

The Monastic Flower in Today's World

From talks given by Zen Master Dae Bong and Zen Master Dae Jin at the Whole World Is a Single Flower Conference 2011 in Lumbini, Nepal on October 25, 2011

Zen Master Dae Bong

I'll say a few things about the current situation in our school, our relationship with monastics (sunims) and how we might proceed to develop the monastic realm in a way that benefits everybody, both sunims and laypeople.

On a personal note, it means a lot more to me to be a sunim than to be a teacher. Being a monk is really the heart of practice for me. Perhaps other sunims feel this way too. Being a sunim is a little like being married: your relationship, obligations and responsibilities are open and public, so our direction and our actions must become clear. If your direction is not clear as a sunim, you will feel pain until your direction becomes clear. There are both difficult and wonderful things about this path, just as for a layperson.

Being a sunim is perhaps also like having a baby: your "I, my, me" has to go out the window, because you get a nonstop reflection of your attachments. A sunim is not a symbol or a role. It means having an obligation and responsibility to the universe with consequences, whether anyone else notices or not. As Zen Master Seung Sahn once said to me, "Even if nobody is there, Buddha sees you," which means cause and effect always function.

In Buddhism, there are currently four sets of the original monastic precepts. These have existed since the time after the Buddha passed away. There were about twenty schools that were acknowledged as carrying the correct precepts, though they each had a slightly different number of precepts. Four of these collections still exist today. One is followed by the Chinese and the Koreans, another by the Tibetans, and two by the Theravadan Buddhists. The basic precepts are the same, but some minor details are different. Only the Chinese and Korean tradition has an unbroken nuns' precepts line. There are people working to bring the nun's full ordination back into the Tibetan and Theravadan traditions.

The precepts that Zen Master Seung Sahn gave us are directly from the Korean tradition and are the same as the Chinese precepts. In our school right now, there are about 26 monks and 20 nuns who we can say are active as sunims. And

there are numerous sunims from other traditions who come and practice with us. Of those we might call Kwan-Um-School sunims—direct students of Zen Master Seung Sahn or one generation removed—some have taken precepts only with the Kwan Um School of Zen; some have taken precepts only with the Chogye order; some that have taken precepts both with the Kwan Um School and the Chogye order; some have taken precepts in one of the numerous schools of Chinese Buddhism; and some have taken precepts in Korea in a different order than the Chogye order. So we have sunims who have taken precepts and presumably have some accountability to a lot of different groups, although the precepts themselves are the same.

To give the Buddhist precepts requires a "platform" of a certain number of bhikkus of a certain monastic age. When Zen Master Seung Sahn gave precepts in the West, he did so under a condition that allows a monk who has gone to a country that has no tradition to give precepts even if there isn't the required platform. It has been suggested to us that one of us go through the precepts school program, which is two years, and then we should have enough bhikkus, and eventually bhikkunis, to create our own correct precepts' platform. But that is a longer-term project. We should be aware that we have some sunims who have taken the same precepts, but with different Buddhist orders, even if we are not closely associated with those groups.

My next point is about communications among our sunims. As our school becomes more developed and organized, we increasingly see the value of good communication. For example, in Korea right now, after each Kyol Che, we invite all the sunims practicing in Korea who are at all related, directly or peripherally, to the Kwan Um School to a big sangha meeting. At recent meetings, we make a circle and go around the room one by one, and each person says what they did during the recently ended retreat season and how their practice and life are going. Then we discuss any issues we are dealing with, issues in relation to temples, precepts, visas, or any other sort of problem or concern. We have been having these meetings



for two or three years; everyone finds them quite valuable, so we'll continue with them in the future.

We also started having similar monastic sangha meetings at Mu Sang Sa for the resident sunims.

In addition, for the last year we've had a Google e-mail group for the international sunims. We've had discussions about some of the issues the lay school has brought up, such as, "What can we expect from monks and nuns when they come to the West?" and "What are the Western laypeople's obligations to sunims?" and so forth. So we have a way of communicating with each other through the Internet.

Next I want to talk about being a sunim and following precepts. I tried to make a list once of all the people who Zen Master Seung Sahn gave monastic precepts to since he started doing so in 1974. I estimated it is about a hundred people. Zen Master Wu Bong one time asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "You have made many monks and nuns, and you've brought many to Korea, and most disappear." And Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "In a war, the front line always dies." So, those that have survived may be either strong or wounded, but either way they're still alive and doing it! I think that in any tradition there are a lot of people who disappear, especially early on, but Zen Master Seung Sahn certainly didn't worry about that.

Our sunims come from many different backgrounds and have been through many different experiences as sunims. In the beginning of our school, everyone took precepts directly from Zen Master Seung Sahn and was accountable directly to him. When we did something wrong, even break a major precept, Zen Master Seung Sahn was clear: he was responsible for correcting us. Generally somebody who broke an important precept or caused a serious problem for others quickly understood, "I made a mistake," and then followed Zen Master Seung Sahn's instructions to correct it. Or simply disobeyed.

As time went on, people became sunims and became close to the Chogye order in Korea while Zen Master Seung Sahn was alive. Some picked up the ethos of sunim life as followed by some sunims in the Chogye order. For example, in Korean culture there is a distinction between public and private. If you do your public job well and correctly for others, then as long as you do not disturb anyone, no one checks what you do privately. There is respect for private time and individual karma. There is a kind of humanness to this approach. In America there is usually no distinction between public and private. What you do in private is also offensive to people who just hear about it, even if no one else is involved. So when we move between two cultures, there can be problems; what is acceptable in one culture is not accepted

in the other and vice versa. What may be acceptable sunim behavior in Korea, may be disturbing in other cultures.

Now we have younger students who are becoming sunims who have never known Zen Master Seung Sahn and never received teaching directly from him. Many of them are going through the training for novices currently given by the Chogye order. These younger monks and nuns are often actually going through a more rigorous traditional training than any of the rest of us have. They are learning valuable things that they will be able to share with us. But who are we all accountable to, now that Zen Master Seung Sahn is no longer with us?

The greatest hindrance for Zen practitioners, whether lay, monk or nun, is arrogance. The great Korean Zen Master Seo Sahn often wrote about this. If we are not attached to culture, to our experiences and preferences, and we are not arrogant, then we can quickly adapt to different cultures and different situations. If we are attached or arrogant, this is not possible. Hopefully we will train ourselves to be free of attachments, preferences, arrogance and the limitations of our experience.



Soon, as a sangha of sunims, we must consider the matter of accountability. When Zen Master Seung Sahn was alive, all our monks and nuns were accountable to him. But now, who are we accountable to? We often took the precepts in many different places. Perhaps we should make a group of senior monks and nuns, bhikkus and bhikkunis, to whom all sunims functioning within the Kwan Um School of Zen will be accountable. Among the lay students and in regard to teachers,

we have the Ethics Committee and procedures. Maybe we can give it a different name, like, "Increase the Benefit of Your Sunim Practice and Life for All Beings Committee," or something.

I was able to continue as a sunim while living in the West—in Cambridge, Berkeley, Providence, Los Angeles and Paris—because I had a strong personal relationship with Zen Master Seung Sahn. Even if I didn't see him for months at a time, I could call him up, and I trusted the communication we had. I think most younger monks and nuns won't survive as sunims in the West unless they have had a strong experience of sangha family, sunim sangha family. Laypeople get a lot of emotional nourishment out of personal relationships, job and family—and sunims can also get that from the sunim sangha. I don't think we've been able to create that in the West yet. It will take time. It is not simply following rules or working and practicing hard. You can set up all kinds of rules, but that is not enough. It's not simply about financial support and kind words. How can a sunim sangha appear

that emotionally supports and nourishes sunims? Of course, it is primarily up to our sunims to create that. But if lay-people are aware of this—if they appreciate and are sensitive to it—it will help a lot.

Here is a simple example of the importance of sangha for sunims. In 1985 I went to Paris for three days; I ended up staying for three years. I was the only monastic in our school in all of Western Europe. At one point we were 17 people living together at the Paris Zen Center, with three bedrooms, two toilets, one shower. It was great, but I was the only sunim there. When one of our sunims showed up for three months it was great for me. How to explain it? We could talk about anything, and I was understood. So there's something important about sunim sangha for the survival of sunims. Someone like Zen Master Seung Sahn, who can go straight on his own in any situation, is extremely rare. Of course, he was already a monk for 20 years when he came to the West. Zen Master Seung Sahn said novice sunim training means becoming a master at community living and practicing. I believe that takes more than four years. But all novices, Western, Korean, Chinese, have told me the same thing: what they learn most from the traditional training is not certain sutras or forms but together action—together living and together practicing. So we need to provide training for our sunims that helps them learn that, that lets them know they are not alone and that there are people who understand them at a very basic level. It takes more than structure and rules to make a sunim sangha. So it will take time. But I think we are heading in the right direction.

Here is some vocabulary that is useful when speaking of monastics and precepts in the Buddhist world. *Bhikku* means a fully ordained monk (male). *Bhikkuni* means a fully ordained monk (female). *Sami* means a novice monk; *samini* means a novice nun. If we get used to the same vocabulary, just four simple words, it will be helpful. These terms are known throughout the Buddhist world.

One of the younger bhikkunis told me that in her sutra school, from which she has graduated, they had many courses on the precepts. She said a very interesting thing: originally Buddha didn't make any rules. A specific situation appeared, it was brought to him as a problem, and he made a rule. So she suggested that we do a similar thing. This is just something to think about. So everything came out of specific situations. You can read about the precepts and find out the exact story of what happened, what rule Buddha made, how to determine when the precept is broken, and what the consequences are. It's quite involved, a kind of legal code.

She told me something else interesting: when they study the precepts, there are two categories: *yul*, which means the vinaya; and *wei*, which means etiquette or behavior. The vinaya, the precepts themselves, never change, even with changing culture. But the *wei*, the etiquette, changes according to the culture. And whenever vinaya and etiquette have a conflict, etiquette wins. Historically sunim behavior and guidelines have been somewhat adaptable by culture. This is

a very interesting point that maybe we do not understand.

Here's an example. The Chinese tradition is very strict about the precepts. However, there is no original precept against eating meat. In the Buddha's time, Buddha taught sunims to receive whatever offering was put into their bowl. The exception was if somebody kills that animal for you, or if you saw it killed. Then you are not to accept it. In the Chinese tradition this was changed to a strict rule against eating meat, fish, or fowl at any time—anything that has a face or will try to get away if you attempt to catch it.

The prohibition against eating meat is not in the original vinaya. In this situation, cultural etiquette and expectations trumped the rule given in the vinaya.

Another example is the precept against singing. But in the sutra schools in Korea, the *saminis* (novice nuns) sing together a lot. It is a group activity done to make harmony and to connect, to bond with each other. Korean people love singing; it is how they become friends.

As our school develops and grows, we will have to become clear on issues for sunim life and practice such as accountability, guidelines for behavior and responsibilities of the sunim and lay sangha to each other. Then we can grow in a way that benefits all beings. ♦

Zen Master Dae Jin

Good to see everybody here, and I'm happy to be with you at this Dae Sung Suk Ga Sa temple. Thank you, Dae Bong Sunim, for interesting insights into precepts and how we live as sunims. I happened to take the main precepts, the bhikku precepts, with Korean monks at Bo Ma Sa temple in 1986. At that time, Zen Master Seung Sahn actually encouraged me to receive the precepts in the Chogye order. In the West we have rigid ideas about rules, and when I first took the precepts in Korea, I had a narrow, rigid idea. It was difficult, but after I took the bhikku precepts, somebody came to me—actually it was one of the precepts teachers—and gave me a calligraphy that said, “Where the water is clear and pure, there are no fish.” And I looked at that calligraphy and was thinking about it and thinking about it: What does it mean? I really wanted to get these precepts down correct. At that time, I wanted the discipline of precepts so much. I wanted to be Moses, who goes up on the mountain and gets the Ten Commandments, and they're encased in gold, and they're a beautiful treasure. But it wasn't like that. Then somebody gave me this calligraphy that said, “clear water, no fish.” That's an interesting point.

I later showed it to Zen Master Seung Sahn, and I asked him what it meant. He said, “Too tight, then cannot practice. Then, no friends.” Too tight, you have no friends. It was a really good point for me that helped me in my monk's life, because I often found myself getting tight and trying to be too disciplined. I think that's the kind of Judeo Christian thing. It's like, “I'm going to tighten up, make more rules for myself, and eliminate my problem that way.” But it doesn't

always work. So the water sometimes is a little muddy, it's not completely clear, but many beings can swim and live in there. But if the water is too pure, if it's too clear, sometimes nothing will live there.

Zen Master Man Gong said that a practicing monk needs three vital things: First is a good teacher. Second, dharma friends. And third, a place to practice, a secure and quiet refuge. In building and developing Mu Sang Sa, we have always tried to keep that in mind, that Mu Sang Sa is not supposed to be just another Zen center. It's also supposed to be a refuge from the difficulties that people have in society. We hope that sunims also find refuge there, and that people can get some peaceful tranquility, some clarity, just being in the presence of one of our sunims at Mu Sang Sa. I know that's aiming high, but that's the way we hope it will be. Many times, Dae Bong Sunim and I have tried to get closer to the younger sunims by not asking for so much formality. Dae Bong Sunim especially has been teaching a lot about that. Unlike many other Zen centers that insist everybody bow to the Zen master every day, at Mu Sang Sa we only bow during retreats. And we don't insist that the Zen master always lead the special chanting. We have the novice monks lead the special chanting sometimes. Novices often do kidos and help with leading practice. So we're trying to lower the barriers between us that way.

One experience that I had is that building a monastery is not so difficult, but running a monastery is really hard. Anybody can build a monastery: You don't need any precepts, you don't need much; you only need a lot of money, some good material connections. Of course, that's not always easy to get, either. Sometimes having money is not so easy. On the other hand, running a monastery is much harder. It requires real wisdom. Usually it requires the kind of wisdom that monks specialize in. And we also have the kind of wisdom that our laypeople have for our Zen centers in Europe and in America, and that kind of wisdom is also useful. Often our monks don't have that: they can't go out to work every day and come back and practice and do that kind of thing so well. But our laypeople in the Kwan Um School do that well, they can quickly shift gears, multitask, balance a whole bunch of relationships—with their parents, with their lovers, with their teachers—with everyone. Monks are not so good at that. But monks have some wisdom about living together as monks. And we have to learn to trust that as a real, tangible sort of wisdom. Rather than shutting that out, we can also soak some of that up.

So we are trying to open up many doors to wisdom, not just the practicing door. Living in Korea, we can benefit a lot from monks' education. Korean monks are always ask-

ing, "What is harmony? How do we harmonize between elder brother and younger brother? How do we harmonize between this kind of monk and that kind of monk?" And in our retreats we have many kinds of monks with many kinds of ordination, and we have to harmonize among them. It's not easy. Sometimes it is very difficult and we have to be flexible. And yet, we have certain rules that apply during Kyol Che, and other rules that apply outside of Kyol Che. We don't need more rules. Maybe if we develop more rules, we also have to develop comparable customs for laypeople in relating to monks.

Asian people are lucky in that sense, because they see monks and nuns as a refuge. They really feel like they can take refuge and trust the dharma through the sunim. It doesn't matter if it's Zen Master Seung Sahn's dharma or somebody else's dharma. They feel like they can trust, and take a refuge in a sunim. There's something fundamental there that we don't yet have in the West. Maybe it will happen slowly. But that trust means that we can allow the sunims in a monastery to run the monastery themselves. We don't have to micromanage it. Even if we give donations to them, we don't



have to micromanage it. There are many stories in Korea about how we should give donations without any conditions, without any conditions at all. Many times we hear that. One story I remember well is of an old grandmother who went to a temple and said to the abbot, "You see that pillar over there? That's my pillar." The abbot said, "What do you mean, that's your pillar?" And she answered, "When I was a young wife, many years ago, I gave the donation for that pillar, and that's my pillar." The abbot said, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear you're still carrying that pillar around with you after all these years."

So there are many stories about that. If you're going to practice generosity, do it unconditionally and it will help you more. It's not easy to do. We all want to micromanage. We all want to give, and then . . . a little management. That's not correct Buddhism. Correct Buddhism means 100 percent unconditional: just give.

Many times that is difficult. I know for myself that was difficult to accept. Because when you get a donation to build something or to do something, there are three parts: there's the person who's giving; there's the object that's being given; and there's the mind of the person who's receiving. And if one of those three is tainted, or has some condition, then there's suffering. If all of those are pure and they all match, then everybody is happy—the giver, the receiver, and even the thing that was given, because it's not being held. Like the old woman carrying around the pillar: that's a heavy thing to carry around for all those years.

We need to be reminded of this delicate balance because it doesn't come naturally. Maybe a few people, like our teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn, can be generous without holding on to anything at all. That's what we encourage our monks to do. I'm sorry if our monks haven't been so good at that yet. It's not that simple to receive with no conditions. Because we sunims are often on the receiving end of generosity, our practice also, as sunims, is to receive with no condition. Not "this is my gift," but "this is a gift to the sangha." And "easy come, easy go." That means that our practice, our center, has to be simple and clear and strong. Then we understand, "that gift isn't mine, it wasn't given to me personally, but to all the sangha, to everybody." This way of thinking requires some retraining. Our whole mind has to be retrained because we tend to say, "That's my thing. That's mine! It was given to me, and now I'm going to make it mine." So it requires a lot of retraining, it's not easy, and it takes practice. But it's possible, and keeping this selfless mind will help our sangha to grow. But we also need the givers to be unconditional. There are so many benefits to be had from giving unconditionally.

Yesterday, our Korean group of people went to the Jetavana Monastery, or what remains of it. There are only archaeological ruins at this point, but still it has the feeling of a monastery. This is where the Buddha stayed for 24 Kyol Ches, 24 rainy-season retreats the Buddha stayed there, in Sravasti. There were many sunims from many different traditions, all practicing—chanting, bowing, walking. There were many different colors of robes, many different colors of faces. And the atmosphere was just one of tranquility. Yeah, there were some people trying to sell all kinds of stuff, tourist guides and trinkets, but the overall feeling of the place was that you could relax, that you could rest there. You could be a refuge. I hope that our sunims become like a refuge, that they don't have opposite mind, with two opposite political agendas going on inside. The world is already so full of that. If our sunims can be a refuge, I hope that our lay practitioners and teachers don't forget that, and help our sunims to be a tranquil refuge that people can find peace with.

Thank you for your attention and your listening. ♦

The Deer Came to Us

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Impressions of the Whole World is a Single Flower trip.
Max Schorr

At the end of World War II, Zen Master Man Gong plucked a petal from the Korean national flower, the Rose of Sharon, dipped it in ink, and wrote a rough calligraphy that read: "The whole world is a single flower." Zen Master Seung Sahn founded the Whole World Is a Single Flower (WWSF) conference as a way to bring people from many different countries and traditions together in the spirit of unity and harmony. In October 2011, the ninth triennial WWSF conference was held in Nepal, with pilgrimages to major Buddhist sites in India. The talks above by Zen Master Dae Bong and Zen Master Dae Jin were given during this conference. Below is an excerpt from recollections by Max Schorr, one of the conference participants. Further material is planned for the upcoming issue of Primary Point.

After dinner, wander around Varanasi with my roommate James from Kansas. A hectic, frenzied evening scene with no sidewalks and tuktuks, bikes, cars, trucks, cows, motorbikes vying for space on the road. This is not Kansas.

Breakfast with the Hong Kong Sangha. Corrin, completely generous, unfolds a world. Stories of joining the practice clearly translated by Shirley. An offering from the tea master. An invitation from Crystal to exercise on the courtyard lawn. Who knew it would be Bodhidharma's original moves? Secret energy invigoration movements that transcend time and would serve many of us

on bathroom bus stops across Bihar.

Off to the market. Off to Deer Park in impossible traffic. Twenty minutes to turn out of the hotel driveway. Twenty more minutes to drive down the block. Looking ahead at gridlock as oncoming traffic swells into our lane. Honking, stuttering, stopping in the mad Varanasi streets. And then the revelation of Sarnath, more welcome than shade in summer or sun in winter. Wide open calm recess. Monument to teaching. Open your mind just to walk in. We walked around the stupa and chanted. Then we chanted Kwan Seum Bosal and the deer came to us.

Arriving at the Chinese Temple there was no power. The beds were firm, wood boards with a thin pad. Live upright. Get over to the Mahabodhi temple. Walk around the stupa. See that tree. See the pilgrims. All the different robes. Hear the sacred chants.

It is all ordinary, but there is no place like here. Open your mind. Pay attention. Be where you are. Fully. Now. One hundred percent. Around and around with barefoot steps, one by one, and hands clasped.

We walk to the Burmese Vihar, where I lived 10 years ago while studying abroad. Siddaram! My barber from 10 years ago. Shanti Deva! who did my laundry 10 years ago. We remember each other with recognition-gaze beyond words.

Happening. Happening. The sweet somber death town Kushnigar. Reclining Buddha. That heaven of a birthplace, Lumbini. A long silent walk. Plenty of shade and quiet energy. A tear goes down your cheek when you hear these beautiful dharma talks from our masters. You can have a silent breakfast forever. ♦