

name. Zen Master Seung Sahn started to read my certificate: “Your name is Song Sahn . . .” and he stopped for a while: “Oh, perhaps we have common karma?” “Yes sir, I’m sure we have.” May this good karma last forever.

A FEW TREASURED MOMENTS WITH ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

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I met Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1981 in Warsaw. It was before the Warsaw Zen Center was founded, in a small house rented for Yong Maeng Jong Jin. The atmosphere I felt there was extraordinary. I was 20 years old, and never before in my life had I met a

person so *different* as Zen Master Seung Sahn. Some older students told me that the Zen master was doing some practice in the middle of the night, fighting with demons and visiting other planets. I didn’t participate in the retreat that time, but this experience was different from anything I’d encountered before, so it was like a seed was planted.

Two years later that seed came to fruition, and I decided to sit my first seven-day retreat in Warsaw, at what is now the head temple for Poland.

I met Zen Master Seung Sahn many more times over the years, and I had several private interviews with him when he came to my hometown of Pila in 1986 to give a dharma talk.

I gave the introductory talk then, and spoke in Polish. I wasn’t even a dharma teacher, so he asked the dharma teacher who came with him to give me a long robe, and he asked me to wear a long mala. He couldn’t understand anything we said, and from a photo someone took he looked bored. But when my talk was over he said “Oh! Great talk!” and everybody laughed. Later on we went to a restaurant and he was still answering esoteric questions using lots of technical Zen language. My close friend then asked the Zen master to paint calligraphy on the wall. When my friend, who was a mathematician, saw it, he was overjoyed. He said he stopped thinking and experienced an extraordinary excitement, something he described as an “Einstein state of mind.” He was very happy and looked so peaceful, even though he had never practiced Zen before.

The next day we went to do morning practice and eat breakfast at a beautiful castle in Tuczno, where I had grown up, and where my mother is still living. Zen

Master Seung Sahn gave group kong-an interviews for all of us in one of the large castle chambers. My two teenage brothers were there, as well as one of my former schoolteachers. The Zen master asked some simple kong-ans. My brothers were young and responded well with their beginners’ mind. But my former teacher’s intellect got in the way, and he was baffled by the exchange. Zen Master Seung Sahn laughed and told him he should learn from the younger students, and not make “difficult.”

During breakfast at a restaurant I was still very excited, so he gave me a fork and said, “Eat!” It was helpful for me to relax in that situation, because I was kind of stuck.

I will always remember how comforting he could be. When I was pregnant in 1989 I went to his room to ask for advice. I was scared of how my life would be changing. He said with his big smile, “Oh, wonderful! I will give your baby a gift!” And he gave me a necklace with a Kwan Seum Bosal pendant.

Many times I asked him about practice, and once he advised me to go for a hundred-day solo retreat. He gave me instruction, helped me plan the retreat, and he even recommended a place, even though I had been his student for no more than six years. He said, “you must do a thousand bows every day, and midnight practice every night, and make sure you don’t open the door.”

Another time I asked him what kind of practice to do during pregnancy and he said prostrations. Some people disapproved of my doing prostrations while I was pregnant, and said I was not a good mother-to-be. But despite their talk, I felt this practice really helped me and my baby son.

When my son was about five years old we went to the airport to say good-bye to Zen Master Seung Sahn. As we sat in the airport café in Warsaw, my son asked if Zen Master Seung Sahn would give him a present: a mala with a miniature moktak on it. He replied, “Of course, if you cut your hair.” At that time my son had long hair, and he said yes, he would get a haircut.

There was many a situation in which I witnessed his spontaneous loving energy and his ability to communicate and talk. He never put up any barrier with any kind of person. He also could understand and accept different men and women, of all ages and cultures, and from every walk of life. He had patience and understanding for many things that others found strange or annoying or stupid.

One time I told him I wanted to be a dharma teacher. I was very young at that time. Zen Master Seung Sahn turned to a monk who was there in the room with us and said, “Look at her: she is very strong—wonderful!”

I wish I could see Zen Master Seung Sahn. I am sure I will meet him again. He is always in my heart, and I miss him so much. ♦