



A Korean cultural center; an outdoor market; Kyong Ho Sunim's room at Cheon Jang Sa



Contributors: Zen Master Dae Kwang, Judy Roitman JDPSN, Chong Hae Sunim JDPS, John Holland, Jody Blackwell, and Liatrix Studer

In October of 2002, Kwan Um School of Zen members from around the world gathered in Korea for the triennial Whole World is a Single Flower Conference and tour. The trip to Korea from the west is a long one—16 hours from New York to Seoul. International flights of this length are more than tedious, they're downright soul-numbing. However, they are not without their lighter moments. Zen Master Wu Kwang said that as they were flying over the Kamchecka Peninsula they were experiencing some rough air when the pilot broke in with an announcement, "Even though we are experiencing some turbulence, it would be unwise for us to deviate from our course at this time since we are flying over Russia."

The Whole World is a Single Flower conference was billed as an opportunity to return to the roots of our practice. Of course the roots of our practice are in our own experience of suffering, but still it's a very interesting and sometimes emotional experience to visit the very places where many of the dharma stories we all know so well took place. Zen Master Seung Sahn has always encouraged Zen students to travel. The experience helps widen our minds and deepen our wisdom. This is even more true when you visit a foreign country with a radically different culture and history, like Korea. For many of us the experiences of the trip went far beyond the usual "tourist trip." The landscapes, the buildings, even the tastes and smells resonated deeply within us.

The Whole World conference was kicked off with a ceremony and Korean entertainment at Mu Sang Sa, our new temple in Korea. For many of us it was the first time to see Zen Master Seung Sahn in person. As he entered the meditation hall he was greeted by a spontaneous and emotional standing ovation. In addition to the group of 36 from the United States, Canada, France, and Germany,

there were also representatives from the Hong Kong and Singapore sanghas. We were also honored by the presence of two old friends of Zen Master Seung Sahn's: Byoek Am Kunsunim, the precepts master for the Kwan Um School of Zen, and Noritake Kotoku Roshi, who has temples in Osaka and Kyoto.

The day after the ceremony we embark on a six-day tour visiting temples and hermitages associated with our lineage. Without a doubt the highest point of the trip is our climb up Won Gak Mountain to Bu Yong Am, the hermitage where Zen Master Seung Sahn got enlightenment while chanting the Great Dharani for one hundred days in 1948. Perched high on a cliff above Ma Gok Sa—the temple where Zen Master Ko Bong has his Zen center—Bu Yong Am presents us with a stunning mountain vista. Suddenly, a sense of place overtakes us... we chant the Great Dharani to honor the effort and practice of our teacher. We are no longer tourists but again rooted in the essence of our tradition. We linger there; nobody is in a hurry to leave. We present a gift of chocolates

and cheese to the resident monk. On the way down we come upon the stream where Zen Master Seung Sahn bathed and refreshed himself; we follow it as it threads its way down the mountain. The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song are the great sutras.

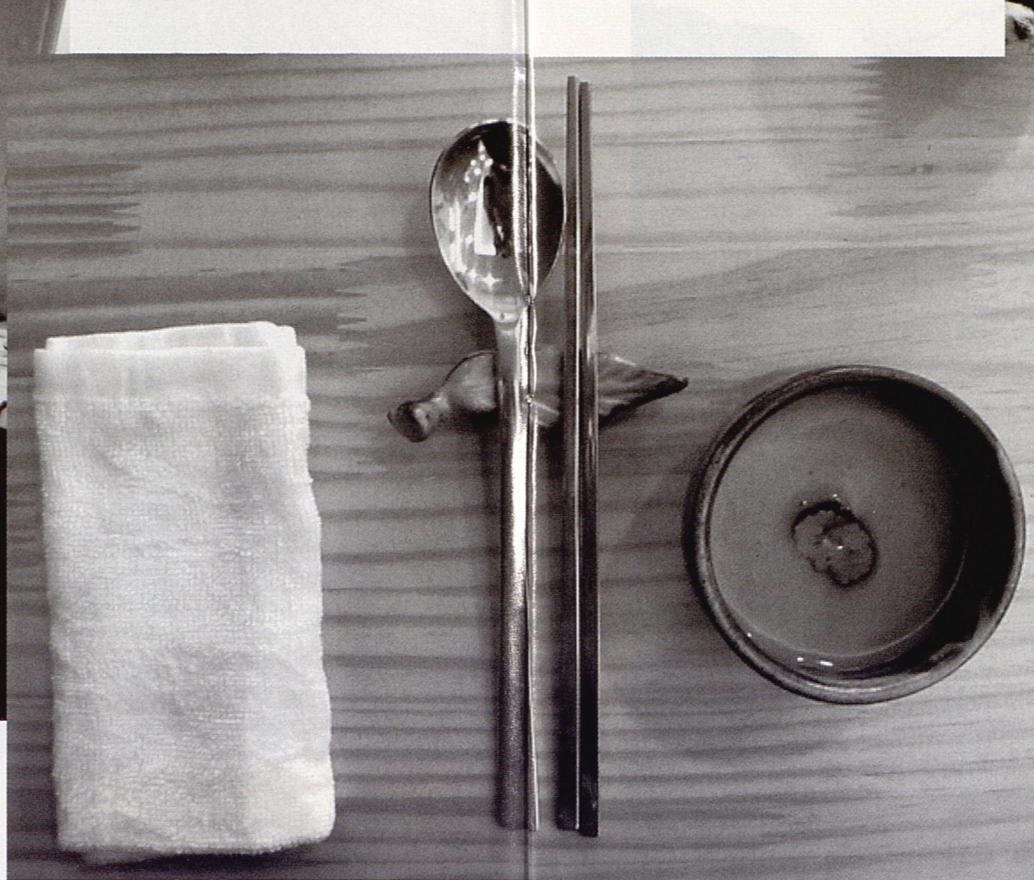
One of the most interesting places we visit is Cheon Jang Sa, the remote mountain temple where Kyong Ho Sunim sent the young thirteen-year-old monk Man Gong for Zen training. This is the same temple where five years later a village boy asked Man Gong the question that was to change his life, "The ten thousand dharmas return to the One... where does the One return?" It is also the region where one of the most compelling Kyong Ho Sunim stories takes place:

Early one fall as Kyong Ho Sunim was climbing into the high mountains for a retreat, he encountered some young men carrying firewood down the mountain. At over six feet tall with a wispy beard and dressed in ragged clothes, Kyong Ho Sunim was quite a striking figure. As the teenagers passed him they stared, poking fun at him: "Sunim, why are you wearing those tattered





Myo Haeng Sunim's restaurant at Daejon



Chanting outside Zen Master Seung Sahn's hermitage

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clothes. Sunim, why don't you cut that beard, it is too long!"

Kyong Ho Sunim stopped and said, "OK, OK, but I'll make a bet with you guys—if you can hit me with one of those sticks you can have all my clothes, my food and my money. If you can't hit me then you will go on about your way and not say anything about me."

The boys jumped at the chance: "It's a deal! We can hit you easy." Then the boldest of the boys removed the load of firewood from his back, drew out a stick and hit Kyong Ho Sunim.

Immediately Kyong Ho Sunim said, "You didn't hit me." The young man hit him again. Again he said, "You didn't hit me."

At this the young men became quite angry at being cheated and started hitting him repeatedly saying, "Yes we can! Yes we can!" Finally they pummeled Kyong Ho Sunim to the ground. "We hit you, so give us your money and food. You can't cheat us."

As Kyong Ho Sunim struggled to his feet he said, "OK, you can have my things." After settling up, he turned and walked away. After a few steps he turned and said, "But you didn't hit me!"

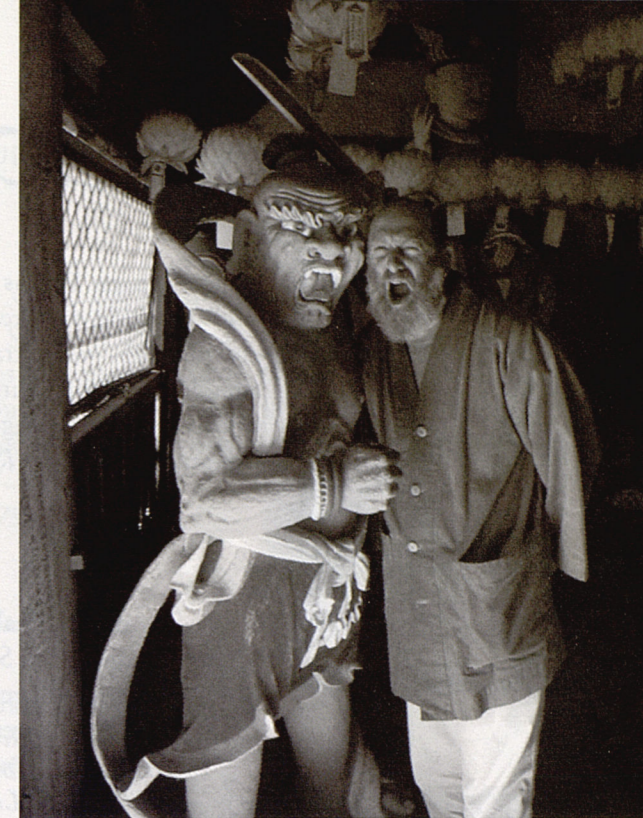
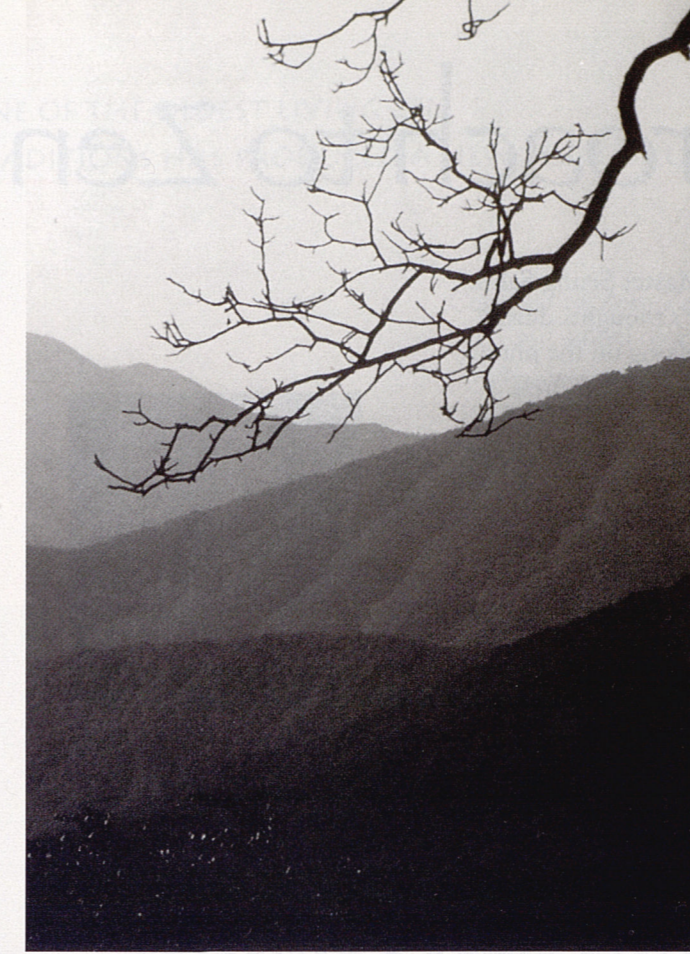
Next we visit a famous hermitage associated with Zen Master Man Gong, Ganwoldo, on an island near Yeunpo. It was established by Zen Master Muhak in 1376 and is separated from the mainland at high tide. Looking out to sea from this tranquil spot, we enjoy a beautiful sunset. The Yellow Sea here reminds us of the famous "Moving Mountains, Moving Boat" kong-an, in which Man Gong took a boat ride with his students. At first there is water covering the sandbar that leads to the temple and we don't think that we can cross over, but an intrepid Korean woman from our party removes her shoes, hikes her skirt, and wades across to enthusiastic applause. As the tide ebbs, we follow her. Like so many pilgrims before, we

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wait outside the temple's iron gate. The temple dogs do their job by barking at us while the resident monk slowly rings the temple bell thirty-three times to announce the beginning of evening chanting. What can we do? Before us is an impassable gate and behind us the sea is lapping at our heels. As the bell stops we tentatively call out, "Yo bo se yo! Hello!" Realizing that we are not the usual rowdy tourist, the monk lets us in. After he regales us with stories of recent tsunamis and ancient temple lore, we retreat back across the sandbar. On the mainland, we notice a cardboard box containing the remains of small candles—undoubtedly left behind by a shaman praying for the safe return of local fishermen.

After spending several days traveling around the Dok Sahn Mountain area, we head south about 100 miles to Un Mun Sa. This temple, located on Tiger Mountain, was established in the year 560. Recently Master Beak Pa (1767–1852), who created the distinction between Patriarchal, Tathagata, and Rational Zen, resided here. Since 1958, Un Mun Sa has served as the largest training center for nuns in Korea. About 250 bhikkunis follow a three- to five-year course at the sutra school.

After a temple tour, one of the older nuns invites us to tea. As we are chatting, she suddenly gets a girlish twinkle in her eye and shares with us a story from her early days as a novice. It is always difficult for recent initiates to get up at 3:00 am, especially in the winter. They usually straggle into the chanting hall at the last minute with puffy eyes and yawns. In order to "inspire" them, the proctor would sometimes sneak around early and fill their rubber shoes with water. Of course, the water would rapidly form a thin layer of ice. Stepping into those shoes was quite a surprise! Everyone was wide-awake for chanting on those mornings.



Causeway to Ganwoldo island

[left] View from Zen Master Seung Sahn's hermitage;
[above] Zen Master Bon Soeng and a temple guardian

Reflection on Un Mun Sa: Jody Blackwell, Cambridge Zen Center

One of my vivid memories of the Korea trip was our 3:00 am trek to Un Mun Sa temple, near the southeastern Korean coast, to join the nuns for their morning chanting. My trip up to that point had been fraught with gadgets, among which was a minidisc recorder I had brought for sampling "Korean noises," whatever that meant. Sightseeing had become a dizzying cycle of suspense, wonder, delight, and then frantic documentation with the camera and recorder, often ending in self-flagellation.

When we arrived at Un Mun Sa in the surreal stillness of pre-dawn, my breath was at once taken away by the melancholy GONG of the morning temple bell and its deep, rich overtones. Again I madly scrambled for my recorder as if I had just discovered Elvis alive. But as we entered the Buddha hall, the dim candlelight betrayed a "Low Battery" message on the recorder. My heart sank. Anytime but now! A painful desire to capture the audio landscape unfolding before me was now a lost chance; all I could do was bear witness to events passing too rapidly for even my mind to grasp.

The voices of the nuns were surprisingly low and robust. As they, and we, sang the Great Dharani, waves of harmony would roll and break through the room like an ocean tide. It was so beautiful that I had to stop chanting for the lump in my throat, knowing that the experience was mine only for a moment. Coming empty-handed, going empty handed. I hear that over and over, but listening to the nuns at Un Mun Sa, I understood just how deep my clinging, keeping, holding karma was. Walking through the temple grounds at sunrise, without my camera (I had also run out of film), I was incredibly sad to have lost the illusion that I could preserve that morning. I was also grateful that I'd been given that teaching in such an unforgettable place.

Afterward: Judy Roitman JDPSN

I was overwhelmed by the beauty and power of the Korean landscape — mountains everywhere, the sea, rice fields tucked into every conceivable corner, crystalline streams, rocks tumbling on rocks, stone steps built patiently over years. The strong emotional connection to those places where our teachers and ancestors have practiced. Chanting outside Zen Master Seung Sahn's hermitage—thank you, Tamar, for suggesting this! The incredible privilege of being in those places where Zen Master Kyong Ho, Zen Master Man Gong, Zen Master Ko Bong, and Zen Master Seung Sahn taught and practiced. ☸