



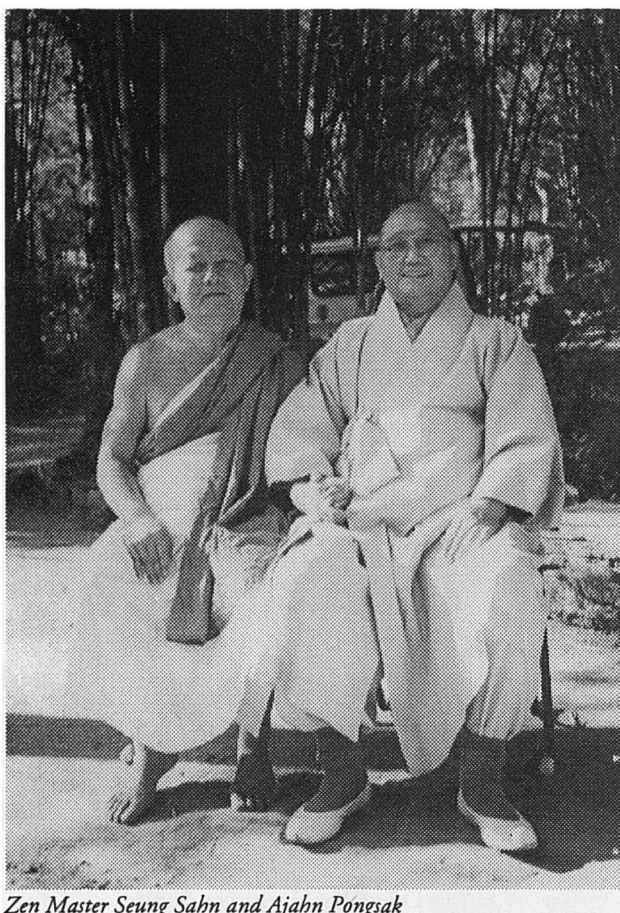
Forest Sharma

Corrin Chan,
Su Bong Zen Monastery

Hyang Um Sunim JDPS, the guiding teacher of Su Bong Zen Monastery, studied with the Thai teacher, Ajahn Pongsak. Ajahn became a monk at the age of twenty, and has been living in the forest of northern Thailand for 46 years. He founded a meditation center there, in the valley around Tu Bou's cave. Ajahn Pongsak received the Global 500 Roll of Honor Award for 1990 from the United Nations Environmental Program for saving the headwater at the watershed in Thailand, and for rural development.

Last December Hyang Um Sunim JDPS, the nun who is the teacher at the Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong, led a group of twenty-four students to a forest in northern Thailand for a seven-day retreat. This forest was the former practicing place of Hyang Um Sunim JDPS, and is protected by the Dharmanat Foundation led by her original Thai monk teacher Tan Ajahn Pongsak.

This is the third time that I have gone with Hyang Um Sunim JDPS to practice in this remote forest. The first time I came I asked Ajahn, "Where is the temple? Why is there no beautiful golden statue of Buddha here?" That was the first night of our visit. Ajahn simply said, "Buddha is always practicing and teaching in the forest." On the last night of our visit, after our sharing of what we experienced during our retreat in the forest, he said



Zen Master Seung Sahn and Ajahn Pongsak

“Do you remember someone asked why there was no temple and no Buddha statue? That’s because the forest is already a temple; everything is Buddha—nature is always speaking the dharma. If we had a temple, sutras or a Buddha statue here you would not go out and just be in nature.”

We were honored on this latest trip by a visit from Zen Master Seung Sahn and Mu Shim Sunim JDPS, a teacher at the Seoul International Zen Center. They arrived about four in the afternoon the last day of our retreat. When Zen Master Seung Sahn met Ajahn it was as if they were brothers who finally had been reunited. They held hands and walked in the forest. At that moment I was very touched, almost crying.

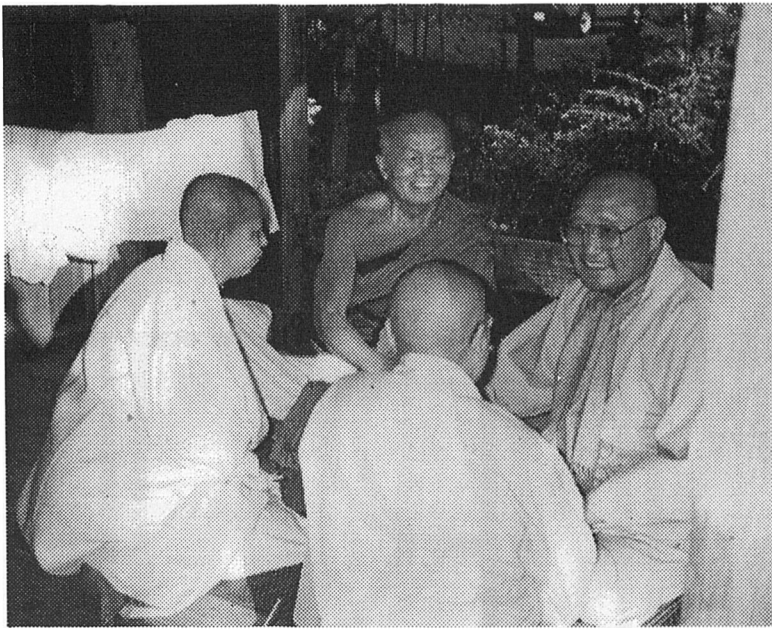
Zen Master Seung Sahn went to see Ajahn’s small hut. It is really small, only

big enough for one person to sleep in. Zen Master Seung Sahn asked, “May I see your room?” “Yes, of course,” Ajahn replied. So Zen Master Seung Sahn opened the door and looked in, “Oh! Its empty. You have nothing—like a monk!” Then he turned to Ajahn and said, “Your room is very good. My room is very complicated.”

At night we had a circle talk with oil lamps. Ajahn let Zen Master Seung Sahn sit at his place. Ajahn simply said that he had planned to say something before the Zen Master arrived, but when he saw Zen Master Seung Sahn, he forgot everything. Later we asked Ajahn what he had planned to say. He only said, “Open mouth, already mistake!”

Something really unexpected happened the next morning when we were leaving. Zen Master Seung Sahn went up to the plateau rising above the forest to inspect the geomancy. Ajahn was very happy when Zen Master Seung Sahn said that if the existing dry reservoir was filled with water, this place would help many people get enlightenment.

As we were walking back down, a man in white robes was sitting on the ground with some of his students, waiting for us. We did not know how he knew Zen Master Seung Sahn was there, but as we approached, the man rose and said to him, “I know you teach the words of the Buddha. Can you tell me his teaching?” Then the man took off his socks and stood in front of Zen Master Seung Sahn. He then proceeded to go into deep samadhi. Zen Master Seung Sahn and the man stood on the plateau for about forty-five minutes without a word—only a bee flying, birds singing and the wind blowing. This man’s group of students—about twenty of them—also stood there with us. These students did not know what



Zen Master Seung Sahn and Ajahn during a kong-an interview with Thai nuns

was happening. What were these two men doing?

Finally, Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "It's enough. Your samadhi energy is very strong." Zen Master Seung Sahn then asked the man what he had attained in nature. This question was followed by many words of explanation in Thai from the man. Then Zen Master Seung Sahn asked, "Ten thousand dharmas return to One, where does the One return?" The man said to his students that this Zen Master's teaching was not correct. Then Zen Master Seung Sahn said to him, "I have a precious gift for you." He took his hand and hit it once. Then Zen Master Seung Sahn went with Ajahn to see the hut Hyang Um Sunim JDPS used to live in when she was on retreat here.

Our students were very excited about what had happened with the man in the white robes. We were talking at the breakfast table about what was said between them. What was really happening? Many guesses. I had only one kong-an in my mind: Zen Master Seung Sahn and this man stood for forty-five minutes on the plateau.... what did I attain? Already we

understood—more words are like legs for a snake.

When Zen Master Seung Sahn was leaving, Ajahn thanked him very much for coming and for his teaching. Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Your dharma is very high class, my dharma is very low. No electricity—very wonderful!"

Hyang Um Sunim JDPS said later that the Thai people and nuns were very moved and cried when they saw these two teachers walking hand in hand in the forest.

The sun shines everywhere, on the good and the bad. Butterflies are yellow, black, blue, green, brown, white, flying everywhere. They just do their job, never saying which color is better or worse. The waterfall makes many different sounds; these different sounds are like an orchestra—no one sound is any better or worse.

I already opened my mouth and made many mistakes. Excuse me.

Mu Shim Sunim JDPS, Zen Master Seung Sahn, Ajahn Pongsak, and Hyang Um Sunim JDPS

