

Student Reflections on Kyol Che

From Wu Bong Sa Kyol Che, Poland

“Basic Logic”

Wieneke Olthof

1. Every day I see my wrists,
throughout my stay they have become thinner.
Every day I am surprised:
are these wrists really mine?
2. The tap in my apartment does not really get warm.
And most of the time I need cold water anyways.
Instead of turning it from hot to cold,
Why not always leave it on hot?

“Why We Sit”

Katrin Hahn

Once, there was a woman. Her name was Sylvia Plath.
She asked a big question:
“Is there a way out of mind?”
Suffering mind. Desperately looking for the exit.
How can I help?

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Photo: Barry Briggs

From Diamond Hill Zen Monastery, Providence Zen Center, USA

“5:15 a.m.”

Monica Glennon

The bell rings. Its sound reverberates long after it's struck.
We chant. Our voices vibrate all that's around us,
As the rising sun rouses everything it touches,
Calling every living thing to
Wake Up!

From Mu Sang Sa, Korea

“Got to Have Faith”—excerpts

Michelle Kaufmann

During a dharma talk that was being given by Zen Master Dae Bong, I asked if a song which is “stuck in your head,” could be a sort of mantra. I never knew that this was going to be a question for much discussion during a time of relaxed silence.

After the intensive week of a retreat is finished, we are given a break and generally this entails that silence does not need to be kept. We began sharing the various songs that were stuck in our heads. Kathy Park mentioned the true story of a man who was stuck in a crevice in the ice and lay waiting to die. This man had “The Rivers of Babylon” stuck in his head as he lay there with a broken leg. Eventually he ended up hearing the sounds of a river and crawled to it, where he was rescued. Kathy said that that song stuck in his head was his true nature guiding him.

After our time of rest the retreat began again with the full schedule. I found that after the intensive week I had a lot of intense negative emotions coming up. I was starting to question what the point of these retreats was; perhaps the meditating wasn't working; perhaps I wasn't doing it correctly; perhaps it wasn't for me; perhaps I should leave—these questions and more pervaded my mind as a deep doubt settled in. Then in one moment I paid some attention to a song that had been stuck in my head at the time, George Michael's “Got to Have Faith,” and all of a sudden my doubt disappeared. I felt like I was listening to my true nature for the first time. I understood that this was a process and that my added judgment that these “bad” emotions shouldn't be there was only causing myself suffering. It suddenly clicked: There was a clarity; I wasn't fighting myself anymore, and I just let the uprising emotions be. By the end of the retreat the highs and lows had settled, and I now have this tool for dealing with them. That was one of the unexpected gems of the winter Kyol Che that will always be with me. ♦