

dark quiet winter months, snowshoeing to the compost pile, and quite often spending six hours shoveling in order to welcome guests is a way of life that takes getting used to. And leaving it takes getting used to also.

Traveling 10 hours by bus actually at times seems similar to traveling in Nepal. The Lucky Star going from Boston's Chinatown to New York's Chinatown isn't much different from traveling from Pokhara to Katmandu. No goats or ducks on this bus though; instead the distractions are movies with violence and sex. Is that the difference? The danger feels the same at times: not the fear of tumbling down cliffs on hairpin turns, but of being squeezed while speeding in and out of fast-moving cars and trucks over roads with bumpity-bump deep potholes. Seeing the city from the first look, my country eyes realize that what looks like the biggest ever hay storage silos one could possibly imagine are actually people houses stacked one on top of the other and side-by-side. Actually, this was a Maine joke in the seventies: "Farmer John goes to NYC and sees the biggest corn silos ever!" It was funny when I was a young teen not having been south of the border—the Maine border, that is.

These brown eyes from the coast of Maine begin to widen, with the whites becoming clear with beginner's mind, until soon enough I find myself sitting beside Zen Master Wu Kwang. He sits in full lotus posture quietly facing the gold Buddha, a gift from Zen Master Seung Sahn bringing Zen from Korea. Zen Master Wu Kwang's body appears not to move when sitting. Of course, he doesn't sit the whole time: he too sits and walks and sits and walks, and eats, and sleeps,

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and pees and sits and walks and bows 108 times each morning. He doesn't talk except in one-on-one student-teacher meetings held twice a day. No discourses on fancy Buddhist teachings. Only right now, we are encouraged and supported to keep *clear mind, clear mind, clear mind, don't knooooow-wwww . . .* a before-thinking place. The *hwadu* is its name. Only question. Not questioning from the intellect but with every cell of his body, he watches the layers of mind make everything, all the while inquiring "What is this?" Before thinking, before opinions, before judgments, before anything, and even before that.

If you are looking for pure expression, for the essence of true human original nature, and are willing to let go of the romance of Asian culture, you can sit in a cave in your own backyard right here in the United States, in New York City, with a bright-eyed Zen master who will look you in the eye and ask you, "What are you doing just now?" And, if you know what you are doing, he will hit you 30 times (a Zen expression). If you say "I don't know" he will also hit you 30 times. So what can you do? Ahh . . . Cheek pressed against the cool window; blue sky turning into night sky, with city lights twinkling. ♦

Nancy Hathaway became a senior dharma teacher in 1984, while a resident at Providence Zen Center from 1979 to 1985, where she served in a number of temple positions. Living with her husband at PZC, Nancy gave birth to her two sons at home. Then she practiced for 15 years at the Cambridge Zen Center. Currently Nancy offers mindfulness courses at colleges, hospitals, schools, and privately. She is a licensed pastoral counselor. Her essays on mindful parenting have been published in anthologies, including *The Best Buddhist Writing 2006* (Boston: Shambhala Publications). Nancy lives on the coast of Maine.

Morning Bell Reverberates Throughout the Universe:

Notes on a Residency at the London Zen Centre

Pedro Dinis Correia

Living in a Zen center in the heart of London is a wonderful and tough experience. This is the perspective of a residency of five and a half months, all while keeping a full-time job.

Daily Practice

Bowing (108 bows). Such a simple movement, yet I found it effective in calming the mind and making the body fit

and healthy.

Sitting meditation. I was used to sitting meditation, and it was great to have long periods of sitting in silence.

Chanting. It took me a while to get used to it, but it brought great moments of beauty and synchronicity. It's a wonderful practice to chant together in a group for someone in need, like we did for a friend of mine who was going through a tough moment in her life.

Kong-an interviews. I found it a great way to check the “inner practice,” to test the intuitive capacity and my attachments (to form, concepts, ideas). It became clear that my pattern is to be caught up in “emptiness” and to discriminate against form. In a way it’s also an interesting method to establish the teacher-student connection. Kong-ans felt close to daily life in a sense that challenges and activates the thinking mind, alleviating stress. I found it to be a somewhat similar feeling to taking an exam or job interview.

I had already seen kong-ans in daily life before, without much formal kong-an practice. But investigating a kong-an together with a particular situation in daily life helped me put clarity into that situation.

To be honest I found it difficult at times, to understand the kong-ans and to play along with them in the interview room. Even when knowing what to do, I resisted playing the game. Eventually my mind lost interest and I stopped actively trying to practice with kong-ans, but they nonetheless surfaced eventually in daily life.

The Schedule and Temple Rules

I would wake up at 5 a.m. and have two hours of morning practice with the teacher. Then I would have breakfast, shower and get ready in time to leave the house around 8:20 for work. Usually it would take just over an hour of public transport—packed like sardines—to southeast London to start work at 9:30 a.m. I spend the whole day on the computer as a Web designer until 6 p.m., with a one-hour lunch break.

Leaving work I would return home, arriving around 7:30. Bedtime was at 9:30, which gave me less than eight hours sleep each day. In the two hours “free time” after work during the week, I scheduled one activity each day: shopping for food, cooking food for several days, washing my clothes, cleaning the house and extra Zen practice when possible, such as more bowing or qigong.

Wednesday nights I would join the group practice as soon as I arrived from work. Practice would start at 7 p.m., so I would enter mid-practice.

Sometimes on Fridays I stayed after work with colleagues for a quick drink and to socialize.

Then the weekends would go fast. Wake up was at 5:30 a.m. I would spend around three hours cleaning the house, dharma room, kitchen or bathroom to compensate for the little time available for chores during the week, as temple residents are required to do 40 minutes a day of cleaning.

Outside work I avoided using the computer as much as possible because my eyes were tired from working at a computer all day. I would use the computer on week-

ends mainly for e-mail, banking, shopping and making travel arrangements.

On Saturday afternoons I would practice with the North London Soto Zen Group, where I had practiced Zen for the first time in 2002. Afterward, I would socialize and go for a pub dinner with sangha members

On Sunday we would do morning practice together at the Zen center until 1 p.m., and afterward I would go for coffee, walk in the park, go shopping or see some of my London friends. Every month on one of the weekends there was Yong Maeng Jong Jin, a day-and-a-half retreat with intense practice.

Besides all that, I would also travel, generally once a month on weekends, to see friends outside London.

Full-time Job as a Web Designer

Work was also intensive, as we have many websites to create. Like working in a fast-food restaurant, the focus was on streamlining and making websites quickly.

Around August or September I had big difficulties at work, arguing with the finance man during the project development meetings. During this time it was difficult, but at the same time interesting to see one of the kong-ans I had worked with come to life, and it helped ease the suffering I had created for myself.

I feel fortunate to have been allowed to stay longer at the Zen center, and I feel that those 5 and a half months helped me to maintain focus and go through some difficult moments at work and in my big-city, stressful life.

The Teacher: Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila Malinowska)

I can see the great courage and dedication that our teacher has in order to accept a residency student such as myself to live in her house, a small flat shared with her young

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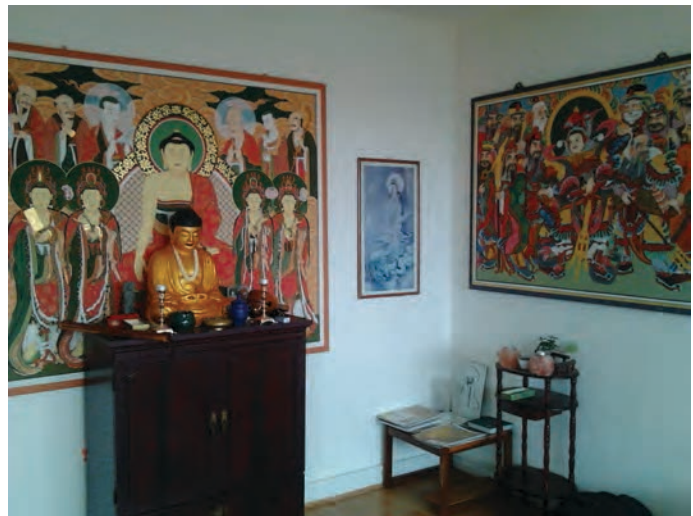


Photo: Bogumila Malinowska JDPSN

adult son, who doesn't take part in the practice but nonetheless contributes greatly to the sangha simply by accepting and supporting Ja An JDPSN and the Zen center in their house.

I felt impressed by her willpower, perseverance and determination, as well as her ability to manage both the Zen center and her daily life, adding on top many more hours of nightly practice, working full time in London and travelling for teaching retreats and meetings. This is no doubt the result of authentic, strong, continuous practice.

I feel that I established a good connection within the household. We were harmonious and learned to respect each other's space.

Conclusion

I see that my practice strengthened during my residency and that I was also a support to the sangha, albeit in the last months my energy went low and I felt tired. This residency program is very tough and a great experience, especially in London where everything is fast-paced and there is a huge mixture of people and cultures in transition. Many people don't stay long, and changes in housing, jobs and life all come fast. Add to it a full-time job and two hours commuting daily, and the challenge becomes a great opportunity to practice Zen in daily life and to try to harmonize temple and city life.

Before my residency started, it was good to meet the

teacher and experience a little of Kwan Um practice. Three weeks seems like enough time to get used to the practice and to go a bit deeper. But then, it's also nice afterward to return to having more space and time in one's life.

It would be interesting if the Zen center were in a bigger house, with a more established sangha giving greater support to one another. This would allow having several students in residence, giving more people the chance to live this extraordinary experience.

There I was, in a cement gray tower block with a green patch of big trees down below, at night the planes flying overhead and ambulances rushing by . . . on those summer nights the moon would show up behind the clouds and the fresh gentle wind would bring all sounds, mixed up together.

It would still be night when morning practice started, the sunrise would gently light up the dharma room, while the morning bell would reverberate throughout the whole universe . . . the big city awakening with golden rays and foggy sounds. There I was, and I am grateful. ♦



Pedro Dinis Correia comes from a small town in southern Portugal. At the age of 20 he lived in London for a time, where he discovered Zen practice. He returned to Portugal and practiced with a small Soto Zen group for some years. Last year, at the age of 35, he returned to London, found work as a Web designer and lived at the London Zen Centre for five and a half months.

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The last time I heard him teach was at a precepts ceremony. He told two stories at precepts ceremonies to illustrate the importance of correct direction, knowing when the precepts are open and when they are closed. First he told the story of Hae Chung, a precepts-keeping monk who would not even uproot grass in order to save his own life and was made national teacher by the emperor in recognition of his virtue. Then he told the story of Nam Cheon killing the cat, a kong-an that has opened many Zen students' minds. When he came to the part of the story where Joju puts his sandals on his head, he took the brass hand bell from the table and put it on his head. Balancing it there he looked at the sangha serenely and said, "So keep precepts, become the national teacher. Break precepts, become a great Zen mas-



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archives

ter. Which one do you like?" He always left us with a question. But when Su Bong Sunim, his dharma heir who died in 1994, asked him "What is the shortcut to Zen?" he answered, "Not for me." This was how he lived his life—not for himself, but for all beings. The poem on the precepts certificate reads:

*Good and evil have no self-nature.
Holy and unholy are empty names.
In front of the door is the land of stillness
and light.
Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.*

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