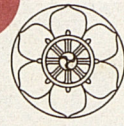
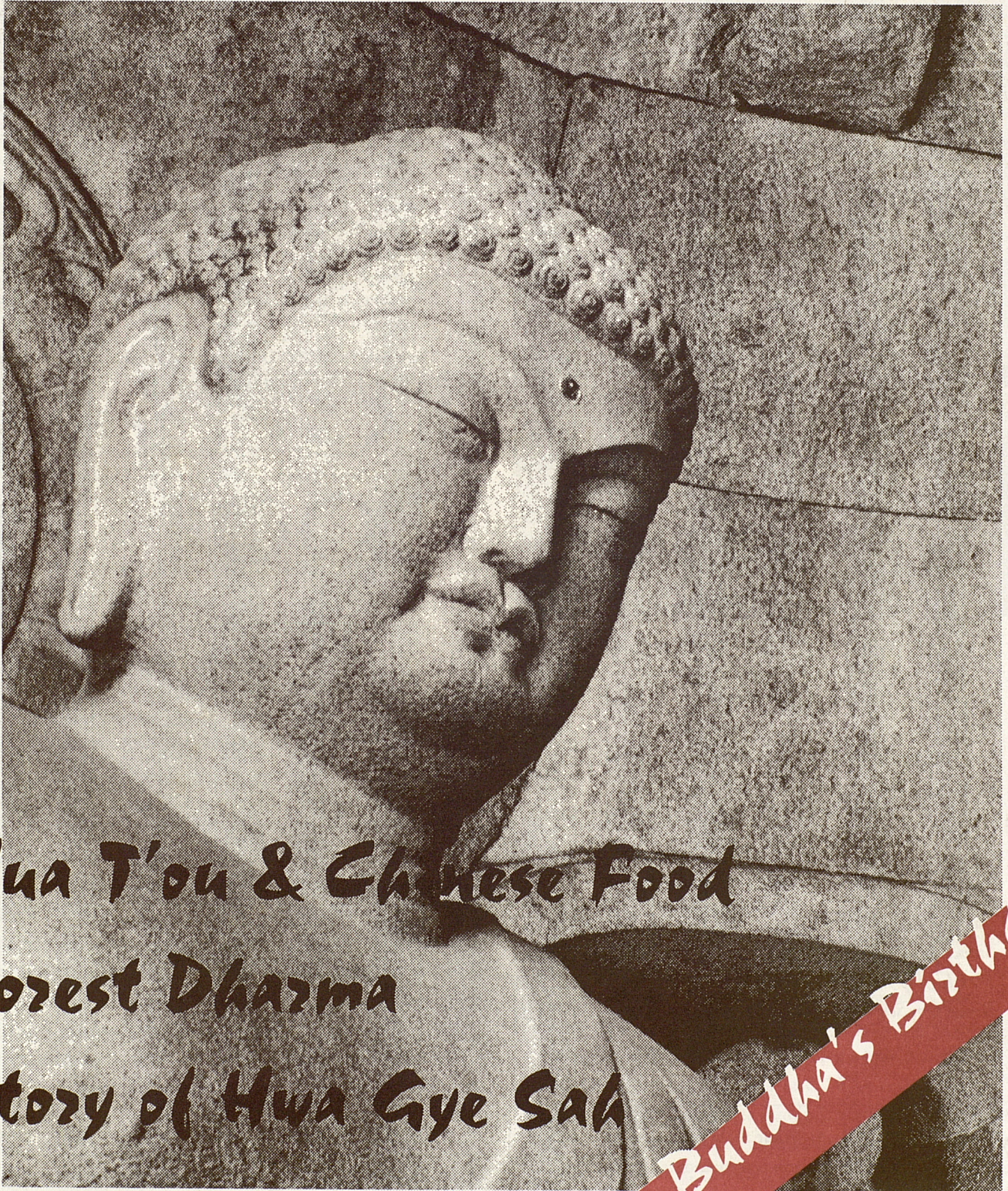


Primary Point



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Hua T'ou & Chinese Food

Forest Dharma

Story of Hua Gye Saa

Happy Buddha's Birthday!

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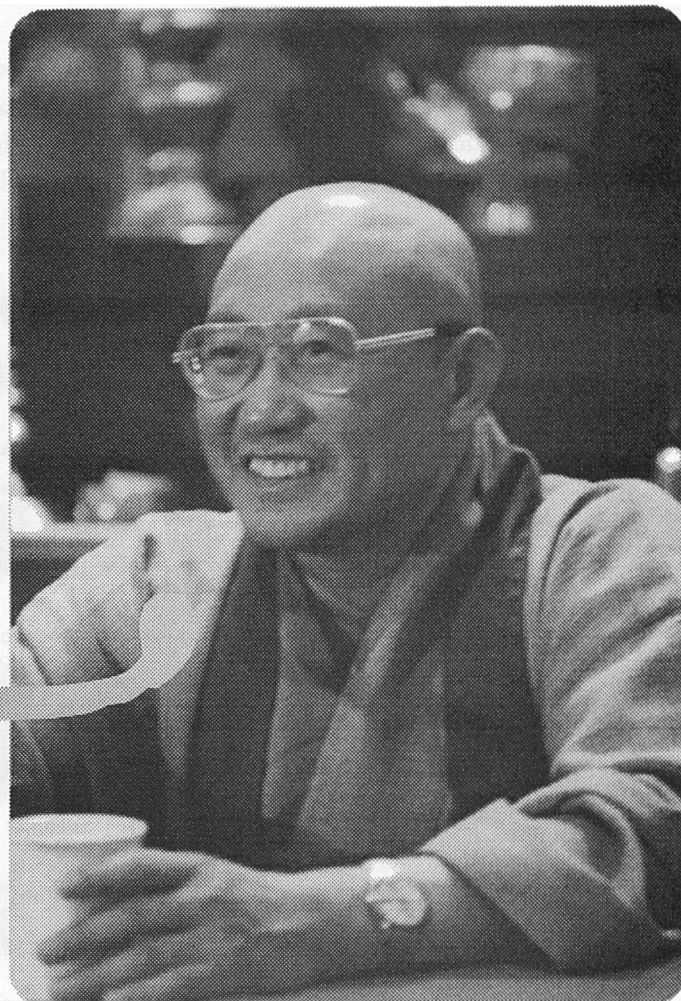
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Cover: Granite seated main Buddha in Sokkuram Cave Temple, Kyongju



HUA T'OU CHINESE FOOD



*A conversation at lunch in Hong Kong between
Zen Master Seung Sahn, a famous monk, and some students*

Monk: Dae Soen Sa Nim, what is the difference between hua t'ou* and kong-an?

Zen Master Seung Sahn: The hua t'ou is like a pointing finger. The finger itself is not important. Direction is most important. The hua t'ou has no meaning. It's just a finger pointing. Most important is direction. Hua t'ou means your direction. A question like "Who is speaking?" has two points, subject and object. If you have two things, then opposites have already appeared. Don't make opposites. "Who is speaking?"... then thinking, thinking, thinking appears. Hua t'ou means cut off all thinking. "What is Buddha? Dry shit on a stick." This has no thinking; it's a direct pointing! Kong-an also means cut off all thinking. Just do it.

Monk: But, when you ask a question you want to find an answer, correct?

ZMSS: You shouldn't want to find an answer. Now in China, Pure Land practice is very popular. Many people practice by asking themselves, "Who is O Mi To Fo, who is the Amitabul Bodhisattva?" That is OK, but not true Zen. It's like this: "What is Buddha? Chopsticks." Then if thinking appears, "why chopsticks?" that's not so good. "What is Buddha? Chopsticks." Then, only action—use the chopsticks, eat! That's correct. "Who is chanting?" If you are thinking, then two minds appear: chanting mind, asking mind. But hua t'ou means cut off these two minds—cut off all thinking. Da Sung Il Pung—HIT! Become one. Just do it!

Monk: But everyone is practicing, “Who is chanting O Mi To Fo?” Da Sung Il Pung is very high class! Nobody understands that.

ZMSS: Yes, this style of teaching has been used for such a long time that the true meaning has been lost. Today, nobody understands. During the Tang and Sung dynasties everyone understood the correct teaching. Live words are very important—that’s Zen. Not thinking words. Just perceive, then inside and outside BOOM! become one. Here’s a poem for you:

阿彌陀佛在何方

Where is Amitabul now?

著得心頭切莫忘

If you keep this question, all thinking disappears.

念到念窮無念處

You return to the place of no thinking

六門常放紫金光

Then your mind light is shining bright.

So, everyone, please eat!

Monk: Sir, what do you do during sitting meditation?

ZMSS: Sitting meditation, lie down meditation, walking meditation, it doesn’t matter. Right now everything must be clear in front of you.

Monk: From what I understand from your talk, when doing a mantra, reading sutra, etc. just do it. But, Chinese people, when they recite O Mi To Fo, they are thinking about O Mi To Fo, Pure Land, etc. But you say, “only do it”—is that right?

ZMSS: Yes, correct. Only do it! Then repeating O Mi To Fo and Zen are not different.

Monk: Then bowing time, only bow?

ZMSS: Correct. Only do it!

Monk: They don’t have Zen Masters like you in China. There, they only sit. They will not bow or do mantra practice. Also, they only stay at the temple. But you use everything as a practice.

ZMSS: Bowing, chanting, sitting—only do it. If you want anything, it’s a big mistake. If you want to go to the Pure Land or want enlightenment, you will have a problem. Only do it! Doing O Mi To Fo or eating, you must try. If you don’t have a try mind, everything is a problem. If you have a try mind, nothing is a problem. Please eat.

Monk: I am very happy, I cannot eat.

ZMSS: Eat, eat! Eating time, eat.

Monk: You are the live word. Now I have attained the live word!

**Hua t’ou means “head of speech”. Its the point just before thinking. Traditionally its a word or phrase (like “mu” or “what is this?”) used by a practitioner to cut off all thinking and return to before thinking, the original self.*



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.

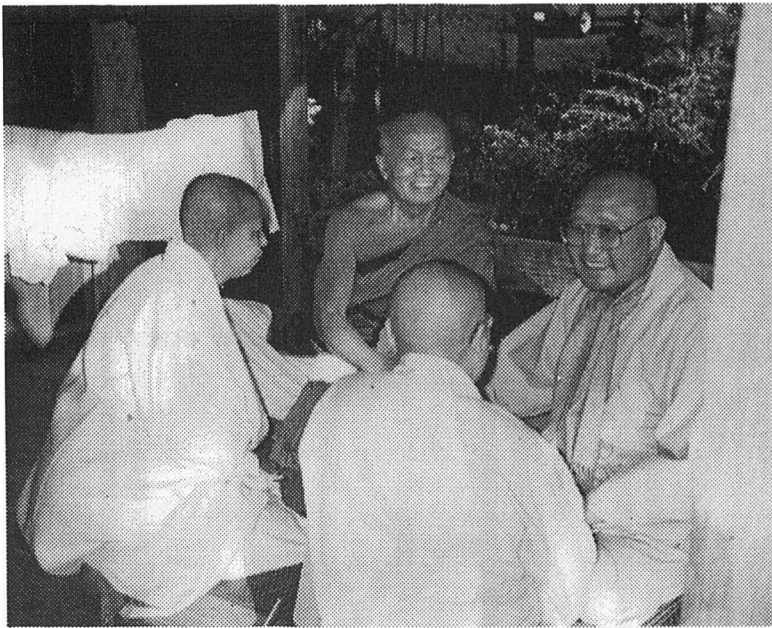
Zen Master Seung Sahn went to see Ajahn’s small hut. It is really small, only

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.

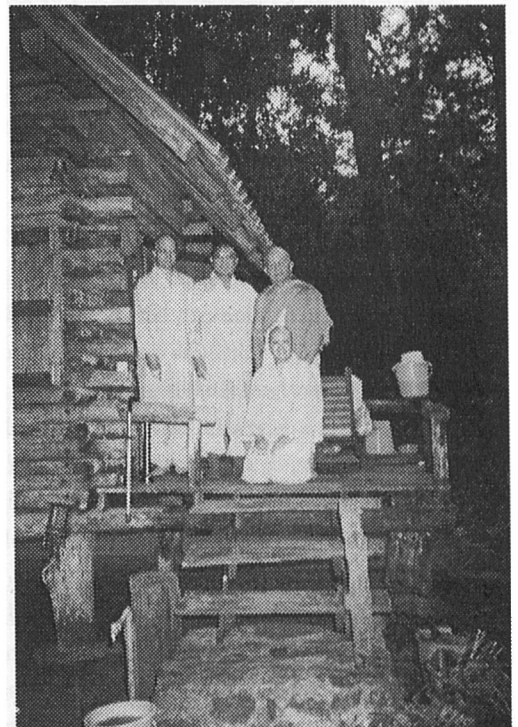
When Zen Master Seung Sahn was leaving, Ajahn thanked him very much for coming and for his teaching. Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Your dharma is very high class, my dharma is very low. No electricity—very wonderful!"

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





BIRTH

Jeffrey Kitzes JDPSN

When Buddha was born, he sprang out of his mother's hip, walked seven steps, said, "Heaven above, earth below, only I am holy."

[hits]

When you and I were born, we sprung from our mother's uterus, dropped into the doctor's arms, and screamed, "WAAAAAAAAAH!"

[hits]

Are Buddha and you the same or different?

KATZ!

The Buddha is wearing gold; Kwan Um Zen students wear grey.

Happy Buddha's Birthday, everyone.

I'd like to take a look at the story of the Buddha from an unusual angle. The Buddha was born a prince in a kingdom in India. His father, the king, decided that, to make him a really great king, he would have to pretend that there was no suffering, old age, sickness, or death in the realm. The amount of deception and lying that had to be maintained to shelter the Buddha from all of this must have been incredible.

The Buddha couldn't know that people got hurt. He couldn't know that people didn't have enough to eat. He couldn't know that they succumbed to illness. What happened, then, when the Buddha played with his friends on an

elephant and one of them fell off and got hurt? How did they hide that from him? How did they conceal the fact that his grandparents died? How did they hide the fact that his elderly uncles and aunts got sick and died?

In short, the Buddha spent the first twenty-odd years of his life in total ignorance. And this total ignorance was supposed to make him a great king. How does ignorance make someone a great king? Really, the whole idea that deception and falsehood would make a great king seems quite absurd.

As the story of the Buddha unfolds, we learn that one day he noticed somebody suffering. He noticed sickness. He noticed old age and he saw a corpse. With that his whole world exploded. Everything that he had believed about life was wrong. All of the things he was taught, all of his ideas, everything, was wrong. It was all made up—a man-made illusion. It's no wonder that when he finally attained his true self, the Buddha decided that his path would be based on truth, because he had been lied to his whole life.

If you think about it, our own stories are no different than the Buddha's. We also grow up being lied to—however well-intentioned the lies are. We are also brought into this world in a very narrow corner of the universe. Each of us has our own different situation that we're born into. But when we're born, our parents, relatives and teachers begin a subtle process of deceiving us, telling us half-truths

HOLIDAY

Happy Buddha's

and lies, for the purpose of making us what they call “good citizens.”

When young, how many of us had a relative die and our parents didn't tell us? One summer my grandmother died while my brother and I were in summer camp. My parents called and told me to come home to the funeral, but told me not to tell my younger brother where I was going because they were afraid it would hurt him too much.

We go to school and the socialization process starts to make us into “good citizens.” So sometimes a very subtle, and at other times, a very unsubtle process happens. We're molded, pushed to become a certain way. Often, we willingly buy into this process. We desperately want to be accepted. We want friends, we want love, we want so many things so badly that we're willing to sacrifice our own perceptions in order to win love and approval. We begin to realize that when we act in certain ways we elicit a smile from someone who is important to us. We conclude: “Oh, I'll do that again. This is great. I do this, and I get a hug. I do that and I'm liked. I do this and I'm accepted.” We really are very smart. We look around, see what works for us, what we think works for us. So, just like the Buddha, we grow up in an environment where we're lied to and told half-truths. We really don't know anything.

How did the Buddha react when he discovered that his life had been a sham, a charade? He said, “Holy shit! I gotta

get out of here! This is crazy!” So he left. He left his wife, he left his child, he left the opportunity to be a king and all the wealth you could imagine, in order to find his true self.

But Buddha isn't the only one who has that kind of experience. All of us sitting here have had similar experiences. For me, I was fifteen and in my sophomore year in a high school English class. I had a young teacher at the time who must have been twenty-two or twenty-three years old. She decided we would study poetry by bringing in lyrics from rock 'n roll songs. This was 1968. She believed we could learn poetry this way. It was a great idea.

I was a bit conservative at the time, and I liked Simon and Garfunkel, so I brought in one of their songs. I presented it in class and we talked about it and everything went well. Somebody else brought in the song, “Hey Jude” by the Beatles. We read the song and the teacher said, “OK, great. What's it about?” I liked to talk in class so I raised my hand and I said, “It's about love, it's about a person wanting somebody, and that kind of thing.” In the back of the room was a guy with long, red hair who raised his hand and said, “Nunh hunh. It's not about that.” He said, “It's about shooting heroin.” He went through the whole song, line-by-line, and showed how it was all about shooting heroin in your arm.

That guy totally blew my mind. I realized that the world wasn't necessarily the way I thought it was. All of the beliefs

and ideas and everything else that I had were just a creation. They weren't really true. So great doubt appeared for me like it did for the Buddha.

In our Zen tradition, we have the story of Dok Sahn, who was a sutra master in northern China. He had heard about the Zen practitioners in southern China who sat all day long facing the wall and did nothing. He said, "This is crazy! They're not studying sutras. How do they expect to get enlightenment?" Dok Sahn was so sure of himself that he knew he had to personally go and teach these monks the true way. Apparently, he was a very famous sutra master and had some standing in the Buddhist community.

He walks hundreds of miles to go teach these crazy Zen monks a lesson. As he approaches the first monastery, Dok Sahn stops at a tea house and encounters the woman who runs it. She sees him carrying a bundle of books and says, "Oh, what's in that bundle?" The sutra master replies, "That's the Diamond Sutra. I am a great Diamond Sutra master. I am going to teach these monks a lesson. They'll learn the Diamond Sutra, then they'll understand the true way."

So the tea house woman says, "That's very interesting. But I have a question for you. If you can answer this question, you can have your lunch for free. If you can't answer, you have no lunch." Dok Sahn was very prideful so he responded: "I can answer any question about the Diamond Sutra. I know it all." "I already understand," the sutra master boasts. "OK, you ask me. No problem."

The tea house woman says, "In the Diamond Sutra it says, 'Past mind can't get enlightenment, present mind can't get enlightenment, future mind can't get enlightenment.' With what kind of mind will you eat your lunch?" The sutra master was stumped.

Dok Sahn couldn't answer at all. Suddenly, this great question appeared: "What is this? I don't understand everything." Just like the Buddha, who realized that his whole life had been a lie. Just like me sitting in that classroom, realizing I didn't know what was going on.

Reaching this point is very important in our practice. Because it's at such a moment we truly understand don't know mind. We truly realize great doubt. What is this? If we're really honest, and truly practice, we are able to hold great doubt. We don't hold it like an idea, but as a direction in our life. "I don't understand. What is this?" Not knowing is the heart of our kong-an practice. "What is this?" Who is

it that thinks they know everything? We're all crazy. Why? Because we hold so tightly onto our opinions, our ideas, our feelings, our desires, our anger, trying to hang onto a little bit of security in this very insecure world.

With his great question, the Buddha went off and pursued every spiritual practice that was around at the time. All of them had one major problem: They all believed something. As his practice deepened, he realized that all belief systems were limited. "That's not the way," he decided. "If you believe anything, already you have lost the way."

Eventually, the Buddha just sat down. He sat down for six years. Breathing in, breathing out. What am I? One morning he saw the morning star [*claps*] and realized great enlightenment. What did he see? What do you see in front of you right now? Is that great enlightenment?

The Buddha taught us that everything is already enlightened. Everything is already complete just as it is now. So, like him, we have to use this great question and deep practice of breathing in and breathing out to let go of our ideas, our opinions, our situation—everything.

Breathing in and breathing out. Only let go. Then when everything disappears, the truth is right in front of us. We already have it. It's already all around us. Why make something more? That's the truth of our way. So, any idea, any belief, any understanding, throw it away, open your eyes, and perceive.

Then we say, helping all beings is possible. If you cling to your idea or your belief, helping all beings is not possible. It's tainted by a fixed idea. So, in Zen we say, throw away all ideas, perceive this situation as it is and correct action becomes possible. The correct way is very clear. But, if we cling to something, we lose it.

I'd like to end with a poem written by a very great Zen Master. It's a poem that I use to begin a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. The poem, called "Original Face," is by Zen Master Seung Sahn:

Your true self is always shining and free.
Human beings make something,
and enter the ocean of suffering.
Only without thinking can you return to your true self.
The mountain is always blue.
White clouds coming and going.

Thank you very much.



*Mu Shim Sunim JDPS
Seoul International Zen Center*



Flower Valley Temple

Hwa Gye Sah temple is the home of the Seoul International Zen Center and our school's head temple in Asia. It also functions as a traditional Buddhist temple with resident monks and a large lay congregation. Located in the north-eastern part of Seoul, Hwa Gye Sah sits at the foot of Sam Gak Mountain looking out to the east over the city. Zen Master Seung Sahn says that when he first started going there in the early 50's it would take him the better part of a day to walk from the main train station in downtown Seoul to the temple. Nowadays it's an easy 35-minute ride on the subway from downtown, and then a 15-minute walk up the mountain. The more faint of heart can of course take a taxi or bus up to the temple. As you walk up out of the urban sprawl of this modern city of thirteen million residents, you enter a completely different world. The busy traffic and air pollution are left behind, and you are greeted by the sound of the mountain stream, the calm of the forest and the faint smell of incense... the mind relaxes. Naturally, you bow before the traditional temple buildings.

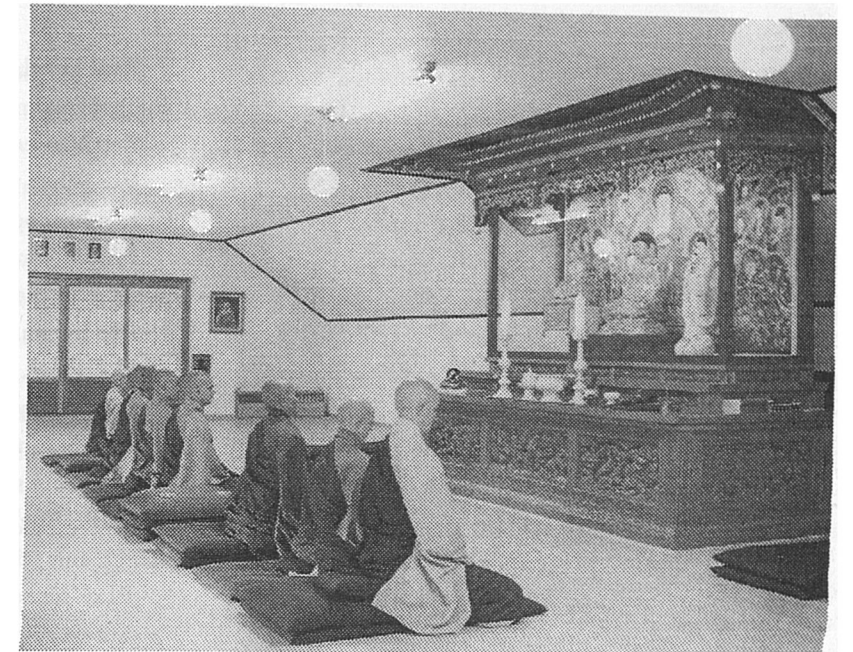
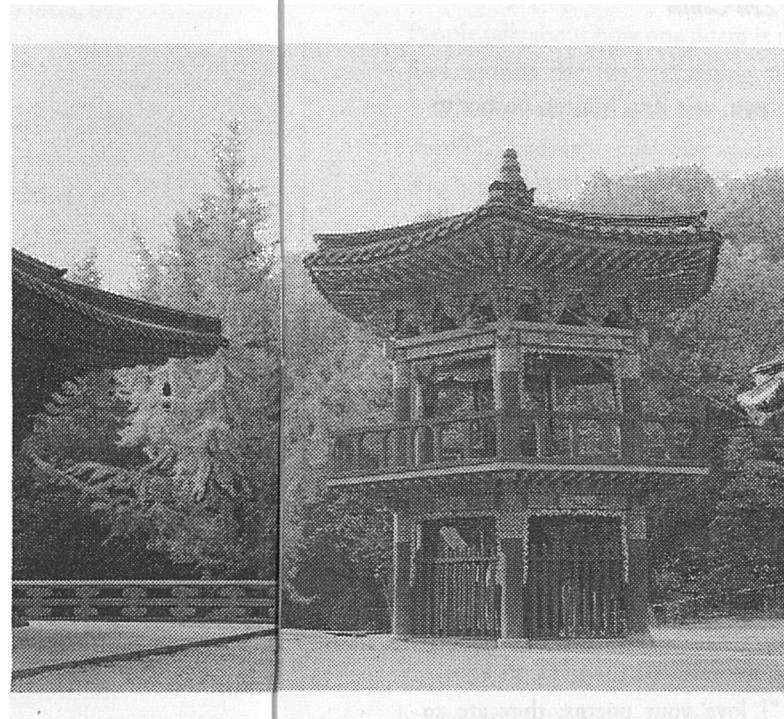
Hwa Gye Sah, meaning "flower valley temple," was first built in 1523 by the monk Shin Wol Sunim during the reign of King Chung-jung (r. 1506-1544). It was destroyed by fire in 1618 and rebuilt in the following years by the Precepts Master Do Wol Sunim. After 240 years the temple became so dilapidated that two monks, Yong-Son and Pom-Un, had it renovated in 1866.

Hwa Gye Sah is famous for its many antiquities. The antique statues of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha (Ji Jang Bosal) and the ten traditional Confucian judges in the Funeral Hall (the Myong Bu Jon in Korean) are especially famous. Carved by the Great Zen Master Nawong in the late Koryo Dynasty, the figures were brought to Hwa Gye Sah in 1877 as a gift by the Queen Mother Cho Dae Bi. After that, the temple served as the worship place for the royal family in Seoul.

Other antiquities of note include the two large incense burners on either side of the Main Buddha Hall, and most interesting are several famous calligraphies made by the



*A view of Hwa Gye Sah
from the Zen Master
Ko Bong memorial;
bell and drum tower;
dharma room at
Seoul International
Zen Center*



governor of Korea who stayed several years at Hwa Gye Sah in the 1890's. It was said that he came to the temple especially because the pure water was very good for treating skin problems from which he suffered greatly. Even today this water—called yak su or medicine water—is one of the big attractions for the people from the neighborhoods below Hwa Gye Sah. Every morning you can see them making a pilgrimage up the mountain with their plastic jugs... Hwa Gye Sah's modern-day version of selling water by the stream.

During the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945), Hwa Gye Sah came under the care of Japanese-style married monks who raised their families in the temple. After the liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945 this trend continued until the Korean War (1950–52), when the temple was occupied at one point by Communist soldiers. It was not until 1958, when Zen Master Seung Sahn became the temple abbot, that the temple was reformed and brought back into the Chogyo Order, the traditional order of celibate monks in Korea.

During his last years Zen Master Seung Sahn's teacher, Zen Master Ko Bong, stayed at Hwa Gye Sah. He was ill and

in need of a place to convalesce. Although Zen Master Ko Bong was a great Zen Master, he had never held a position at any temple or established a temple of his own. This was because he was a complete freedom-style Zen Master who had few dealings with other monks and only taught nuns and lay people. When he became older, Zen Master Ko Bong suffered a stroke. At that time Zen Master Seung Sahn had become abbot of Hwa Gye Sah, and took his teacher to there to live. It is said that despite his advanced age and illness Ko Bong Sunim never forgot his role as Zen Master and teacher.

At one time he was walking across the Hwa Gye Sah yard with our teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn to leave the temple. Ko Bong Sunim took a wrong turn and started walking off towards the woods. Zen Master Seung Sahn gently steered him back in the direction they needed to go, but Ko Bong Sunim only shouted at him, "How dare you correct your teacher, you are just a young monk! Have you no respect?" After a few steps, once again Ko Bong Sunim went off in the wrong direction, and again Zen Master Seung Sahn corrected him. Again, he was scolded by his teacher for helping him, and they continued on in this way several times until they finally reached their destination. In

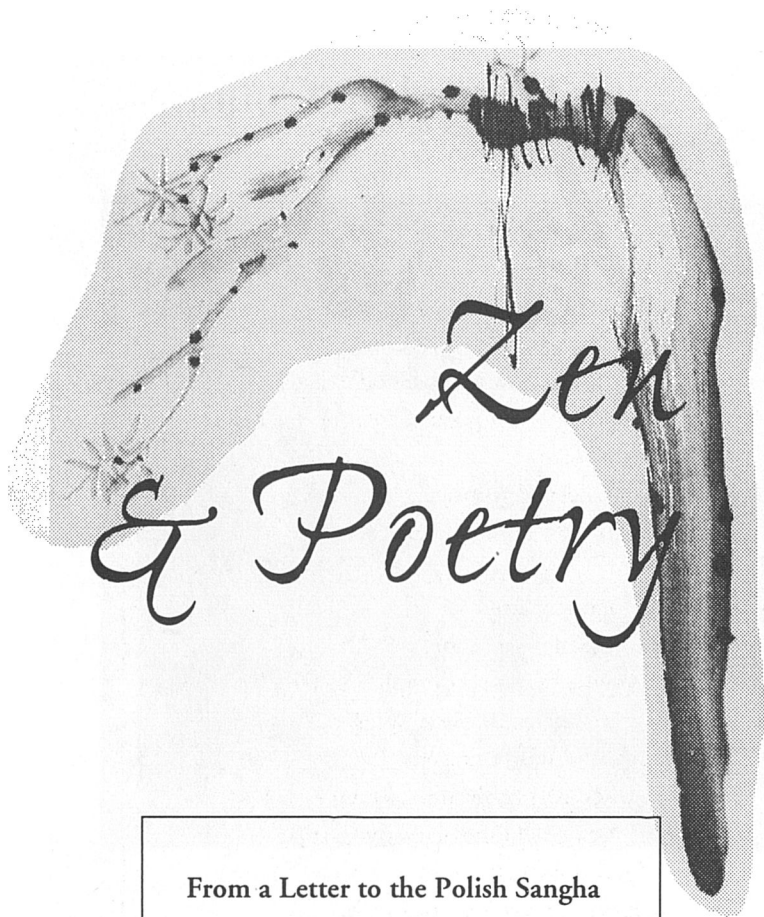
this way, with great love and compassion, Zen Master Seung Sahn helped his teacher in the last few years of his life before he passed away in 1961.

During the time that Zen Master Ko Bong and Zen Master Seung Sahn were staying at Hwa Gye Sah, several other great Zen Masters in Korean Buddhism came there to live. One of them was Hyo Bong Sunim, one of the most famous Zen Masters in recent Korean history and teacher of Ku San (Nine Mountains) Zen Master. Before he became a monk, Hyo Bong Sunim was a judge in Korea during the Japanese occupation. At one time he was asked to sentence one of his fellow Koreans to death for a crime against the Japanese that he felt was unjust. After much agonizing over this judicial decision, he decided to leave his home and judge's position in order to seek the truth. He soon attained enlightenment and taught many disciples.

Other renowned residents during this period were Jeok Um Sunim, Dok Sahn Zen Master, and Chun Seong Sunim, all disciples of the great Zen Master Man Gong. Jeok Um Sunim was teacher of Byok Am Kun Sunim, the head of Shin Won Sah temple, where we hold our three-month winter retreats. Hwa Gye Sah became known at this time as the premier Zen temple. It attracted many lay people

from the Seoul area who sought to practice and learn from the Zen Masters and monks who lived there.

Construction on a new building for the Seoul International Zen Center was begun in 1989 and completed five years later in 1994. In 1995–96, the memorial pagoda area for Zen Master Ko Bong, Zen Master Dok Sahn and Precepts Master Jeok Um was renovated and completed. In 1997 a new temple gate was constructed at the entrance to the temple. Also, in 1996 an arsonist attempted to burn down the building that housed the new Dharma Hall and the Seoul International Zen Center. Fortunately, several monks from the Zen Center discovered the fire and it was soon put out, although not until almost one million dollars of damage to the dharma hall was done. Despite this serious setback, under the continued wise leadership of Zen Master Seung Sahn, Hwa Gye Sah has gone on to become a most active dharma center for both international students and Korean Buddhists, hosting two three-month Kyol Ches a year, and several one-hundred day chanting retreats that are all very well attended. Indeed, one can say that many wonderful flowers have come to bloom in the valley that holds Hwa Gye Sah temple.



From a Letter to the Polish Sangha

November in Warsaw
Fifty people together in one room.
Sitting Zen for three days.

Try mind. Bread
And potatoes and onions.
Fifty people eating together.
Get energy. Find the true way.

What is the true way?
Don't know? Primary point?
Before thinking?
Someone appears. Hits the floor.
WHACK!
But *is that* the true way?

November in Warsaw.
The sky is dark.
Fifty faces are shining.

from *Bone of Space* by
Zen Master Seung Sahn

Paul Lynch, Ocean Eyes Zen Center

An interview at Dharma Zen Center

Paul Lynch: Why do you, as a Zen Master, bother to compose poems?

Zen Master Seung Sahn: For you. *[laughter]*

PL: When you compose your poems, do you actually write using "beautiful language"?

ZMSS: No. This moment appears, then compose a poem. Not checking situations, and not making anything.

PL: In your teaching, you say that people suffer from word sickness, so word medicine is necessary. Would you describe how you use language in your poetry?

ZMSS: Simple! Only whatever situation comes up or appears! Any style of writing is OK. You know, Korean, Japanese, English, any kind of writing, but most importantly, only what appears.

PL: This seems too simple. I love reading your poetry because it allows me to connect to this moment, so what if I was to say to you, "I love your poems; they are so beautiful," what would you say to me in response?

ZMSS: I don't care! *[much laughter]*

PL: Of course. In your teaching you often talk about candy, something that gives us a good feeling. So a Zen Master's words can sometimes be candy and sometimes hooks. Is there candy in your poems? Are there hooks?

ZMSS: Yes, sometimes candy and sometimes hooks appear in my poems, but realize that I don't create candy or hooks in these poems. They are written, with no intention, only for all of my students.

PL: What happens in your mind when you read or hear other peoples' poetry?

ZMSS: I don't check other peoples' poetry. The mind with which I read other's poetry is only a practicing mind, so the meaning appears. Then I only comment.

PL: So, what is the best way to read *your* poems so that I may learn your teaching?

ZMSS: Put it all down, everything! Then my mind and your mind can connect.

PL: That's not so easy. Is poetry Zen? Does true poetry manifest Zen mind?

ZMSS: Zen mind, poetry mind, writing mind, practicing mind, all are not different.

PL: So would you say it is better to write poems or to talk about poems?

ZMSS: If you see clearly, hear clearly, and smell clearly, then everything is clear. So, right now... what appears? People talk about how one poem is this and another poem is something else. This is making something.

PL: So, only read the poem, then [*claps hands*] cut off all thinking, and then only what appears in this moment is all that is necessary?

ZMSS: Yes. It's very simple. For example, in my poetry book *Bone of Space*, when I traveled around Europe, for each city I visited I wrote a poem. If you read these poems you will understand the situation, condition and relationships that existed during that trip—how I connected to each country, each city, and how I understood these cities. Something would appear, and I would make a poem. This is not special; in writing poetry, I only see clearly, hear clearly, smell clearly, and think clearly. My thinking is clear, not checking anything. Just think clearly, then make your poem.

PL: In the west there is a rhyming poetry style, or in Japan there is Haiku, which is limited to 17 syllables. These are poetic structures, but it appears to me that Zen poetry has no structure. Is this correct?

ZMSS: Yes, that is correct.

PL: So, whatever appears we write it down?

ZMSS: Haiku poets only follow Japanese style. This style is very tight and many people are attached to its form. Zen means, don't attach to name and form. Perceive everything. Don't attach to the particular country, people, forms, situations, or conditions—only become one. Then some idea will appear; that's the poem. That's it, OK? My poetry does not make anything. It's the result of seeing clearly, hearing clearly, and thinking clearly.

A long time ago in Japan, there was a well-known region called Matsushima. Matsushima is a place by the ocean, with mountains, rivers, trees, and flowers. Matsushima inspired many beautiful poems. At one time the famous Zen Master and poet named Basho decided to visit. When Basho saw the beauty of this place he wrote this poem:

Matsushima—
ah, Matsushima!
Matsushima!

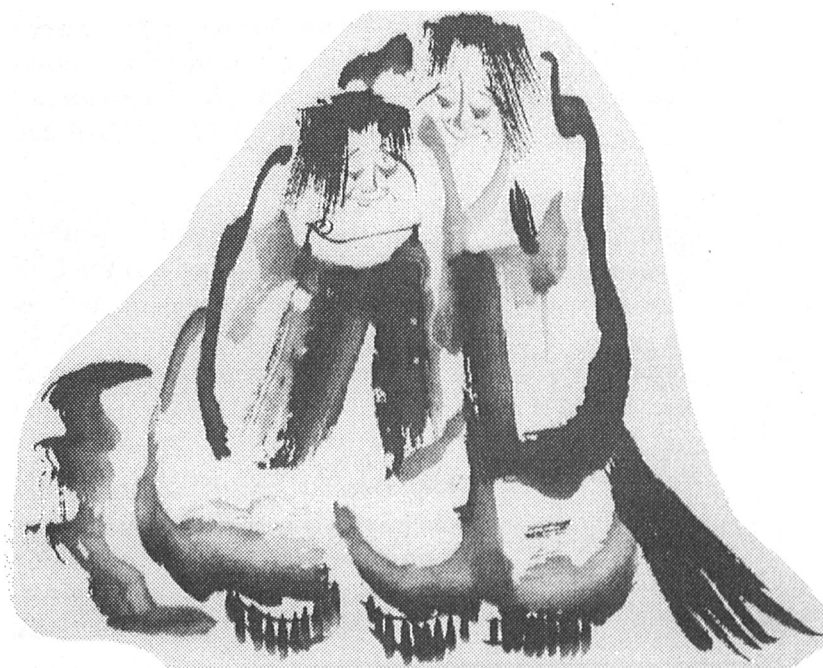
Three clear lines! This is a very famous poem. Only Matsushima is Matsushima—it is very simple. That is the most important point. This is great Zen poetry.

Paris

Many heroes, many kings,
Where did they go?
Old shadow's tight chill.
The hero broke how many skulls?
The king drank how much blood, tears?
High buildings, wide rooms, only for one man.
Samsara is clear:
Sun comes, dew disappears.
Place de la Concorde stained red.

Many original masters
Coming, going—freedom.
Eiffel Tower, l'Arc de Triomphe, Louvre, Versailles,
Stone tiger, ancient obelisk, Winged Victory
Singing a chorus of mirages.
Palace mind deeply, deeply sleeping—
Good times, good times, never wake up.
Shining, shining eastern sky.
Seine River flowing into the ocean.

from *Bone of Space* by
Zen Master Seung Sahn



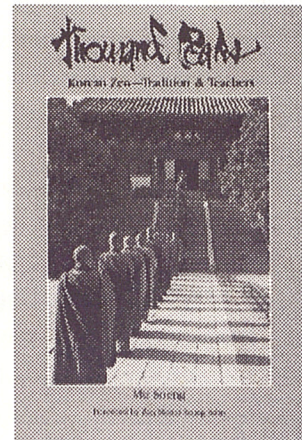
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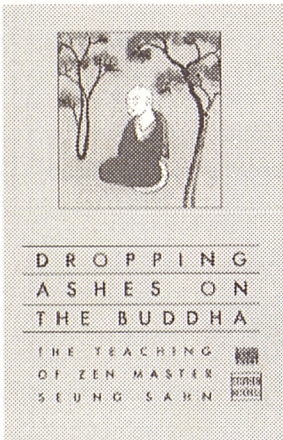


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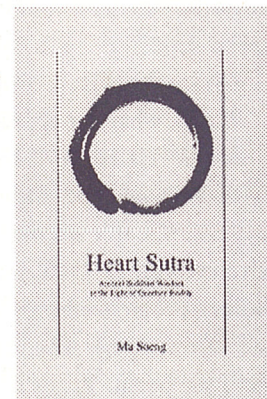


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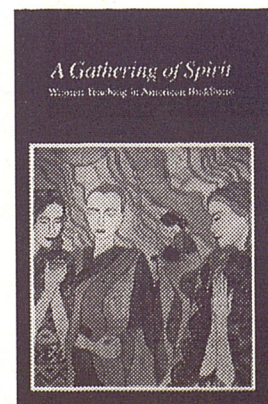
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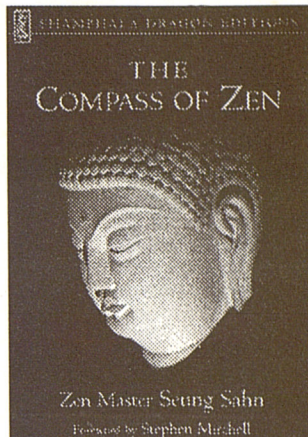
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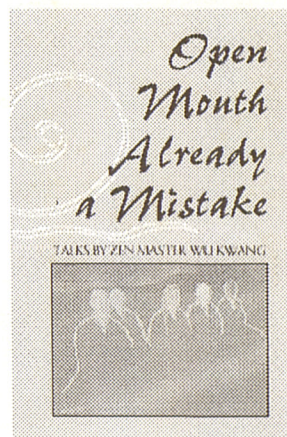
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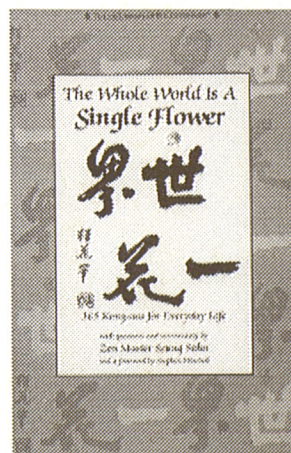
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Judith Roitman

Walking on grass.
Invisible pavement.
Earth revolves around moon.
Leaves grow.

Ink filling well.
Beyond language.
Smoke into water.
In ocean, swim.

Body up or down.
No manifestation.
Elephant fingers
Feet inside socks inside shoes.

Light on bowl.
Perfect.
Cows dance in it.
Soup's gone.

Poetry

Paul Lynch

What Day?

Two days ago we left
yesterday never came
and today is here now.
Past, present and future
all exist in this moment
20 hours of travel
Hong Kong looms
on the horizon.
It's 11 am in Hong Kong
and 6 pm yesterday in Los Angeles

October 2, 1996
KAL Flight 615
Over Hong Kong

Morning Meditation

Between Heaven and Earth
beyond life and death
right here,
in this moment,
breathing in and out
the mystery of life unfolds.
Sitting at dawn
with a room full of friends
the rain beats on the rain.
A dog's nose appears
in the crack in the door.
A sharp pain in my back,
thirty minutes pass.
Everything remains the same

Mark Houghton JDPSN

2539 BIRTHDAYS

OH NO!

Another birthday.

2539 birthdays?

That's ridiculous!

Who can get that?

Is it celebration or depression?

Success or failure?

Riding the winds of change,

Where is there a home for either?

The full spring moon swallows heaven and earth

Shitting golden Buddhas on every altar.

WOW!

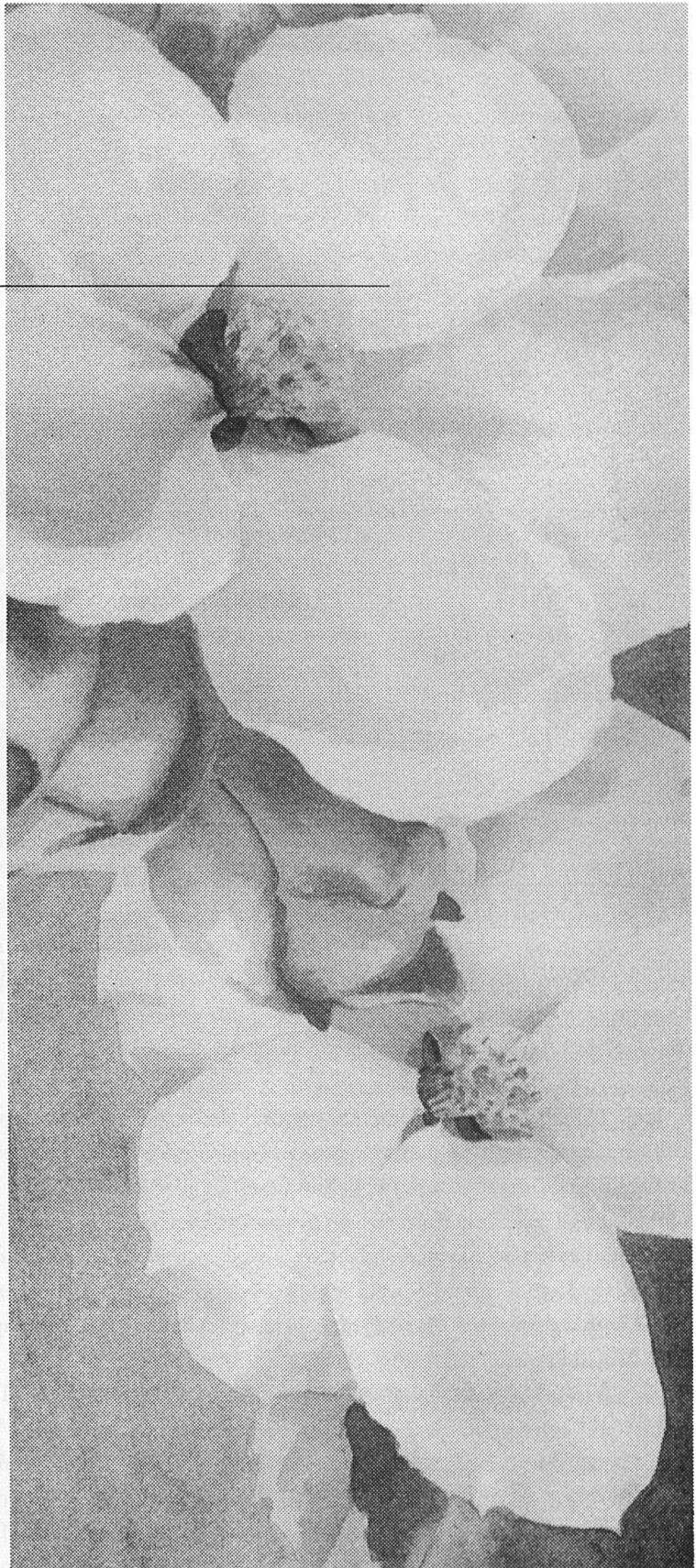
In front of us,

Still golden Buddha

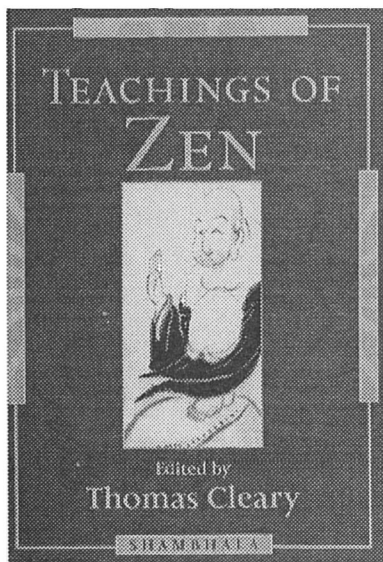
Offers longer days

and warmer nights.

April 8, 1995



BOOK REVIEWS



Teachings of Zen
Compiled and
translated by
Thomas Cleary
Shambhala
Publications,
Boston, 1998

~ ~ ~ Reviewed by Wu Kwang Zen Master

Here is yet another book by the prolific translator Thomas Cleary. Cleary has performed an invaluable service for English-speaking students of Zen, Buddhism, and Chinese culture by making so many ancient texts accessible and available to us.

The job of a translator of Zen writings, is to be able to be true to both the spirit and the letter of the original texts. Of these two, the spirit, vitality and energy of the original is primary. Several years ago, I asked Maezumi Roshi what he thought of Cleary's translation of the great Japanese Soto Zen Master Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*. Maezumi Roshi didn't answer me directly, but said "when Thomas Cleary is good, he's really good." In the current volume, Cleary

brings to life the flavor and character of the Tang and Sung dynasty Chinese Zen tradition, as well as some later teachings. The readings begin and end with Fu Shan-hui (487–569) and end with selections of Yuan-hsien (1618–1697).

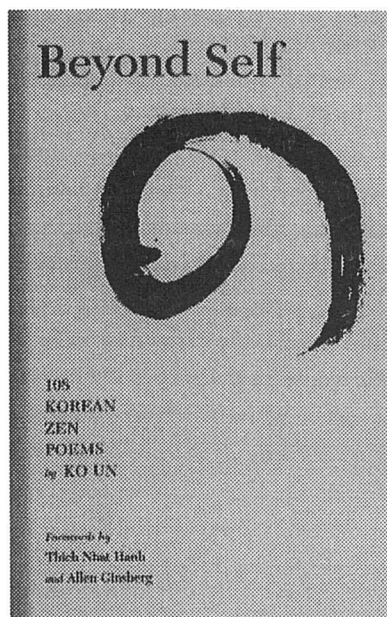
One Christmas a few years ago, my daughter gave me a gift called "the Zen Calendar." It was one of those desktop calendars where you pulled off the page of the preceding day to reveal the current date. Each page had a short saying or paragraph by some Zen Master, or other luminary whose theme seemed to be Zen-like. Cleary's *Teachings of Zen* has a similar feel to it. Most of the selections are one page or less. The longest piece is a translation of Zen Master Ma-Tsu's (709-788), "The Normal Mind Is the Way," which is four and a half pages. Some pages contain no more than three or four sentences, leaving the rest of the page blank. For example, page 43 has Ku-shan's (d. ca. 940) "The Object of Investigation":

Ku-shan was asked, "What is the basic object of investigation?" He replied, "How one has gotten to such a state."

If you are interested in a book that contains short readings of an inspirational or "wake up" quality, then the present volume is to be recommended. Here is another example:

"The Normal Mind"

Chao-chou was asked, "Is a person with a normal mind still to be taught?" Chao-chou said, "I don't go through such a person's door." The questioner asked, "Then wouldn't it be someone sunk into the beyond?" Chao-chou retorted, "A fine 'normal mind'!"



Beyond Self:
108 Korean
Zen Poems
by Ko Un
(translated by
Young-Moo Kim &
Brother Anthony)
 Parallax Press,
 Berkeley, 1997

~~~~~ Reviewed by Judith Roitman

“What could a little pipsquak of an Arhat with his measly fruits possibly have to offer? Around here, even Buddhas and Patriarchs beg for their lives. Where’s he going to hide, with his ‘Hinayana face and Mahayana heart’? At Vimalakirti’s, he couldn’t even get his manhood back. Surely he can’t have forgotten the way he sweated and squirmed?”

Hakuin (tr. Norman Waddell)

“When the children get cranky and whiny  
 I vow with all beings  
 to stop what I’m doing and cuddle  
 and show them I know times are tough.”

Robert Aitken

“Magnolia flowers, I *know* you are there, and that makes me very happy.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

“Wow! You recognized me.”

Ko Un  
 tr: Young-Moo Kim  
 and Brother Anthony

The Korean poet Ko Un has lived a dramatic life, a life marked by severe disruption and suffering, as has been the life of his country. To quote from Alan Ginsberg’s *Foreword*, “A precocious scholar, then conscripted Peoples Army worker, then alms begging monk ten years... then published poet, then temple Head Priest... took off his robes in nihilist despair... headmaster, then prolific writer and drunk, then would-be suicide, then militant nationalist rebel... then detainee & political jailbird,... then at age 50 a husband and father... prisoner... epic poet” and adds “‘Widely acknowledged to be Korea’s foremost contemporary poet,’ according to his translators.” A life made for legend and, as the *Introduction* by Ok-Koo Kang Grosjean makes clear, a life already a legend (“Overwhelmed by the suffering, Ko Un roamed the hills and mountains... Ko Un read the book every night for seven days, deeply moved by its grief and suffering... In his dark cell, he realized the interconnectedness of all beings...”)

A trip to the university library gave me a better perspective. Ko Un is one of Korea’s better known contemporary poets and perhaps its most prolific; “foremost” is a bit of hyperbole. While his life, marked by a period of alcoholism and several serious suicide attempts, has been particularly dramatic, the combination of serious religious practice with political commitment is not unusual. Ko Un is one of many Koreans, including the current President, who have been political prisoners threatened, explicitly or implicitly, with death, and one of many Korean poets (including Chogye order monks) whose work is marked deeply by spiritual practice. While Ko Un himself claims a radical linguistic poetics (see below), the bulk of his work is concerned with returning poetry to the vernacular. Much of it focuses on politics and, especially in recent years, on the lives of ordinary people—in his ongoing project, *Ten Thousand Lives*, he has pledged to write about every person he has ever met in his lifetime.

*Beyond Self* is the second collection of Ko Un’s poetry to be translated by Young-Moo Kim, a professor at Seoul National University, and Brother Anthony Teague, of the monastic Order of Taize and also of Sogang University in Seoul. The first collection, *The Sound of My Waves*, focused largely on political poems and vernacular sketches. Published by the Cornell East Asia Series, it did not sell widely. *Beyond Self* focuses mostly on explicitly Buddhist poems, which tend to be shorter and much tighter than Ko Un’s other work, and, with its forewords by Thich Nhat Hanh

and Allen Ginsberg, is being marketed to a general Buddhist audience.

Is it worth reading? Sure. This is no-bullshit stuff, with a lot of clarity, clearly aimed at waking the reader up. The introductory material and translator's notes focus on Zen (refreshingly called "Son") in Korea, most welcome indeed (but perhaps not entirely fair as a representation of Ko Un's life).

"Wow! You recognized me" is an entire poem (entitled *A shooting star*). Forget the title and stare at the line. It is its own hall of mirrors. Or consider

*A rainbow*

There are such things, straightening clothes

or

*Beyond*

Without you

how can I possibly live?

Most of the poems in this book, unlike the ones I have quoted above, are explicitly immersed in Zen practice and references. Within modern Buddhist poetics it stands clearly in the tradition of classical Ch'an texts.<sup>1</sup>

*Idle talk*

Dharma's father was Hui K'o.

Shen Hsiu and Hui Neng were Hung Jen's fathers.

Shen Hsiu had fun in the palace.

Hui Neng had so many fathers  
that the southern rivers and lakes got dizzy.

A really immoral family!

While the Buddhist references in this poem are more compressed than in most of the poems in the book, its rough language, skewed imagery, and militant stance against piety are typical. Also typical of many of the poems in this book is the way the language turns against itself, cutting against expectation—you were maybe expecting

the word "immortal" in that last line?

But this brings up a small problem. The language Young-Moo Kim and Brother Anthony have chosen is natural and fresh. As English, it reads well—no small achievement. But the puns and near puns make one wonder what is going on in the Korean. The *Translator's notes* focus on explicating the Korean Son tradition, and more power to them, but does not deal with issues like this, except to say the usual things about how impossible translation really is. Something more specific would be welcome.

Ko Un's poetics, as expressed in his *Preface*, lead the American reader to expect something quite different. Ko Un writes, "Son offered the means by which the importance attached to the acts of speaking and writing could be overthrown in a powerful grassroots movement of rejection... Son literature is an intense act of the mind liberated from the established systems of speech and writing, a new and completely unfamiliar system... This vitality underlies the fascinating tensions, the urgency, and the outrageous ellipses that strongly characterize Son poems..."

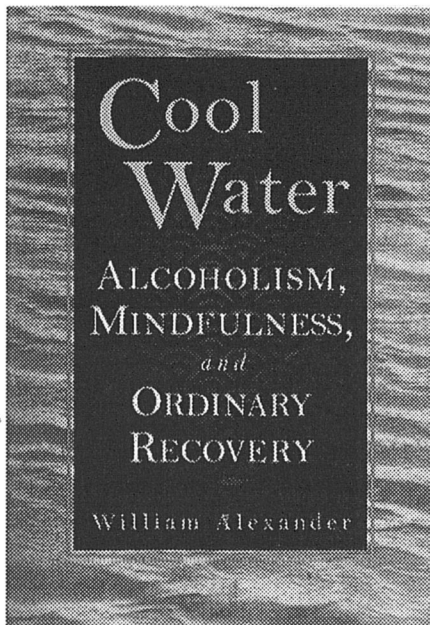
In American poetry, remarks like this would lead the reader to expect grammatical implosion, marked disjuncts, open referents, and the deconstructed self (and this sort of poetic practice can in fact be found in the work of the Korean poet Yi Sang<sup>2</sup>). But to Ko Un, overthrowing the acts of speaking and writing refers to returning to the speech of ordinary people, heightened by the directness of Son practice and the realization, integral to Son Buddhism, that language never quite works.

*Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Walter K. Lew of UCLA for his kind assistance in pointing me in the right directions.*

<sup>1</sup> The first three epigrams were chosen to exemplify other Buddhist poetics, and yes I know Hakuin wasn't writing a poem there, but the excerpt does exemplify a poetics.

<sup>2</sup> Anthologized and easily accessible (tr. Walter Lew) in *Poems for the Millennium*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris. Should the reader be curious about Korean-American poetry, s/he might want to check out the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and of Myung Mi Kim, both of whom are quite influential in the general contemporary American poetry community.





*Cool Water:  
Alcoholism,  
Mindfulness,  
and  
Ordinary  
Recovery*  
by William  
Alexander  
Shambhala  
Publications,  
Boston,  
1997

~~~~~ Reviewed by Tony Somlai

There is a genre of writing aimed at individuals who live at the marginalized edges of society. This type of writing is based on the narrative of illness that is met with great valor. Usually they are autobiographical and present the personal accounts of an individual's ability to overcome some sort of illness or disability. What is problematic with many of these stories is that they continue to focus on a sense of self that triumphs over adversity. Sadly, the voice found in these narratives is that of an author who has become an authority on how to win the battle over human suffering. They present a formula for overcoming the inconvenience of the human condition. While a model of conquering adversity follows rational logic and at first read seems appealing, I can't help but wonder what happens to those people who follow the words of the authority and continue to suffer,

who continue the futile search to find the meaning behind their miserable condition. The concern is that one's narrative of success over suffering does not isolate those who cannot achieve that same narrative's success. While the human experience of suffering doesn't vary much (OUCH!), the perception (what we think) surrounding that suffering does. William Alexander, in his personal narrative *Cool Water*, provides a testimony that points to the original root of human suffering by shattering what we think about recovering from alcoholism.

There are two very striking, and appealing, aspects of Alexander's book that need mentioning. First, this narrative does not ask for pity or sorrow. There are no excuses for the life that William Alexander lived. While he explores this life deeply, he never asks you to become traumatized by his ordeal. This is the story of an ordinary man pointing at a life that is not special. There are no "superheroes" here, and that is refreshing. Second, Alexander is not an authority. Lately there have been a number of books written that "marry" Zen with other approaches. Quite often, these authors fail to mention the direct influence of their Zen teachers. Much to his credit, William Alexander clearly and concisely gives his many teachers the respect of acknowledging their teaching.

Very simply, William Alexander is a recovering alcoholic who has married the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous twelve-step program and the mindfulness tenets of Buddhism into a program called "Ordinary Recovery." His voice is authentic in that he tells us that this book is about his alcoholism and his experience of Zen as he teaches Ordinary Recovery. He makes it clear that he is not a Zen teacher and that he is a "beginner in Zen and in AA" and hopes to always stay that way.

"Mindfulness," in the style of the well-known Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching, is at the center of Ordinary Recovery. To be fully in the present moment is the medicine path given to overcome the "oppressive demands of a national and world culture of increasing materialism, consumerism, and continued violence." What William James, the founder of AA, calls a spiritual awakening, Ordinary Recovery points to as what you are doing right now.

Alcoholism is an acute and chronic black hole of self-involvement that foolishly supports the myth that you can control your dependence. However, there is this constant

gnawing feeling that something is missing. Alcoholism forces continued isolation from the world, it is an energy that stops one's dharma light from shining outward. It suppresses compassion and replaces it with denial and fear. The alcoholic believes the myth of "my life, my situation" to be the truth. Alexander points straight to the heart of the problem when he says that, "the real definition of my alcoholism is that when I drink, my life goes down the toilet. How about you?" Very simple wisdom from a man who has directly experienced it. Alexander has the disease of alcoholism but he is not alcoholism. What is he then? He answers, "So, rather than being either defective because of genes or gin, or perfect because of Buddhism and recovery programs, I discover that I am merely human."

Earlier in this review I referred to Bill Alexander as a recovering alcoholic because that is what my training and experience have brought to me in wanting to describe the frame of reference for this narrative. However, he does not describe himself in this manner. Rather, he believes that recovery ends in a spiritual awakening and that the end of recovery is "the beginning of intimacy." Many people are shopping around for answers to their suffering questions. They will go to many different retreats offered by many different teachers. One day they're Buddhist, the next day they're Taoist, and then the next day they are Sufi masters. This kind of round and round shopping behavior can only lead to more suffering. Alexander finds the same is true for the differentiation between recovering and recovered alco-

holics. He finds that addiction to recovery can become a subtle trap where alcoholism is no longer the addiction but recovery is. He finds that the end of recovery occurs when you realize that you will recover from alcoholism but never be cured. The end of addiction is the beginning of the awareness of addictions that are endless. For Bill Alexander "the process after awakening is about staying awake, a constant round of letting go."

Human beings, by nature, are not invalids or victims of what life has to offer. The Buddha attained this at the moment of his realization that the roots of suffering are contained within our desire, anger and ignorance. Each moment provides another opportunity to explore this intimate attainment of the Buddha. You are not an orphan left to wander on your own, chasing from one delusion to the next. The whole point is to completely digest this life, this human condition, so that your true nature, your true job can be attained. Then the issue of meaning in your life truly becomes meaningless. William Alexander's life narrative points to the effort of simply doing what needs doing. Perhaps if he had never gone down the path of alcoholism and Buddhism he would never have realized how ordinary the whole thing really is. *Cool Water* points to the refreshing possibility of each moment, the opportunity to come back and help others. If you have the opportunity, please read the story of an authentic voice that no longer seeks to be an authority but speaks from the direct experience of a very ordinary life.

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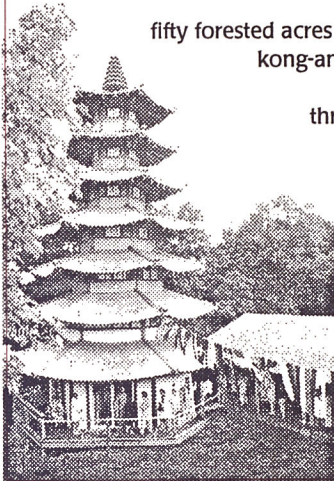
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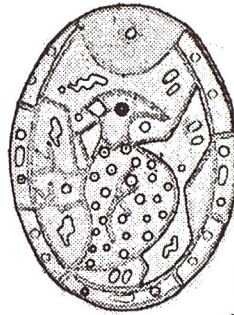
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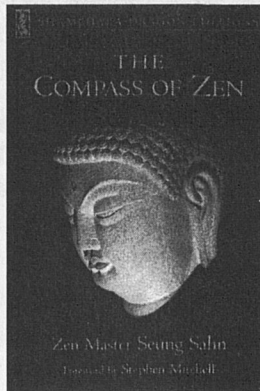
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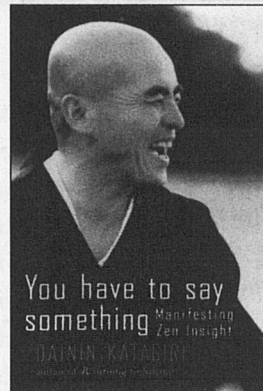
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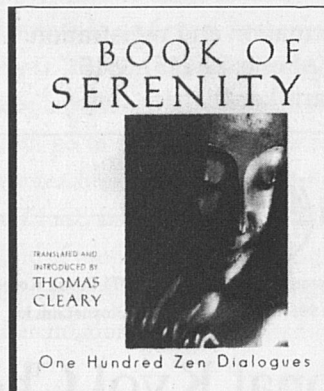
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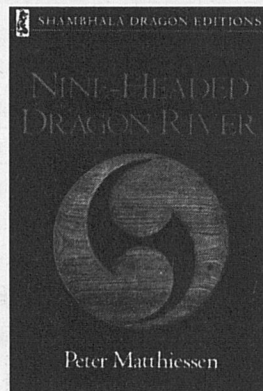
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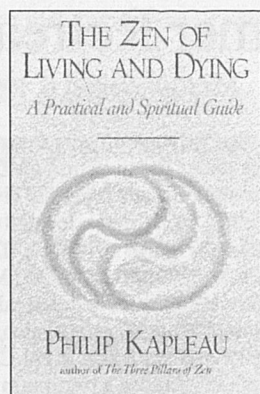


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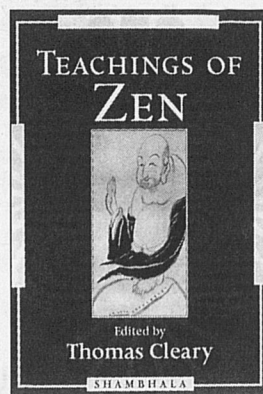
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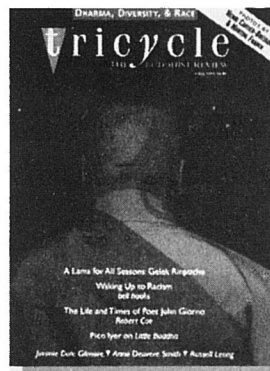
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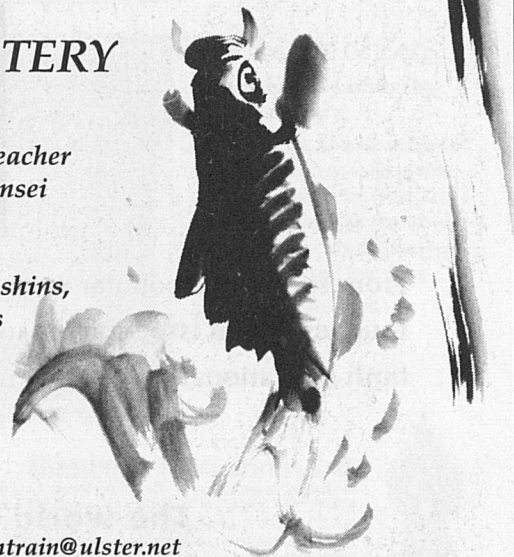
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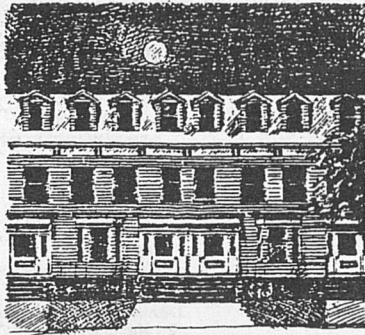
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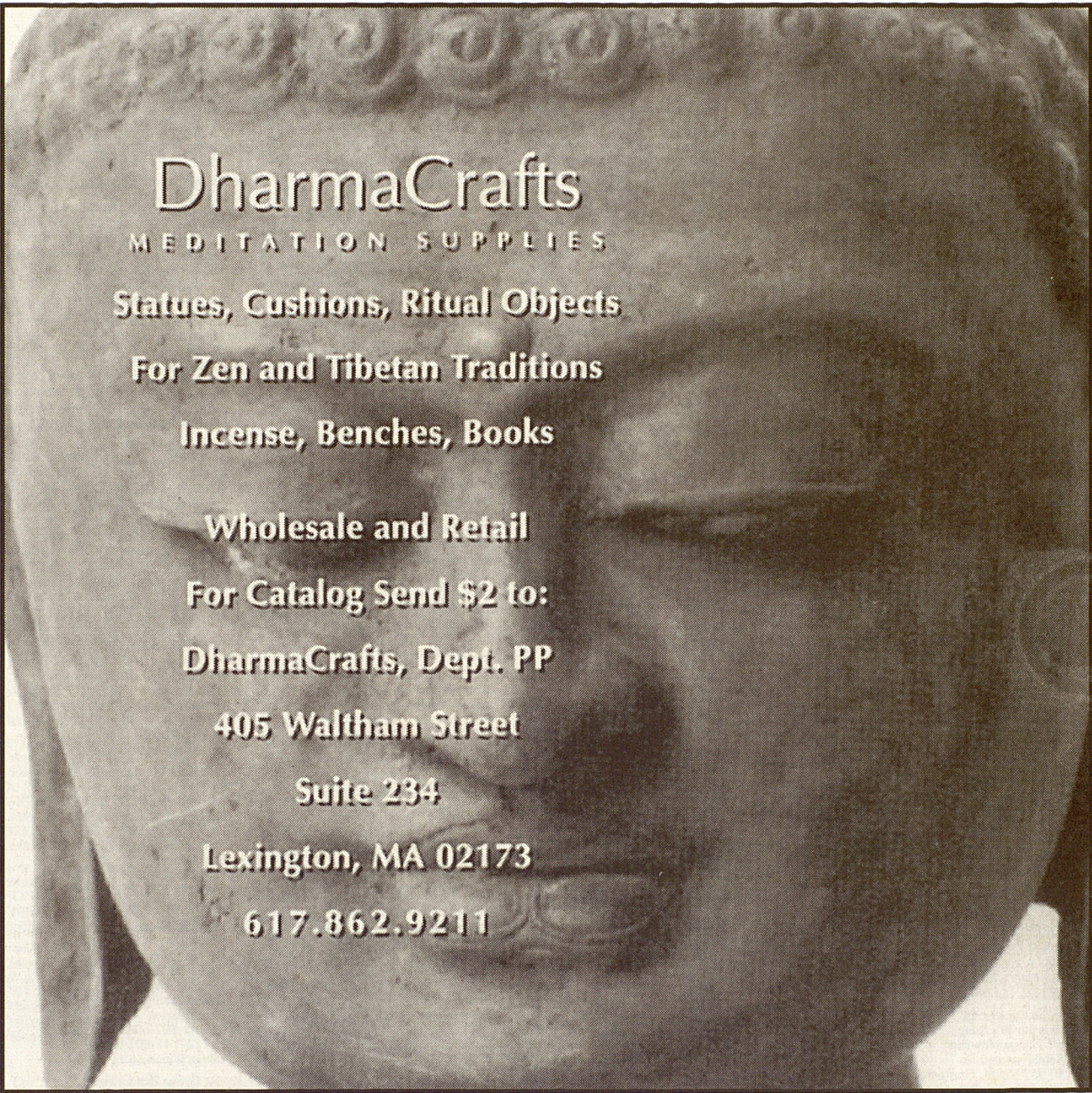
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