

# Editor's Note



On April 17 of this year, Zen Master Wu Bong suddenly died while leading a retreat in Paris. In the tradition of our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, he spent his life as a teacher traveling and teaching, not settling permanently in any one place, and dedicating his activities to spreading the dharma. As the head teacher for the Kwan Um School of Zen in Europe, he shepherded the growth of the school. His efforts persist in the flowering of our school in Europe and the teaching activities of the Zen masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, who were so close to him and continue his works to guide the practice, made now more poignant by his death. We offer this issue as a tribute, compiled from around the world by the European sangha. It contains excerpts of his teachings and offerings by students and colleagues. In the Korean tradition, Zen masters who have died, as well as those over 60, are referred to by the title *Dae Soen Sa Nim*, which means "Great Zen Master." In recognition of the title conferred on him, we refer to him here as Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim. May his example sharpen our own appreciation of Zen practice as the great work of life and death.

## Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim

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*Zen Master Ji Kwang*



Our dear Zen master, Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim, was born on June 22, 1950, in Wroclaw, Poland, into a Jewish family who suffered through the German occupation during the Second World War. In 1964 the family decided to leave Europe and they emigrated to the United States.

Jacob Perl, as he then was called, finished high school in 1968. When he was 20 years old, in 1970, he started practicing Zen with the famous Soto Zen teacher Suzuki Roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center. The questions of life and death were very urgent to him. Continuing his

search for a teacher, he went to a Tibetan lama, Tarthang Tulku, for one year to practice Tibetan Buddhism.

While he was a student at Brown University in Providence, he trained in Shim Gum Do and became a master in this martial art. In 1972, during his time at the university, he met Zen Master Seung Sahn and became one of his first students. In the same year he did his first hundred-day solo retreat. He was 22 years old. Also he took five precepts and received his Buddhist name, Poep Mu, which means Empty Dharma or No Dharma.

In 1973 he graduated from Brown University with a bachelor's degree in mathematics. Afterward he did more retreats, and in 1978, together with Zen Master Seung Sahn, he returned for the first time to Europe—to Poland, his motherland—where from that time onward a sangha developed that grew and became the largest sangha in our European school.

In 1978 he did his second solo retreat in America. He suffered poor health during that time because of the restricted diet and very strong practice.

In 1984 he received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn and, despite still living in the United States, he became the principal supporter for the Polish sangha. From that time onward he traveled frequently to Poland.

In 1988 he married Grazyna, and soon afterward adopted his son Nicholas, who was about 10 years old at the time. The next year his son Matthew was born. In 1992

he was officially named the European head teacher by our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn.

In 1993 he received transmission from Zen Master Seung Sahn, and was given the dharma name Wu Bong, which means Universal Peak. At that time he lived at Providence Zen Center with his family, where he was abbot for many years. Shortly afterward he moved to Paris with his family and established the Paris Zen Center, but still he had business in the United States, so he travelled often between the continents.

Between his inka and transmission he was active teaching in Asia, South Africa and America, but most of his teaching work was in Europe.

In 2000 he gave his first inka, to Mukyong (Roland Wöhrle-Chon). In 2006 he gave his first transmission, to Zen Master Bon Shim (Alexandra Porter). In 2012 he gave his second transmission, to Zen Master Ji Kwang (Roland Wöhrle-Chon). In total



he gave transmission to two students and inka to seven students.

In 2008 he moved to Korea to prepare himself to become a monk. In order to keep a place in Europe he also maintained a residence at the Berlin Zen Center, which from that time onward became his home in Europe. In 2009 he was ordained as a Buddhist monk in Korea.

Until the end of his life he continued to guide and teach the European sangha while also focusing on teaching in Korea. He led several Kyol Ches in Korea at Mu Sang Sa Temple, Hyang Choen Sa Temple, Hwa Gye Sa Temple and Boep Hwa Do Ryang. This last temple is that of his Korean student and friend Deok Hyeon Sunim, and is where he lived since 2011.

Wu Bong Sunim left his body after a cardiac arrest on Wednesday,

April 17, 2013 at 1 p.m. while leading a Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the Paris Zen Center. ♦

