor difficult. Is that true?"

"KAAAAAATZ!!!" [Very loud.]

My talk is finished. Thank you for coming.



Dharma Combat

MDT Do Am Sunim's First Defense

Questioner: We say there are three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Which one is the most important?

Do Am Sunim: You already understand!

Questioner: I ask you!

Do Am Sunim: I am very glad we are all together at this ceremony.

Questioner: Thank you for your teaching. (Do Am Sunim and the questioner bow together.)

Questioner: The Heart Sutra says: No attainment with nothing to attain. So I ask you, for whom is this celebration?

Do Am Sunim: You already understand!

Questioner: If I already understood, I wouldn't have asked you!

Do Am Sunim: For you!

Questioner: Thank you for your teaching!

(Do Am Sunim and the questioner bow together.)

Questioner: My watch has been stolen from me. Do you know how I can get it back?

Do Am Sunim: You already understand!

Questioner: I still miss it!

Do Am Sunim: It's twenty to eight.

Questioner: Thank you for your teaching. (Do Am Sunim and the questioner bow together.)

After the Dharma Combat was complete, Dae Soen Sa Nim presented Do Am Sunim with the two classic collections of traditional kong-ans— the Mu Mun Kwan and the Blue Cliff Record— a Zen stick, and the special Master Dharma Teacher kasa. Do Am Sunim then gave his first formal Dharma talk as a Master Dharma Teacher.