

DEVELOPMENTS

The Business of Zen

by Richard Streitfeld, School Director

We were at our wit's end. For several years the Providence Zen Center, head temple of the Kwan Um Zen School, had been struggling with a declining resident population, financial crises, the stepping back of the charismatic founder, and a general loss of interest in a practice that requires profound discipline and attention. Historically, Zen has taken root in a country over a number of years—adapting to the new culture while retaining the teaching's roots. America of the 1980's with its fast food philosophy and highly competitive culture, is obviously different from 4th century Korea. If Zen communities are to survive and prosper, they must adapt to the realities of the culture, while retaining the bone of the teaching.

In our attempts to adjust, we had embarked on an ambitious program of conferences and rentals. Our large facility and scenic setting were a natural for programs which could help us solidify our financial situation. But it was unrealistic to expect a staff already burdened with running the residence to handle another large set of tasks with any kind of efficiency, much less good humor. Advertising went out late and innovative conferences were canceled. The staff was too busy planning programs to attend to new students and guests. There were no new ideas, and the friction among the directors increased as we worried about the future.

In addition to our difficulties adapting to the culture, we were also having trouble with the other, the essential, half of the historical method for bringing Zen to a new country: we were losing the bone of the teaching. The office staff was a revolving door of people drawn by practice but perpetually burning out—and losing sight of their direction, of their original motivation for coming to the Zen Center. It was not to just learn kitchen schedules or Dbase 3.2, but to do intense practice—awakening, so that office and kitchen tasks are done with complete awareness and attention.

By July of 1988 PZC had reached a critical point, and we came to a hard realization: We could not continue to run a large deficit each month and expect to survive. On our own, we had tried everything. Yet, we found that despite sincerity, hard work, and a grounding in practice, it wasn't working—the place wasn't thriving. In fact we were barely getting by. We weren't growing, and the teaching wasn't being served.

As a result of these realizations, the center's directors took the critical step of hiring a management consultant to work with us. The individual we turned to had been working with Kwan Um Zen School for a year, challenging the sangha organization and guiding it through productive, and in some cases revolutionary, changes. Since PZC and the school are intertwined, it was natural for the consultant to attack PZC's crisis.

The first step was to examine all our options, even the most extreme and painful possibilities. The status quo wasn't working. Due to the degree of the crisis, whatever option we chose would have to be dramatic and risky. The options we explored ranged from starting a business, to becoming a full-blown rental center (renting the space to various groups, putting our own activities on hold), to the unthinkable: selling the land and moving back into Providence, from whence we had come in 1979. There were strong arguments for moving—this property has risen dramatically in value; we would attract many more members in the city; we would be able to buy a smaller place, easier to maintain, and not have to work so hard to attract residents. The current residence is spacious and comfortable, but after the fifth water leak it seems huge, old and always needing attention.

After much soul-searching, we agreed to go professional by hiring a marketing coordinator at real wages. While the plan was bold and untested it was in line with what our real purpose is: to offer Zen teaching. Money for the new position would come from selling some assets. We had been struggling for years trying to do things we had inadequate skills for: designing brochures, running advertising campaigns, etc. We are all intelligent and trainable, but none of us had time to learn. Immediate action was needed.

Our consultant had further advice on this matter, counsel which was hard to swallow: concentrate your search outside the sangha. Given, we did not seem to attract marketing types, but our general policy was to hire only Zen students. Besides, how could a non-practitioner understand us?

Our advisor had observed that for most of us formal practice was why we were here; the job was secondary. Our purpose was to engage in traditional Zen practice. Often the result would be a tug-of-war between practice and work. Someone wants to do a long retreat, but there's no one to replace him or her. The flyer deadline is Monday and there's a retreat this weekend. And there was a yearning to stretch—to get out of the office and do the more traditional and physical jobs: chopping

wood, cooking, gardening. While the feeling wasn't universal, a pattern was clear. The consultant's most dramatic question was: "Why not get some real help and free yourselves to concentrate on practice and teaching?"

If our goal was to succeed on a business level it would be necessary to reach out to the surrounding culture. We would focus on the bone of the teaching, and someone from outside the sangha would help us to promote it.

As a result of this decision, ads for a "marketing and development coordinator" appeared in Providence area newspapers in late September. The prerequisites for the position include five years of successful professional work in marketing and development; the salary is \$25,000 per year plus profit-sharing based on extraordinary performance. The questions on the application form are a bit unusual, including such queries as "What is your direction in life?"; "What hesitations or cautions come up as you apply for the position?" The candidate is not expected to adhere to Zen philosophy or live at the center, but must be sympathetic and understanding of its goals and values. Once hired, the coordinator will be asked to attend "Introduction to Zen" workshops and experience the practice first hand.

Provocative? Yes. I suggest that not many centers have gone this route. It rubs us the wrong way to have someone else do our work. Yet, we are caught. To survive we must sponsor programs and have a full house. But when we are overwhelmed by the business of Zen, the teaching often loses its hold, and our way is lost. To incorporate this practice into our lives takes time and concentrated energy. Something has to give. This is not to separate Zen from everyday life, to say that practice is confined to the Dharma hall. It is to reiterate our original intentions in joining a Zen community—to discover our true selves; thus we must dive into the formal practice. A supportive atmosphere must exist, one that above all stresses formal practice as a tool to deepen our awareness.

Will it work? As Zen Master Seung Sahn says, we can only "go straight, don't know, try, try, try for 10,000 years non-stop." The directive to open our minds and not look back is well taken. Of course, this approach may not work. But no matter what results, if the center can stay open to this new experience we will have much of value to share with America's Buddhist sangha. We will keep you informed of the unfolding.



PERCEIVE WORLD SOUND

Zen Chanting Tape

Zen Master Seung Sahn and his students have created a masterpiece of sound—clear and profound chanting that cuts through our thinking minds to stillness and compassion. This tape includes the morning and evening bell chants and regularly practiced chants professionally recorded at Sprague Hall, Yale University.

Copies of these high quality tapes are available for \$10.95 each and can be ordered by writing to the Kwan Um Zen School, 528 Pound Rd., Cumberland, RI 02864.

Classified Ads

The **INFLATABLE ZAFU** is actually an inflatable beachball inside a fine quality zafu cover. It's lightweight, convenient and guaranteed. Colors: Plum, Burgundy, Navy Blue, Royal Blue, Black and Green. Cost: \$16.50 Freight Paid. Free brochure on this and traditional meditation cushions. Carolina Morning Designs, Dept. P, Box 31-B, Hot Springs, NC 28743, (704)622-7329.

About The Kwan Um Zen School

The Teachers: Zen Master Seung Sahn is the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. He is the 78th Patriarch in the Korean Chogye Order, and became a Zen Master in his native Korea at the age of 22. After teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, he came to the United States in 1972 and founded the Providence Zen Center, now located in Cumberland, Rhode Island. He is addressed as "Soen Sa Nim" (Honored Zen Teacher) by his students.

Soen Sa Nim has established over 50 Zen centers and affiliated groups in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Europe and Korea. These centers comprise the Kwan Um Zen School. The Providence Zen Center is Head Temple in the United States. In 1984 a Kwan Um Zen School of Poland was formed which includes five Zen Centers and ten affiliated groups, of which the Head Temple is Warsaw Zen Center. In 1985 a Kwan Um Zen School of Europe was established, with its Head Temple at Centre Zen de Paris.

Soen Sa Nim travels worldwide leading retreats and teaching Buddhism. Working to strengthen the connection between American Zen and Korean Buddhism, he has established

the Seoul International Zen Center in Korea and the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in the United States. At Diamond Hill, Zen students who wish to may become monks and live the traditional monastic life in the original practice style of Bodhidharma.

Published works by and about Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching include **Dropping Ashes on the Buddha** and **Only Don't Know** (collections of his teaching letters and Zen stories); **Ten Gates** - the Kong-an teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn; **Only DOing It** (the 60th birthday tribute book with anecdotes from students and friends and a biography); and **Bone of Space** (a book of poetry).

He has given "inga" - authority to lead retreats and teach kong-an practice - to seven senior students. Called Master Dharma Teachers, they regularly travel to Zen Centers and affiliates in North America and abroad, leading retreats and giving public talks. They are: **George Bowman** and **Mu Deung**, Cambridge Zen Center; **Barbara** and **Lincoln Rhodes** and **Jacob Perl**, Providence Zen Center; **Robert Moore**, Dharma Sah (Los Angeles); and **Richard Shrobe**,

Chogye International Zen Center of New York.

Training Programs: Zen Centers offer daily meditation practice and introductory talks on a regular basis. These events are free and open to the public. Some centers also offer personal interviews each month with the teachers in our school when available.

Introduction to Zen Workshops: Beginners and newcomers can experience Zen practice for a day, with instruction on meditation, question periods, informal discussions and lunch.

Short Intensive Retreats (Yong Maeng Jong Jin, or "Leap like a tiger while sitting"): Each month many of the Zen centers hold silent meditation retreats for 3 or 7 days under the direction of Zen Master Seung Sahn or one of the Master Dharma Teachers. The daily schedule includes 12 hours of sitting, bowing, chanting, working and eating in traditional temple style. Personal interviews and Dharma talks are given by the Zen teacher. Advance reservation is necessary and requires a \$10 non-refundable deposit. (Providence Zen Center requires a 50% deposit.)

90-Day Intensive Retreat (Kyol Che or "Tight Dharma"): Conducted in total silence, long intensive meditation retreats are powerful tools for examining and clarifying our lives. The daily

schedule includes 12 hours of sitting, bowing, chanting and formal silent meals. Personal interviews and Dharma talks are given frequently. Registration is for 90 days, 21-day periods or a one-week intensive. The School offers annually three long Kyol Che's (one in Poland, Korea and the United States) and a three-week summer Kyol Che at Providence Zen Center. See schedule.

Chanting Retreats (Kido): Occasionally chanting retreats are offered. A Kido is powerful training in keeping a one-pointed mind and using group energy to deepen awareness.

Membership: If you would like to become member of the Kwan Um Zen School, you may either contact the Zen center or affiliate nearest you, or become a member-at-large by writing directly to the School. You do not have to be a member to participate in any of the training programs. However, rates for members are reduced and include a free subscription to the bi-monthly **NEWSLETTER** and the international newspaper, **PRIMARY POINT** (3 issues per year). The most up-to-date calendar information is in the **NEWSLETTER**. Non-members may subscribe to the **NEWSLETTER** for \$6.00 a year and to **PRIMARY POINT** for \$10.00 a year. □