

Obituaries

Soeng Chol Sunim

Last fall one of South Korea's most revered monks was cremated in a funeral at Hae In Sah, a remote mountain temple and routine stop for Zen Master Seung Sahn's students traveling in Korea.

Soeng Chol Sunim, 82, was the spiritual leader of the Chogye order. He died in a meditation room with his daughter at his side. It was one of the largest funerals in modern Korean history, and the largest Korean Buddhist rite in a half-century.

With the sounds of wooden gongs and chants of Buddhist sutras, Soeng Chol Sunim's body, wrapped in saffron silk, was transported in a temple-shaped casket made of yellow and white chrysanthemums and lotus flowers. Monks laid the body inside a gigantic pink and white paper lotus flower where it was cremated.

Soeng Chol Sunim had a middle-school education, but was a voracious reader who taught himself English, German, French, Japanese and Chinese. He became a Buddhist at the age of 25, and was considered a great interpreter of Buddhist philosophy. He seldom left his meditation room and always wore the same tattered and patched gray coat. Sunim granted an audience only to those who made 3,000 consecutive deep bows before a statue of Buddha.

Sae Deung Sunim

Sae Deung Sunim, Zen Master Seung Sahn's dharma sister, was born in 1926 and first entered temple life at the age of 11 years old. She received the novice precepts from Zen Master Ko Bong at the age of 14, and the name Sae Deung which means "lantern that lights the world." She established the Sae Deung Son Won, a training center for nuns in Taejon, and visited the Providence Zen Center in 1982, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary.

Sae Deung Sunim passed the Duk Sahn "Carrying Bowls" kong-an, and was one of three nuns to receive inka from Ko Bong Sunim. She died on December 9, 1993, leaving nine ordained nun disciples. Her cremation took place at Su Dok Sah temple with several hundred people in attendance, including Zen Master Seung Sahn, who traveled there from Hong Kong especially for the occasion.