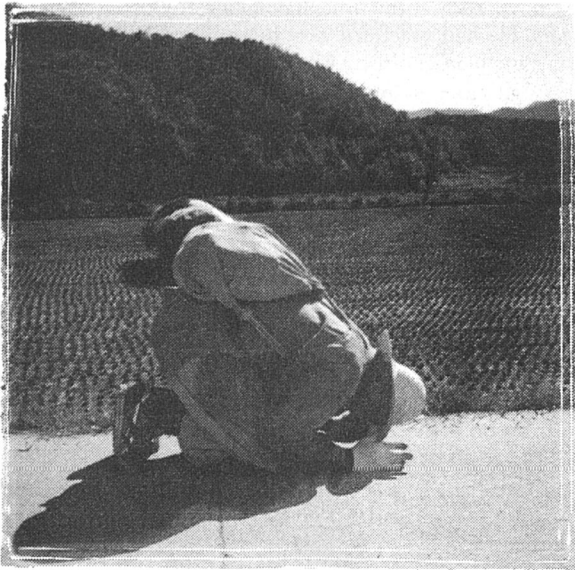


AROUND DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Myong Haeng Sunim, Kye Ryong Sahn International Zen Center/Mu Sang Sa

In October 2000, Dae Soeng Sunim and I completed a three steps, one bow pilgrimage around Kye Ryong Sahn mountain here in Korea. We were inspired by the stories of Chinese monks in the past who had completed such journeys, especially Empty Cloud Zen Master, who bowed over three thousand miles throughout China. And after reading about the pilgrimage completed by two American



monks up the coast of California in the early 1970s, we decided to attempt a similar journey ourselves.

Our initial plan was to bow from the east coast of Korea to the west coast, following the demilitarized zone, for the reunification of the two Koreas. But when we proposed this idea to Zen Master Seung Sahn, he immediately said "Too long!" and suggested we try something shorter in length, about ten days or so. We contemplated many different courses, but eventually chose this route around Kye Ryong Sahn. This would allow us to stay in our own area, circling a mountain long associated with our lineage, and we would be able to begin and end the journey from our new Kye Ryong Sahn International Zen Center/Mu Sang Sa.

We had planned to begin on the full moon of the ninth lunar month, but Dae Soeng Sunim was still in America at that time, so we delayed the start by a day. Incredibly, after arriving back in Korea the evening before, Dae Soeng Sunim was able to start bowing the next morning! After a small

opening ceremony with Zen Master Dae Bong and the rest of our Mu Sang Sa family, we started bowing down the road at about 8:30 on the morning of October 13.

We decided to carry everything we would need on our backs, hoping to find lodging and food along the way. After two hours of bowing it was time for lunch, but we had made it only as far as the Bo Kwang Sik Dang, a



restaurant at the base of the road leading up to Mu Sang Sa, about one and a half kilometers. We were completely exhausted, and after lunch we lay on the floor of the restaurant, contemplating our journey and massaging our already raw and bloody knees.

The knee pads I had been using were especially designed by an elderly Hwa Gye Sa bosalnim for use on this journey, but I had to give them up in favor of the sleek models Dae Soeng Sunim brought back from America. Also, we found that the straps from the knee pads were chopping the backs of our legs, so we decided to wear them on the outside of our pants. Most importantly, I sent back about half of my stuff to Mu Sang Sa, which lightened the load but left only one or two changes of clothing for the trip.

We continued bowing again after lunch but by the evening we had made only about four kilometers. It was slow going, but there was little traffic and the weather and scenery were absolutely stunning. At the end of the day, Myong Do Sunim and Chong Won Sunim were there to

IN FOURTEEN DAYS

meet us with ice cream and bread, which we promptly ate too much of, making us feel sick and bloated. So, we decided to call it a day, and spent the night at a local inn, about ten minutes drive from where we had started in the morning.

The next day was even tougher, as our knees got

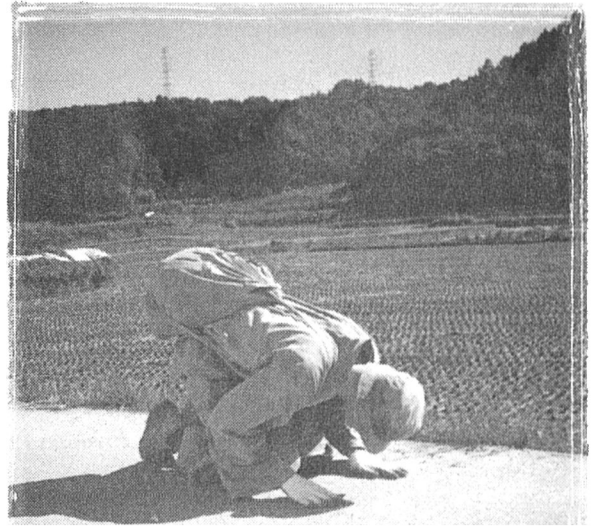


bloodier, and we started bowing first along a rocky dirt road before we were forced onto a three-kilometer stretch of eight-lane highway. Cars and trucks were flying by at 80 km/hr, paying us little heed as we prostrated our bodies by the side of the road, noses in the dirt when we were lucky, broken glass and animal carcasses when we weren't. The worst were the cement truck drivers, who sometimes would pass within inches of our heads as they careened carelessly over the lane dividers, disobeying all of the completely optional Korean traffic laws. But by the end of the second day we were finished with major highways, at least for the moment, and spent the night at the apartment of a Korean Sunim with whom we are friendly.

The next few days we continued along back country roads towards Shin Won Sa. It was rice harvest time, so we passed many farmers and their wives working hard in the fields. They would invariably take interest in what we were doing, sometimes stopping their work to come over and talk to us. A couple of old ladies were moved to tears by our efforts, pulling 1000 won (about 80 cents) from their

pockets, apologizing that they couldn't offer us more. Often it would take us ten or twenty minutes to bow by a particular field, so the farmers would stand by the side of the road, as if watching a road race—for turtles.

On the evening of day four we spent the night at "The Sacred Mother's Village" a Catholic convent which cares



for about 80–90 severely disabled people. The housemaster nun told us that if we wanted to spend the night there we should help take care of some of the residents; so we spent about two hours feeding some young men who couldn't feed themselves. In the morning we attended Mass, wearing our big kasas, and after performing three prostrations to Jesus, we tried to join along with the morning chanting (much to the surprise of the nuns and the French priest, who was saying the mass in Korean.) After a quick breakfast we continued down the road.

That night we experienced the opposite extreme, stopping at what we thought was a Buddhist hermitage, but which turned out to be a training center for shamans and fortune tellers. We were not so welcome, but they gave us a metal container box with sporadic heating to spend the night in. We hastily left before dawn the next morning.

As we progressed further, we started to receive more offerings of food. We had made a rule at the beginning of the trip that we wouldn't refuse any offerings, which turned

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out to be challenging after a while. People would see us coming down the road, go in their houses and prepare a plate of fruit and drinks (there was plenty of time) which they would hand to us as we bowed by. Other people went out of their way to buy bread, cans of fruit juice, soda, milk, etc., and would track us down and offer the goodies. It was always welcome, of course, but sometimes our stomachs were already full, so we would put everything in our bags for later. And then it would happen again. Before long, our bags weighed almost twenty kilograms, so packed full of stuff that we would fall over sideways while trying to bow. We sometimes jokingly called these people “Christian saboteurs,” who were out to stop our efforts to make it around the mountain. To cope with this problem we started giving away most of what we received, usually to little kids or farmers we saw along the way.

One man who we met on the second day of the trip came and found us every day we were bowing, sometimes driving as much as an hour out of his way in his pottery truck to bring us acorn jelly, melon juice, tofu, eggs and other delicacies.

After six days of bowing we had gone 28 kilometers, and had made it as far as Shin Won Sa, which is almost half way around the mountain. We were completely dirty and smelly, knees raw and bloody, and totally exhausted, so we took a day off to recuperate in the hot bath. After bowing to Byok Am Kun Sunim, we continued down the road, making it as far as Kap Sa that night.

And that was the easiest part of the trip. The road became more winding and narrow, sometimes with no shoulder at all, and climbed sharply uphill for many kilometers. The trucks seemed to go by even faster and more recklessly, as if in an effort to see who could come closest without decapitating one of us. We were becoming quite a tourist attraction, with almost everybody slowing down to gawk or wave hello. We were worried we might even cause an accident. Any Buddhist follower who passed us would hapjang, and one admiral and his wife from the local military base actually got out of their cars and did three full prostrations in the dirt in front of us.

We encountered almost no hostility at all, except for one country lady who told us we looked like crazy people bowing down the road like this, and that if we came to her church, Jesus would save us without having to go through all this suffering. We promised to go to her church meeting the next night, but were unable to attend because we were too tired to even move.

The last part of the trip was by far the toughest. In order to avoid a ten-lane expressway, we chose a winding mountain road that took us six kilometers out of the way and about a day to navigate. As we were making our final

approach to Dong Hak Sa, we had our first rain storm of the trip. It started to pour, but we pushed through it and made our goal for the day, bowing for about an hour in the driving rain. People who passed us really thought we were crazy now, completely soaked to the skin, covered in mud, our faces duly planted in whatever pool of water we came to next. Buses that passed would send a shower of water raining down on us, soaking us once again. But strangely enough this was the most peaceful part of the trip for me—Dae Soeng Sunim says not—for the outside conditions were so totally crazy and out of control that you couldn't possibly hold your opinion or like/dislike mind. This kind of checking mind completely disappeared, and it was only rain and wet and three steps, one bow.

We had only two more days to go. That morning it was still raining, but we set off anyway, uphill for almost three hours. Bowing downhill is actually much harder than bowing uphill, so then of course we had to bow downhill for two to three hours. This particular day we had no idea how we would eat lunch. But just at lunch time our loyal friend and supporter appeared with a camping stove and some tofu, so we had a tofu lunch.

That night we slept at a temple in Om Sa Ri, where the resident monk and lay followers had prepared a big dinner in our honor. Luckily we managed to shower and shave before going there, thus preserving U.S./Korean relations. The next morning we began our final approach to Mu Sang Sa. As we bowed through downtown Om Sa we were stopped almost every 10 meters by people offering bread, coffee, etc. By lunch we made it back to the Bo Kwang Sik Dang, and were joined by most of the Mu Sang Sa family for a welcoming meal. After lunch we made the final stretch back to the temple, bowing all the way up the stairs and into our own Buddha hall. What a relief!

If you were to ask me the deep meaning of our trip, I would say “On the west side of Kye Ryong Sahn there are many dead snakes, and on the east side there are many dead frogs.” This practice was much more difficult than either of us expected, but also there were many benefits. Many people who saw us said they received inspiration from the determination it takes to do this kind of practice. One bosalnim told us she was tired of seeing monks who just sat around dressed in starched clothes drinking tea, and not practicing at all. Also, with Mu Sang Sa being a new temple in the area, we did this pilgrimage as a way to help support our family and do what little we can to make this dream of Kye Ryong Sahn International Zen Center a reality.

After thirteen nights, fourteen days on the road, and almost seventy kilometers later, our bodies were broken, but strong. Our minds were clear, though, for after so many days of putting continuous effort towards this kind of practice, a lot of complicated thinking disappeared. So, in the end, it was only three steps, one bow, for you.