

Caring for Us

Students and successors of Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim

I was staying at New York Zen Center by myself. Then Wu Bong appeared. He brought his lunch with him from a Chinese restaurant. He said, “Hi!” to me and started eating. I was starving, trying to hide that, but he did not pay attention anyway, he was just eating with a huge appetite. I thought, what kind of man is this? He should share his lunch with me! He finished his lunch and then he asked me, “Are you hungry? If you are hungry, you can buy Chinese lunch at the corner, it’s delicious.”

—Zen Master Bon Shim

I finally was able to arrange my life in order to attend the entire three months of the intensive Zen retreat called Kyol Che, which took place in a temple called Mu Sang Sa in Korea. The day came to board the plane to Korea. One hour before boarding, I got cold feet and murmured to him: “I don’t think I should go . . .” At that very moment Zen Master Wu Bong took my hand and said “Then don’t,” and pulled me in the direction of the exit. Such a simple tool, but it caused me to react with a strong “No! I have to!” and push through to the boarding gate. I turned back to see his beaming face and we laughed with each other across the gate.

—Zen Master Bon Yo

One day I mentioned to him that I wanted to start painting again, to which he only said, “Uhhh.” But shortly thereafter, he came home from work with watercolor paper and paints for me. No need to talk about it, just do it!

—Zen Master Bon Yo

One time, after my dharma talk I felt sad. I was not so happy with my talk. Zen Master Wu Bong noticed that and he said, “Don’t worry. After one hour nobody will remember your talk. It doesn’t matter if it’s good or not.”

—Zen Master Bon Shim

Our first meeting happened during summer Kyol Che, 1990, in Warsaw. I had an interview with him that left a strong impression on me. I am still able to visualize Zen Master Wu Bong in front of me, shaking his head and saying, “No-o-o-o! Just keep don’t know!” But it didn’t feel bad not to know the answer to the kong-an. It was more like he cared about me; he wanted to help me experience don’t know and digest my understanding.

—Zen Master Ji Kwang

For a long time I could not understand how it is possible that we all at the same instant got enlightenment, as is told in many sutras. So I asked Zen Master Wu Bong



during one dharma talk by him, “How can we at the same time get enlightenment?”

Zen Master Wu Bong immediately asked me, “What color is this floor?” I told him that it is brown. At that he said, “Yes, for me the floor is brown too.” I was overwhelmed by his simple and plain answer. For me the floor is brown and for him the floor is brown too. What a wonderful enlightenment together at the same time! His teaching was always like this: simple and sharp like a knife blade. With not many words he was pointing to the essence.

—Muchak JDPSN (Namhee Chon)

During an interview, Zen Master Wu Bong told me something which radically changed my direction and eventually my life. He said, “If you have a bad teacher and you are a bad student then this is a bad situation. If you have a good teacher but you are a bad student then this is also a bad situation. But if you have a bad teacher and you are a good student, then this is a good situation. In your case, Jo, you might have had bad teaching, but you were a good student.”

—Jo Potter JDPSN

It was a very interesting feeling, when I first saw Zen Master Wu Bong. It seemed as if I had known him for a long time. He is such a relaxed person! He was sitting there, smiling, and with his big eyes he looked inside of me, as it seemed. I just felt good with him.

—Muchak JDPSN (Namhee Chon)

With his constant teaching, numberless Zen events, and mostly with his clear mind, integrity and credibility, he has reached many, many people and has encouraged them to practice Zen. A lot of them stayed, practiced with his guidance, and handed on their experience to others. Zen Master Wu Bong had a good talent for organizing the Kwan Um school of Zen in Europe—this is one main reason why the organization has developed so well and has constantly grown. But probably most important was that he has always granted his students space so that they can grow.

—Zen Master Ji Kwang

I told Zen Master Wu Bong, “While I was sitting in the dharma room during Yong Maeng Jong Jin, I saw a big spider. I was sitting and thinking, I really want that spider to go out!” Zen Master Wu Bong said, “You kept sitting. You didn’t run away.”

—Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila Malinowska)