

A Prayer

*The suffering of Cambodia
has been deep.*

*From this suffering
comes Great Compassion.*

*Great Compassion
makes a Peaceful Heart.*

*A Peaceful Heart
makes a Peaceful Person.*

*A Peaceful Person
makes a Peaceful Family.*

*A Peaceful Family
makes a Peaceful Community.*

*A Peaceful Community
makes a Peaceful Nation.*

*And a Peaceful Nation
makes a Peaceful World.*

*May all beings
live in Happiness and Peace.*

—Ven. Maha Ghosananda

The Dalai Lama's Teacher

Bruce Blair

I once accompanied Maha Ghosananda on his return from a visit to the Dalai Lama. I asked him how I should respond to queries concerning his whereabouts. He replied simply, “Only say, ‘Don’t know!’”

After leaving the solitary life of a forest monk, Maha Ghosananda had for decades made it his practice to travel alone. Whether he was teaching in refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border, leading his historic Dhammayietra peace walks across his devastated homeland of Cambodia, or being an ambassador of peace and reconciliation around the world, he would always travel between events unaccompanied.

To those of us responsible for tracking his travels, he seemed to be practicing a veritable art of appearing and disappearing. One day he’d be at the Vatican lifting the Pope off the ground in a warm embrace. Next he would appear at the United Nations in New York. Another day, he would be breaking bread with a Catholic priest in Chiapas, and the next, he would be in South Africa, sharing the podium with Nelson Mandela.

Several times nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Maha Ghosananda for decades wandered the world by himself. Only with the onset of old age did he allow people to accompany him on his travels.

As a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn, Maha Ghosananda's dear friend, I had the privilege of helping him many times. Recently, an event occurred which made me question the appropriateness of my behavior as his attendant. Out of respect for the monk's safety, I had become very good at giving guarded answers about his whereabouts and plans. Many times I found it necessary to be less than polite in response to these queries; this made me feel very uncomfortable.

Looking for counsel, I recounted to Maha Ghosananda how, the day before, the Dalai Lama had very directly asked me where he was staying. I had, without thinking, replied in my customary manner: "At a temple in the woods." I looked at Maha Ghosananda and said, "How silly I have been. Even with your dear friend the Dalai Lama, I acted like a guard dog, and evaded the question about where you were staying."

Maha Ghosananda's eyes twinkled.

In a perfect imitation of Zen Master Seung Sahn's voice, he said, "When Dalai Lama ask where I come from, only say, 'DON'T KNOW!' Then you become the Dalai Lama's teacher." We both laughed with delight. ☸

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