

# Locating a Temple at Furnace Mountain

## *A Study in Geomancy*

Robert Genthner, *Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

*"When you find your place where you are, practice occurs, actualizing the fundamental point."*  
— Dogen

The practice of geomancy regards all of nature as a single living organism. The earth is similar to the human body. It has meridians, which support power centers. For example, the body has meridians along the arms, legs, spinal column, and head, all supporting one point, the "tanjen" ("energy garden"), which is two inches below the navel. Similarly, there are places on the earth that exist in the same kind of balance.

Just as there are teachings that point the way, perhaps there are also places that provide added support for spiritual practice, land configurations that aid and facilitate this work. The truth can be realized in any situation: on the bus, in the kitchen, on vacation. But when our bodies are very sick we go to a hospital, where it is quiet and the energy is organized for healing. The healing of the mind is different; for this we must go to places in nature where the energy is balanced and promotes a gradual healing.



"Black Turtle" or the "Main Mountain" at Furnace Mountain, the mountain located at the top of the site.

After we purchased a four hundred acre mountain-top farm in Kentucky five years ago, Zen Master Seung Sahn came to help locate a temple site. When we took him to the top of the big rock which crowns the mountain, he looked out across the valley to get his bearings. Then his body began to shake and he said, "This spot has the best geomancy of any land I have ever seen. If it were in Korea, many people would give whatever they could to develop it as a place for spiritual practice. Giving to a place where the energy is balanced means getting back a great deal more."

As one walks along the back ridge of Furnace Mountain to the top of the rock and looks out, one can see across the horizon many mountain ridges that all support a single point. Coming down from the top, one is surrounded by mountains forming a natural bowl. A bowl made up of giant arms and legs encircles the tanjen of the land. This tanjen or power spot is the site for the main meditation hall of the future temple. The poetic image is that the tanjen is the nest where "golden chicken hatches golden eggs," gold being the metaphor for enlightenment.

Furnace Mountain, with its caves and rock outcroppings, has long been used by Native Americans as holy land. There have been many artifacts dug from the caves that document its use as far back as prehistoric times. This land is also registered in the National Register of Historic Places because of a prehistoric carving of a bird's foot on the face of the big rock.

The mountain was named Furnace Mountain because it was once the site of large outdoor smelting furnaces in which iron ore

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was processed. The iron was used to make cannonballs, which were shipped down the Ohio River and used in the Battle of New Orleans, the mountain's "sarira" (*see glossary page 27*) in the service of war.

Many people have visited the mountain since its purchase. The well-known Cambodian monk Maha Ghosananda was here, and we were looking for a site to build a hermitage for Cambodian monks. He seemed to like a place on the cliff overlooking the main road. When it was pointed out that this was close to the road and one could hear the cars, he looked out over the ridge and said, "Yes, standing in nirvana, we look out into samsara."

Recently a neighbor's 85-year-old grandmother visited. While standing on the power spot on New Year's Day, without knowing anything about Buddhism or geomancy she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "Oh, this place is magical."

What is it about this particular piece of land that provides support for spiritual practice? The dynamic energy of the power spot demands attention. And yet not everyone who comes to the land to work or practice has a good feeling. It has been our experience that when one holds anything while practicing and working on the land, one comes face to face with that holding. While this is true in our daily lives, it seems to be intensified by the strong energy of the land. "Transcendent Wisdom is like a great mass of fire. Approach it, and it burns off your face."

The practice of geomancy, like any practice, can be one of delusion or one of realization. When practiced from the mind of fear and hope it can become superstition and obsession. On the other hand, it can be a practice of attention, to the earth and to the earth's energy. Perhaps in this attention there can be the realization that we are not separate from the world. The earth is our body, and heaven our breath. □

### *Powell County*

*Six warriors painted gold and red  
Smile at Buddha, killing her dead.  
As the morning sun melts their crystal spears  
A backfiring pick-up shatters all fears.*

*Kwang Myong Sunim  
Furnace Mountain  
22 January 1991*

### *The Furnace*

*A burning Bodhisattva  
Illumines heaven and hell blackening  
Her feet, she dances  
Through the transparent wall crumbling  
The cool evening breeze.*

*Kwang Myong Sunim  
Furnace Mountain  
12 March 1991*

## Through Many Dynasties

### *Geomancy and Korean Buddhism*

*Mu Soeng Sunim*

When did geomancy first set foot in Korea? The science of feng-shui was brought from China by Zen Master Toson (827-898). Toson had gone to China to further his Buddhist studies, and while there happened to become acquainted with geomantic principles and practices. The impact of geomancy was such that it soon transcended the confines of the Buddhist world in Korea and became an integral part of Korean society and ways of thinking.

According to geomantic tradition, a military commander named Sejo was building a new house for his family when Toson, recently returned from China, walked through the area. When he saw the house under construction, he remarked "flax is being planted in a place where sweet rice should be planted." Sejo's wife heard the remark and persuaded her husband to go and talk to Toson. Together Sejo and Toson walked in the area and Toson picked a more auspicious site for the house. The monk also told Sejo that he would have a son and advised him to name the child Wang Kon. Toson left a sealed letter for the future child and addressed it "To the master of unification of the three Hans (*kingdoms*) of the future."

Sejo built a new house at the site suggested by Toson and moved in with his family. His wife became pregnant in the first month and gave birth to Wang Kon, the future founder of the Koryo dynasty. After Wang Kon had conquered large parts of the dying Silla kingdom, Toson helped him select a site for the capital of the new dynasty. This site became the future city of Kaesong.

Wang Kong, now ruling as King Taejo, was a devout Buddhist and personally friendly with many Zen monks of the time. He appointed many of them to high official positions at his court. During his reign, Taejo ordered the building of some 3,800 temples, and just before his death he promulgated ten admonitions to guide his successors, based on his belief that the prosperity of the kingdom was derived from the protective powers of the Buddhas. One of the admonitions says, "We must build temples for both Son (*Zen*) and Kyo (*sutra*) schools and appoint abbots to them, so that they may perform the proper ceremonies and themselves cultivate the Way."

Geomancer-monks have been a prominent feature of Korean Buddhism since its earliest days. Rather than pursue the