

traveling zen

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excerpted from a workshop at the Whole World is a Single Flower Conference

Welcome everybody. We have our workshop in a very busy place here. That is quite good, because we are going to talk about our practice being independent from our outside situation. Traveling Zen—that means being in train stations, airports, different houses and strange places, sometimes not very comfortable places. This is very good practice. I've sat Yong Maeng Jong Jins in a preschool, a music school (with the lessons going on next door), somebody's small apartment, and once even in a cafeteria.

I did most of my training here at Providence Zen Center. It is a very beautiful place. From time to time, like this weekend, it gets very busy. Most of the time it is very quiet here, and it has perfect conditions for practice. Since I've been living in Europe, I've missed this Zen Center a lot. However, when you travel, the practice situation is very different.

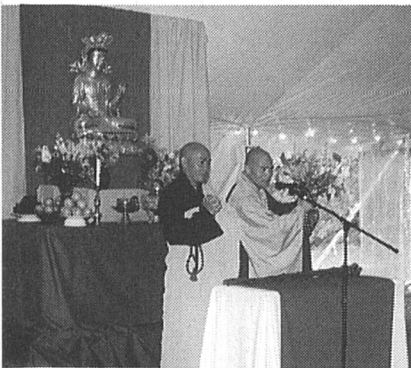
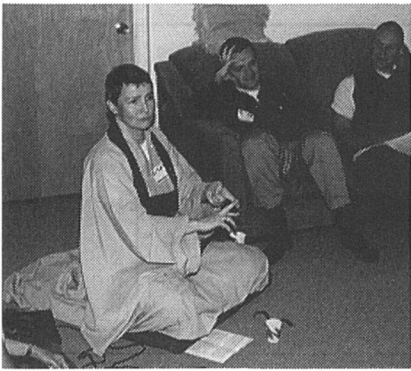
"Traveling around" practice helps us because our everyday life is not quiet and does not have perfect conditions, although we wish it did. Europe is small, but contains many different countries, different cultures, different languages, people with different life experiences, and cities with different architectures. But even so, while traveling, I discover that in the end every sangha is the same!

In my first year of traveling, when I visited the Zen Centers for the first time, I was truly amazed. In Barcelona, I met a girl who looked almost exactly the same, acted almost exactly the same, had the same kind of emotional approach to life as a girl I had met a month earlier in Prague. Then I went to Berlin, and there she was again! This made me think... how does it happen, what does it mean, what is this thing that is the same for everybody? And I'm sure you know it as well as I do.

In the United States there are three main groups: Asians, Africans, and Caucasians. There are differences in skin color, cultural background, education, and the way we were raised in our families. Then when we meet, we connect and understand each other. It can happen only when there is openness. Closed, attached, holding mind can't connect.

An open mind is very beautiful. We call this intuition, acceptance, tolerance, and without thinking, and all of it is truth. This kind of experience is don't know mind, without thinking, and baby-like mind. *[At this point the infant daughter of a Su Bong Zen Monastery student laughed loudly, and everybody laughed.]* As you can see, the baby already understands. This baby has no opinions, is not checking and is not complaining. She has a very simple and open mind.

In the many countries in Europe, not all of the sanghas have a teacher, so the students travel as well. One of the Zen Centers will schedule a Yong Maeng Jong Jin and someone in Austria will say, "Ah! There's a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Budapest! (or Prague! or Bratislava!) Let's go!" And five people go. Very often, during Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Paris, the entire Brussels sangha comes. The same happens with the Cologne and Amsterdam groups. There is a lot of support between groups, and often you see the same people among the Yong Maeng Jong Jin participants. In January there is a retreat in Brussels, in February there is one in Cologne, and in March we will meet in Paris.



Traveling Zen is not only “teachers” traveling, but the whole sangha traveling, and love, compassion, and help traveling!

Student: I had a problem; in New York the Zen center was five blocks from my house, very convenient. I went to Korea and I couldn't practice as much as I was used to. It was so formal, that I didn't feel as comfortable there as on 14th Street. So my practice became very weak. I talked to the teachers about it, and they said this was making a hindrance. Actually it was just a transition.

Perl PSN: Thank you for saying that. It's an important point, because here sits a Chinese woman living in Wales and you're a Westerner who was living in Asia. Here we have different cultures and perhaps culture shock. It's difficult for everybody; that's why it's necessary to look at things from inside. I'm a European and a Westerner. Originally from Poland, I lived a long time in the United States, and then I went back to Europe and live in France. When I went to Asia, it was again very different. In those transitions I experienced many kinds of cultural shocks. But all of it, all of these differences, are only on the outside. It is important to understand that these different cultural situations are not better or worse, they're just different.

Inside we are all just the same. We all want to be happy, we all want to be loved, our stomach calls for food in the very same way. Even outside we are the same: two legs, two arms and one head—Asian person and Westerner, French and Russian, Polish and American. It doesn't matter.

Zen Master Seung Sahn came from Korea and he brought many practice tools—Korean tools—and he gave them to us. As with everything that is happening in our life, it's now up to us how we use them.

You all have these tools, you understand them, and you are using them. The traveling of students and teachers is another tool. You meet many people. Some of them you know quite well, some less well. You might not see somebody for one year, or one month, or a few days. In the meantime, a lot can happen and change. In other words, you have to really put it all down to have a relationship. An artist would prefer to talk with another artist, an engineer with another engineer, a woman with another woman, and a man with a man. We all have our interests, likes, passions and hobbies. But in the end, there are only human beings talking to other human beings. When the dualistic ideas are put down, our true nature connects.

When you enter the Zen center, you say hello, you bow... and that's it. You are already among friends, among family. Immediately there is relationship, friendship, jokes, or serious talk. There is connection. We all already have very strong dharma and karma connections. Thanks to this practice, it manifests itself.

I hope you all will have a chance to come to Europe and participate in some of the retreats, and meet all the dharma friends I have been so lucky to meet. Thank you very much.

