

MAN BITES DOG!

Hyon Gak Sunim

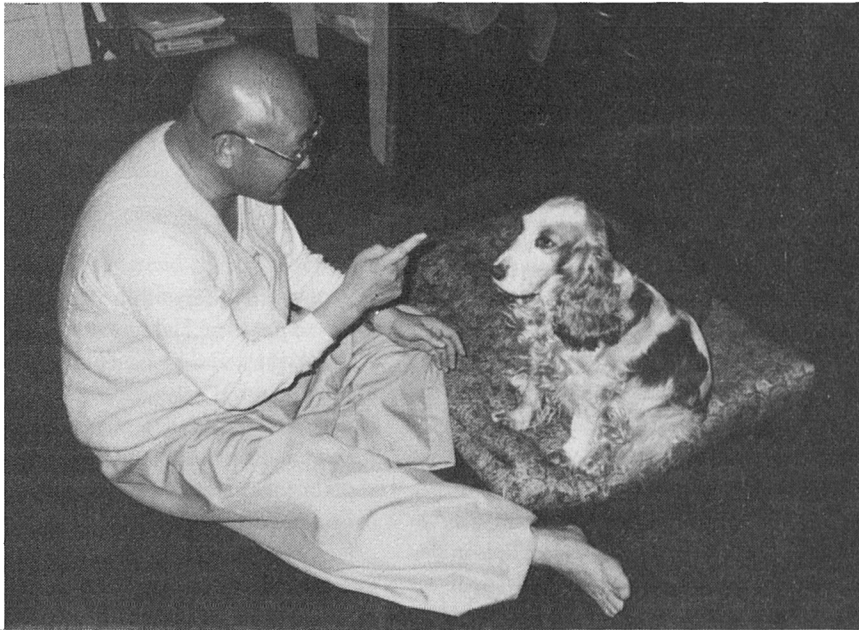
This picture shaves about nine hundred ninety-nine words off the old cliché about a picture's worth. Boil it down to one, and multiply that one word by a factor of three: "Try, try, try." The balance is ten thousand years of nonstop teaching to sentient beings in this world.

A witness to this spontaneous and intimate event in a hustling, bustling teaching career was

the inimitable Ven. Hyon Mun Sunim. Zen Master Seung Sahn was visiting Poland in 1987 with Do Mun Sunim (then Abbot of the Paris Zen Center) and Do Ryun Sunim. After his usual stop in Warsaw to deliver dharma talks and give interviews to a following of students which regularly packed the Warsaw Zen Center to the gunnels, even spilling out into the yard three-deep and peering through windows into a packed Dharma room, they arrived in Krakow.

Hyon Mun Sunim remembers: "There were two rooms prepared for Dae Soen Sa Nim in the home of Marzena Magdon. Huge ceilings. Do Mun Sunim asked me for a nice mat so that the Zen master could do his usual thousand bows that he did every day, even when travelling. When Dae Soen Sa Nim first entered, there was a dog in the apartment already; it belonged to the owner. Of course, the dog was moving around a lot when we arrived, because there were many people, and everyone was very excited, as usual when Dae Soen Sa Nim came. There was a lot of energy in those times. The dog was very nervous, you know, like the way dogs become in these sorts of spontaneous situations in the human realm.

"We set out this wonderful golden mat and cushion while Marzena made tea. Suddenly, out of all the coming and going, the many, many human legs going out of rooms and stirring up this poor dog, the dog came up and sat right on the mat in Dae Soen Sa Nim's room. We wanted to remove the dog, because



after all this was the great Zen master's cushion where he would do his bows and receive students. I was always pissed at dogs, especially this one sitting on the mat of Zen master. In Poland, dogs are not special like in America.

"Dae Soen Sa Nim was at this moment coming out of the bathroom, and saw the dog, which we were trying to pull off the cushion. He

stopped us, and sat down on the bare floor, facing the dog. Suddenly, the dog calmed down and seemed very peaceful. He looked right in the Zen master's eyes, with big attention. Everyone was still coming into the apartment, swarming in the doorways to catch a glimpse of the Zen master, hoping for some kind of big interaction. But as Dae Soen Sa Nim sat there in front, all was total silence and stillness. I remember the Zen master did not touch the dog; he did not treat it as something cute or anything. And he didn't push it away from this meeting with his students. This was strange, because when he first arrived at the Zen center, while Dae Soen Sa Nim was greeting us, the owner's cat walked up and tried to crawl into the Zen master's lap. And Dae Soen Sa Nim pushed him away, kind of pulled him by the tail and moved him back. Many people laughed. But what he was doing with this dog was different, so we were surprised when he just sat and the two made such strong eye contact. Dae Soen Sa Nim was very serious for a moment, and then opened his mouth and started to talk, right to this dog: 'Listen to me, form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Why come back like this again? Next time don't keep your dog's body. Even this is very comfortable for you, don't hold this dog's body, OK? Next life you again become human being, get enlightenment, and help all beings. That's your job. Understand?'"

Try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop.