

patience is not enough

IN MEMORY OF BYOK AM SUNIM

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I had the good fortune of meeting Byok Am Kun Sunim at Shin Won Sah in Korea in 1998. He was living at the temple and I was there for ninety days sitting Kyol Che, so I crossed paths with him many times during my stay—on the temple grounds as well as in the dharma room. I have so many fond memories of him from that short stay that it's hard to pick one or two to share! My most vivid memories are from his visits during intensive week, when he sat with us for a couple of hours every evening and gave us wonderful dharma talks. His relationship with Zen Master Seung Sahn was clear to all of us. Even with Zen Master Seung Sahn miles away in Seoul, Byok Am Kun Sunim took all of us under his wing and treated us like family while we were there. I had heard stories about what a stern old master he was, and had been warned to be on my best behavior whenever I crossed his path, but my experience of Byok Am Kun Sunim was warm and welcoming and often humorous. He shared his own experience in a way that a grandfather might. One night he gave a short talk about endurance and patience. I don't remember the details of his talk but I do remember him telling us that this was the meaning of life, and that old people understand this. He also made a point to tell us that patience is not enough—that you must try, try, try. Every talk he gave us he made a huge point of the importance of trying. One day he brought us a cake from Zen Master Seung Sahn that he carried back from Seoul. He told us that when Zen Master Seung Sahn asked him if he would mind taking it to us, he told Zen Master Seung Sahn, "I can hardly carry this body back!" But then he said, "OK, since they're practicing so hard I will." When he finished this story, he laughed along with the rest of us. I'll never forget how one night he talked about habit, and told us that until ten years earlier he had forgotten how to laugh, and that this was just a habit. It was almost unbelievable that the warm and entertaining man in front of us was talking about himself! He said it took a lot of time and effort to change this habit, but clearly he could laugh again! The picture I still have of him in my mind's eye is of his smiling face. ☸

