

GREAT HERO HALL

Mu Shim Sunim JDPS

For the last two years here at Mu Sang Sah Temple we have been in the midst of an intense project, construction of our new Buddha Hall. Our campus consists of two large buildings which support our ninety-day biannual retreats and now a new Buddha Hall. The shell of the building was finished last November (2003), then the inner work, including the three altars, altar canopies, and Buddhist paintings, took an additional six months to complete. Finally, everything was ready for the Grand Opening Ceremony held on Saturday, May 15, 2004.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's vision was that this hall should be built in a traditional and grand style. Although our other buildings are structural concrete, it was decided early on that a traditional wooden hall was needed as our crowning glory. A traditional wooden structure can last well over a thousand years (the one at Su Dok Sah was built in 1308) and also resonates a feeling which only wood can provide.

Building a Buddha Hall of this scale in Korea requires the interest and help of many people. Zen Master Seung Sahn, our sangha brothers and sisters, and many, many dharma friends contributed generously to help with the construction, sometimes under difficult circumstances. During that time at Mu Sang Sah Temple, we continued to hold Kyol Che and also did extra kido chanting to encourage the workers and others to make a great Buddha Hall.

Almost all the wood for the new Buddha Hall had to be imported from Canada or Alaska because nowadays Korea

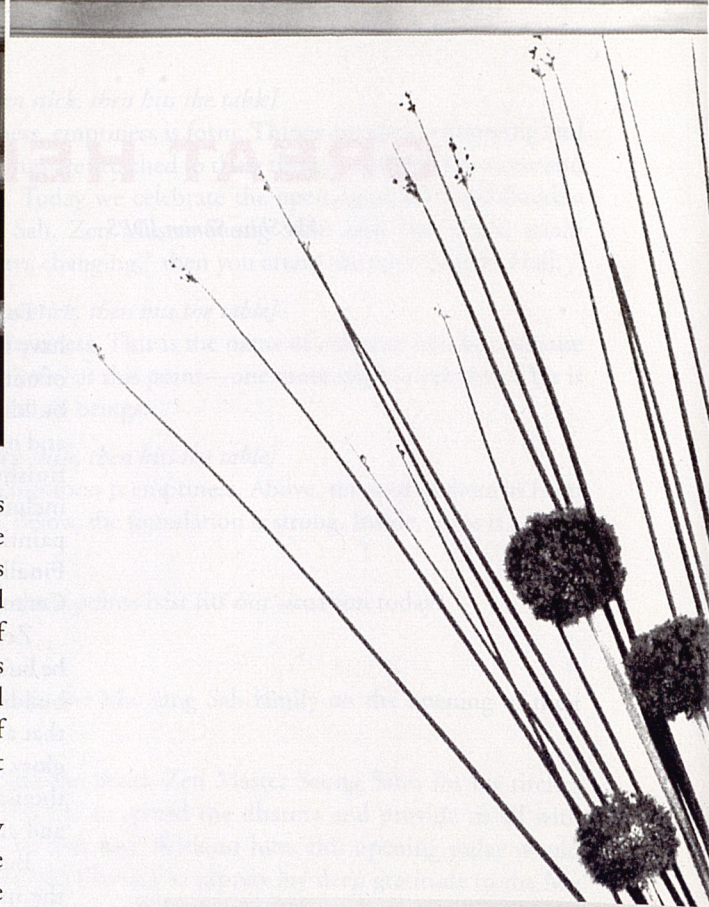


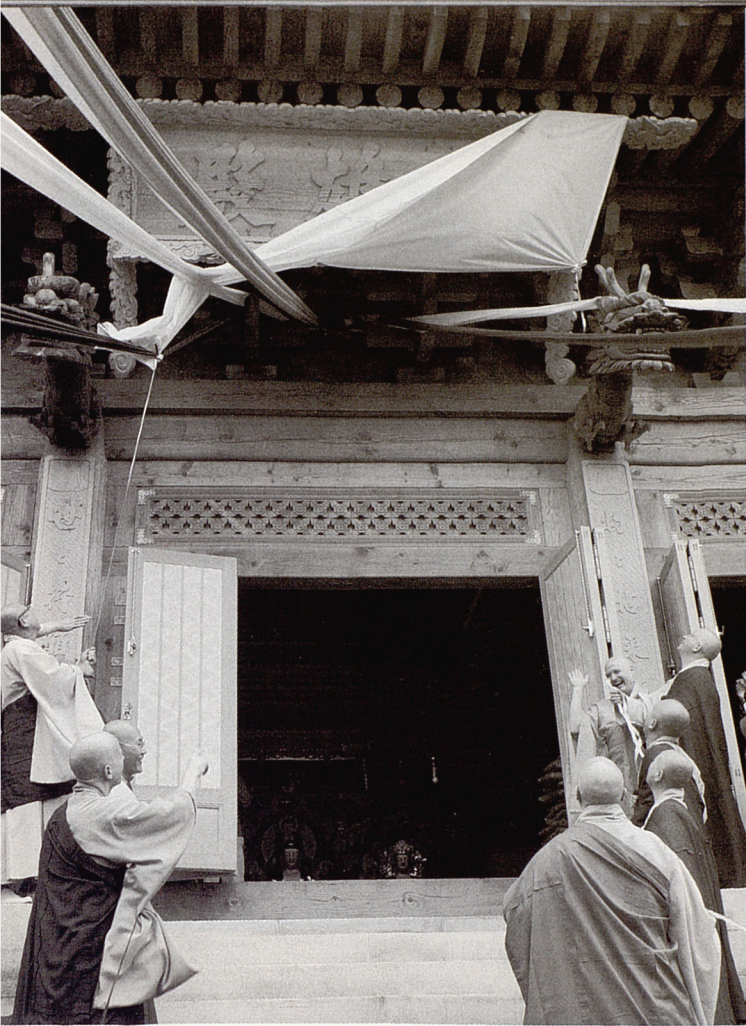


does not have any trees of the size that can be readily used for the columns and the big beams that are central to the construction. The wood for the beams, columns and floor is Douglas fir, and the wood for the roof rafters is red pine from Korea. The beams were intricately carved and interlocked in such a way that no nails were used during the construction. The roof tiles are pure copper and last much longer than a traditional tile roof. As they age they acquire a green patina which gives a quite interesting visual effect. Each end of the main roof ridge is capped with a dragon head of cast copper. In addition, there are six carved wood dragons above the front doors symbolizing long life and prosperity for the temple.

Entry to the hall is through one of twelve wooden doors, each elaborately carved with different lotus flower designs. Made of red pine, they are massive and feature large brass fittings. From the inside looking out, these same doors have a simple rice paper appearance quite different than from the outside. This signifies that once you are inside the Buddha hall, you leave behind the worldly realm and enter the utter simplicity of the sublime.

The main altar, which has three levels, is dominated by a large gold statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. To the Buddha's right is Manjushri





Bodhisattva, Dae Ji Munsu Sari Bosal, and on the left is Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Dae Haeng Bo Hyon Bosal. These two bodhisattvas are cast of solid bronze with gold gilding, and represent Great Wisdom and Great Action. On the right-hand wall, as you face the main altar, is the altar for Hwa Om Shin Jung, the Army God, leader of all those who protect the dharma. On the left wall is the altar dedicated to those who have recently passed away. This altar represents the Pure Land of Amita Buddha, and is used for memorial services.

The back-drop for each altar is a Buddhist painting (taengwha) filled with various scenes relating to its function. The taengwhas were done in the Koryo dynasty style. The main altar, made of red pine, has elaborate carvings showing the six realms, and a large elephant and lion, which are the animals traditionally ridden by Samantabhadra and Manjushiri Bodhisattvas. Hanging above the main Buddha are two dragons fighting over a magic ball, representing transcendental wisdom. On the ceiling, twenty-five feet above the floor, is a frieze of four carved dragons. The overall effect is one of awe and sublime inspiration.

Over the main entrance is a large carved calligraphy which reads, Dae Un Jon or "Great Hero Hall." On each of the six columns in the front are calligraphy signboards



which have teaching words from the morning bell chant sutra and Zen Masters for all those who enter to read—they say:

The blue mountain of many ridges is the Buddha's original home.
The vast ocean of many waves is the palace of stillness.
Be with all beings without any hindrance.
Life after life vowing to save all beings.
Kye Ryong Mountain has Guksa (National Teacher) Bong Peak.
No low, no high through the ten directions.

Please feel welcome to visit our temple at Mu Sang Sah and experience this spectacular Buddha Hall for yourself. ☸

