

Someone once asked me what the Kwan Um School was actually like, and I said, “Look around.” One time David Klinger, who’s an old student here, and I were talking about the school and I asked him, “What’s our school really like?” He said, “What are you doing now?” Those are interesting teaching ideas about what a school is and, of course, they point to what it really is, but that’s for a dharma talk. So, even though you already understand, I’ll say a few more words.

When Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who brought Zen from India to China, gave transmission to his top student, Hui Ko, he gave him a picture of himself, and a sutra. Inside the book was a poem which said, “Originally I came to this land to transmit the Dharma and to save all beings. A flower with five petals will open and by itself the fruit will ripen.” This is Zen talk which means that in China five schools would appear, which did happen.

So now it’s 1,500 years later and you can see, today, how ripe the fruit is. Of those five schools, three disappeared almost immediately—one didn’t even last one generation. Two of them, though, are still in existence today, the Lin-chi School and the Tsao Tung School. Also, where Bodhidharma came from, there were many schools. If you read about traditional Buddhism in South Asia you’ll know there are and were many schools. There’s the Theravadins, the Sarvāstivādins... many of them. There were probably also different meditation-style schools, but we don’t know much about them. What we do know about is Bodhidharma’s transmission to China and then our inheritance of this teaching tradition.

All of these teaching traditions can be called schools. They also are usually associated with some kind of organizational principal. Our school was founded by Zen Master Seung Sahn, who “came to the West” in 1972. He came to transmit the dharma and save all beings.

Interestingly, he only had a single flower and it only had one petal on it... that’s us! We owe an incredible debt of gratitude to him for all that he’s given us. He gave us a very clear teaching style. And, over the years, he also was able to organize us to perpetuate our dharma and allow it to spread. Over the years, things developed. It started out very small, just a few people in an apartment, and then it got bigger, and now, this morning, we had all these people giving talks from Zen Centers all around the world.

If you go out into the woods you will see that there are many kinds of animals, but there’s one thing that they all have in common, they all have a head, they have a body and they have a tail. Even we had a tail, originally. Very important for animals to function, then, is to have at least these two parts, the head and the body. Zen Master Seung Sahn established our school so well that we are here today, the body, but he also set up a system so that we could have a head, so that we could function correctly to spread the dharma.

Today we’re very fortunate to have one person, Zen Master Soeng Hyang, who is very capable of taking this position as the head. It’s kind of interesting because she has a five-year term—that’s our style—and at the end of that five years there will be an election of her again, or somebody else. Anyway, she’s already been the School Zen Master for three years but today she actually becomes it. So I was thinking, “Wow, wouldn’t it be great if presidents operated like that?” If they had to like spend three years of actually doing it and then they got stamped OK! We already know what she is like, so this is our stamp of approval for her leadership abilities. So now we have our very first School Zen Master Installation Ceremony.

A long time ago in China, there was a famous Zen Master named Judi, in Korean we call him Guji, just like the bag, Gucci. He’s historically renowned because no matter what kind of question was asked of him he would just stick up one finger. Of all the stories I’ve read about Guji Zen Master, they never say which finger he stuck up. Conventionally, it’s considered he probably stuck up this finger: *[sticks up his index finger.]* That’s the way the story is told, at least when we’re in polite company, but we don’t know for sure, perhaps it was another finger. But, luckily for our school, today there will be a different finger sticking up: *[sticks up his thumb.]* Thank you. ☸



1,500
years