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## WENTY YEARS LATER...



Zen Master Seung Sahn first came to Poland in 1978 accompanied by eight American students. Together, we all crushed into a private house on the outskirts of Krakow—a city not unused to dragons—and *experienced* our first Yong Maeng Jong Jin intensive retreat and precepts ceremony in Poland. Still high on the surge of inspiration, we started to meet regularly to try meditation together. Nobody really knew what was going on (only *don't know*), but despite the numerous and spontaneous improvisations during chanting and generally getting it all mixed up (try mind), we gradually grew into an increasingly active and tight-knit group. Practice was a very bright light in the murky-grey era of hard-line communism.

The sutras started sounding better, practice forms were learned and our practice became stronger. We remember the wicker-basket lamps, North Korean tea-set and endless cups

of Chinese Republic green tea (the only touch of the Orient available to us) in the midst of our evening conversations! New family. Soon we had our first Yong Maeng Jong Jin (without a teacher, which was normal for almost the next ten years as we didn't have any resident teachers yet in Poland). It was very serious—lots of pain and lots of doubts.

Zen Master Seung Sahn came once a year to teach us. Our annual dharma kick! There was always a crucial lack of space and everyone crammed into whatever building had been arranged. Never enough bathrooms and always a miserly small kitchen. When one person turned over in their sleep, the whole dharma hall had to follow suit; hence the oft-quoted saying that practice in Poland is “like practicing in a matchbox.” This created a very intense atmosphere where no one complained and we all felt incredibly close to each other—conditions being favorable.

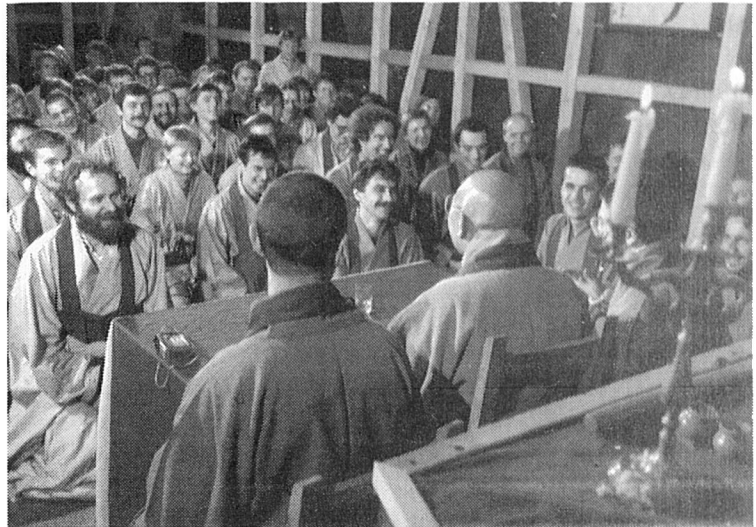
Zen Master Seung Sahn's hectic and tornado-like visits to this day greatly inspire and mobilize us, so it was no surprise that our sangha started to spread out into other cities such as Gdansk, which became one of the most important School centers with very involved members (to say nothing of producing two Ji Do Poep Sas). Zen groups sprang up between Gdansk, Krakow, Katowice, Lodz and Warsaw, in an almost "missionary" situation, bringing Zen to small, conservative Catholic towns. Not an easy ride.

Eventually it was decided that Warsaw should host the head temple, and a house was bought on the edge of Warsaw in Falenica. Later the neighboring house was purchased, a dharma hall built and that's how it looks today. Winter and summer Kyol Che are held in this house, the only place in the Kwan Um School in Europe at present, attracting Zen students from Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Russia, Yugoslavia and the United States.

As with every Center, it has its fair share of stories to tell: policemen taking off their rather large boots to come inside to "ask a few questions," new-born babies, multi-sangha picnics, our ten-year ceremony, the teaching visits of Zen Master Seung Sahn (nearly always with Ven. Mu Sang Sunim), Zen Master Su Bong (who was always a special favorite), Wu Bong Soen Sa Nim (our Guiding Zen Master), Jane McLaughlin-Dobisz JDPSN, and many others who have either taught, or helped through the years.

Now we have Polish Ji Do Poep Sas who teach on a regular basis throughout Eastern and Western Europe, even reaching the shores of the United States once in a while.

During the last twenty years it is interesting to note how our sangha is a constant reflection of our rapidly-changing society, especially since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Some members drop out, totally absorbed in their new-found freedom of material advancement, while new mem-



bers come along searching for answers that Poland's traditions or new situation do not provide or are not clear to them at present. Katowice and Lodz Zen Centers are a good example of this. They are located in areas of large unemployment where young people have formed centers that grow stronger and more ambitious each year. They're the new wave in our ever-changing School. During Zen Master Seung Sahn's last trip to Poland there were so many people in our dharma hall that it resembled a human-limb and wood construction that looked like it would run away at any moment, what with all the heads poking through the windows, too! Upon seeing this Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Oh, new dharma hall necessary! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" The sudden burst of laughter that exploded in the Dharma room at those words could have been disastrous, from a structural point of view!

And it becomes a fact. The building of our new dharma hall coincides with twenty years of the Polish Kwan Um School of Zen, to quote Zen Master Seung Sahn again, an anniversary inspired in his customarily one-pointed way: "Twenty year ceremony necessary!"

KWAN UM SCHOOL OF ZEN IN POLAND  
TWENTY YEAR ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY  
OFFICIATED BY ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>, 1998  
FALENICA, WARSAW, POLAND

