

ZMSB: Over the past ten years Dae Soen Sa Nim has been slowly introducing us to Korea. Many of the monks have spent time in Korea, and now we have the very successful International Kyol Ches at Shin Won Sah. We've had two Whole World is a Single Flower conferences in Korea, and a third one is planned for 1993.

Now, when Zen Masters like Won Dam Sunim visit America, they talk about Koreans and Westerners together as "our family." Other Korean people hear this speech, and this family feeling grows. So Dae Soen Sa Nim has fertilized these seeds and now the bond is taking root. I think it will continue to grow stronger even after he passes.

MRSN: Where and when did you meet Zen Master Seung Sahn?

ZMSB: In 1974 I attended a small lecture about Buddhism, where I met a Korean monk. He asked me, "Why did you come here?" I said, "I want to understand Zen." He told me it was not a Zen discussion group, and asked if I wanted to meet a great Zen Master. I said "O.K." So two days later, he introduced me to Dae Soen Sa Nim, who shouted at me, "WHO ARE YOU?" BOOM! My mind stopped and I couldn't articulate an answer. But inside an answer was there, "You are my teacher."

MRSN: Did you have any idea at that time that you would become the next Zen Master?

ZMSB: (*laughter*) No idea. No Zen Master.

MRSN: Thank you. □

Zen Master Bo Mun

(George Bowman)

Transmission name Bo Mun
(Wide Gate)
Dharma name Song Hae
Original name George Bowman

*Everything follows the law of appearing
and disappearing.*

All dharmas originally stillness.

In no form, no name

Bright moon appears over mountain.

Zen Master Seung Sahn



Zen Master Bo Mun studied anthropology and biology at Brown University, and attended Duke University on a Ph.D. program in anthropology of religion in 1969, until he left to study Zen full-time. He has studied extensively with other Zen Masters living in America, received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1977, and led the first three Winter Kyol Che retreats at Providence Zen Center. A longtime runner, he has done extensive racing, including a number of marathons. Zen Master Bo Mun is a skilled carpenter and worked on major Providence Zen Center building projects. He was ordained a bodhisattva priest in 1982. Zen Master Bo Mun is guiding teacher of the Nashville Zen Group. He is also guiding teacher of the independent Cambridge Buddhist Association. He has a private practice in contemplative psychotherapy and lives in Cambridge with his wife, Trudy Goodman.



Dharma talk

One fall day, a day very much like this several hundred years ago, a monk asked Zen Master Un Mun, "How is it, old Master, when the tree withers, and leaves fall?" And Un Mun said to the monk, "Body exposed to golden wind!" So I ask all of you, where is your golden wind? (*Hits the platform with his Zen stick.*) Outside a fall breeze scatters golden and crimson leaves.

I will tell one short golden wind story. It involves Zen Master Seung Sahn and it takes place twenty years ago, when I first met my teacher. It has a lot to do with our practicing and bringing this wonderful clear presence to this moment, and meeting life as it is—this really is what our practice is about. In a sense it is no practice at all. We were sitting Zen and Zen Master Seung Sahn had just come. In those days he was very poor; he was fixing washing machines. We lived in a very poor section of town, and the street noises were very loud when we practiced. Every night at exactly seven o'clock when our evening practice began, a rock and roll band would start playing upstairs. Plaster would fall from the ceiling. I remember asking myself, "What in the world am I doing here?" Zen Master Seung Sahn looked at me and smiled with those bright and vivid eyes—only this.



MRSN: Zen Master Seung Sahn has a unique teaching style, but he allows his students great freedom to find their own way. How has this been for you?

ZMBM: I met Dae Soen Sa Nim when he first came to Providence in 1972. It started out very informally; we used to sit around the breakfast table and he would tell Zen stories. Then came robes, bowls, and a more formal practice discipline evolved.

In those early days Dae Soen Sa Nim would say, "I want you to follow my say and just do it, just put away your opinions." He said that if you do that and practice hard, then later on any teaching style would be okay. If you want to teach in a Burger King, great. If you want to teach in a Zen temple, okay. But in the early days and for many years thereafter, we really followed his way. And although there is a certain amount of freedom that he's given us now, a great deal of training and discipline preceded it.

MRSN: Can you elaborate on how you've been able to adjust your teaching style to suit the needs of individual students?

ZMBM: Students come from different backgrounds and have different capacities. Some students want to do formal kong-an practice. If that's a dharma door or a way that opens them to practice, I'll use that. There are other people who can't relate to traditional kong-ans and really need to use mindfulness as the gate. Some people want a very formal relationship with a teacher, while others are looking more for a dharma friend. I'm comfortable in either role; it really depends on the needs of the person.

MRSN: What do you see as the future for lay Buddhists in the West?

ZMBM: When I first began practicing in the late sixties, I studied with Suzuki Roshi. He would joke with us, saying that we weren't really monks and we weren't really lay people. And Dae Soen Sa Nim used to call us

"bat monks"—not quite mammals and not quite birds. Certainly, in the seventies and early eighties, many of us who practiced together lived like monks but remained laypeople.

I think it will take some time before a monk sangha develops here. There is an enormous need now for lay practice and as it becomes more established, it will be able to support monasteries and monks' practice as is done in Asia.

MRSN: Is there any story about Dae Soen Sa Nim that sticks out in your mind?

ZMBM: Actually, there are four vivid images I'm fond of that I'd like to share.

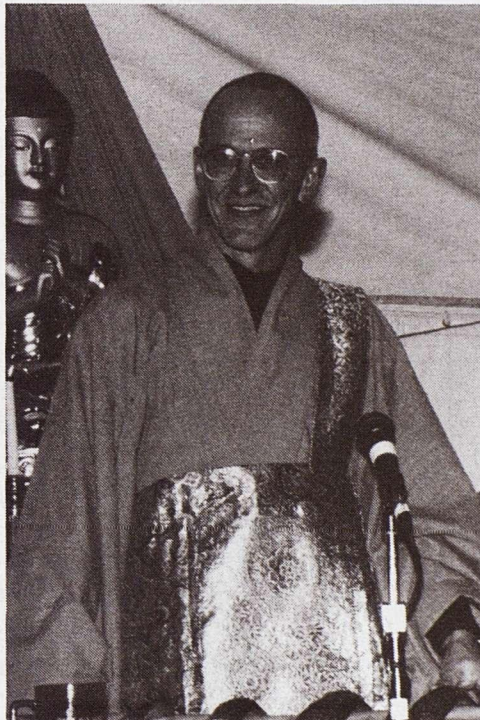
The first was in the early seventies. We were driving through the Pennsylvania countryside, looking for a site for a rural retreat center. Dae Soen Sa Nim, in his great Zen Master's voice, sat in the car singing Italian operas at the top of his lungs.

The second was when we were building the main dharma room at Providence Zen Center. I was one of the lead carpenters, and Dae Soen Sa Nim came out to help. I handed him a large electric drill which, I didn't realize, had a blunt bit. I showed him where to drill a hole. When I came back in five minutes there was smoke coming up from the wood and of course he hadn't made much progress—but there he was, still one-pointedly trying.

The third was one spring at the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery. The path was lit with sunlight filtered through the new leaves. He was walking up to the monastery with Maha Ghosananda, hand-in-hand.

Finally, an image from the first Providence Zen Center on Doyle Avenue. Dae Soen Sa Nim was sitting on the front steps about mealtime. He used to refer to his stomach as "Star Market"—his English was a little basic in those days. So he held his hand to his stomach and said, "Star Market empty . . . time to go shopping!"

Here is Dae Soen Sa Nim's enormous enthusiasm for life, his unending try mind, his gentleness in the midst of great strength, and his great bodhisattva humor. □



Zen Master Bo Mun