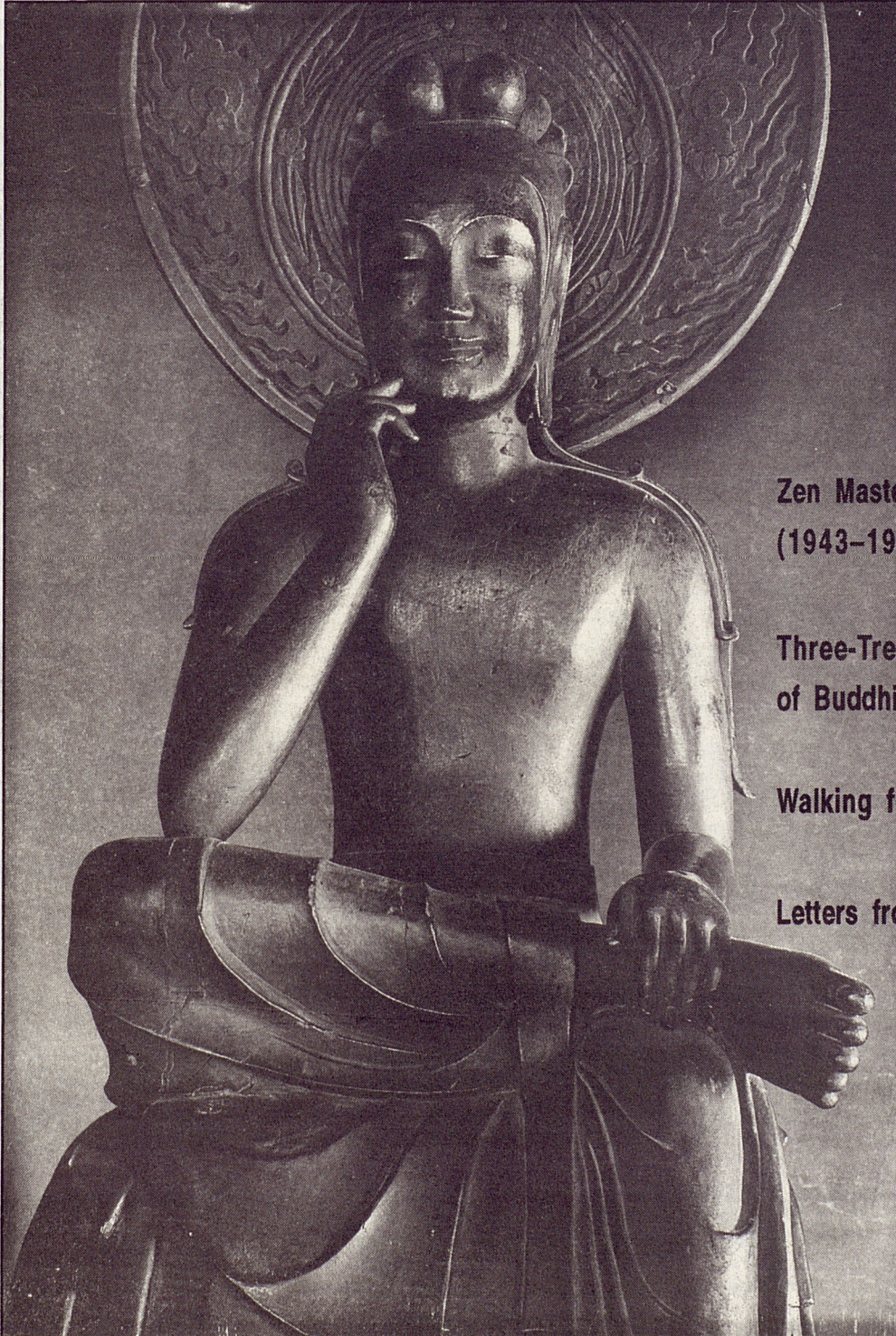


Primary Point

Volume 11, Number 2 Summer 1994 \$4.00



**Zen Master Su Bong
(1943–1994)**

**Three-Treasure Structure
of Buddhism**

Walking for Peace

Letters from South Africa

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PRIMARY POINT

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Published by the Kwan Um School of Zen, a non-profit religious corporation under the spiritual direction of Zen Master Seung Sahn. 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. After teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, in 1972 he founded the Kwan Um sangha, which today has affiliated groups around the world. He has given transmission to Zen Masters, and “inka”—teaching authority—to senior students called Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, “dharma masters.”

The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the world-wide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. PRIMARY POINT is published three times a year: Fall/Winter, Spring, and Summer. To subscribe, see page 31. If you would like to become a member of the Kwan Um School of Zen, see page 29. Members receive PRIMARY POINT free of charge. The circulation is 5000 copies.

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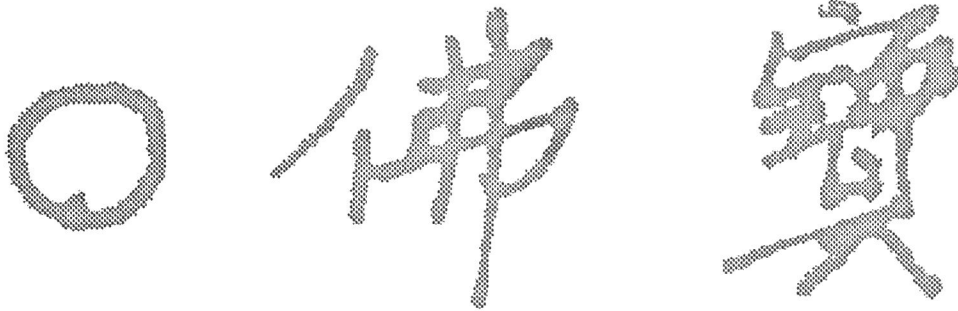
Buddha, Dharma, Sangha:

The Three-Treasure Structure of Buddhism

*Excerpt from The Compass of Zen Teaching, with Commentary by Zen Master Seung Sahn
(to be published in 1995.)*

The Precious One which is the Buddha:

The object of faith and emotion, departing from pain and attaining pleasure. Having to do with *samadhi*, beauty and faith.



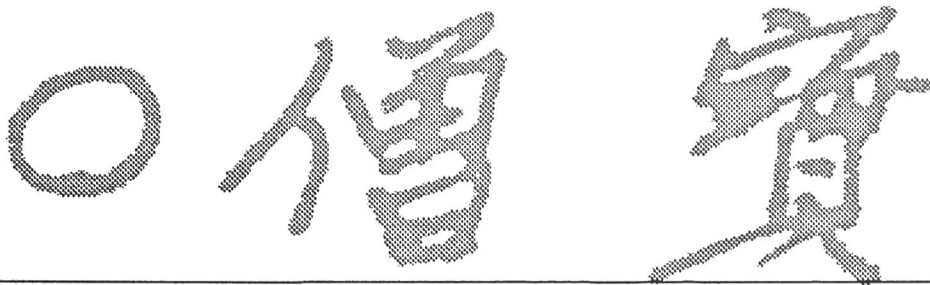
The Precious One which is the Dharma:

Philosophical, intellectual, going from ignorance to enlightenment. Having to do with *prajna*, truth, and understanding.



The Precious One which is the Sangha:

Ethical, mental, putting an end to evil and practicing good. Having to do with *sila*, goodness, practice.



The
Three
Treasures
lead to
holiness
and
moksha
[liberation].

Commentary

The Three-Treasure Structure of Buddhism

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

Modern Buddhism is comprised of three main branches: Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Zen. Although these three branches are often thought of as quite distinct, they do share a common basic structure. This common structure consists of the three treasures, or “jewels,” of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Time and space, cause and effect make this world. All of this comes from thinking. Human beings’ minds are composed of emotions, intellect and will. These are called the three clouds, because if you cannot control your emotions, intellect, and will, or they do not function harmoniously, they will cloud over your true self. Then you lose your way in this world, causing more suffering for yourself and others. Because of these three clouds, Buddhism has the three corresponding treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Then what is Buddha? Buddha means waking up and attaining your true self. If you attain your true self, you become Buddha. But in Zen teaching, Buddha is not special. Buddha means if you attain your true self, you attain your own mind. An eminent teacher once said, “Mind is Buddha; Buddha is mind.” So how can you attain your true self? At first, when you begin practicing, you only believe in Shakyamuni Buddha and in his teaching. As you practice this teaching, you see that you can better control your thinking and emotions. And if you control your thinking and emotions, then you can take away suffering and get happiness. As a result, your mind is not moving as outside conditions constantly change. Then you can see clearly, you can hear clearly, you can smell clearly—everything is beauty, just as it is. Then you can believe that the sky is blue, the tree is green, a dog is barking,

Buddha
is your
pure
mind

‘Woof, woof!’ You can believe in everything. Somebody once asked Un Mun Zen Master, “What is Buddha?” He replied, “Dry shit on a stick.” Perceiving that is the same point. This is moment-to-moment life. We call this the treasure of Buddha.

Beauty does not come from the outside appearance of things. In the treasure of Buddha, “beauty” means that when your mind is not moving, everything is beautiful. I was teaching in Paris several years ago, and saw an exhibition of paintings. An important picture was hanging alone on a large wall. From across the room, you could not tell what this painting was about. As I walked up to it, this picture became clear — two old and worn-out socks, with holes in them, hanging in a frame! All dirty! But that was considered to be the best picture. Everybody in the museum was saying, “Wow, that’s number one, you know?!” But why have these dirty, worn out socks hanging in a high-class museum? What do these socks mean? What is their inside-meaning? The inside-meaning is a very important point.

The inside-meaning of this picture is that some human being did a lot of walking in these socks, putting a great deal of energy into them. With time passing, the socks became worn and full of holes—they showed a lot of suffering. So this picture of old socks is making a very important point: this picture teaches us something about a human being’s life. So although the socks are very dirty, the meaning is very beautiful. Where does this beauty come from?

True beauty comes from our not-moving mind. In Sanskrit, it’s called *samadhi*, which means deep meditation, unmoving. When your mind is not moving, everything is beautiful, just as it is. If your mind is moving, however, then even if a beautiful picture, a beautiful landscape, or beautiful things appear in front of you, this view quickly changes in your mind, and does not seem so beautiful. For example, when you are angry, or sad, or depressed, then even the birds chirping right outside your window sound irritating or depressing. Because you attach to feelings or outside conditions, whenever these feelings or outside conditions change, then your mind is constantly changing, changing, changing. You lose your center. Then even a beautiful landscape may seem ugly or revolting. So the most important thing is to keep a not-moving mind, moment to moment. Then you can perceive true beauty, and you can digest your understanding so that it can become wisdom.

A not-moving mind gives rise to faith. When your mind is not moving, you can believe in this world. The word for that is faith. Believing in Buddha as an “object of faith” means believing in your true

*Dharma
is your
clear
mind*

self. Faith means simply that you can believe in your true self, your original nature. Then you can believe your hands, your eyes, your ears, your nose, the trees, the sky, God, Buddha—everything! Someone once asked me, “Soen Sa Nim, do you believe in God?” I said, “Of course I believe in God!” The person was shocked: “But you are a Zen teacher! How can you possibly believe in God?” “I can believe my hands. I can believe my nose. I can believe my eyes. Why not believe in everything? I believe this tree, this dog, this cat—why not believe in God?”

You can believe in everything; believing in everything means realizing that you and everything are never separate. [Hits the table.] OK? You and everything are never separate. Let’s say a husband and wife both believe in their true self. Then even though the husband’s and wife’s bodies are separate, this mind always becomes one and they are never separate. If you believe in your true self, then you can believe in everything; you and everything already become one. The name for that is “faith.” “Mind is Buddha; Buddha is mind.” You are Buddha; Buddha is you! When you see, when you hear, when you smell, when you taste, when you touch—everything is beauty, just as it is. With a not-moving mind, even shit is very beautiful! When this becomes clear, your true way appears clearly right in front of you. So the treasure of Buddha means keeping a not-moving mind.

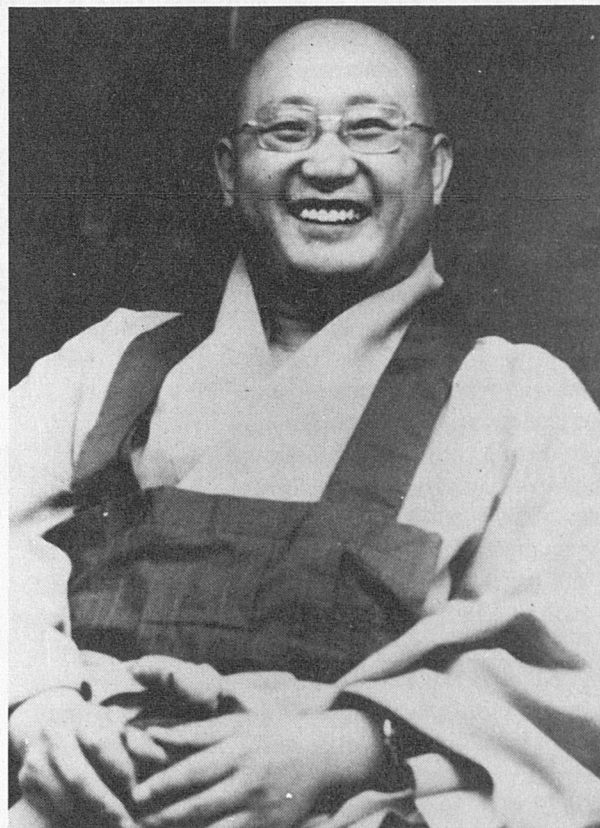
However if you only understand this, that’s merely intellectual. If you haven’t attained your true self, you don’t truly understand what is life, what is death. So it is very important that you take away ignorance and get enlightenment. How do we do this? First, you must digest your understanding. When you truly digest your understanding, then “The sky is blue” becomes yours. That means your understanding is becoming true wisdom. Your ignorance is changing as your mind opens. When you completely digest your understanding, our name for that is “getting enlightenment.” Wisdom appears by natural process as you continue practicing, digesting your understanding. That is Dharma—the treasure of Dharma.

What is the meaning of Sangha, the treasure of

Sangha? Sangha is the ethical side of our life, which means having “correct life.” Correct life comes from your will, from your center. This means taking away bad habits, and following a good way which helps all beings. If your center is not moving, then having correct life is possible. We also refer to that as “correct direction.” That’s the Buddha’s basic teaching—keeping a correct direction. “Why do I want to do this or that? Only for me, or for all beings?” In order to keep our correct direction, however, we need some basic rules or guidelines for our life. These rules, or precepts, always point us toward saving all beings. Precepts are not rules to limit our actions; precepts mean correct direction. If you follow these precepts, you attain goodness. Then only correct action appears by itself: you don’t check inside, you don’t check outside. Moment to moment just doing it is possible, because these precepts already point the way to our correct job of helping all beings. Then you can believe in your true self one hundred percent. One name for that is “freedom”; another name is “holiness.” This is also called “become Buddha.”

Buddhism has a very clear teaching structure: the treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The

Zen Master Seung Sahn



Chinese characters for this reads *sam bo*, three treasures. There are three dimensions to sam bo. They are original sam bo, form sam bo, and true sam bo. The original three treasures are the historical figure Shakyamuni Buddha; the actual teachings of Dharma which he gave 2,500 years ago in India, before any sutras appeared; and the assemblies of monks and laypeople who followed his teachings while he lived—the original Sangha. So that's the original Buddha, the Buddha's original Dharma speeches, and the original Sangha of people who heard and followed his teaching. In Sino-Korean, we call that *jin che sam bo*, the original three jewels.

More than 2,500 years have passed since the original three jewels appeared in this world. Now we have *sun jun sam bo*, or form of the three jewels. Since the original Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have disappeared, what is the form of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha that we see today? Every temple has a Buddha statue. In Buddhist temples and in our Zen centers in the West, the Buddha statue is gold. This gold Buddha is the *form* Buddha—it represents the original Buddha. Today we have many sutras, as many as 48,000 sutras. These are the written records of the Buddha's teaching. We also have books with teaching and events from the lives of eminent teachers in the history of Buddhism. That's the *form* of the Dharma. And originally, while Sangha meant only those people alive at the time of the Buddha who heard his teachings and put them into practice, today there are many Buddhist communities throughout the world. This is the Buddhist Sangha, the *form* of the Sangha. All together, that's *sun jun sam bo*, the form of the three jewels.

Then what is the true Sangha? What is true Dharma? What is true Buddha? In Korean and Chinese characters, we call this *il che sam bo*, which means "become-one three treasures." Your pure and clear mind is Buddha. When your mind-light shines, that is Dharma. When your mind acts with no hindrance, that is Sangha. Buddha is your pure mind, Dharma is clear mind, and Sangha is your "no-hindrance mind."

But what is a pure mind? What is clear mind? What is a no-hindrance mind? A long

time ago, somebody asked Joju Zen Master, "What is Buddha?" He said, "Go drink tea." Another time, someone asked Joju, "What is Dharma?" "Go drink tea." "What is Sangha?" "Go drink tea." In Sino-Korean, we call that *shil yong sam bo*, which means real three treasures. If you drink tea with a clear mind, then in that moment, you become actual Buddha, actual Dharma, actual Sangha. Joju Zen Master answered many kinds of questions with "Go drink tea!" If you don't understand this you must go drink some tea, right now! Then you will attain the actual Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, OK?

In *the Compass of Zen*, it says that the treasure of Buddha means beauty, the treasure of Dharma means truth, and the treasure of Sangha means morality or goodness. In Sino-Korean, we call this *jin song mi*—"truth, goodness, beauty." How are these connected? What is the relationship between truth, goodness and beauty? Everyone has seen a beauty contest on television. Many women come together and are judged on beauty. That means the judges look for each woman's beauty, or *mi*. But they only look at the woman's body and face. If her face and body are beautiful, and if her actions are graceful, then this woman wins the contest. But real *jin*, truth, is not only how our face and body appear: real truth and beauty are found in our mind. What does our mind look like? Usually our mind is filled with many kinds of ignorant thoughts, and that makes the mind seem ugly. If you practice hard and gradually take away ignorance, you get enlightenment. Then wisdom appears: that's true beauty and truth.

Everybody has goodness, or *song*, already in their mind. One way to easily see this is by going to a movie where a good character is battling a villain. The good person is being beaten badly; maybe he or she is about to die. It looks like the villain is going to win! That's no good! So everybody in the movie theater is thinking, "No good! No good! Get up! Get the bad person!" If the good character and the others suffer a lot at the hands of the scoundrel, then everybody watching the movie feels upset. Nobody wants the good person to die. The anxiety we feel is the innate goodness we already have in us. "Get up! Get up! Get the bad person!" This mind appears. So that's goodness. This goodness comes from where? It comes from our nature, our true nature. Myself and all beings are not different, and are never separate. That's why goodness is realized in Sangha. So, true goodness means correct direction—precepts. ☉

Zen Master Seung Sahn is founding teacher of the international Kwan Um School of Zen.

Sangha
is your
no-
hindrance
mind

Obituary

Zen Master Su Bong (1943–1994)

Jane McLaughlin, JDPSN

On July 17, 1994, Su Bong Soen Sa was giving a kong-an interview to a fourteen-year-old girl during a two-day retreat at the Hong Kong Zen Center. It was shortly before lunch. He had asked her a few kong-ans. Then he asked her, "What is universal sound?" The young girl hit the floor. Su Bong Soen Sa's voice became very soft, and he said, "Correct." His chin lowered to his chest. Then our dear teacher and friend, the lineage holder for the "Perceive World Sound" school, quietly passed away. He was sitting up, in formal robes and kasa, with his Zen stick in his hand.

Within the hour, the phones started ringing all around the world with this sad news. Many of us who knew and loved Soen Sa—students, friends, and family members—had a similar response: "Where did he go?" "Why so soon?" The glaring, absolutely unavoidable impact of his death is perhaps his most effective teaching of all. Why? Because it takes each and every one of us right back to the most fundamental kong-ans of all, the ones there are no getting around, the ones that keep coming back when you least expect them: "Who are we?" "What are we doing in this world?" "Is there life or death?" "What is the meaning of, 'Only go straight, don't know, try, try, try, for ten thousand years'?"

For the last twenty years, we have had the great good fortune and honor to practice with and learn from this short, smiling, mischievous fellow called Su Bong Soen Sa, who dedicated his life to addressing these

fundamental questions. More importantly, though, he vowed to help everyone else learn how to find their way with these questions, too. And lastly—and most important of all: Soen Sa actually translated his vow into the moment-to-moment action of his life.

Since first meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn in Los

Angeles in 1974, Su Bong Soen Sa was always one of the most dedicated Zen students. I love the story of the first time Su Bong Soen Sa met with Zen Master Seung Sahn. The story, as he recalled it to me many years ago, went like this: One day, Su Bong Soen Sa went over to Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn if he could make an appointment to meet with him and ask him a question.

"Of course!" Zen Master Seung Sahn replied. "Why don't you come on Saturday at one o'clock?" Su Bong Soen Sa was very excited to finally talk with a real Zen Master! On the appointed day, he went to the Zen center one hour early and waited. One o'clock came and went. Two o'clock came, three o'clock came.

He was still waiting! Zen

Master Seung Sahn walked past him a few times, and yet seemed to take no notice of him. But Su Bong Soen Sa never questioned him. He simply waited there, thinking about the question he wanted to ask. He had read in the Platform Sutra, "Don't attach to any thinking which arises in the mind." The Sixth Patriarch heard that, and got enlightenment. Su Bong Soen Sa was very curious to know what exactly this "enlightenment" was all about.



He even brought the book along to point out the sentence to the Zen Master!

Finally Zen Master Seung Sahn motioned to him and said, "OK, come here. Please, sit down." They sat down on either side of a low, Chinese-style table. "What is your question," Zen Master Seung Sahn asked him.

"Well, Zen Master, there's a sentence in the Platform Sutra which I don't understand. When the Sixth Patriarch heard it, he got enlightenment. I want to understand this enlightenment."

"Oh?? What sentence is that?"

Su Bong Soen Sa opened up the book and placed it on the table facing Zen Master Seung Sahn. Pointing to the sentence, he traced under it with his finger as he read it aloud: "Don't attach to any..." Suddenly, Zen Master Seung Sahn slammed the book shut on Su Bong Soen Sa's finger. "Who are you?!!" he shouted at him.

Su Bong Soen Sa was shocked! "What do you mean?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "No more reading! Put it all down!"

Su Bong Soen Sa was stuck, as never before, but in a new and wonderful way. It was a clear kind of "don't know," not the absent wondering, or circular, confused kind. His index finger stuck between the pages of a sutra, Su Bong Soen Sa instantly realized, "Oh! This is my teacher!" He was very happy, because at last someone had asked him the thing he most wanted to address in his life, "What am I?" It didn't matter that he couldn't answer. Just to ask it was a great relief.

Since that day, Su Bong Soen Sa kept this question all his life. For twenty years, he helped build Zen centers all over the world. He was always available to help. In the early years he designed and built pagodas, painted Buddhas, hammered nails, licked envelopes, picked up visitors at the airport, answered phones, shoveled snow, went for coffee with new students—his energy was nonstop. By now it's legendary how, in the dawning years of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching in the West, Su Bong Soen Sa and Zen Master Seung Sahn would hurtle around the streets of Los Angeles in Soen Sa's beat-up old orange Dodge van, a gold Buddha statue perched between them (looking very much like a third passenger), with dozens of mats and cushions in the back, en route to a new center or group. With the Buddha statue, moktak, chugpi, incense, and chanting books, they were a veritable temple on wheels. And this took place not only in Los Angeles, but in Providence, Cambridge, Maine, Kansas, New Haven, New York... anywhere he was needed. In the meantime of course, he was always practicing, practicing, practicing, keeping his question close to his heart.

On Buddha's Enlightenment Day in December of 1981, Su Bong Soen Sa (at the time a bodhisattva monk

named See Hoy Liau) was given "inka" by Zen Master Seung Sahn. The following winter he led his first 90-day winter Kyol Che at Providence Zen Center. At the end of that retreat he ordained as a monk and was given the name Mu Deung Sunim. Since then he led thirteen 90-day Kyol Che retreats in the United States and in Korea. Between Kyol Ches he travelled and taught in Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, South Africa, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the United States, Croatia, and countless other places. Above all, the dharma was his life. And his life was on the road—for all of us.

In October of 1992 at a ceremony in Providence Zen Center, Mu Deung Sunim was given formal dharma transmission by Zen Master Seung Sahn, and the enlightenment name of Su Bong Soen Sa, which means "'Extra-Ordinary' or 'High Mystic' Peak." As we look at Su Bong Soen Sa's life, the two things which shine through most consistently are his great question and his great vow. We can learn from his example that anything is possible. That's how he was. Right or wrong, good or bad, right up to his last breath, he was doing it for all beings. That was, and always will be his greatest gift to us. It has been really incredible to watch him do that, because he was someone right here among us. This was not some ancient person in India who we read about in awe. This was someone like you and me. Su Bong Soen Sa's dharma was to show us that we can all wake up if we try. That's the teaching of his life and his death.

The bodhisattva vow is far greater than any one person who embodies it. A human being comes and goes, but the bodhisattva vow continues. Su Bong Soen Sa showed it to us. He is showing it to us even now, in this moment, if we choose to wake up. And so it remains alive in each of us. In the Orient there's an old saying which goes, "You must fulfill your obligation to your teacher." Now it is our job to do it. This is the true meaning of fulfilling our obligation to Su Bong Soen Sa, of fulfilling our obligation to all beings. We must keep that alive and pass it on. I'm quite sure that's what he would expect. ☸

Jane McLaughlin, JDPSN is editing a book on Zen Master Su Bong's teaching and would appreciate copies of his dharma talks, and anecdotes and photos. Material can be sent to McLaughlin PSN c/o the Cambridge Zen Center.

A meditation garden will be built at Providence Zen Center in memory of Zen Master Su Bong. The garden is being designed by one of his sons, Paul Liau. Contributions may be sent to the Providence Zen Center.

Motivation for Practice

These articles were written by students as a prerequisite to taking dharma teacher in training precepts.

by Barry Briggs

When my best friend, dharma teacher Tom Campbell, asked me one day three years ago, “So, what will it take to get you to a retreat?” I responded, “Just ask me to a retreat.” Motivation to begin practice was just that simple. You ask me, I answer you.

It hasn't stayed that simple. The practice that began with that first retreat has exposed shapes and contours of surprising power, unexpected strangeness, considerable confusion, and great reward. Pursuing these contours has taken me into a world that I had only rarely glimpsed before Tom's invitation. Practice has forced me to study the map of motivation: What is this? What is this condition? What is this situation? What is this relationship?

Answers to these questions, when they've come, haven't always been pleasant. At the beginning of practice, the first question to arise was: Why pursue this job and neglect my family? After six months of practice, it became clear that I would need to leave a well-paying and prestigious work situation so I could look more deeply at my life. Then, nearly two years into practice, my wife and I separated. In ways I don't fully understand, practice made the patterns of the relationship far too painful to sustain. Through practice, also, I've begun to look more clearly at my upbringing. This has meant accepting painful truths about my parents and the ways in which they raised me.

So, practice has begun clarifying my karma and this has brought much pain and suffering. Why, then, do this practice? Wasn't life much simpler, less confusing, more fun before practice began?

What began three years ago, and has increased in power and force, is a mapping of life's true nature. To extend the metaphor, before practice, I was wandering lost in an unknown, unperceived landscape. With practice, I have been given a mapping tool, a device for coming to know the hills, defiles, crags, and depths of this life.

For many years, I have been a rock climber. This activity has never been easy and has frequently

been dangerous. And it has been rewarding. It has been an activity of coming to know an unknown terrain intimately, sometimes painfully, so that I could be free to move beyond that territory. So, too, with practice. The practice of sitting on the cushions has been the practice of coming to know the landscape of life, sensing the possibilities, and learning to just do it.

Once this landscape has been mapped, then freedom becomes possible.

But... freedom for what?

Freedom to save all beings from suffering. Every morning I vow to save all sentient beings, numberless though they are. The vow is almost numbingly grand. How could I possibly do this?

Moment, by moment, by moment, coming to know my true condition, situation, and relationship—by practicing—I can begin to clarify the answer to this question. Now, my work situation has changed, changed in a way that gives me time to volunteer my expertise to help other people. My family has also changed—my wife, daughter, and I are now back together—to a situation where, increasingly, moment by moment, we can love one another. And, as I've come to see my karma, come to terms with it, I've experienced a loosening of its grip on my life. As karma has begun to loosen, I have started responding more directly, more intimately, to life situations, to relationships with other people, and to my condition.

So, this practice of sitting on the cushions every morning, going to as many retreats as possible, repeating Kwan Seum Bosal, and learning about staying present in every moment of the day—this practice is about mapping a landscape. The landscape of *don't know*. The landscape may have no end—don't know—but the mapping has begun and the possibility of truly seeing this life, these people, these situations, has increased.

This is the motivation for practice. Learning to look at this life directly, clearly, honestly. Looking, really seeing. What is this? Then, out of *don't know*, comes this growing sense of intimacy with the self, with the moment. Out of that intimacy comes the freedom to help other beings, even all beings, to save them from suffering.

It's as simple as: you ask me, I answer you. ☸

Motivation for Practice

by Tim Colohan

My name is Tim Colohan. I'm 40 years old and I live in Los Angeles. I am an artist and an art director in the film and TV industry. I am queer and have just recently "divorced" my husband of thirteen years. My life changes a great deal. To penetrate these changes and understand myself, I practice Zen, Tai Chi and Chi Kung. My effort is to be as vital as possible so as to vitalize the people around me and to respond to the world with compassion and give people what they want. So why practice?

In 1971 I married Sharon, my high school "steady." I was nineteen. She was pregnant with our first child, Hesper. In 1974 my son Aaron was born. My children were the first people I ever fell in love with—the first that I loved in a dynamic way, albeit with all of my shortcomings as a young father. It was a technicolor experience, lush, textured, scary, rich.

One day I asked Sharon, "My life is so black and white except for my experience with the children. Why? I want that same technicolor quality in all areas. With my wife, friends, co-workers. What am I doing wrong?"

I was not freely, emotionally and spiritually invested in anything but my children. About a year later—a grieving, tortured, self-examining year later—I divorced Sharon and moved out. I planned to co-parent my five- and seven-year old and let myself be open to falling in love with a man.

Sharon was very angry and very hurt; she had been true and was now betrayed. She told me that I could not participate in an ongoing way with my children, that I had abandoned them and their cause for the sake of my sick and intrinsically disordered behavior. This was the most painful event in my life to date. I spent days in a fetal position in bed, crying, paralyzed with grief. I also became very angry. My source family had not allowed me to be angry most of my life. Now I had a good reason. Sharon and I did not speak more than a few angry words in the following seven years. I was able to speak to Hesper and Aaron in a limited, ongoing way. I stayed very angry.

In 1988, after practicing for three years, I was listening to Zen Master Seung Sahn give a dharma talk and answer questions. I asked him if I should continue sending money to my ex-wife for child support. In my opinion she used the money mostly for bad teaching and I was helping her. I explained my emotions to Zen Master Seung Sahn and asked him "What should I do?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn's reply was this: sending money or not made no difference, my job as a father was for my children to know my mind. I must do that. My ex-wife and I shared much karma, lots of ex-sex, emotions, betrayals, love and anger. If I bowed 500 times a day for 100 days and chanted Kwan Seum Bosal 3,000 times a day, my ex-wife would bow to me and ask, "What can I do for you?" No problem.

My mind and Zen Master Seung Sahn's mind became the same. I said OK and started to do this. The next day I could hardly walk. In an interview with Zen Master Seung Sahn I explained I could not do this special practice. He said, "You are a young man! (36 years old.) I am old! I bow 500 times a day, so can you." He shamed me into doing it. Gradually, in about three weeks, I was able to bow and chant this special practice. Soon my "I don't want to chant" karma appeared, so I stopped chanting but continued to bow. It took 123 days to complete the practice.

As the days passed, I became less and less angry. I was clearer with my husband, Simon. I perceived my children more clearly and they listened more to me. I had regular conversations with Sharon about important issues. I felt calmer. My direction began to appear. I sent money, no problem. A few weeks after the practice was over I began working in my studio on a painting that became a breakthrough piece. I experienced a calm freedom and courage in the studio that I never had before.

Sharon met someone and in a year was engaged. She was friendly and understanding towards me. She remarried. I became more realistic and aware of my painting career and possible alternatives in my life. In short, Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching changed my life in a fundamental way. I cannot go back regardless of how difficult the practice becomes. ☉

A Letter from South Africa

By Rodney Downey
Dharma Zen Centre

None of us who shared in the experience will ever forget the 27th and 28th of April, the two days of voting in our first Democratic election in South Africa. It was an extraordinary affair! Millions upon millions of people—black, white, coloured and Indian, rich and poor, male and female, young and old—turned out, stood together and voted, most of them for the first time in their lives. They stood under the boiling sun and pouring rain by the hundreds and thousands. In certain areas where the queues were two to three kilometres long, people stood from 4 am (even though polling stations opened at 7 am) and some late into the night.

No incidents of violence were reported throughout the whole country; peace had suddenly descended. The crowds were happy and people were helpful. We observed them smiling, talking and joking as they waited. Old people were brought to the front of the queue and people coming out of the polling stations were transformed, faces shining with dignity, the look of “at last we are all human beings and have a right to be heard in our own country.” Everybody came together and this to me was the most exciting thing I had ever experienced. Old enemies stood together—ANC, Inkhata and the National Party in the same queue—all voting and doing together practice!

By the end of the first day,

millions of people had voted. It was estimated that 90% of the total population of the country had cast their votes. In our area alone an estimated 40,000 people had cast their votes when only 25,000 were expected. It was obvious that the 1991 census was inadequate and inaccurate. The fact that so many voters had been accommodated was a sheer miracle. Inside the polling stations people were processed quickly, but for some who were illiterate, it took time to vote and people needed assistance. In some areas the system broke down and in other areas there were corrupt officials. Some people stood all day and still didn't vote; places ran out of ballot papers; others ran out of the marking ink for the hands, but still the atmosphere continued. Most problems were addressed and sorted out by the second day.

In the end, the ANC received 63% of the vote, the NP 20%, and the IFP 11%. In a way, the result can be seen as anticlimatic because the most important issue at stake was the together practice that the entire country shared in. South Africa will never be the same.

The real change started two years ago with our referendum, the last great white election, when two-



Party Political Posters

Courtesy of The District Mail

thirds (3,500,000) of South Africa's white minority voted themselves out of their privileged positions, electing to end their hold on the monopoly of power. This must be the only time in history that a minority in power voted themselves out of office. But the result was this magnificent election.

Here at the Dharma Centre we were kept incredibly busy as area command post of the IEC—the Independent Electoral Commission. Heila was in charge of monitors for eight voting stations, located about ten miles in all directions. We had meetings with all the political parties, received visits from the Commonwealth monitors and members of the United Nations observer team. One Japanese U.N. official was quite startled to find himself in a Buddhist Centre.

During election week we were up soon after 4 am to prepare for each day's non-stop activity—phones ringing, faxes running constantly, and an endless stream of people coming in and out. During the two voting days,

Ah! Mandela— A New South Africa

By Heila Downey
Abbot, Dharma Zen Centre

the television played all waking hours, serving as our information source of the activity in the rest of the country, a way to keep in touch.

Here in the Western Cape, by 11am on April 27, it poured rain. To see 600 to 700 people standing patiently in the pouring rain was really quite moving. At the end of that day, when we finally switched off the fax machine and the duplicators, we were exhausted but elated as it had been a great day in our lives and a great day for the Centre.

Ours wasn't the only Centre that contributed to this election as Antony Osler from the Poplar Grove Zen Centre was controlling the monitoring operation in Kimberley, in the Northern Cape. Other sangha members helped out in other parts of the country.

Finally we have all stood together with the same goal, the same objective—people simply wanting peace and happiness. The elections are done, and the effect in our country and the rest of the world will continue for years to come. With the experience of the two day election, South Africa can now go forward, confident in claiming its rightful place in the world.

“KWAN SEUM BOSAL”



The months leading up to election week saw the media crammed with propaganda and predictions, bombarding the populace with a plethora of empty speculation about “whom did what to whom in the past” as well as “what they will do when...” in the future.

As members of the Dharma Centre, we needed to be involved in this process of change but the question was just how? Before too long the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches, based in Cape Town, called upon church leaders of all denominations to adopt a leading role during the preparatory period as well as in the running of the elections.

A peace project was launched by the Mayor of Cape Town with Bishop Desmond Tutu delivering the opening address and prayer and myself concluding the event with a Buddhist prayer. In conversation with Bishop Tutu after the meeting, he took my hands in his and said, “You know, you Buddhists are always so calm and peaceful. I have the greatest love and admiration for his Holiness the Dalai Lama and I am delighted that we, as religious leaders, can finally join hands for peace.” My heart was truly filled with joy! Bishop Tutu, a warm, humble, great man.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was founded to oversee and administer the elections. The Dharma Centre was invited to be part of this body and I served as the District Monitor, monitoring the election process in the district where the Dharma Centre is situated. I was soon to be known as “our red-headed Buddhist sister.”

Our job as District Monitors was to have our teams trained by the IEC and canvas our people. I was blessed with a team balanced by race, gender and religion. Each and every member committed to peace and with one common goal in mind: Everyone wants change.

The question of a Buddhist group leader, with meetings surrounded by statues, Buddhist pictures and having to take off one's shoes, needed to be addressed. As I pondered a way to approach the team with regard to this issue, Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching came to my rescue: “DON'T MAKE ANYTHING!” Truly simple. Recognizing and sympathizing with members feeling threatened was our first step toward healing the wounds of our country. Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Black, White, Coloured and Indian—NO PROBLEM! Members of our team could often be heard saying “Man, don't make anything, just do it!”

Our weekly training sessions at the Dharma Centre were awaited with joy and excitement. We planned and plotted with Rodney ever at hand giving moral and gastronomic support. Soon our team became known as the hottest team around.

No amount of training could have possibly prepared us for the chaos and long hours of work prior to and during election days. Nobody truly knew how many people would come to cast their vote and no words could adequately convey the atmosphere of patience, dignity, joy, smiling faces and helping hands that prevailed at voting stations, even in the pouring rain.

Voter education prior to the elections was a mammoth task and executed more effectively in some areas than in others. At one voting station a lady was found to have colored in all the blank boxes intended for marking the one party of her choice. She stopped only when she reached the box next to Mr. Mandela's picture. Her mission accomplished, but a spoiled paper and a lost vote.

One elderly gentleman, shaking, hardly able to hold the pencil in his hand, was assisted by two voting officials. After five minutes of ethical and legal coaxing, one official, realizing that "old uncle" did not know whom to vote for, was heard to say "Uncle, just vote for the one with the nicest face."

Having cast their vote (for most their very first vote), some became quiet, others had tear-filled eyes, some literally ran out of the voting arena. One lady, quite positively bursting with joy, exclaimed at the top of her voice "dit was lekker!" (Afrikaans for "that was great").

Observing and monitoring the electoral process included securing a restricted entry, high security perimeter surrounding voting stations and counting stations. We sometimes had to negotiate and mediate in conflict situations between political parties. In one case we had a brush with the chairperson of the local taxi association, a very powerful body in South Africa. Due to a lack of communication, planning and a simple oversight, we omitted negotiating the relocation of a taxi stand falling within a restricted area. Realizing the potential security risks at a major counting station, we called a meeting with the chairperson of the taxi association, the police commander and the chief of traffic. The taxi chairperson, having adopted an aggressive stance, informed me that I, together with the traffic officials, were at fault. Explaining in very graphic language that Saturday was the busiest day of business, he said "we cannot move 30 taxis at this late time." His powerful verbal onslaught left me momen-

tarily stunned, then "How may we help you, sir?" came to my rescue, and a potentially explosive situation was defused. The taxi chairperson responded without hesitation, "No, lady, how can we help *you*?" The chief of traffic and police commissioner approached me at an opportune time and asked, "how did you do that, who are you and where do you come from?"

On the day following the last day of voting, a group of foreign journalists were heard to say, "We are pulling out, there is no action here." The peace and calm prevailing in our country immediately before, during and after the elections is surely unprecedented in an event of such importance—it can be done!

Here at the Dharma Centre, political parties sat around a table, no shoes, talking, posturing and eventually softening around the edges, agreeing that when the 1994 election dust finally settles on our beautiful village

and country, we all want to live together in harmony and acceptance of change, embracing peace.

Admittedly, it will be some time before the dust does settle, before the wrongs of the past are forgiven and the wounds are healed. This is the birth of a new country. Building houses, educating our youth, aiding our poor, are all part of our new job in this, the new South Africa. Zen Master Seung Sahn always says "only try, try, try for 10,000

years, then anything is possible."

This was a truly life-changing experience, working with people exiled from their country for many years, now returning home to the prospect of freedom and peace.

In the years prior to the referendum and elections, when visiting abroad, people repeatedly responded with tension upon hearing that we came from South Africa. They often reacted with slight anger and judgement, saying "How can you live there?" Things have changed. During a visit to Korea in May, many people asked us where we came from. Our reply, "Nam Aphrica" (South Africa). Their response, "Ah... Mandela!"

Viva South Africa, viva the great people of our land! ☺



Heila and her team

Courtesy of The District Mail

Desert Bloom

by Scott Restivo

Along South Cloverdale Avenue in Los Angeles, the front yards present a monotony of green, varied only occasionally by a few flowers or a short hedgerow. The green strip ends abruptly, however, at #1025, the home of the Kwan Um School of Zen's Dharma Zen Center. There, a desert garden blooms, abounding in red, yellow, orange and violet flowers.

The garden is the work of the Center's former abbot, Mu Ryang Sunim. Soon after he became abbot in 1991, the monk began to question the wisdom of watering the front lawn two or three times per week. "I wanted to get rid of the grass ever since we moved



here," he says. Why encourage the growth of a plant (grass) that is not native and not adapted to the hot, dry climate of Southern California, especially when the area was in the grips of a five-year drought, he wondered. Because the grass is foreign to the climate, it requires extra water, fertilizers and other chemicals to grow.

Mu Ryang Sunim consulted gardening experts and garden books and drew up a plan for a garden with plants tolerant of the desert conditions instead of the water-dependent lawn grass. "My requirements were a meditative, low-water-usage, low-maintenance garden," he says.

In January, 1992, he stopped watering the lawn, which soon turned brown. He then rototilled the dried-out sod. He left a Carob tree that was growing along the street and a Bird of Paradise along the back wall near the house.

For the new garden, he put in graceful Mexican bamboo and morning glories along the side fence. In the main section of the garden, the monk planted a patchwork of colorful flowers. Rising from a groundcover of dark green Rosemary are clumps of Orange Sedges, silver-gray Dusty Millers, yellow Sage, pink Primroses, blue Plumbagos and deep red Kangaroo Paws. The plants present a variety of textures, including lacy Yarrows, felt-covered Sage, smooth Sedums and shiny Dusty Miller. Myoporium, Weeping Juniper and Mallow trees add height to the garden. Along with the Bird of Paradise, a Purple-queen Bougainvillea graces the back wall.

The plants the monk chose have several adaptations to the dry heat of a desert. Rosemary has narrow, leathery leaves that retard evaporation and thereby retain moisture. The Sedums are succulents with thick leaves that store water for future use. Others, such as the Fescues, have extensive root systems that allow collection of the scant water in the soil.

The abbot gathered rocks from the San Gabriel River Valley and beaches along the Pacific Ocean for use in the garden. These smooth and speckled rocks are strategically placed so that their light color offsets the rich hues of the growing plants.

To emphasize the meditative aspect of the garden, Mu Ryang Su Mim included an olive tree (for peace), a Bodhi tree and a Hand of Buddha (a type of lemon tree). He also added a juniper, a member of the cypress family. A famous kong-an reads: a monk once asked Zen Master Joju, "Why did Bodhidharma come to China?" Joju answered, "The cypress tree in the garden." The abbot points to the juniper and says, "There's our cypress tree in the garden."

The garden has been well-received by the neighbors, some of whom ask for advice on plantings. Birds and butterflies, drawn to the many flowers and seeds, have become more numerous. The Dharma Center is helping in its small way by reducing its water use. The beauty is a welcome by-product. "We transformed another boring and water-guzzling grassy lawn into a drought-tolerant Buddhist garden," Mu Ryang Sunim says. ☉

Zen Master Seung Sahn on *Little Buddha*

During his recent swing through the East Coast, Zen Master Seung Sahn was asked by several people his opinion of the movie, Little Buddha. As the first feature-length movie to deal with the life of the Buddha and Buddhist teachings, Little Buddha has drawn many different reactions from members of the American Buddhist sangha. The following comments were made in response to a question asked by a student during Zen Master Seung Sahn's public Dharma talk at the Providence Zen Center, June 24, 1994:

Q: Zen Master, someone told me that you recently saw this movie, *Little Buddha*. What is your opinion of this movie and the teaching it contains? I heard that the filmmaker tried to use this movie as a vehicle to transmit Buddhist teaching to a wide audience...

ZMSS: The first half of this movie was very good, and had good teaching. The beginning of the movie showed the Buddha as a young prince, how he was struck by the suffering of the world. The movie also showed the Buddha leaving home to find his true self. That's a very important point: the Buddha left home, left his wife and child, left the palace in order to answer this question for all beings: "What am I? What is a human being?"

But the second half of the movie was not as clear. The Buddha left home, and never went back to his family. He never went back to his good situation. In the movie, this young American boy is taken by the teachers. He leaves the world of samsara, just like the Buddha did. But at the end of the movie, the boy is back with his parents again. That's not clear teaching. He already left home: Why go back to his parents? What kind of teaching is this? It does not connect to the Buddha's life.

Also, this movie does not show the young boy growing up, getting enlightenment, and teaching other people. That's the point of him being recognized as a teacher. So that's not complete. It's like when you go to the bathroom. After you use the toilet, you must wipe yourself. That's how you finish the job! This movie should show what happened to this boy—that he studied hard, became a great person, and helped many beings. This movie did not finish the job, so a bad smell appears! Same as that. If the filmmakers only want to make a happy ending, that's not clear. Why spend the whole movie to find this dead teacher, and then this teacher ends up with his parents again? Same with the young Nepali boy and girl, who were also chosen as teachers. The movie would have been complete if it showed them practicing hard, getting enlightenment, and helping other people. But why finish this movie before that? If you finish the movie before that, it does not connect to the Buddha's life. It does not show how Buddhism is about teaching other people *today*. So it's not complete—not clear teaching. ☉

After you use

the toilet,

you must wipe

yourself.

That's how you

finish the job!

“We are Never Discouraged”



*Ven. Maha Ghosananda
continues to walk for peace*

ooo

Dhammayietra III, the Cambodian walk for peace and reconciliation, began April 24 on a note of hope. More than eight hundred people assembled in Battambang city for a week of training in non-violence—monks, nuns, Cambodian citizens, and a small contingency of foreign clergy and laypeople representing a variety of religions and civic organizations.

For three days, Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda, Cambodian Supreme Patriarch, led the Dhammayietra through Battambang city. Monks mindfully beat on drums. Walkers raised up banners proclaiming, “More violence can only bring more harm... Now is the time for peace.” Residents crowded onto the city streets, lining the pathways with buckets of water, waving incense, casting flowers, and queuing to receive the Dhammayietra’s blessing. “May we live in peace.... as cool as this water!” one villager said. Cambodia has known civil war for over two decades.

Early on the morning of the fourth day, Ghosananda led the walkers onto the highway and out beyond city limits. The Dhammayietra was to proceed along Route 10, through controlled territory and some of the world’s most heavily mined areas, and on to Khmer Rouge headquarters in Pailin. The recent increase in military conflict in Cambodia’s northwestern provinces had brought Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda to choose this route. “We must walk where peace is most needed,” he said.

On the fifth day, without warning, the walkers were caught in crossfire between royal government and Khmer Rouge forces. In the melee to follow, one monk and one nun were killed, and several Cambodians wounded. Six foreigners who had joined the walk were briefly taken hostage by Khmer Rouge soldiers, to be released several hours later with apologies.

Maha Ghosananda, a 1994 Nobel Peace Prize nominee and a onetime student of Mahatma Gandhi, proclaimed that the Dhammayietra must continue despite the tragedies. “Peace will come slowly,” the monk said, “It is coming step by step.”

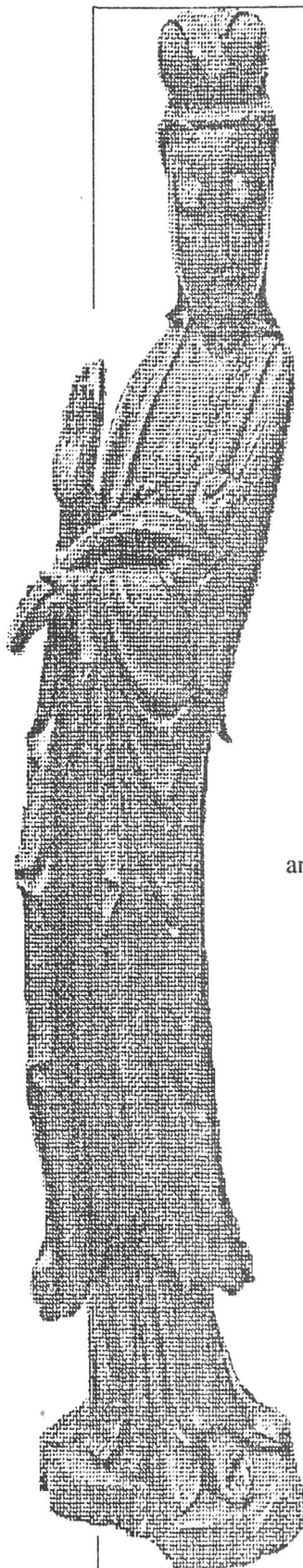
Peace has indeed come slowly to Cambodia. Military conflict began late in the 1960s, as the Vietnam War spread across Cambodian borders. Extensive U.S. and internal bombings contributed to destabilization of the Cambodian government. In the years to follow, a series of political and military conflicts festered into a national holocaust, resulting in the death of more than a million Cambodian citizens and almost complete destruction of the Cambodian infrastructure. Today, Cambodia remains among the world's poorest nations. Civil war and factionalism rage on, despite last year's U.N.-sponsored elections that were supported by over 90% of the nation's populace.

As Dhammayietra III continued and guerilla attacks escalated, Maha Ghosananda joined Cambodia's King Sihanouk in calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, to be followed by round-table talks between royal government and Khmer Rouge leaders. The Dhammayietra has always been inter-religious and non-partisan in spirit; it calls for all sides to lay down arms and put selfish goals aside, in an effort to promote peace and reconciliation. "Hatred can never be appeased by hatred. It can only be appeased by love."

Dhammayietra III proceeded for three weeks, concluding a week ahead of schedule, due, in part, to repeated military encounters. The Pailin destination was never reached. In the end, a long, thin procession of some 1,200 saffron-robed monks, white-robed nuns, lay people and villagers walked peacefully and quietly into Siem Reap town, then on to the site of the ancient and majestic Angkor Wat temples. On May 16 a closing ceremony took place below the temples' central tower, with chanting, speeches and public prayers. The Phnom Penh Post reported that a double rainbow appeared overhead.

Several weeks after the Dhammayietra's conclusion, Maha Ghosananda led a contingency of Buddhist monks to peace talks held in Pyongyang, North Korea, and again to a second round of talks held in Phnom Penh. Both rounds of talks ended prematurely and without consensus.

A foreign reporter queried Maha Ghosananda as to whether he had ever been discouraged during his twenty-five years as leader of the Cambodian peace movement. The monk replied, "It's like breathing in and breathing out. Breathe out, you die. Breathe in, and you are born again. So each and every day, our journey for peace begins anew. We are never discouraged." ☸



Dharma Circle

by Elise Dirlam-Ching

In near stillness
only nostrils and bellies
softly flaring falling
and a flutter at the toes of Buddha
ghost of incense
memory of flame:
Silence tumbles over silence.

Who knows
that the next one's throat
has tightened on a loss
another's loins cramp against desire
another's mind is just
this moment a sprung trap?

Startle of wood
bodies bow
circles scattering
except the one
that holds the stillness.

*Biographical note:
Elise Dirlam-Ching
collaborates with her husband
Kaleo as poet and artist/
maskmaker. She is a
registered nurse at the San
Francisco county jail.*

Poetry

anasazi, grand gulch

san juan bioregion, october/november '92

a woman squats at the cliff's edge
grinding corn in shallow scoops
worn of flat sandstone,
a bulbous tower gazes back
across the cultivated valley,
an ancient hair barked cedar at her doorstep

no separation

woman corn rock cliff sun
shining down
on the water carved dome
(how many centuries rushing water?)

that sweeps up to shade
the masonry clay dwellings.
blue clay handprints mark presence
yellow clay snake painting
brown clay

rectangular birthing woman

sun
shining down to earth only
no separation

woman corn rock
canyonmind
nine-hundred years
squatting beside the cliff
as desert sun lingers
in rock after dusk
to teach us, cleanse us,

to heal
oil pumps beating
in adjoining valleys
our fractured speed-worn minds.

—Paul Bloom

Mountain Temple

Korea, *Shin Won Sah*

Morning calm.
Memories older than stone
on the uphill trail
past the hermitage.

In great love
there is no this or that.
But dreams still trouble me.

Near the shaman's temple
a small family
tends pots on open fires
where the mountain stream
collects in a rocky pool.

Twilight deepens
during the dusty descent.
I search the leaves for eyes.

—Stanley Lombardo

Spring Equinox, Wolf River

Neopit, Wisconsin

again, for Tom

Even here sparrows
cheep in the background,
a netting of plain song,
the warp and weft one color,
a constant note sounding
behind our conversation.
Back in Kansas sparrows
speak with the same voice,
wear the same brown coats
on flights through tree limbs,
unremarkable. Two beaver
swim below the bridge,
snout first, cleaving dark glass
until they slip under white ice,
their voyage together
as silent as the fading light,
and the Wolf River lies quiet
this cold spring night.

—Denise Low

Book Reviews

Master Yunmen: From the Record of the Chan Master "Gate of the Clouds," translated, edited and with an introduction by Urs App. Kodansha International, New York, Tokyo, London, 1994. 272 pp, 8 photographs. Paperback:\$12.

Reviewed by Stanley Lombardo

Urs App, a long-time Swiss resident of Japan, tells us that he wrote this book during the same period of time (c. 1985-1990) that reconstruction of the monastery buildings at Mt. Yunmen in Southern China was underway. The monastery was founded in the tenth century by the Chan master Wenyan who became famous under the name of the mountain. Yunmen means "Cloud Gate." We know him as Un Mun (Korean pronunciation), and if he sounds familiar it is because he appears in more kong-ans in the standard collections (17 cases in the *Blue Cliff Record* and five in the *Mu Mun Kwan*) than any other Chan master. In fact, as App makes clear in his splendid introduction, Un Mun more than anyone else can be considered the founder of kong-an practice. At the very least he ranks with such figures as Ma Tsu, Lin Chi, and Jo Ju as one of the luminaries of the classical age of Chan.

App translates about a fourth of the material—dialogues and talks—in the original Record of Yunmen—a compilation made by his students—including everything that made its way into the kong-an collections. So, for instance, we have the familiar:

Yunmen went up to the Dharma Hall, and on hearing the sound of the bell, he said: "The world is so wide and vast; why should I wear the seven-strip robe at the sound of the bell?"

This appears as Case 16 in the *Mu Mun Kwan*. But App also gives us a wealth of such previously unavailable gems as these:

Someone asked Yunmen, "Though this is constantly my most pressing concern, I cannot find any way in!" The Master said, "Just in your present concern there is a way."

Someone asked Master Yunmen, "What is the most urgent phrase?" The Master said, "Eat."

Master Yunmen asked a monk, "Are Korea and China the same or different?"

Master Yunmen answered on behalf of the monk: "The Monks' Hall, the Buddha Hall, the kitchen pantry, the main gate."

To this last excerpt App appends a note cross-referencing other entries dealing with non-duality, as well as references to Kitaro Nishida, D. T. Suzuki, and R. DeMartino on the same subject. Most of the 285 selections have some kind of explanatory footnote. The selections themselves are arranged under various headings, according to type: Corresponding to the Occasion, Essential Sayings from the Master's Room, Statements with Answers in Place of the Audience, Critical Examinations, and Pilgrimage Record. Most of this is dharma combat of one sort or another, often caustic, sometimes dripping with sarcasm, always live words. Un Mun often answered his own questions when he couldn't get anything out of his monks. There are also a few talks, mostly brusque diatribes aimed at getting the monks to practice harder.

Helpful apparatus include an appendix cross-listing selections with four classical kong-an collections, a long note on the history of the text, a bibliography, and an introduction in three parts: A Brief History of Chan, the Life of Master Yunmen, and The Teaching of Master Yunmen. This last includes sections with headings like: The Basic Problem, Matching Concepts, Duality, What Can One Do?, Letting Go, Koan, The Pathless Path, Breakthrough, and Ways of Teaching. App does a very good job at pointing from many directions straight to the heart of Un Mun's teaching—What am I?—and presenting its original flavor. This is from his introduction:

Many talks and dialogues that came to be used as koans show the human situation in highly concentrated form, and seek to bring this to a point of coagulation in the practitioner, fan the fire of seeking and doubt, and simultaneously keep the seeker from getting sidetracked. And since everything that is an object—including all objects of thought, all Zen teachings, and what ever people say—is a sidetrack, Yunmen says: "Even if, in order to make progress, you sorted out all Chan teachings with their thousand differences and myriad distinctions, your mistake would still consist in searching for proclamations from other people's tongues.... In the meantime you cheat the master in your own house. Is that all right? When you manage to find a little slime on my ass, you lick it off, take it to be your own self, and say, 'I understand Chan, I understand the Dao!' Even if you manage to read the whole Buddhist canon—so what?"

This is pungent stuff, and no sidetrack. App has written an important book, both as research in Buddhist studies and as insight into the roots of our practice. ☉

Nothing Special: Living Zen
Charlotte Joko Beck with Steve Smith
Harper San Francisco, 1993.
273 pp, Hardback: \$20.

Reviewed by Judy Roitman

Several years ago, a remarkable book on Zen appeared. Titled *Everday Zen: Love and Work*, it was written by Charlotte Joko Beck, a Zen teacher who runs a center in San Diego. It was remarkable because it avoided nearly all specialized terminology, was rooted in the daily lives of Americans, yet was very clear in its teaching. It is the book I recommend to anyone wanting a first book on Zen, clearly delineating the human predicament and what practice is about.

Unfortunately, Charlotte Joko Beck's second book, *Nothing Special: Living Zen*, is a disappointment. Like the first book, it is a collection of dharma talks edited by her student, Steve Smith. Like the first book, it is relentless in its exposure of the games our minds play trying to avoid recognition of reality, and hard-nosed about what it means to truly accept and be open to our lives—no easy comfort here. These are its strengths. But it has serious weaknesses that undercut its conscious message.

"Language is a virus from outer space."
William Burroughs

Anyone who has done kong-an study remembers that first realization—confused, maybe a little desperate—that language the way we usually speak it *doesn't work here*. Do not cling to words! Do not mistake language for reality! Buddha is Buddha. Buddha is mind. Buddha is dry shit on a stick. Buddha is three pounds of flax. Which one do you like?

But Joko Beck clings to language. She develops metaphors—whirlpools, cocoons, electric baseboards (that's us, by the way, waiting for things to be plugged in), icy couches, melting ice cubes, castles and moats, locked doors—metaphors which would be powerful if they were said in passing, but which are developed for paragraphs, for pages, for entire dharma talks. Her language becomes a trap, for both her and the listener/reader.

(holding up one finger)
Zen master Guji

Zen master Guji answered every question by holding up one finger. One day while he was gone, his young helper answered a question the same way. When Guji got back and heard about this, he cut off his helper's finger. As the boy, sobbing in pain, stumbled out of the room, Guji called out to the boy. The boy turned and Guji Zen Master held up one finger; the boy was enlightened.

Here is Joko Beck in a typical exchange with her students.

"Joko: When we are in touch, on the other hand, our lives are more like that of the natural man. What does it mean?

"Student: It means a sense of appropriate action.

"Joko: Yes. What else?"

"Student: Greater openness. Natural intelligence takes in information through the senses and functions as part of everything else

"Joko: Yes. We tend to see clearly..."

We are very far from Guji here. Joko Beck has opened a conversation that can only exist on an abstract level. And rather than try to pull her students back from this level she encourages them by agreeing with whatever they say. Throughout the book there are many conversations with students, and most of them follow this pattern. Maybe this works if you are there, physically present, but on the printed page it seems flaccid, as if the finger pointing at the moon has lost its muscle tone.

"Someday you die."
Zen master Seung Sahn

Joko Beck is big on physical tension—when your mind is trying to deny reality, this manifests itself physically as tension. Well, sure. Well, so what. She points out frequently that Zen is not therapy, but her rhetoric undercuts her. She is really great on accepting the body in all its pain and general yuckiness, but then makes this pain and yuckiness a symptom. Students converse with her about necks and shoulders tense, not from practice, but from emotional problems. She realizes the absurdity of this, pointing out that if Zen were about alleviating tension everyone could just go to massage therapists. But she keeps falling into this language again and again.

"And the monk was enlightened."
Nearly every Zen story you ever heard

Most American Zen teachers don't want to even mention enlightenment. We've had enough people stuck in some transcendent experience that they can't get out of after reading D.T. Suzuki or Philip Kapleau. Enlightenment is tricky for all kinds of reasons. Joko Beck tries to talk about it—she calls it joy. And for this she is to be applauded. But she wants to describe it, she wants to tell you what it's like to live in what she calls joy. Nearly every Zen story you ever heard *ends* with the words "and the monk was enlightened." They don't begin there, and they don't develop the theme. For good reason.

"Life is irritating."
Buddha, tr. Stanley Lombardo

Joko Beck is great at teaching the basics of Buddhism without any Buddhist taint. Here is a quote at random: "Feeling that something is wrong and seeking ways to fix it—when we begin to see the error in this pattern, serious practice begins." We've got in this one statement the four noble truths, Buddha's great realization—"all things, just as they are, are complete"—and a steady gaze at the heart of Zen practice. Joko Beck is simply terrific at bringing things together this way. She is merciless at tracing out all the ways we try to evade the truth. She does not try to pretend that reality is pretty or conforms to our desires. These are the great strengths which made her first book so remarkable. Here these strengths remain evident, but they are intertwined with rhetoric that ultimately weakens them. ●



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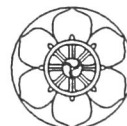
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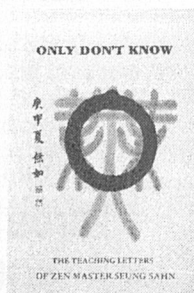


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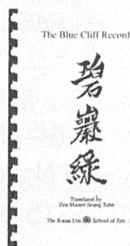
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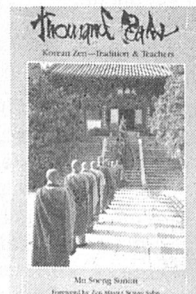
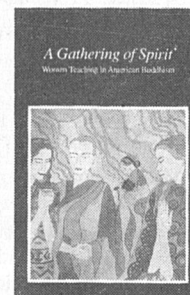
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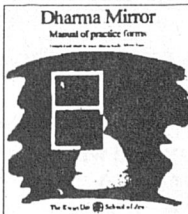
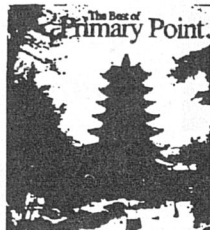


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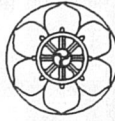


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Wake Up!
 On the Road with a Zen Master



Wake Up!

*On the road with
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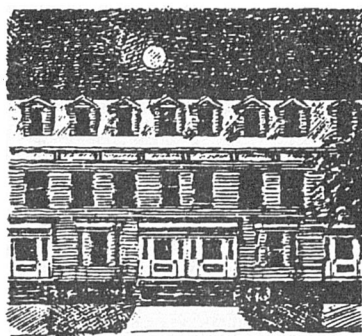
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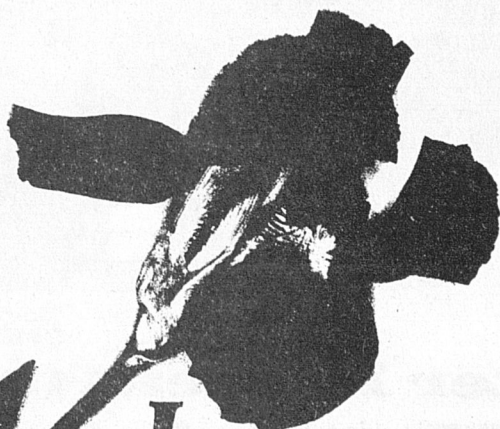
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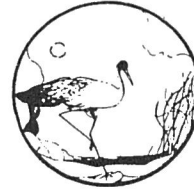
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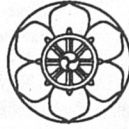
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Glossary

beads: a string of beads resembling a bracelet or necklace, used for counting bows or repetitions of a mantra in various sects of Buddhism.

Bhikshu (*Sanskrit*): fully ordained monk.

Bhikshuni (*Sanskrit*): fully ordained nun.

bodhisattva (*Sanskrit*): a being whose actions promote unity or harmony; one who vows to postpone one's own enlightenment in order to help all sentient beings realize liberation; one who seeks enlightenment not only for oneself but for others. The bodhisattva ideal is at the heart of Mahayana and Zen Buddhism.

bosalnim (*Korean*): in Korea, a lay woman who helps at a temple

Buddha (*Sanskrit*): an awakened one; refers usually to Siddhartha Gautama (sixth century BC), historic founder of Buddhism.

Buddha-nature: that which all sentient beings share and manifest through their particular form; according to Zen, the Buddha said that all things have Buddha-nature and therefore have the innate potential to become Buddha.

Chogye order: the major order in Korean Buddhism, formed in 1356 by the unification of the Nine Mountains Schools of Zen.

Dae Soen Sa Nim (*Korean*): title used by Zen Master Seung Sahn's students in referring to him; "great honored Zen Master."

dharma (*Sanskrit*): the way or law; the path; basically, Buddhist teaching, but in a wider sense any teaching or truth.

dharma room: in Zen Master Seung Sahn's centers, the meditation/ceremony hall.

enlightenment: awakening.

hapchang (*Korean*): literally, "palms together;" a hand position used in various practice situations.

hara (*Japanese*): the vital energy center of the abdomen; in many Zen traditions considered the seat of the heart-body-mind.

HIT: the sound of a palm or stick hitting a table or floor; used to cut off discrimina-

tive thinking.

inka (*Korean*): "public seal;" certification of a student's completion of, or breakthrough in, kong-an practice.

interview: a formal, private meeting between a Zen teacher and a student in which kong-ans are used to test and stimulate the student's practice; may also occasion informal questions and instruction.

Ji Do Poep Sa Nim (JDPSN) (*Korean*): "dharma master;" a student who has been authorized by Zen Master Seung Sahn to teach kong-an practice and lead retreats.

karma (*Sanskrit*): "cause and effect," and the continuing process of action and reaction, accounting for the interpenetration of all phenomena. Thus our present thoughts, actions, and situations are the result of what we have done in the past, and our future thoughts, actions, and situations will be the product of what we are doing now. Individual karma results from this process.

kasa (*Korean*): brown piece of cloth worn around the neck or over the shoulders, symbolic of Buddhist vows and precepts.

KATZ! (*Korean*): traditional Zen belly shout; used to cut off discriminative thinking.

Kido (*Korean*): "energy way"; a chanting retreat.

kimchee (*Korean*): spicy pickled cabbage.

kong-an (*Korean*; *Japanese*: koan): a paradoxical or irrational statement used by Zen teachers to cut through students' thinking and bring them to realization.

Kwan Seum Bosal (*Korean*; *Sanskrit*: Avalokitesvara; *Chinese*: Kwan Yin; *Korean*: Kwan Um; *Japanese*: Karzeon): "one who perceives the cries of the world" and responds with compassionate aid; the bodhisattva of compassion.

Kyol Che (*Korean*): "tight dharma;" in Korean Zen tradition, an intensive retreat of 21 to 90 days.

Mahayana (*Sanskrit*) Buddhism: the Bud-

dism practiced in northern Asia; encompasses schools in China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet.

mantra (*Sanskrit*): sounds or words used in meditation to cut through discriminating thoughts so the mind can become clear.

moktak (*Korean*): fish-shaped wooden instrument used as a drum to set the rhythm for chanting.

patriarch: the founder of a school and his successors in the transmission of its teaching.

sangha (*Sanskrit*): in the Mahayana and Zen traditions, the community of all practitioners; may refer to a family of students under a particular master.

senior dharma teacher: in the Kwan Um School of Zen, one who has met certain training requirements, usually over at least nine years, and has taken sixteen precepts.

sutra (*Sanskrit*): Buddhist scriptures, consisting of discourses by the Buddha and his disciples.

transmission: formal handing over of the lineage succession from teacher to student.

Yong Maeng Jong Jin (*Korean*): literally, "valorous or intrepid concentration," paraphrased "to leap like a tiger while sitting."

In the West it is a short silent retreat of two to seven days involving thirteen hours of formal meditation practice a day. Participants follow a schedule of bowing, sitting, chanting, eating, and working, with an emphasis on sitting meditation. During the retreat each participant has interviews with a Zen Master or Ji Do Poep Sa Nim.

Zen (*Japanese*; *Korean*: Son; *Chinese*: Ch'an; *Sanskrit*: Dhyana): meditation practice.

Zen center: meditation communities which may include a residence. All the Zen centers in the Kwan Um School of Zen are under the spiritual direction of Zen Master Seung Sahn, and each offers regular practice and periodic retreats.

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