

M A N N Y A D V E N T U R E S

It's hard to know what to say exactly. I only go back twenty-nine years so I take no responsibility for the year before that, but I have to take some responsibility for the years after that. Probably the best thing that I can do is tell you some interesting stories about the beginning.

I met Zen Master Seung Sahn when he had been here a year, and some people were starting the Cambridge Zen Center. Because Zen Master Seung Sahn needed to learn English, they signed him up for an "English as a Second Language" class at Harvard. The two people who signed him up were able to leave Providence and go to Cambridge so they could be on their own. They rented a very fancy house in Cambridge, and took Zen Master Seung Sahn there, and he started going to English classes. He would come home every day with assignments, such as going to the supermarket and buying ten vegetables and then writing about it.

My first adventure with him was taking him to the supermarket and buying vegetables, and then helping him write his homework. At that time I didn't realize what that would lead to. If I had known what that was going to lead to, I might not have done that.

In those days he had index cards because he was trying to learn English, so he kept these index cards with him all the time for his vocabulary. Whenever he was riding in a car or going anywhere, he'd take out his cards and try to learn some English. There was a very interesting group of people that showed up in Cambridge that summer. I was friends with some of them because I had been a graduate student at MIT. Jonny Kabat, Larry Rosenberg, and Jack Kornfeld were there, and others who thirty years later are teachers of Buddhism in various traditions. But back then nobody would know that.

We didn't wear robes. We didn't bow to Zen Master Seung Sahn. I went down to Providence, and there was a very interesting crew there: Alban, Zen Master Soeng Hyang, and some guy in the audience who is going to talk later. Alban was the first head dharma teacher. He used to bring a cup of coffee to the dharma room most of the time. He was a student at Brown, and most of the time he wore shorts and a fez, particularly in the winter time in the snow. He and a buddy of his, Nick, would go to school from the Zen Center dressed that way. That was interesting; there were some interesting characters. They'd go down to Manny Almeida's Ringside Lounge, which was right down the street, for a beer after sitting at night.

Every time Zen Master Seung Sahn introduced new things, like asking people to bow to him in the morning, half the people would leave. When he introduced formal meals, he couldn't speak much English. He said we had to buy these bowls and make these cloths and nobody knew what he was talking about. So we went to the store, and we found these black and red plastic bowls. Then he had us make these cloths. It was this big production and we're thinking, "This must be really amazing." The first time he had us eat a formal meal, nobody knew what to do and we're thinking, "What in heaven's name is this guy doing? This does not seem like an improvement on anything." So half the people would leave.

It's really quite amazing that some of us stayed for various reasons. I think I stayed because we did a lot of retreats and had a lot of interviews, and that was wonderful. But another reason I stayed was Zen Master Seung Sahn took me on many adventures. Nowadays we have Zen centers all over the world. You can go sit Kyol Che, you can sit this retreat, that retreat, you can go hear dharma talks, you can get it on cassettes, on CDs, on videos. We didn't have any of that. We just had Zen Master Seung Sahn back then.

We didn't have a lot of people, and some of us he took on adventures with him. My adventures included many very interesting ones, some not so interesting, some very unpleasant. When I think about some of the more interesting ones... I learned how to smuggle \$25,000 into Berlin and put it into a suitcase and get it to a guy who went into Poland and bought a building when Poland was

a communist country. That was very interesting. I didn't realize I needed to learn how to do that, but I did.

I went to Korea on what I thought was a vacation with Zen Master Seung Sahn. He took me to the Korean embassy with him the day before we left Los Angeles. I was used to going with him wherever he went, and people were talking in Korean, and so I didn't know what was going on. I'm sitting in the embassy having a cup of coffee, and he's talking to the ambassador in Korean and they're passing some papers around. Then he gives me this paper which said I was the president of a delegation going to Korea on the reunification of Korea. I don't take any credit for having to do those things. I have a PhD from MIT, which was a great thing in Korea... Korean people love all those things. So I was a very important person to lead this delegation. And I'm looking at this paper and I said, "Soen Sa Nim, what is this?" And he said, "Just sign this paper." And I go, OK.

So I went to Korea and we were on a mountain doing a retreat, and the Korean CIA came and took my passport and Zen Master Seung Sahn's passport and they left. I didn't know if I was going to get it back or what they were going to do to me. Then we went to a very big university and I was supposed to give a talk. I'm up on the stage and there's eight hundred people in the audience who don't speak English. As I look out the window all these buses drive up and these soldiers get out of the buses with rifles and they surround the building. And I have to give a talk in two minutes. I'm going, OK, this is interesting. Many, many things like that.

I lived in Los Angeles for a few years when we started a Zen center there, and all kinds of people would come and sometimes they were famous people and sometimes not. But one person that showed up was Werner Erhardt—I don't know if any of you know of him, but for a couple of years he was a somewhat famous teacher. He had these groups called "est" that you paid a lot of money to attend. I was living in this Korean temple where I was the only American. It was a house in the Wilshire district, and when people rang the doorbell I would answer the door. One of Werner Erhardt's assistants came one day and said he wanted to meet Zen Master Seung Sahn. So we arranged a time and Werner Erhardt came over.

So I'm sitting there with Zen Master Seung Sahn, and Werner Erhardt was there with a couple of his students, and we had tea. And Zen Master Seung Sahn asked Werner Erhardt what he did. Werner Erhardt presented himself to Zen Master Seung Sahn as a teacher of a new age Buddhism. So Zen Master Seung Sahn said, well, "What do you teach?" And I don't remember what Werner Erhardt said but he went on and on about enlightenment and emptiness and this and that. Zen Master Seung Sahn sort of listened to him. After Werner Erhardt got finished, Zen Master Seung Sahn looked at him and said, "What is emptiness?"

So, Werner Erhardt proceeded to give him an explanation of what was emptiness. I don't know what he said, but he went on for a while. Zen Master Seung Sahn waited for him to finish, and then he said, "OK, you ask me, what is emptiness?" So Werner Erhardt said, "OK, what is emptiness?" [Long pause.] Zen Master Seung Sahn didn't do anything. He just sat there.

There was a pause when I did that just now, and then some nervous laughter, because we don't know what to do with that. It was very good teaching to physically be there at that time with someone who knew what to do with that question.

I had a chance to be there for many interesting things like that. After thirty years we have a different situation, because people who come to our school still sit retreats, but don't have quite the opportunity for the adventures that I had. I can honestly say I'm glad I took advantage of it. It was wonderful teaching—all of it. The good and the strange. I've forgotten a lot of it, for good reason. But it's very wonderful to have survived twenty-nine years of it and to still be able to come here and talk about practicing with people, and to see your wonderful faces. Thank you.



18]

[19

Thirtieth Anniversary