

Last Meeting

Arne Schaefer JDPSN

My last interview with Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim occurred during the one-week Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Berlin in April 2013. I wanted to check my answer to a kong-an about moving mind and he agreed with what I presented. “Yeah, that is the style how we handle that.” Then after a little pause he asked, “But what is wrong with moving mind?” I was surprised and asked, “Isn’t it that we say if you have a strong center, your mind is not moving?” “Yeah,” he answered, “but sometime strong center means moving mind is no problem.”

“Wow, that is a good teaching!” I heard myself saying and just loved Zen Master Wu Bong for his simple and so very helpful reflection on this question, which is also a part of my personal struggle in life when I am not just accepting what is. I am sure I will remember this teaching all my life.

After the one-week Yong Maeng Jong Jin, Zen Master Wu Bong was our guest in my home for the first time. Knowing how much he liked Korean food, I had invited him the week before for dinner in a Korean restaurant. After the visit I asked him if he liked it. He said it was OK, but the next time he would like to have German cooking. So I suggested he come and taste traditional homemade noodles called spätzle, a southern German speciality, made by boiling small lumps of dough.

I picked him up in the afternoon. We just sat in the living room, had some tea and talked about anything that came to mind. Then my wife and I started to prepare dinner and asked Zen Master Wu Bong to have a rest. He went to his room but shortly afterward he came to the kitchen and asked how he could help. He cleaned the salad, and after that I asked him if he would want to try to do the spätzle. He tried to fill the spätzlepresse, a kitchen utensil to press the sticky dough through into the cooking water. You have to be fast,

otherwise the noodles stick to each other. We both worked together: he loaded the press and I took care of the noodles in the hot water. It was fun!

After the dinner we kept talking until midnight. He was so relaxed, sharing memories of the early seventies when he was beginning to practice and had not met Zen Master Seung Sahn yet.

We enjoyed the time and it felt so much like just being good friends.

Early in the morning I brought him to the airport to fly to Paris. On my way back I saw the sun rising like a big red balloon and I was very grateful and happy about this wonderful time we had together. I felt a new quality in my relationship to Zen Master Wu Bong. Just three days later he was gone.

Thank you, Wu Bong Dae Soen Sa Nim, for everything. Your simplicity of just following the situation was always inspiring. Your sincerity in practice, your devotion to the dharma, also your calm but sharp mind, your wonderful sense of humor and your kindness were always and still are an inspiration for me. Somebody once called you the “Nothing-Special Master” and I think that was true: you never made something special out of you or your life. You were just yourself—whatever that is. (Ouch! I can feel your stick hitting me as I write these words.)

There is so much I am grateful for and I feel a big loss. You gave us so much and left a big heritage. Now it is our turn to honor you by continuing with trying to give our best and do the job we all share: to help this world of suffering.

I am also very grateful for having our sangha family which is also a merit of your life’s work!

Thank you for everything, my dear teacher and friend,
Arne

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Gratitude

Dearest Soen Sa Nim,

I thank you so much for your teachings and encouragement. Was looking forward to seeing you in May, and just cannot imagine not being able to see you again. I feel that I had taken your teaching and presence for granted as you have guided me from the very beginning, and so somehow thought you would always be there to help. I am sorry. There is just much gratitude and sadness . . .

Be in peace, Suuim.

With much, much love, your student,

Soo