

of having as many as 60 people at Yong Maeng Jong Jins, as in the beginnings with Zen Master Seung Sahn, now retreats had three or four people. We started by doing one Yong Maeng Jong Jin a month. Gradually we had a bigger sangha and we were able to invite teachers to lead some of the retreats, from Zen Master Wu Bong to Zen Master Bon Yo, and our keen-eyed guiding teacher Zen Master Bon Shim, who nowadays visits us two or three times a year. Some students started attending retreats and Kyol Ches in several temples in Paris, Germany, Poland, America, Korea, and so on, and their practice became stronger.

Currently, Barcelona has a core group of about twenty practitioners. We have daily practice in Barcelona and a monthly Yong Maeng Jong Jin in our center in Torredembarra, a village 100 kilometers from the city, near the beach.

The story of the Kwan Um School in Spain has been quite complicated: a strong start with visits by Zen Master Seung Sahn, then it almost disappeared. But thanks to a small group of students we could gradually rebuild our Zen center again.

Despite all the problems, it has been a fun and exciting time. Memories of the retreats in Ahaba will remain in the minds of all who participated. Nobody can forget the common bathrooms—men and women showering together, to the astonishment of the monks who accompanied Zen Master Seung Sahn!

The story of the Barcelona Zen Center is proof that in spite of all the trials and tribulations, so long as a small group of people wants to practice seriously, they can rebuild their center from scratch. More important than quantity is the quality of practice, and the intention. Zen centers can exist only with a good direction and a deep sense of practice. We don't know the future of the Barcelona Zen Center or the Kwan Um School in Spain, but the important thing is to keep working, moment to moment, in the right direction.

FINDING THE WAY BACK HOME

Zen Master Bon Shim



For as long as I can remember, I've been looking for some guidance, something that could help me to understand life, my self and this scary world. Living in a Catholic family, I had only one choice, so I used to go to church almost every day to pray for some help. Finally, a friend of mine, whom I met accidentally and who knew that I was looking desperately for answers to my existential questions, told me that a great

Korean Zen master was coming to Krakow in two weeks, so I should come to the airport to greet him. I was very excited and couldn't wait, imagining what a great Zen master would look like. When the day finally came, I went to the airport to wait for him an hour before his arrival, holding a bunch of flowers. The Zen master appeared with eight American students, and at first I was disappointed because he looked ordinary, like any other Korean person. Only later, when we went to my friend's house and he started talking, did I know I had just met my teacher.

I can't describe how happy and grateful I felt: just like finding the way back home after being lost for a long, long time. We had our first Yong Maeng Jong Jin with interviews, and a precepts ceremony, with the precepts burn done with little wax strings instead of the incense sticks that we use nowadays. From that time on Zen Master Seung Sahn used to come every year, always so powerful, laughing a lot and always taking care of people. Whoever came and needed any answers from him, or just a little attention, he was there for them. His great compassion was the most striking thing about him, and there were thousands of situations I observed during all those years when I was so amazed by his unconditioned love.

Foremost was that he came to our country, which was still communist at the time. That time was very hard for Poland, the last years of communism, with martial law and no food in the shops, and so Zen Master Seung Sahn's visits were extremely important for Polish people. He gave us hope and helped us to see things from a different perspective. The path to liberation had a deep meaning for us, living in an oppressed country, so our sangha grew quickly. We had so many people for Yong Maeng Jong Jin and kido retreats that we could hardly manage. Every time he arrived there was a public dharma talk. Once six hundred people attended his talk. He also used to travel a lot, and any time students invited him he didn't hesitate, but just went there, gave a talk and a new group appeared.

Personally, I also benefited greatly from him on many levels. He would stay at my place whenever he came to Poland. It was inspiring to see him getting up at three o'clock every morning. My baby used to wake up around this time. When the baby was three months old it cried a lot. When Zen Master Seung Sahn noticed it, he did a beautiful ceremony for the baby. Every time he came, he looked at my little boy with his keen eyes. And when my older son was a teenager he had many teenage problems, so once Zen Master Seung Sahn had a serious talk with him. I've never known what this talk was about, but since then my son has been getting up at 5 a.m. for morning practice.

Our great teacher saved many lives. We will always miss him.