

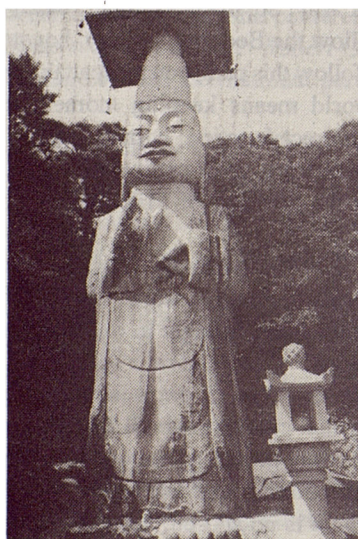
SPECIAL REPORT

The Whole World is a Single Flower

A Peace Pilgrimage to Korea

Robert Genthner, *Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

August, 1990: As the crisis in the Persian gulf deepens and America inches towards a military confrontation, we are headed for Korea on a peace mission, to take part in the second triennial "Whole World Is A Single Flower" conference. We join other fellow travelers at the airport in New York; there are



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Unjin Miruk Buddha, Kwan Ch'ok Sah Temple.

Kwang Myong Sunim, an American nun in our party. "Are you a nun?" "Yes." Question: "Why?" Answer: "It's my life's direction." Question: "What were you before you were a Buddhist?" Answer: "Christian." "Why did you change?" "I found a teacher who I believed in." "Were you ever married?" "Yes." "Did you have children?" "No." "So how long will you be a nun?" "Ten thousand years." Throughout this exchange, Maha Ghosananda only grins, beams love and kindness.

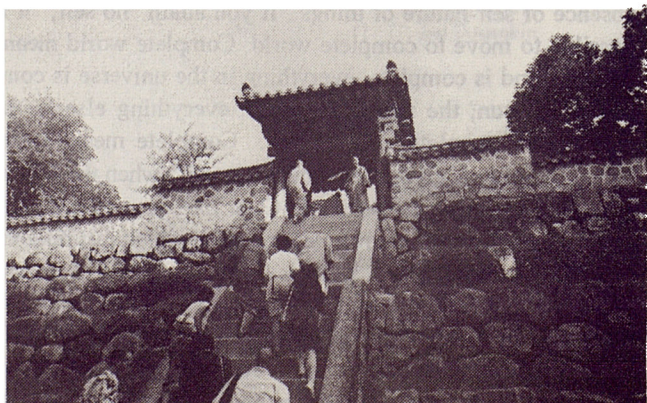
We arrive in Seoul after a long and tiring flight, seventeen hours long. There is no one to pick us up and the airport has closed. The police come. They are not happy that we are there. Recent demonstrations in Korea have caused an increase in security around public buildings. Finally our cars come. We pile in. We are happy. The police are happy. The world is at peace again.

We stay in a small hotel near Hwa Gye Sah, Zen Master Seung Sahn's temple. It's a "love hotel" it says on the card, a place where people can go to get privacy, "share love." Seoul is so crowded and people are so poor that couples have to rent rooms for a few hours to get privacy. Many Korean families

live together with four or five people in two rooms. Many people sleep where they work, a room or two in the back of the store, for example. Children often sleep in the same room as their parents.

After a day of shopping in Seoul, we head for Su Dok Sah in the mountains. Zen Master Mang Gong, the monk most responsible for reviving Korean Buddhism in this century, resided at Su Dok Sah for many years; his pagoda on the mountain bears the inscription, "The Whole World is a Single Flower." Zen Master Seung Sahn belongs to the lineage of Mang Gong Sunim and practiced here as a young monk. Thus this temple has special meaning for the participants. The temple was also the host for the first "Whole World Is A Single Flower" Conference in 1987.

We arrive to find an incredible new building. Three years ago, they were working on this building and we had to go up a side road. Today we arrive at the foot of granite steps and walk up a long granite corridor toward a magnificent post and beam building looming over a pond with fountains and streetlights and stone lanterns everywhere. It looms over the mountain like the magic castle at Disneyland. Behind this wonderful structure is the original temple that dates back some fifteen hundred years. The simplicity and age of the older buildings is a stark contrast to the magnificence and splendor of the new construction. While we're here, we walk to Mang Gong's hermitage; here a figure of Kwan Seum Bosal (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) has been carved out of the rock, magnificent, compelling, echoing the dharma right into the twentieth century. We climb even higher up to Jung Hae Sah, which is a small temple at the top of the mountain.



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Hae In Sah Temple.



Bruce Blair

Patsy Talbot, a Canadian living at Su Dok Sah Temple.

Simple, magical, this temple's geomancy (the Chinese science of determining where the 'chi' or energy of a location is most harmonious) is perfect. It's like walking into a mystical wonderland, a comfortable, magical place that we just don't want to leave.

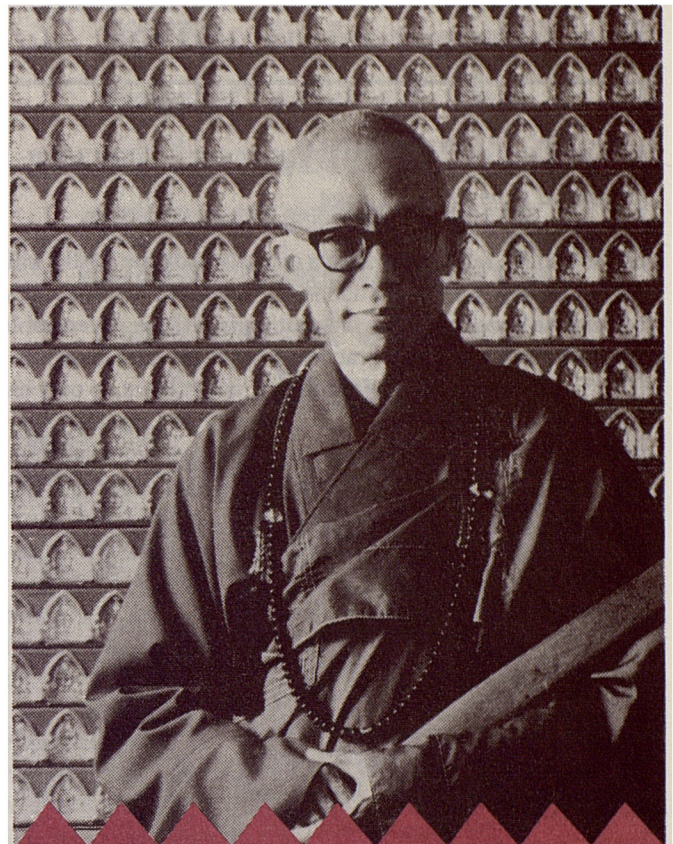
The conference begins with an opening ceremony and many people speak; older masters are helped up the high podium to give their dharma talks. The opening ceremony is followed by lunch; the temple has provided two tents serving rice, tofu soup, vegetables and kim chee (pickled cabbage) in abundance. It is the traditional temple meal to which we will all soon get accustomed. We are touched by the generosity and hospitality of the temple and, most especially, of the many "Bosalnim," the lay Korean women who volunteer their labor to cook and clean for the temple.

The afternoon session is opened with a talk by Zen Master Seung Sahn. He warns that the world is in trouble. There are too many people on the planet with too much ambition and ego. We're destroying our planet and destroying each other. It is our job as human beings to practice and realize compassion, thus changing this destructive direction.

After Zen Master Seung Sahn's talk, the students break into groups led by various teachers. At the end of group meetings, each teacher gives a short presentation of what their group talked about. Taizan Maezumi Roshi of the Zen Center of Los Angeles offers the following: "How can our spiritual practice help this world? How are we helped? It is not a one-way thing. It is a mutual thing." He quotes one sister who says we cannot understand, "The Whole World is a Single Flower" unless we appreciate nature, what we do to it and what it does to us. Everything is part of me. I am lived by it; not, "I am living." Roshi quotes Kwang Myong Sunim from Kentucky, how she has learned to appreciate water when her water ran out; he quotes someone else as learning a great deal living without air conditioning, learning to live in his environment, and not be protected from it.

Next, Venerable Maha Ghosananda offers a synopsis of his group, "compassion in action." He says that eating is suffering; you are what you eat. He explains that the fly eats the watermelon, the frog eats the fly, the snake eats the frog, the bird eats the snake, the hunter shoots the bird, the tiger eats the

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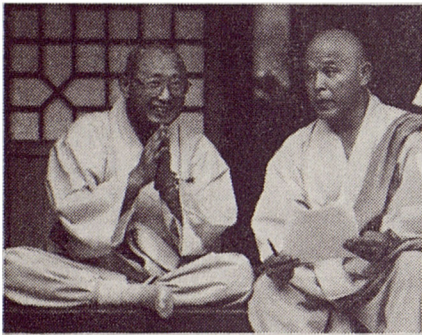
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The Whole World is a Single Flower Conference 1990

Peace Pilgrimage

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hunter and the fellow tiger fights and kills the tiger for the kill. He says every time the Buddha ate his food, he would cry because he understood this fact: eating is suffering. Venerable Maha Ghosananda's own practice is not to eat after noon time. He offers that we should be mindful of what we eat, to only eat what the body needs, and to eat mindfully and carefully. It's the beginning of the developing of compassion, and this



Won Shim Sunim

Zen Master Seung Sahn with Mu Deung Sunim, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim.

attitude and this practice will result in a deep compassion for all beings.

J a k u s h o Kwong Roshi of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center next speaks on the "maha sangha," the greater community. Maha, he explains, is a word that means no

beginning, no end, and this is our practice. He relates to Zen Master Seung Sahn's earlier talk where he held up a flower and asked, "Where was the beginning and where was the end?" Explaining what maha sangha means, Kwong Roshi says, "When I look out and see your faces, this is maha sangha. It's so obvious. A support system. When I go to Poland, I see many different types of practices coming together, students from different teachers, because they're so eager for the dharma. They all come and practice no matter what teacher is there. This is maha sangha." In the maha sangha, he explains, there are no dues and no membership. It goes with you everywhere you go and is always with you.

Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim of Centre Zen de Paris explains that when we practice and our mind is clear, no one has to tell us what to do. The sutra says this: you are a bodhisattva. When we do positive things, life is positive; when we do negative things, life is negative. When we transcend positive and negative, then our correct function, correct situation, correct relationship appear. I, my, me disappears. After her opening remarks, Dae Poep Sa Nim leads the group in chanting, "namu bul," and says, "At this moment, I, my, me disappears."

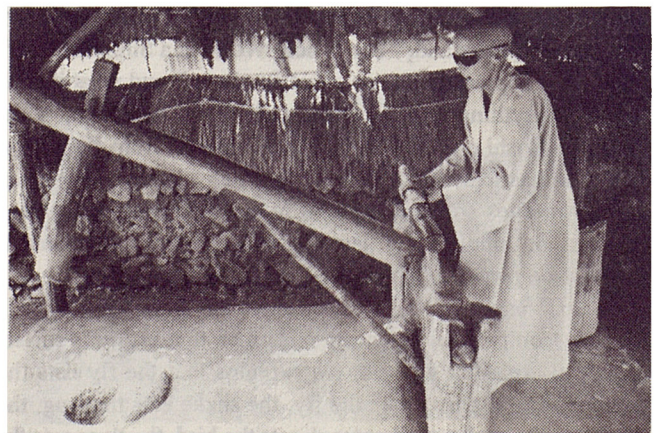
Dharma Master Hui Kung from Taiwan describes how Buddhadharma can purify our mind. He says that precepts, samadhi and wisdom are world peace. He recounts that China was the second nation to acquire Buddhism; today China has one billion people. If all of them practice and follow precepts,

samadhi and wisdom, then the whole world can be harmonized. Precepts, Samadhi and Wisdom mean that we can get along with everyone no matter what religion they follow and make the whole world harmonious. Just because of sheer numbers in China, if China blooms the whole world blooms, he says.

Finally, Kuroda Roshi, brother of Maezumi Roshi and a prominent religious figure in Japan, offers the sentiment that human beings and all other beings have eternal life. Our personal life may be fifty to seventy years, yet this life is only a fraction of the eternal universe. He suggests that the difference between hell and the "pure land" is whether you are controlled by your ego or you help others. If your ego controls you, you live in hell; if you help others, you live in the pure land. He goes on to say that we are not living by ourselves, we are lived by others. Zazen practice means our mind is clear, we are living in nirvana, and we see that the "whole world is a single flower." If you see this point, it is the entrance point to peace and harmony, he concludes.

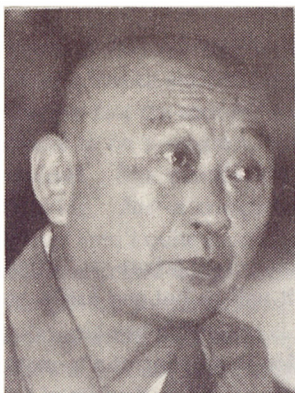
Throughout the conference, the mist has clung to the mountains and rain has poured from the sky. It is a compelling juxtaposition of concerns about saving the earth and the environment in such a magnificent and splendid setting. One couldn't help but be struck by the energy and enthusiasm of the participants. Most of them have come thousands of miles to meet and talk about these issues. It was agreed by all that the world is in crisis and that if human beings don't respond in some fairly dramatic way, the world will not recover from this critical time period.

After the panel discussion, we crowd into the buses and are taken to local mineral baths where we have an opportunity to clean up our personal environments. The public baths are a wonderful Korean custom, and one especially enjoyed by the Western group. We lounge in the hot and cold tubs, experience the sauna, indulge in massages, drink cold juices and watch Korean soap opera on T.V. After the baths, the group heads



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Kwang Myong Sunim at the Korean Folk Village.



Won Shim Sunim

Kuroda Roshi

back to Seoul where the next day we would have a conference at Lotte Hotel in downtown Seoul.

Next morning, we all assemble and go to Chogye Sah, the headquarters of the Chogye Order, where we are served a splendid lunch and received cordially. People shop in nearby shops, which are full of Buddhist paraphernalia, from robes to beads to moktaks to incense. After shopping, we board the buses again and are

taken to Lotte Hotel where the evening conference is to be held.

The keynote speaker at the Lotte Hotel conference is George Bowman, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim (*see next article*). His address stresses the need for concern about the air we breathe and the environment. He offers that in order to understand what it might be like if we don't do anything about our environment, we might practice holding our breath for thirty seconds and seeing what it is like to live without air.

Christine Debrah, the Minister of Environment in Ghana, talks about how women there are the wood carriers and wood gatherers for the home and how the deforestation of the area has resulted in environmental havoc and chaos. She ends by leading everyone in a traditional Ghanese song, and, noting that "the whole world is a single flower that provides shelter," opens an umbrella imprinted with a map of the world and raises it over her head.

This is a long and challenging conference, with many speeches in many different languages, requiring two, and sometimes three, translations. At a point when the conference has gone on for too long and people are getting tired, Kuroda Roshi takes the podium and gives a compelling speech that both heals the spirits of the attendees and begins to heal the rift between Japan and Korea. In a dynamic and intense exchange, Kuroda Roshi, a robust, fiery and humble man, apologizes for the cruelty and mistreatment inflicted by Japan on Korea during the years of occupation. He steps down and warmly shakes Zen Master Seung Sahn's hand. Then, at the end of his speech, he does a prostration bow to the audience as if to say, "on behalf of my people, please forgive us." One could feel the chill go up our collective spine as many of us — including the Roshi himself — wiped the tears from our eyes.

After the conference, we are treated to a banquet and more speeches. Late into the night, we head back to our hotels and settle in; some of us would go home in the morning, while others would go on a tour of temples in the southern part of the country. □

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