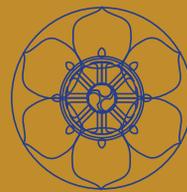
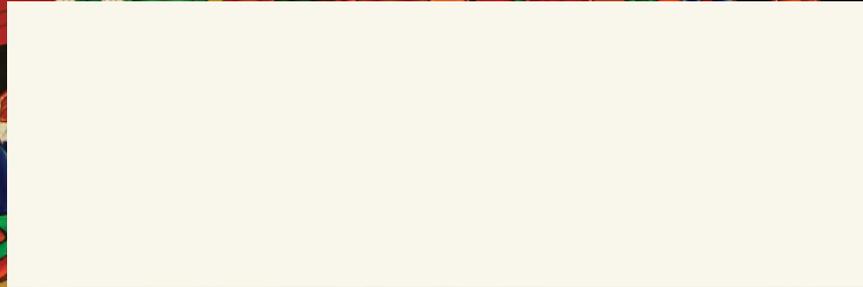


# Primary Point



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PRIMARY POINT®  
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# Winter Kyol Che 2015/16

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 99 Pound Road  
 Cumberland RI 02864-2726 U.S.A.  
 Telephone 401/658-1476  
 www.kwanumzen.org  
 online archives:

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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 2,100 copies.

The views expressed in *Primary Point* are not necessarily those of this journal or the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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**Founding Teacher**  
 Zen Master Seung Sahn

**School Zen Master**  
 Zen Master Soeng Hyang

**Editor-in-Chief**  
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**Editor for Europe**  
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Cover: This company of Dharma Protectors centers around Weitou, with guardian figures such as a celestial general, gandharva, yaksha and others surrounding him. Photo by Grzegorz Piaskowski. Taenghwa information courtesy of Won San Sunim.

# Earth, Air, Fire and Water: Repaying the Universe

*A talk given by Zen Master Seung Sahn, December 1, 1990.*

In 1986, I visited Swami Satchidananda's yoga ashram in West Virginia for the opening ceremony of the Lotus Shrine, a beautiful ecumenical pavilion. They had a dedication ceremony and had invited many teachers. All the teachers were asked to give a short talk and do some chanting from their tradition. I talked to them about how every day we breathe in air, breathe out air. We breathe in and breathe out all the time but we never pay for this most vital of our needs. The sun shines every day and nourishes our bodies with sunlight and energy for all things to grow. We live on this earth and use its resources, but we don't pay any money to the air or the sun or the earth.

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Our body is made up of four elements: earth, air, fire and water. Everything we eat or use is also made of these four elements. So these four elements are us and we are these four elements. This means we are the universe and the universe is us. But how do you show your gratitude to the universe? If you understand that, you understand your correct job as a human being. A human being's correct job is to make harmony with everything in the universe—with the sky, with the tree, with the dog, with the cat, with everything. If you have this harmony mind, you cannot kill an animal or kill a tree. That's the correct idea. This correct idea appears when you put down your opinion, condition, situation and moment to moment keep correct function, correct situation, correct relationship. Then you and the four elements become one.

After the talk, we tried the Om Mani Padme Hum chanting. In the middle of the Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra, we have this mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum. These four words mean the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. If you try this chanting, then taking away your opinion, your condition, your situation is very easy. You become one mind; you and the universe are never separate. You return to your original nature.

In Korea, there is a school of Buddhism called Jing Gak Jong. Their mantra is Om Mani Padme Hum, and they chant it all day long. It's the same style as the Kwan Seum Bosal chanting that we do in our school. Om Mani

Padme Hum means Kwan Seum Bosal. They both mean original mind. Also, Om Mani Padme Hum means eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind.

In India, Om is a sacred sound, a sacred mantra. The whole universe begins with Om. In our Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra, we have another mantra: Om Nam. Om Nam means cleaning our minds, cleaning this world. If you use something, it becomes dirty and then you need to clean it, like your clothes or your body. When you use earth, air, fire and water—the four elements and the universe—without giving anything back, your mind becomes dirty. So we use Om Nam to clean our minds.

If you try Om Nam or Om Mani Padme Hum forty-nine times in the morning and evening, then everything becomes clean: your stomach, your head, your job, your house, your universe. Why forty-nine times? In our Asian belief system, seven is a holy number. Seven times seven is forty-nine, so we try a forty-nine-day kido or forty-nine-day ceremony after someone dies.

If you try mantra practice, your mind will become quiet. But if you become attached to this quiet, then you have a problem. Another time, many years ago, I went to Swami Satchidananda's ashram. They do a lot of very wonderful chanting. It's like samadhi; people close their eyes and feel very peaceful and almost sleepy. I gave a talk and shouted KATZ! Everybody was very surprised. Brother David [David Steindl-Rast, an eminent Benedictine monk. —Ed.] was sitting next to me and he said, "Soen Sa Nim, everybody was surprised. They woke up." I said, "Not wake up. Everybody got enlightenment!"

I explained that if you only stay in your mantra, you enter nirvana. But, if you only stay in nirvana, you cannot save all beings. Wake up means entering *anuttara samyak sambodhi*. So "KATZ!" is not "KATZ!"; it is *anuttara samyak sambodhi*. So this time when I went again to Swami Satchidananda's place, he saw me and said, "KATZ!" I also said, "KATZ!" Then everybody laughed.

So our direction means, How do you make your center

strong? You must decide for yourself what kind of practice you want to do every day. Once you decide something, you must do it, and do it at the same time every day. If you have a special situation such as a guest coming and you cannot do your practice at your decided time, then doing it some other time is OK. But if nothing is happening and your lazy mind appears and you don't do your practice, then your center will not become strong. When you go to a Zen center, you do together action with other people: chanting time, chant; sitting time, sit; bowing time, bow. Doing together action will take away your karma. It will help you let go of your opinions, conditions and situations. Doing together action will help your lazy mind disappear.

Sometimes your "don't like" mind gets very strong. But like/dislike doesn't matter. If you continue to practice, like/dislike mind will become weaker and weaker. Making this mind completely disappear is very important. Why? Strong like/dislike mind means your direction is not clear. Then your practice is "only for me"—I like that, I don't like that. But if your direction is clear, you understand that your practice is only for other people. With that mind, any kind of situation is no problem. You only practice. That's a very important point.

There is a story that illustrates this. It is about my teacher, Zen Master Ko Bong. He didn't like chanting; he only liked to sit. One time he was staying in a small temple in the mountains. The abbot of the temple had to go away for a few days. While he was gone, a woman came up to the temple with rice and other food. She asked my teacher to do a ceremony for her. Without hesitation, Ko Bong Sunim said, "OK, OK," even though he didn't know the ceremony chanting.

The woman washed the fruit and cooked the rice and put everything on the altar. Then Ko Bong Sunim picked up the moktak and did some strong chanting. But this chanting was not Buddhist chanting; it was Taoist chanting. He had studied Taoism, so he knew one Taoist sutra. He chanted for one hour. The woman was very happy and said to him, "Thank you very much."

On her way down the mountain, the woman met the abbot of the temple. She explained to him how Ko Bong Sunim had done the ceremony for her. The abbot was very surprised. He said, "But he doesn't know any chanting!" The woman responded, "No, no, he did some fine chanting. I understand this kind of chanting." This woman had been a nun and she understood that what



*Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archives*



*Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archives*

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Ko Bong Sunim had chanted was not Buddhist chanting, but she was impressed by his try mind, his only-do-it mind.

When the abbot came up to the temple, he said to Ko Bong Sunim, "I met a woman who told me you did a ceremony for her."

"Yeah, no problem."

"But what kind of chanting did you do?" the abbot said. "You don't know any ceremony chanting?"

Ko Bong Sunim said, "Oh, I did some Taoist chanting." They both burst out laughing.

This is a story about only-do-it mind. When you just do it, there is only one mind. That mind is very important. It doesn't matter whether you do Buddhist chanting or Christian chanting or chant "Coca-Cola." In one mind there is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Inside and outside have become one. Then you connect with everything. You can connect with God, with Buddha, with a dog, with a cat, with a tree, with the sky, with everything. One mind means becoming completely still.

So when you try Om Nam or Om Mani Padme Hum or Kwan Seum Bosal or any mantra, just do it. Then your opinion, your condition and your situation will disappear. If you come to a Zen center, then waking up, together bowing, together chanting, together sitting, together eat-

ing becomes very easy. Then just doing it is very easy, because it's together action. In the beginning, you will have strong like/dislike mind: "I don't like Zen center food," "I don't like bowing." But if you do together action, then slowly, slowly this mind disappears. Then you can control your feelings, your condition, your situation. Then you can believe in yourself 100 percent.

There is no life, no death; no coming, no going; no time, no space. You make time, so time controls you; you make space, so space controls you. But if your practice is strong, you can use time, you can use space. Then moment to moment you can do anything. Then you see clearly, hear clearly, act clearly. If somebody is hungry, give them food. It's not good or bad; it's only bodhisattva mind. But if you have this kind of mind, "Ah, I have done bodhisattva action for this person," then that's a big mistake.

One time, my great-grandteacher, Zen Master Kyong Ho, was walking with his student Yong Song Sunim, who would later become a famous Zen master in Korea. Kyong Ho Sunim was a person of wide mind and wide actions. Yong Song Sunim was a person of kind mind and kind actions. As they were walking, they saw a group of children who had captured some frogs and were torturing them. So Yong Song Sunim offered some money to the children and bought the frogs from them. Then he put them back in the pond.

They started walking again. Then Yong Song Sunim said, "Today I brought free life to many frogs. That certainly is good karma for me and for the frogs." Immediately Kyong Ho Sunim said, "That's wonderful action, but you will go to hell!"

Yong Song Sunim was very surprised, "You said it's wonderful action. But why do you say I will go to hell?"

"The frogs are free but you will go to hell," said Kyong Ho Sunim. Yong Song Sunim begged him to explain. Kyong Ho Sunim said, "You keep saying 'I brought free life to the frogs.' This 'I' will go to hell." Then Yong Song Sunim understood and bowed to him.

Therefore, anytime you have "I," you have a problem. Our teaching is only do it. Don't make "I." When you do a good action, it's not "I did a good action"; it's your original job as a human being. It's your payment to the four elements, to the sun, the moon, the stars, the universe. A helping action is not good, not bad. Nature does its job without making good or bad. Water is flowing; is that good or bad? Sky is blue, tree is green; is that good or bad?

Don't make anything. Just do it. ♦

Note: The following two articles were speeches given on September 27, 2016 at the 25th Anniversary Celebration for Kwan Lin Chan Lin in Singapore. (The temple name literally means “Kwan Um Zen Monastery.”)

## Man of the Mountains

*Gye Mun Sunim JDPS*

Originally coming from the mountains,  
Speaking in the mountain tongue.  
Hawking pine breeze in May,  
Priceless in the human realm.  
—*Mengan Siyue*

I am a man of the mountains who likes to speak in the mountain tongue. City folks, if you do not understand, do not blame me. In the heat of May, I bring the cool pine winds from the mountains. City folks, I am afraid you do not know how to put a price to it!

“Originally coming from the mountains, speaking in the mountain tongue.” Who is the man from the mountains? What is the language of the mountains, the mountain tongue?

This is a metaphor. It means that both you and I have the mind of the Buddha, we are people of the mountains and the sound of truth is the mountain tongue. When the cool pine winds, which arise from the emptiness of all dharmas, blow onto the burning vexations that plague the human realm—that is truly priceless! Those who understand do not even need to fork out a single cent. Close your eyes and look inward. There, you will find a limitless



Photo: KYCL Archives

source of cool breeze.

Five fives is twenty five. What is “five fives is twenty-five”?

As Kwan Yin Chan Lin celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, we have a poem to share with everyone:

Originally coming from the mountains,  
Speaking in the mountain tongue.  
Hawking pine breeze in May,  
Priceless in the human realm.  
Five fives is twenty-five.

What is “Five fives is twenty-five”? Investigate!

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## Warning! There Is a Tiger Loose!

*Zen Master Dae Kwang*

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Kwan Yin Chan Lin. Traditionally, we measure our lives with anniversaries, birthdays, weddings, graduations . . . many kinds of remembrances. However, in the end, it’s not how many anniversaries we’ve had or how long we’ve been here that’s important. What’s important is what you did with your time. The same is true of Buddhist temples and Zen centers.

In the early nineties I was fortunate enough to accom-

pany Zen Master Seung Sahn to Singapore on a teaching trip. I had met a very interesting and sincere monk from Singapore in the late 1980s in Korea, and now we were going to visit him. His name was Gye Mun Sunim.

After our arrival we were sent off in a very small boat to an island to pay a visit to his temple. As the boat landed I noticed a banner hanging above the dock, which read, “Warning! There is a tiger loose on the island.” Coming from America I was quite shocked. I was used to bears and



Photo: KYCL Archives

snakes, but tigers—that’s a whole different story! It turned out that a tiger had swum from Jahor over to Pulau Ubin and was scaring the local residents. Fortunately, we made it to the temple alive and were able to have tea with Sunim.

It’s amazing to look back now and consider how Kwan Yin Chan Lin has grown over the last 25 years. But, whether located on a undeveloped island, in Bukit Timah, on Lavender Street, or in Geylang, the direction of Kwan Yin Chan Lin has always been the same: Provide clear teaching and help the world. Only a clear and dedicated leader can inspire something like that to happen year-in and year-out. That’s the true tiger!

Nevertheless, we all know that in human realms nobody does anything by themselves. Without the support of a dedicated and sincere sangha Kwan Yin Chan Lin would not be possible. Our Zen center has been able to do its work all these years through the dedication and hard work of a large number of people. Happy anniversary, Kwan Yin Chan Lin—all of you! ♦

## 8] I Still Don’t Understand My True Self

### Interviews with Zen Master Wu Bong

*Eduardo del Valle Pérez*

When I was a young Zen student, I was very interested in checking if it was true that great masters were always keeping a not-moving mind. I entered the interview room, bowed in front of Zen Master Wu Bong and sat in front of him.

He asked, “Do you have any questions?”

I suddenly jumped over him very fast, shouting “*Aah-hhggg!*” And I grabbed his neck tightly and shouted at him, “*Give me the money!*”

Zen Master Wu Bong kept completely quiet. His body didn’t move even one millimeter. He just smiled while I was grabbing his neck and very kindly asked me, “How much do you need?”



During a dharma talk at the Palma Zen Center, Zen Master Wu Bong explained that our body is not our true self. Then, when I went to the interview room I asked him, “During the dharma talk, you said that our body is

not our true self, but in the *Song of Dharma Nature* the great patriarch said, “This empty delusory body is the very body of the Buddha.” So why do you make a distinction between our body and our true self?”

Zen Master Wu Bong looked down at the floor and smiled like a child who has been caught stealing candy in a shop. He looked at me with that smile, happy to have a student confronting him. Then he said “It is just a teaching style I’m using.”



At the end of 1992, before he had received dharma transmission, I asked Jacob Perl JDPSN (who would later become Zen Master Wu Bong), “Teacher, why have you not received transmission?” He seemed humbled, looked away from me for a moment and then looked at the floor. He suddenly became sad and said to me very softly, “Zen Master Seung Sahn said to me that I don’t still understand my true self.” A few months later, he got transmission from Zen Master Seung Sahn. ♦

# Where Am I?

*Myong Hae Sunim*

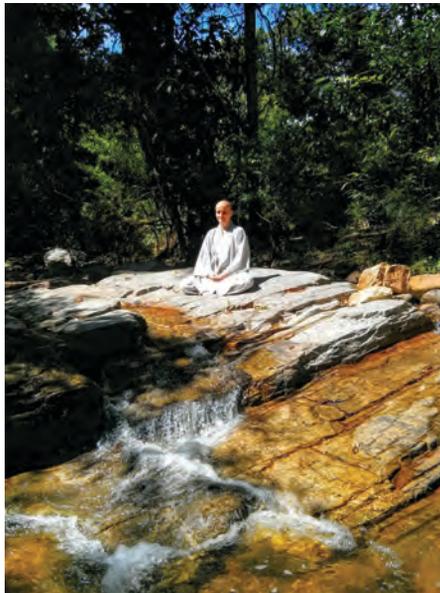
I started practicing Zen with the Kwan Um School in Lithuania in 1991. My practice there quickly pointed me in the direction of ordaining as a monastic. I traveled to Korea, ordained and soon went to Hong Kong to train with Zen Master Dae Kwan. I have been a nun now for 19 years under the guidance of Zen Master Dae Kwan, or “Sifu” as we all lovingly call her.

This last year I had the opportunity to experience our Kwan Um School in a special way. It started with me joining the three-month winter Kyol Che retreat at Providence Zen Center and then part of summer Kyol Che in Europe. At Providence, we had a different teacher nearly every week, and in Europe, summer Kyol Che took place in different countries, including the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet and practice with different sanghas from our international school. Our style of practice in the Kwan Um School is the same around the world, but there are small adjustments from sangha to sangha. I experienced don’t-know mind continuously while adjusting to these small differences. This was so valuable because it brought back a beginner’s mind over and over again. At the same time that I was experiencing the differences, I also experienced the sameness within our school, and this was a wonderful and warm feeling. You are at home in every place!

One interesting lesson for me was chanting the Heart Sutra in so many different languages. This was great! Usually we memorize the Heart Sutra in one language and then sometimes go on automatic when we chant it. Our mouths chant it but our minds think right along with no hindrance. This is not possible when trying to chant in a different language. Every word is completely new. Also, even though we all chant the Great Dharani in Korean, the melody would change ever so slightly from group to group, sangha to sangha and country to country. I found

myself asking “Where am I? Where are we in the chant?” So again and again—back to don’t-know mind!

This was the first time that I met and practiced with so many different teachers as I traveled from Asia to the United States and to Europe. Each teacher had a different way of presenting Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings. Each teacher has his or her own character and life experience, creating new and lively exchange in interviews. I often laughed as much as I learned. I felt their care and their sincere wish for each of us to grow.



*Photo: Teannie Yeung*

At first I experienced frustration with the different approaches that teachers took. Sifu, however, taught me not to attach to a “standard” answer, but rather to connect with the teacher in front of me. This meant perceiving what is happening in each moment of the interview. It was a treasure to learn different perspectives from each teacher. It is the same in our lives; there is no one formula that fits every situation. This was of great value to me and helped me to be clear in every moment, rather than depending on past experience. I completely enjoyed the process itself!

But just as wonderful and helpful as it has been to meet with so many teachers in our school, for me it has been profoundly important to have one primary teacher with whom I could deepen my practice and who guided me through thick and thin. Meeting with my primary teacher regularly meant she could point out hidden habits and show me what was sometimes so difficult for me to see clearly about myself. It was Sifu who sent me out at this point in my life to expand and to experience. I am very grateful to her.

I encourage everyone to take advantage of the unique situation in our school. You don’t need to look for other schools. Your practice can benefit greatly by meeting the many teachers and trying out the slightly different styles in the international Kwan Um School. ♦

# Once Upon a Time at Berlin Zen Center . . .

*Muchak JDPSN (Namhee Chon)*

“It would be great if we could have a Zen center near our home and do that thing we did the last week!” Roland said.

I replied, “Yes indeed! Maybe we can do it at our home.”

This was our conversation on the way home after one week of Kyol Che in Falenica, Poland. It was the very first time we participated in a Zen retreat at all, on top of which, it was the intensive week of training. Actually it was a week full of suffering and pain. We had come unknowingly to the intensive week in the middle of Kyol Che, during which extra bowing and night practice were scheduled. Everyone had only about four or five hours of sleep a day. But as soon as we left the entrance gate of the Warsaw Zen Center after the retreat, we clearly saw that something very important had come into our life.

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After coming home, we took all the furniture out of the larger room of our small two-room, 65-square-meter apartment. In the middle of the room we put a small table, and on top of it a thumb-size Buddha statue. This was now our dharma room. But we had no other people to meditate with! Therefore, as a next step, we visited countless bookstores, organic food stores and Japanese Zen dojos in Berlin and put our advertisements everywhere we could find space. And we waited, waited and waited for people to join our meditation. Many weeks and even months passed, and still, nobody showed up. It was just the two of us in the dharma room for a very long time, until on one Sunday, a couple appeared wearing the black robes of the Japanese Soto school. That was 25 years ago.

I still remember vividly our first YMJJ in Berlin. Since Roland and I were both quite poor students, we could not afford to buy mats from a shop. I had to sew the covers and fill them with cotton we bought from a wholesale market. They were finished just shortly before the YMJJ started. Many young people came to the retreat. They were strongly inspired by the teacher at that time, Do Am Sunim JDPS from Poland, whose eyes sparkled during the interviews and dharma talks. He lit a fire for practice in peoples' hearts. After that, besides regular morning and

evening practice, people often came to the Zen Center for night practice and 1,000 bows. The fact that the Zen center was also our home was forgotten completely. It was good like this.

Soon after our first YMJJ, we got a phone call from Zen Master Wu Bong, who at that time was called Dharma Master Boep Mu, and he said, “Zen Master Seung Sahn changed his schedule in Europe. Instead of Paris he wants to go to Berlin. Will you be able to prepare a retreat with him and find accommodations?”

Of course we wanted to! But it was only three weeks away! (This was in the spring of 1991.) Moreover, he was supposed to be accompanied by a group of monks and Zen masters, including Mu Sang Sunim, Su Bong Sunim, Do Am Sunim and Boep Mu JDPSN (later known as Zen Master Wu Bong). The biggest problem was to find hotel rooms for all of them. There was a major trade fair in Berlin at the same time, and so no hotel rooms were available in the whole city. After unsuccessful attempts to



*Photo: Berlin Zen Center Archives*

find rooms, we had to ask the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Berlin for help. They loaned us some old, worn mattresses and blankets, so we could accommodate all our honorable guests in our single dharma room, where they had to lie down to sleep packed tightly together.

Dae Soen Sa Nim said simply, “Stay at the Zen center, no problem!”

So he slept in the other small room, in Roland's and my bed.

"Since the beginning of our school, we have never spent nights so close together like this," said our guests, laughing and taking the situation with humor.

But there was an even more serious problem: the bathroom. As was customary at that time in cheap student apartments in Berlin, we had no shower! Therefore we had to take all our guests to the nearby public bath, which was located in a big public swimming pool building. Of course, we had no car, so we had to walk about 15 minutes each way. I learned that Americans usually take their cars even for distances walkable in 10 minutes. This was somehow a big surprise for me.

The retreat was a great success. We were all thrilled and enthusiastic about our teachers and the large turnout. We promised Dae Soen Sa Nim that we will get a good hotel room for him if he came to visit again. We could happily keep our promise the following year. With an increasing number of members and support from Korea and Mu Shim Sunim (now Zen Master Dae Jin), who sent us a golden Buddha statue and a big bell, our Berlin Zen Center slowly got into good shape.

From the very beginning, the Zen center was too small to host retreats. For many years we had to rent places for our YMJJ. Thus a weekend retreat for us meant moving

the whole Zen center back and forth: the Buddha, bell, mats and pots all needed to be moved to the rented places and afterward back to the Zen center. I guess this was one of the reasons why our dream of a bigger Zen center became strong and urgent. We wanted to build a residential Zen center with a bigger dharma room and many more bedrooms so we could live and practice together.

Where there are visions, there are ways to fulfill them. In the mid-1990s, the Zen center received a generous donation from a wonderful bodhisattva, a friend of one of our members. With this money, we could now rent a 400-square-meter former factory floor. We renovated it according to the needs of the Zen center. This happened during the years Roland and I were living in Korea. This very large project was accomplished by Jo Potter JDPSN, Arne Schaefer JDPSN and many other members in Germany and all of Europe with much dedication and love. Thanks to their work, members and visitors of Berlin Zen Center still receive the immeasurable benefit of having a beautiful space of our own to do retreats, and to live and practice together. The building project of Berlin Zen Center is yet another story in itself, and I hope we will soon have an opportunity to tell about it.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped to establish Berlin Zen Center. Thank you all! ♦

## Winter Kyol Che - Europe 2016 January 2nd - March 18th at Wu Bong Sa, Warsaw, Poland



With special events March 19 - 20:  
Memorial Ceremony for Zen Master Wu Bong  
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Picture courtesy of Barry Briggs JDPSN

**Editor's Note:** In this issue, we've chosen a number of articles that touch on aspects of Zen and everyday life. A number of our sangha members—and even extended sangha—have contributed their experiences on how they live the dharma outside of dharma room practice. The articles appeared through dialogue between them and the editor, and my hope is that they may begin a dialogue for you as well.

# Staying Open and Curious in the Face of Uncertainty

*Jan Sendzimir*

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Long before I ever heard the First Noble Truth it was clear how pivotal change was in my life. Against a backdrop of war, riots, famines and industrial pollution I struggled with all the transitions a young person can undergo. Zen practice helped me to face this challenge with my whole life, exploring the sources of these boundaries that define *who* is challenged and *how* one responds. The momentum to open, which started with Zen, helped in dealing with crises that emerged at scales far bigger than I first imagined.

Who draws the line that marks one's identity? Is it only the skin that encloses one's self?

Crises may expose boundaries that are much wider than that. Suppose change is challenging how nations function (financial collapse, war) or how the whole world works (climate change)? Who draws the line enclosing the "we" that responds to these broader crises with together action?

For over 40 years I have dealt with change, working personally and in groups to understand and adapt to an uncertain world. Some knew me as a scientist, some as an eco-activist, some as a Zen Buddhist, and some as all of the above. No single label, technique or practice could address the full range of crises that could emerge at personal, family, neighborhood, metropolitan, regional, national or international levels. To return toward harmony at any of these levels it was far more important to stay open and curious over the long run rather than immediately snap out the right tool with the right answer.

That has proven the key challenge all along: how to keep a vivid question alive rather than hide behind an answer. Settling deeply into this moment, questioning can light any corner like a flickering candle. But those not fully settled prefer the stark spotlight of certainty. In every community, whether Zen or activist NGOs or science, people may cling to the little bright circle cast by the steady beam of their assumptions, myths, paradigms and other stories. But the shifting shadows of an evolving world will sweep over any fixed beam of light. As the German general Helmuth van Moltke said, "No plan survives contact with the enemy."

Certainly the label of "Zen student" did not prevent me from clutching to myths in my quests to help the world deal with change as a scientist. The start of my career as an ecologist saw me trying to decrease environmental destruction by developing ways to determine the value of nature that are more accurate than money. For years I was trapped in the myth that people are logical and will consciously choose "the higher value" of nature over their own self-interest. My world closed in and narrowed around this myth and our magic method, and I became a dogmatic advocate. The maxim "If you are a hammer every problem looks like a nail" certainly applied to me.

Ironically, it was not a Zen teacher but a scientist who woke me up to my cultish ways. He pointed out that I was no longer even a scientist. A real scientist never defends an idea. One's job is to challenge any idea with the evidence

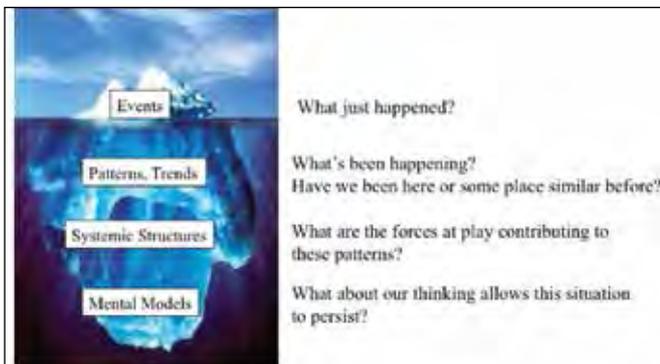


*Photo: Jan Sendzimir*

one gathers. To show the weakness of an idea provides the opening for us to advance to better understanding. This reminded me of how Zen originally appealed to me as something that never ages, because it challenges one to recognize that as soon as one feels comfortable with an answer, one has fallen asleep. My mentor sustained that nimble outlook by always referring to concepts and theories as lies. They are lies because they are incomplete. No idea can capture the whole world. They always fall down eventually. To stay open and honest, my mentor's motto was "The truth is hiding at the intersection of conflicting lies."

Sometimes an idea can brilliantly come close to the truth, perhaps for a little while. And if one is humble enough to entertain more than one way of looking at the world, perhaps one can bracket the truth, nestling in closely from several sides. For several decades I have worked with people inside and outside of science on how to make better decisions about how to respond to challenges like climate change. The aim was to work together and attain a view wide enough to include all the lies, for example, myths people use to filter how they see the world, knowing full well no single person "has the whole truth." Even this public agenda did not keep people from flocking to their own myths. Everyone had a miracle cure, a panacea. Eco-activists might go back to 400-year-old maps to envision a world without human influence, and determine "what nature wants." The hammer solution for economists was markets, and for political activists it was holistic socialist visions.

For more than 50 years businesses and communities have experimented with dialogues like this to make it plain to everyone what ideas they have been holding on to and how they might move beyond them to deal with change that might destroy them. The future may be so uncertain that we lack the means to cope right now, but perhaps we can "learn our way" to a better future. One diagram was developed by Peter Senge to show the stages of such learning in groups.



Moving from the top to the bottom of the iceberg one finds more and more powerful forces that influence one's world. Most people are stuck at the top, on the events, the newspaper headlines, that pop up like flares with no pattern that connects and makes sense of them. Historians and statisticians might look deeper for those patterns that show us trends that brought us here or that suggest where we are going. Looking deeper one searches for the ways that we interact, the patterns of behavior, that create those trends. At the base are the most powerful forces that determine all the patterns above: the myths and paradigms we nurture. Based on this iceberg view, to achieve any insight one must sustain learning long enough and deep enough to uncover the mental models and myths with which we build our worlds. Not that any one is "right" or "wrong," but because when we recognize this diversity we might peacefully and intelligently find solutions that satisfy everyone.

What a delicious irony that after starting out 50 years ago as a bug-loving biologist, I have come full circle from the certainty of "hard" science to push against the doors of perception. Here I wonder about what Zen might offer for going deeper. Zen pushes one further. If these paradigms frame how we construct reality, then what lies beneath that? What is evident when one has no platform to stand on, no paradigm with which to filter what we see and feel? As always, I have no answer. But the questions have only grown more intriguing, and when they are offered instead of solutions, people are more likely to reach for their own resources to look for a way forward, rather than get stuck on what I have to say. ♦

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Photo: Karl Keindl

Jan Sendzimir has been a senior dharma teacher for 30 years and is head dharma teacher at the Vienna Zen Center (Kwan Um Zen Wien). He moved into the Providence Zen Center when it actually was in Providence and has been a student of the Kwan Um School of Zen since 1974. He has worked as a systems ecologist for over 30 years, often acting as the bridge between scientists and nonscientists in sustainability

projects in Central Asia, West Africa and Europe. He is an avid photographer and currently teaches and does research at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Science in Vienna.

# I'm Breathing—Are You?

*Nancy Hathaway*

It began as a quiet, peaceful day, as mornings with mothers and children at home often begin. But as the day goes on, the activity and energy of the household increases. Grandmother comes to visit, friends come to play with treasured toys, tiredness comes on and hunger appears. So, he loses it. Five years old and screaming, a full-blown temper tantrum. Grandmother (my mother) begins getting uncomfortable with his behavior, saying, “If he doesn’t stop screaming, I will need to go home.” This was the beginning of her four-day visit. She lives three hours away.

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I lead my child into our little at-home meditation room. The room is bare and full of space—loving, attentive, nonjudgmental space. It has been furnished over time with breath and posture, with attention and chanting. I sit with him on a pile of bed pillows and hold the flailing, screaming mind for ten minutes, for twenty minutes, for thirty minutes. What a meditation retreat! How long will this mind go on? I hang in, mindful of my breath, posture and body sensations, mindful of us both. Staying with my breath, I keep an upright posture and quietly chant Kwan Seum Bosal. (This is a Korean Zen chant that invokes love and compassion. I could have chanted Coca-Cola. It is the relaxed mother in me that is chanting.) Finally, at sixty minutes, the flailing quiets and disappears; the mind of smiles and hugs and cuddles appears. We sit quietly breathing together.

Gram is still here.

A week later the screaming mind appears again in my five-year-old. This time he takes me by the hand and leads me into the safe space. On this day the screaming mind only needed ten minutes. And the next time only four. And the next time only . . . Now, at eighteen years old, when this young adult/child who knows me so well sees any tension in my face, he lovingly says, with a relaxed, strong posture, full of confidence, and with a smile, “I’m breathing—are you?”

Parenting is challenging. Our children cry. Our children throw temper tantrums—in supermarkets, in quiet spaces, in the most embarrassing of places. Our children whine, fight, say sassy things. They push our buttons.

They want dinner when we’re not ready to make dinner, and they don’t want dinner when it is ready. Our children want one more story, just when we are beat, exhausted and need to do just a few more things before hitting the sack ourselves. Our children look into our eyes and with the sweetest of faces say, “Mommy will you play with me?” while we are in the middle of something—whatever it is—and it’s hard to let go of what we’re doing, or it’s not appropriate to let go of what we’re doing. Perhaps dinner is burning and the phone is ringing and someone is at the door while at the same time our children want our attention—and they want it *right now!*

We want the best for our children, our families, ourselves; we want family life to be peaceful and happy. But family life is often uncomfortable and filled with intense feelings. The question is: What do we do with this discomfort? What do we do with our feelings? How do we relate to this strain of wanting something other than this?



Many of us have come to expect family life to look like images from *Martha Stewart Living*. Magazine pictures begin to seem like the norm. If our life doesn’t look like that, we think something is wrong. The few of us who do have the Martha Stewart house realize that something is missing. We spend much of our time and energy trying to get it all together. We put a lot of time into our makeup, but our faces have frowns; our clothing is well thought out, but our posture is bent over; our kitchens are big and glamorous, but the warmth of the hearth is missing. We have romanticized the material world, thinking that it brings happiness. We are surrounded by messages from

the media that tell us, if we have this or that, we will have it all. But what is it all? Do we take the time to ask ourselves what it is that we are *really* looking for?

The simple answer is we're looking for happiness. We have come to believe that happiness will come from stopping the crying child, the temper tantrum, the whining, the sassy talk, the loud music. We try to avoid pain, and we seek comfort—often by acquiring more and more of something, anything—instead of wanting, accepting, appreciating and receiving what we actually have.

There is another way. As a longtime student and instructor of Zen and mindfulness, and the mother of two sons, I have found certain Buddhist teachings and practices to be extremely helpful in working with the inherent challenges and discomforts of raising children. In particular, the core Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths (I call them the Four Precious Truths) and the practice of meditation—in the midst of regular, everyday life—have guided and supported me through the parenting years. These teachings have no religious boundaries; they are remarkably universal—mothers of any background can draw on them for insight and guidance. Meditation and the Four Noble Truths point us in the direction that we all long for as human beings on this planet together; they point us in the direction of freedom from suffering.



## The Four Noble Truths of Parenthood

Asked to give a talk after his enlightenment, the Buddha chose for his first discourse what has come to be known as the Four Noble Truths, or as I like to say the Four Precious Truths. *Precious* because they offer a direct and well-worn path to true happiness. This talk was given on Vulture Peak in India in sixty century BCE. These ancient truths are relevant today in 2011. Following is part of an essay written for parents bringing these Four Precious Truths into everyday life with children. Even if we are not parents, as Zen students we can relate this to our

own lives if we think of “mother” as Zen practitioner and “child” as the humanness in all of us. Zen Master Uchiyama, in *Opening the Hand of Thought*, says, “To be a true adult means to treat each moment as our child.”

### 1. Parenthood will always include discomfort and pain.

The First Noble Truth of Buddhism is that life often fails to meet our hopes and expectations. As parents, we face this essential fact when our children cry, lose a favorite toy, feel left out, get sick. When pain arises, more often than not we get tight, we turn off, we resist. We try to push it all away. Many mothers think that if they are “good mothers” their children will not be uncomfortable, will not cry, will not feel angry, will not have any real problems. But the first Noble Truth of Buddhism reminds us that difficulty and pain will always be part of life, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, whether we are the haves or the have nots.

### 2. Suffering is caused by wanting life to be other than the way it is.

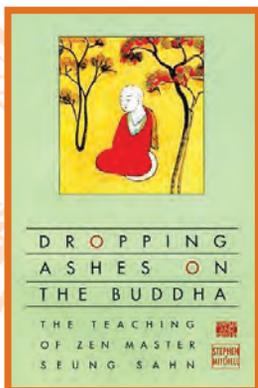
Suffering arises when we want something other than what we are presented with. And, of course, we often want something other than what we get. Our children are crying, and we want them to be smiling. They are throwing a temper tantrum in the grocery store, and we want them to be cute and make it easy for us to do our shopping. Our child wets the bed or the house is a mess, and we yell out of frustration.

The way we usually try to find happiness—by controlling or forcing the situation to be the way we want it to be—is, in fact, the route to more suffering. Of course, we want peaceful situations, happy children, a clean house. But if this is not the reality, how do we deal with it? How do we relate to the inherent challenges, frustrations and pain of daily life with children? So often we create more unnecessary suffering by insisting that our children be different from who they are, that this moment be different than it is. We create more suffering when we try to ignore the pain, the discomfort, or when we get angry at it. In short, whenever we try to get rid of what is, we get into trouble.

### 3. Freedom from suffering is possible.

The third Noble Truth is fairly simple. Since we know the cause of suffering (wanting things to be other than they are), we can find a solution. There is a way out of this trap. Then we ask, “What is the way out of suffering?”

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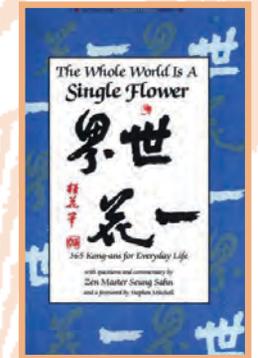
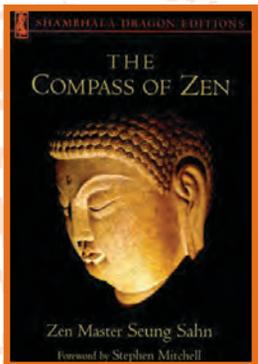
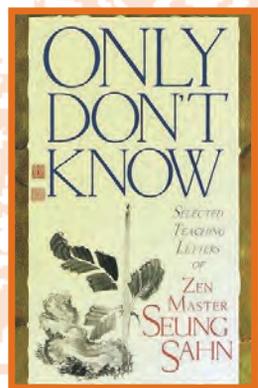
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How can we create true happiness instead of being led down the old, worn path of creating more suffering?

#### **4. The way out of suffering is learning to be with life as it is and making that our practice.**

More traditionally, the fourth Noble Truth of Buddhism outlines a specific way out of suffering known as the Eightfold Path (right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right meditation). In broad terms, the Eightfold Path consists of powerful daily practices for learning to live in harmony with life as it is, rather than constantly trying to force life into being what we want it to be. Parenthood provides countless opportunities to do just that—to drop our expectations, our hopes, our preconceptions, and to learn to be with life just as it is, in *this* moment.

The first step is to become fully aware of what *is*. For example, I am in the supermarket and my child is crying. Embarrassment arises within me, the look of the woman next to me suggests to me that I am committing a mortal sin by having a screaming child. I feel tightness in my chest. I hear the voice in my head that says my child shouldn't be screaming!

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This is my experience; this is the pain of *this* moment. I breathe and take a moment to notice my thoughts, feelings, physical sensations. I let them in. This is what is. You might ask how I can do this in the middle of such a situation, feeling harassed and under pressure. It takes practice and courage and faith. The more we do it, the more we open to the fullness of the moment, the more we know in our mind and body that it works. It doesn't take long before the situation starts to shift. We begin to feel a little space, and coolness arises. Then from a calmer, more balanced place, where we are aware of what is and accept what is, we find that we know what to do. We know how to set limits for our child or we know that we must let go of our own expectations. We act with greater compassion and wisdom for all.

Too often, when the going gets tough with our children, we try to escape our reality. We lose our courage to live in the moment. When our feelings start to intensify, we try to run away from them by blaming the situation on someone else, usually someone closest to us like our spouse or our children. As strange as it sounds, if we open to discomfort and experience 100 percent, then we experience freedom, liberation, true love.

By opening to the moment, we are able to slow down and breathe into the middle of our discomfort. We are able to be with our children, see their discomfort fully, see their pleasure fully, smell the flowers, really see the smiles on their

faces. We notice the I-want-a-perfect-child dream, the I-want-a bigger-house dream, the I-want-you-to-be-other-than-you-are dream. By noticing the dream, we acknowledge it; by acknowledging it, we sometimes don't have to act on it. The essential point is that the way out of suffering is to practice accepting what is—accepting the whole realm, accepting discomfort, ours, theirs—accepting it all.

### **Putting the Teachings into Practice**

As mothers, how do we use the Four Noble Truths to help us to become more present with our children? How do we start to live in the real moment right here, right now, rather than in the dream, whatever dream it is? The idea of living in the moment is simple, but attaining it is not so easy. Old habits die hard—old patterned ways of being, of doing things, of living life. To change these old habits, we need to practice. We need to practice making a choice that is not based on feelings of fight-or-flight, not trying to change what is, not trying to control the situation, but rather by choosing to live with discomfort. So how do you actually do this in the real world, in daily life? How do you turn this vision of wakeful parenting into a reality? In Zen, we begin with the body.

#### **Posture**

In Zen, proper meditation posture is the basis of enlightenment—some say it's all you need. What is proper posture for the practice of parenthood? It is to stand erect in the middle of life, with dignity, grace and an open heart. The practice is to do this at the kitchen sink, behind the wheel of the car, pushing the grocery cart, changing diapers. The other choice is to stand rounded over, chest hollowed in as we sink in and try to cover or hide our pain, oftentimes subconsciously. If we stand straight, or sit upright, with shoulders back, chest and heart open, head upright, we automatically become more aware and awake.

In traditional Zen meditation, proper posture also includes how we hold our faces. Zen practitioners are sometimes instructed to do sitting meditation with a slight smile on their faces. Not a fake, wide smile, but a gentle half-smile. A simple practice for mothers is to bring this kind of smile into the daily life of parenting.

Many of us have always wanted to be a mother. We knew that this would involve making dinner for our families, changing diapers, getting up early and so on, and yet here we are making dinner and wishing that we

were somewhere else. “Oh, the sunny, warm Caribbean . . .” Yet this same exact experience, including the Caribbean dream, can change from an expression of our suffering into a moment of true happiness if we put a small smile on our faces. It is that simple. The same exact scenario of wanting to escape from our lives can bring us happiness if we are fully present to it, aware of the longing, aware of exactly what this present moment brings. Doing so, we become less attached and have more distance, seeing this scenario as manifesting on its own. The practice of the half-smile takes the ego out of the situation, adds some space, brings gentle awareness of what is. Try it. Change a messy diaper mumbbling, grumbling, complaining—then add a smile, being aware of it all. This small, relaxed smile can make a surprisingly big difference.

### The Bell of Attention

Ring a bell in the home is a wonderful way to remind us to breathe, straighten our posture and come back to the present moment. Find a bell that is attractive and easy to ring. Create a special table that invites attention, presence and respect as the setting for the bell. This table could include seasonal flowers or objects that your children might collect, such as horse chestnuts or acorns. This should not be a place of forgetfulness, but a place that is alive with change. You could add a frame to display school papers for a few days at a time. Place the bell on the table so that it invites people to ring it.

Anyone in the family—child or adult—may ring the bell at any time. When the bell is rung, everyone stops what they are doing and is aware of three breaths (and perhaps the parents remember to smile). This bell can give children a wonderful sense of power. They can do something that makes everyone stop—for a positive reason. Children are sensitive, more so than we realize. When they need attention they ring this bell and sometimes their need will be satisfied by taking three breaths . . . sometimes.

Knowing that this is your direction, your children may start to notice when you are stressed and may know that if you raise your voice, it’s because you’ve temporarily lost your openness, not because they are bad. They may also see when they are not acting compassionately and may develop a skill for coping with their own stressful situations—breathing

before an exam, straightening their posture as they get up in front of the class while giving a report, taking a quiet moment before a foul shot in front of the whole school.

As mothers, we must make a conscious choice about how we want to live. The swirl of society is rushing around us. Do we want to live in a dream, or do we want to experience reality? As we experience what it really means to be a mother, we begin to connect to all mothers, for we all want to end suffering and find true happiness for ourselves, for our children, for all beings. I call this realizing “mother’s mind.”

As we learn through our experience what it means to be a loving, compassionate mother, we encounter each situation as our child. Using the resources of the present moment, we become fulfilled and truly happy even as we face our biggest challenges, because we know that this, too, is part of being a mother in this universe. As we practice on this path of awareness, we expand our love to include more and more of the pleasures and pains of what it means to be human. This is the way things are as a parent.

Motherhood is the perfect path for spiritual practice, for enlightenment. It puts us right in the gut of this life: we love our children to death, we want the very best for them. We do so much for them, making great efforts to get them what we think they need. But what our children really need is for their mothers to be present with them. You can give them the tiniest of birthday cakes, the smallest of presents, and if it is done with real attention and wakefulness, what could be better?

And when they cry—over the loss of a toy or the loss of a friend—what is it that they really want? Yes, they want particular things, this or that, but on a basic level they want their mothers to be present with them while they cry. They want a mother who can stand in the middle of chaos and breathe, and have a slight smile on her face, because chaos is the way it is. So please be present in it, and give your children what they—and you—really want: the great open question, full of wonder, curiosity, surprise, asking, “right now, *what is this?*” ♦

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# When World Sound Equals Police Shooting Black Men

Colin Beavan

## A Big Question

There is a teaching in the Kwan Um School of Zen in which I am a dharma teacher: We practice so that our minds become clear. Without our thoughts and judgments to muddy our minds, we can see clearly where the world needs our help and how to help it. Once your mind becomes clear, you become one with your situation and react with spontaneous compassion. So we say: When a hungry man comes, you can just give him food. When a thirsty woman comes, you can just give her something to drink.

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This is a very simple and wonderful teaching, one that I like because it reminds me that my spiritual practice is not just for me but also for everyone else. But still, I have some very big questions about my relationship with the world. Even if I understand about feeding hungry people when they appear, what do I do when other, more complicated world problems appear?

For example, what do I do when I see so many videos on the news of black person after black person being shot and beaten by white police officers? What do I do when I am reminded further that people of color are getting the shortest end of the stick, not just when it comes to police violence but in every area from education to employment to home ownership? What do I do when I see that the more layers I peel back, the more complex the issues of racism are? What on Earth, as a white practitioner of Zen, am I supposed to do, then, when it is nowhere near as simple as giving food to a nearby hungry man or water to a nearby thirsty woman? What do I do when the problem seems so big and totally beyond my control?

### ***Kwan Se Um Means “Perceive World Sound”***

Kwan Um, the name of our school, means “perceive sound.” Zen Master Seung Sahn, our founder, said that “perceiving world sound means perceiving that many, many people are suffering.” The Zen master insisted that the bone of our school’s teaching is not just attaining Buddha’s truth but attaining the correct function of that truth. Or to put it another way, not

just knowing what Buddha knew but doing what he did—helping people. After all, when you live in the world, what is the actual point of enlightenment besides helping others?

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “Only attaining truth is ‘monk Buddhism.’ Keep your hair cut and go to the mountains, practice your whole life. Correct function is not necessary because you have no wife, no children and no connection to society.” He also said: “Lay practice [practicing in the world] is not like a monk’s job—it is how to help other people. First your family, then your friends, then your country and all beings: helping them is your obligation.”

For my part, if I am honest, then I must admit that sometimes, when I am practicing meditation, helping the world is not my first idea. Sometimes I want peace—“nirvana.” I want something for myself. Thinking appears that tells me “maybe my practice will help me feel less upset about the world.” Or “maybe I will learn to accept things I have no control over.” Sometimes, I even want escape from the confusion that comes with not knowing what to do in the face of big world problems like systemic racism. But these thoughts are part of the Zen sickness we sometimes call attachment to emptiness or attachment to peace. Attachment to peace is still a kind of clinging that prevents me from functioning correctly in the world—how can I help?

The great news is that *How can I help?*—our bodhisattva vow—is not something that we impose on ourselves. It is not a promise that we make on the outside of ourselves about how we will be on the inside. Because the vow is already at the core of ourselves. Our practice is just to liberate the vow. Clinging to peace is what is on the outside. Attachment to stillness is the actual imposition—because it is the desire for something that does not exist. The bodhisattva vow—to function in relation to things as they actually are—is our true nature. It is the sunlight that is revealed when the clouds of I-my-me desires for peace and heaven finally part.

It is this light that helps me understand that my confusion in the face of big societal problems is itself truth. My confusion and despair do not need to be pushed away. In fact, they cannot be pushed away. A better practice is to embrace truth. Embrace things as they are. Embrace confusion. Then the question becomes: What is my relationship to that truth? What can I do with my confusion?

### Helping Is Both Possible and Necessary

Zen Master Seung Sahn wrote, “If you can hear the sound of suffering then helping is both possible and necessary.” This teaching is very helpful to me. It gives me faith in my confusion. It tells me that the fact that I feel confused about what I can do about the systemic racism I witness means that somehow I can help with it. Not knowing what to do is itself the seed that will eventually grow—if I nourish it—into knowing what to do.

Once, in relation to another problem, I asked one of our school’s very senior teachers, “What do I do about being confused?”

He said, “Get unconfused.”

So in my confusion about the racism I have been witnessing, one of my first steps is to get unconfused. I have begun by asking questions, having conversations. Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, “When a primary cause meets a condition, you get a result. If you want to change the result, you must change the primary cause.”

So what is the primary cause that results in people of color getting shot by police, put in jail far too often and not having the same access to opportunities that white people like me are more likely to have? I have heard many people say that the problem, when it comes to police violence against people of color, is individual racist police officers. Certain bad eggs in our society. But instead of using such a simple idea to help me escape from confusion, what happens if I keep not knowing? Keep asking why?

Eventually, what I have begun to learn from people who know much more than I do is that the problems—from police violence to unequal access to opportunity—are caused not just by bad people but by a bad “system.” The problems are not caused just by prejudiced people but by a “system” that is itself racist. There are many reasons for the racism of our “system” of federal, state and local governments, religious organizations, corporations and other institutions. Part of it is the inheritance of history. Part of it is because societal “systems” tend to automatically favor the largest groups. Part of it is because many prejudiced people have power in the systems.

So how can I assist in changing these primary causes? Where in this complicated system, metaphorically speaking, is the hungry man or the thirsty woman that appears before me whom I can help? I have learned that I have some influence in the “mainstream,” through my membership in the institutions that add together to make up the system. Each of us can reduce some of the primary causes of systemic racism to work toward a different result by using what influence we have.

Here are some examples. They are not the only methods but they are some that I have used:

- **We can join anti-racist organizations where we can help and learn:** I have found that the fastest way to get involved with issues I care about is to join in with others who are already working on them. That way I can learn and channel my efforts effectively.
- **We can each lovingly explain to people how systemic racism works and how we need to work to change the system.** In my case, right now I am using my small amount of influence by writing this article.
- **We can each learn to tolerate and promote the tolerance of difference.** For example, I recently read about a company where black workers tended to sit around and chat before getting to work. White workers got straight to the task and thought the black workers were lazy. Black workers thought the white workers were cold. But it turned out that the black socializing reduced worktime conflict and therefore increased productivity. Blacks and whites got the same amount of work done.
- **We can support institutions run by people of color.** Rather than just making white organizations more inclusive, each of us can support non-white owned and run organizations with our money and memberships.
- **We can remember to hire and encourage our employers to hire outside our personal networks.** When we only hire friends and social connections, we end up denying employment opportunities to people who are not like us, as well as losing the opportunity to acquire their new skills and talents.

Is this everything we can do? Will this fix everything? Will it even fix anything? Maybe yes. Maybe no. Who knows? Be willing to stay confused. If you make a mistake or you are not as effective as you would like to be in your first attempt, then you can fix it in your next. Our practice is not to constantly check the potential results of our actions—that can paralyze us—but to keep strongly to

*(Continued on p. 26)*

# Book Excerpt: *Meditation for Moms and Dads*

Shana Smith

**Editor's note:** This article includes five excerpts from various parts of a forthcoming book.

## Tip #1 The Four Noble Truths of Parenting and the Path

The Buddha laid out what are called the Four Noble Truths, and they are considered the foundation for all spiritual seekers. Here they are, simplified and modified for moms and dads:

1. With the considerable demands of parenting, there will be times when you really feel suffering. And *oy*, when you feel it, the rest of the family feels it, too.
2. The reason we suffer is usually because we have unrealistically high expectations of ourselves as parents and the world and people around us, and with expectations not being met. (For example, we get sick—not supposed to happen! Our child misbehaves—not supposed to happen! I can't finish all my work in time—not supposed to happen! I am not a perfect mom/meditator as I see what perfect is supposed to be—not supposed to happen!) With our constant efforts to mold ourselves and the world around us so these expectations can be met comes predictable disappointment, fatigue, heartache, and so on, aka *suffering*.
3. There is a way to end this cycle of suffering. The whole world benefits from this Way. You do not have to go to any extremes like leaving your family to go on a lifelong pilgrimage to the Himalayas, or live as an ascetic in the woods and

eat oak leaves for twelve years. Nor is the Way to win the lottery and have all worldly needs compensated for (although occasional pedicures are really nice). It is often called “The Middle Way.”

4. The Middle Way involves concerted daily focus on right choices, as defined in the Eightfold Path, and is worth studying. The Middle Way involves getting to know your mind and your extremes, and finding your center. For example, parents often oscillate between the extremes of exhaustion and mania. Learning through meditation what your tendencies and triggers are will allow you to recognize these tendencies and coax yourself lovingly to a state of balance, and hence end the roller coaster. Ultimately, it is your clear intention to end suffering via meditation and the daily action of sending love to yourself and to others that will set you—and those around you—free. Not only your family, but the whole world will find peace at last through this Way, and yes, Mom and Dad, it all starts with you. There is a reason spiritual deities have names like Holy Father, Divine Mother, Mother Earth, Father Sun, and the like. As parents, we have been endowed with a mighty big mission from the All, one full of miracles, magic, connection and awareness beyond boundaries or gates. Enjoy—or at least notice and fully experience—every moment.

## Tip #27

Children have a way of interpreting, utilizing and expressing the spiritual/yogic/meditation teachings in their own unique ways. Because we are adults



Photo: Shana Smith

with lots of stories—that is, baggage—that can affect or infect our interpretations, children’s unique expressions can irritate us and make us feel we need to correct them toward the “proper” way of expression. Or, better yet, bring us back to total innocence if we let them. Take my five-year old son, for example, who, like most young children, is full of unique and hilarious expressions. Today, I asked him to use a mindful Yoga Nidra type of body scan to help him get to sleep for naptime. So he did, a la: “Go to sleep, eyes! *Bam!*” (Hits his face close to his eyes.) “Ow! Hahahaha! Go to sleep, head! *Super zop!*” (Punches himself on the head.) “Oow! Hahahahaha! Get yourself to sleep, ears! *Whammo!*” (Boxes himself on the ears.) “*Youch!* Bwaa hahahaha!” Unbelievably, he passed out in three minutes.

### Tip #68

Said a 98-year-old wise woman to me recently: “When you are in your twenties you think you are wise because you are a grownup. When you are in your thirties and forties you think you are wise because you have a job and kids. When you are in your fifties you think you are wise because your kids are grown up and you’ve got stuff. When you are in your sixties you think you are wise because you have grandkids and you have photo albums. When you are in your seventies and eighties you think you are wise because you are outliving all of your friends and you have a lot of stories about your life. But when you get to be my age you figure out that all you’ve been doing is defining yourself relative to other things, as if you were some kind of fixed point. That’s impossible. I’m almost 100 and there is nothing to say. I’m just here, still breathing in the whole thing and I’m damn thankful for it.”

### Tip #69

My young son and I were watching in wonder at the early morning light illuminating the rising mists from the ground in wispy, smoky clouds. He asked me: “What is that?” I explained that it was water, changing form from liquid to vapor and going back into the air. He asked: “Why does it do that?” I dutifully told him about the water cycle, about evaporation, how the rising sun warmed the water molecules and made them dance right up into transformation. I know a lot about these things. I was a scientist, and can to this day identify almost every type of sea star on the planet by its taxonomic classification and geographical location.

But as I said the word “dance,” I realized that he and I, in our true state of being, are no different from the

rising mists of the morning. When our mind is pure and present, we too dance from one transformation to the next, as the forces of nature dictate. It is not our place to cling to the leaf for fear of not being dew anymore. We will only suffer unless we defer to the greater miracle before us. I know a lot about sea stars and the water cycle and ecology and biochemistry. But I never danced with them until now. I know a lot about education and taking care of kids, but without dancing with our kids we are joyless. We dance to piano lessons, to board meetings, through dishwashing, through taxes; we dance to dance classes. We dance to the ethers, and then back again, as we are called.

### Tip #70

Even if you haven’t been on your meditation cushion or yoga mat for weeks, you know you are doing OK when you see the mountain of laundry before you and your mind simply registers, “This is what’s in front of me to take care of in this moment.” If instead your mind is saying, “*When will it ever end?!*” then you have created the householder’s version of a kong-an, worth contemplating, for there is no answer other than “Never” and “Right now,” simultaneously. It’s a win-win. ♦

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*Meditation for Moms and Dads: 108 Tips for Mindful Parents and Caregivers* by Shana Smith will be available February 2016, from Clear Sky Publishing, <http://clearskypublishing.com>.



Photo: Richard Godby  
Media Group

Shana Smith is a mom, musician, meditator, marine biologist, teacher and writer. She is an avid and longtime student of Zen and Buddhism, a decades-long yogi, and a much sought-after kirtaniya, or devotional chanting leader. Known across the state of Florida and the United States for

the past 20 years as her children’s entertainment persona “Shana Banana,” Shana and her family (husband Dan, daughter Grace Ohana, and son Benny Albert) have settled down in Gainesville, Florida to run their meditation- and yoga-based Gainesville Retreat Center, which attracts many renowned teachers and practitioners. For more information, phone numbers and e-mail addresses, go to, [www.GainesvilleRetreatCenter.com](http://www.GainesvilleRetreatCenter.com) or [www.ShanaBanana.com](http://www.ShanaBanana.com).

# Did Buddha Chant?

Scott Martin

The following piece is an answer from Orlando Zen Center's web master to a question submitted about chanting.

Hello,

Two questions:

1. Did Buddha chant? Please direct me to your source of information.

2. Is there a reason for chanting?

Thank you,

M.

Hi M.,

Thanks for writing. Please note that I am answering your e-mail only as a member of Orlando Zen Center and not in any way as its representative. Other members would surely answer differently.

24] **You asked: "Did Buddha chant? Please direct me to your source of information."**

Don't Know! Zen is a Mahayana style of Buddhism, and as such is not so concerned with the veracity of truth claims related to the historical Buddha. Have you tried searching Google for answers to this question?

**You asked: "Is there a reason for chanting?"**

You can read what our founder, Zen Master Seung Sahn, said about chanting on our school website in an article titled "Why We Chant." [Or you can read the article, "Earth, Fire and Water Repaying the Universe" in this issue. —Ed.]

These are *my* reasons for chanting:

- It's part of our tradition. Our school's heritage is traditional Korean Chogye Zen Buddhism. In the 1970s, upon arrival in the United States, our founder adapted what was a purely monastic practice into something that could be practiced by American laypeople. And so the Kwan Um School of Zen was born. Many cultural elements remain, which may

seem anachronistic to secular Westerners, such as chanting, wearing robes, eating meals in a formal, traditional style, doing bowing practice (that is, prostrations), and so on.

- Our school puts a strong emphasis on doing things together, which we call *together action*. Chanting is an opportunity to participate in an activity where the group is of one mind, moment by moment.
- Chanting is a form of meditation. Meditation means to perceive this moment 100 percent. Meditation isn't limited to sitting on a nice comfortable cushion.
- We do silent retreats lasting anywhere from a single day to 90 days in length. They are almost totally silent, except during chanting period. It's nice to open your mouth and stretch your vocal cords twice a day.
- It's fun, and some of the chants sound cool. (I admit this may be debatable.)
- Some days you don't want to chant, and it's good and healthy to sometimes do things that you don't want to do.

Your questions are interesting, and I now have questions for you:

- If the Buddha chanted, what will you do?
- If the Buddha did not chant, what will you do?
- If you can never determine whether or not the Buddha chanted, what will you do?

The only real way to answer questions about chanting is to come and try it. If you come to practice, we would be happy to welcome you and answer any questions.

Very best regards,

Scott Martin



Photo: Jan Sendzimir



Photo: Scott Martin

Scott began practicing with the Orlando Zen Center in 2008, becoming a dharma-teacher-in-training in the fall of 2013. He manages many of the center's digital communications and can be reached at [scott@scott-martin.com](mailto:scott@scott-martin.com).

# Book Review

## *Universal Enlightenment: An Introduction to the Teaching and Practices of Huayen Buddhism*

By Tony Prince

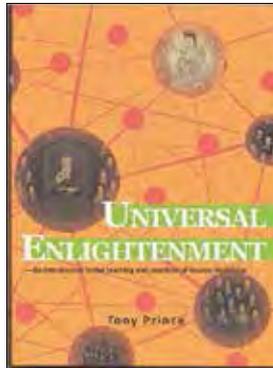
Kongting Publishing, Taipei, 2014

Review by Zen Master Bon Hae

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* (aka the *Hua Yen Sutra*) is one of the most daunting of the major sutras in Buddhism. Clearly a late Mahayana sutra, legend has it that it was the first sutra that the Buddha taught, to his mother Queen Maya, up in the Tushita Heaven. Various partial translations can be found online; the full English translation by Thomas Cleary is 1,464 oversize pages long, not counting an extensive introduction, appendices and commentary. Its pages are filled with hundreds of buddhas and bodhisattvas with names like Light of the Supreme Lamp of Universal Virtue, Lion Banner of Universal Light, Subtle Light of Flames of Universal Jewels (just three of the 20 listed just on p. 57 of Cleary's translation), as well as jeweled palaces, bejeweled trees, scented flowers falling from the sky (the title itself translates as *Flower Garland Sutra*), many varieties of celestial and noncelestial beings, and language so ornate and repetitive that this modern reader has a hard time not having her eyes glaze over. It is a major source of two fundamental Buddhist concepts: first, the interpenetration of all phenomena, from which follows the notion of *pratityasamutpada*, that is, dependent co-origination, or co-dependent origination, encapsulated by the image of Indra's net (which also comes from this sutra); second, the practices, path and vows of a bodhisattva. And there's more—much more. For example, it is the source of the following lines in our morning bell chant: "If you wish to understand all Buddhas of past, present and future, understand that the universe is created by mind alone"—these lines have in themselves had a profound influence on Buddhism.

The *Avatamsaka Sutra* gave rise to the Huayen school of Chinese Buddhism (Huaom school in Korea), one of the more intellectually complex Buddhist schools, which almost died out in the ninth century, but whose basic concepts inform all Mahayana schools, including—and especially—Chan/Soen/Zen.

Tony Prince has written a wonderfully lucid introduction to all this complexity, clearly delineating the fundamentals of Huayen Buddhism, which, far from dying out, remains fully alive and, apparently, especially attractive to lay practitioners. His discussion is strongly based on the writings of the



eightth-century Chinese teachers Fa Zang and Li Tungxuan, as well as other classical Buddhist texts, but he also quotes a wide range of Western authors to show that the basic teachings of Huayen are not impossibly strange outside of East Asian culture. An appendix gives brief and highly informative outlines of the chapters of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. As an added bonus, when he translates from Chinese, he also gives the original Chinese in footnotes.

Basically, Huayen doctrine can be represented by three personages: Vairocana Buddha (substance), Manjushri Bodhisattva (truth), and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (function).

Vairocana is the cosmic Buddha, the Buddha who not only pervades but is coextensive with the universe, the personification of Buddha nature, of the absolute. The basis of Huayen practice, we are told, is exactly faith in the reality of Vairocana, "in our knowledge of the ultimate identity of our own minds with the mind of Vairocana."<sup>1</sup> (p. 6)

Manjushri is the bodhisattva of wisdom, the fundamental wisdom of deeply perceiving true nature, the universe as it actually is in all its interpenetrated glory, and hence the wisdom of realizing the necessity of practice in order to manifest our true wisdom. Manjushri is our inspiration to and our guide in practice.

Samantabhadra is the bodhisattva of action—not random action, but enlightened action, the manifestation of Buddha nature in this world. In some sense you could say that practicing Huayen is about becoming Samantabhadra.

The great theme of interpenetration of all beings leads inexorably to the great themes of emptiness, nondualism, and dependent co-origination, which have been explicated in commentaries over tens of thousands of pages (or more) for well over a thousand years. Prince does a wonderful job of summarizing much of this explication, and it would be a disservice to summarize it further in this review. He also does something quite wonderful in relating these doctrines to the ornate repetitions of the sutra. Yes, paragraphs seem to blend into each other; and yes, it is difficult to separate things out at times, but that is because that is how the universe is, and our desire to keep things separate is part of our disease that must be cured. As for the extravagance of the

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Mahayana cosmogony, with its overflowing abundance of natural and supernatural beings, different times and spaces coinciding with each other, different worlds appearing and disappearing, coinciding and separating—confronting this, absorbing it, our minds are forced to open to a vision greater than our ordinary deluded one.

As for the other great theme of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the path to bodhisattvahood, rather than being seen as a path to changing our status, it is simply the manifestation of what we already are. As Prince puts it (p. 99): “Enlightenment is . . . returning to the source or to our original home.” The *Avatamsaka Sutra* itself has various chapters delineating the stages toward bodhisattvahood, with chapter titles such as *Ten Practices*, *Ten Dedications*, *Ten Stages*, and so on, but, as Prince quotes Fa Zang (p. 137), “One stage is all stages, one practice is all practices.” Or, as Prince says (p. 110), practice is “a way of making Enlightenment manifest in the world rather than as a means to the achievement of Enlightenment.” As Prince outlines it, Huayen practice is built on a scaffold of (1) recognition of our innate Buddha nature; (2) faith that we can manifest it; (3) nonattachment to the world of impermanence, especially to our ego-mind with its fears, desires and schemes; (4) constantly cultivating awareness of the Buddha; and (5) bodhicitta (aspiration to awaken). Practice itself is enlightenment.

Which brings me to my one small (and, given the richness and clarity of this book, it is very small) complaint—just what are these Huayen practices? As outlined, they seem to be essentially attitudinal. There is no mention of meditation, chanting, bowing or devotional practices. Yet a quick search online shows that in fact there were important ancient Chinese texts devoted to Huayen meditational practices (see Thomas Cleary, *Entry into the Inconceivable*<sup>2</sup>). I asked Prince about this, and he responded that “any Dharma practice can be adopted as a Huayen practice if

undertaken from the Huayen point of view.” I hope this is incorporated into any later edition of the book.

Aside from curiosity about Huayen Buddhism, there is another good reason to read *Universal Enlightenment*: Huayen had a huge influence on Chan, and therefore on our lineage of Korean Zen. As Cleary points out in the introduction to *Entry into the Inconceivable*, Linchi, Unmun and Tahui—major ancient Chinese ancestors—are just three among many Chan figures greatly influenced by Huayen. So this book is an excellent introduction to an important source of our practice and teaching. With this book, Tony Prince has given a great gift to the English-speaking Buddhist community.

And as a gift is how my husband and I stumbled across it. We received it from a shopkeeper in Seoul who had been given a bunch of free copies by a stranger. She offered us more, but we foolishly said no. You can’t get *Universal Enlightenment* through your local bookstore, nor can your local bookstore easily order it. For a long time it was effectively unobtainable. The publisher is Kongting Publishing Company in Taipei, the in-house publisher of the world-wide Huayen school that Prince studies in, and for a long time the only way to order it was through a Chinese-language website that required registration and that apparently, even if you read Chinese, is difficult to navigate.

But now you can get it through Amazon. Do yourself a favor and buy a copy. And make sure your local Zen center library has one too.

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#### Notes

1. Vairocana is prominently invoked in our morning bell chant, where he is called Biro.

2. [http://www.khamkoo.com/uploads/9/0/0/4/9004485/entry\\_into\\_the\\_inconceivable\\_-\\_an\\_introduction\\_to\\_huayen\\_buddhism.pdf](http://www.khamkoo.com/uploads/9/0/0/4/9004485/entry_into_the_inconceivable_-_an_introduction_to_huayen_buddhism.pdf)

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#### WHEN WORLD SOUND EQUALS POLICE SHOOTING BLACK MEN

(Continued from p. 21)

our vow in this moment and then the next moment and then the next. Fall down seven times, get up eight.

How may I help? How may I help? If you are holding your vow with all your strength when you die to this moment, you will be reborn in the next moment with a situation that improves your ability to help. Trust that if you can hear the sound of suffering in this moment, then helping will be both possible and necessary in the next. ♦

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Writer and social change activist Colin Beavan is the author of the forthcoming *How to Be Alive: A Guide*



Photo: Ayla Christman

to the *Kind of Happiness that Helps the World* (Dey Street Books, January 2016). Colin attracted international attention for his year-long lifestyle redesign project described in the wildly popular book, *No Impact Man*, and Sundance-selected documentary film that it inspired. A sought-after speaker by wide-ranging audiences, he also consults with businesses on improving eco-friendly and human-centered practices. He is the founder of the No Impact Project and a dharma teacher in the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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*"Clear mind is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds come and cover it, but the moon is always behind them. Clouds go away, then the moon shines brightly. So don't worry about clear mind: it is always there. ... Thinking comes and goes, comes and goes. You must not be attached to the coming or the going." -Zen Master Seung Sahn*

If you would like to become a member of the Kwan Um School of Zen, please fill out the form at the back of this issue, or visit [kwanumzen.org/members](http://kwanumzen.org/members).

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Buenos Aires Kwan Um Group  
 c/o Dorota Maldrzykowska  
 & Tomas Rautenstrauch  
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 Buenos Aires, Argentina  
 +54 11 43 07 26 80  
[kwanumzenbsas@gmail.com](mailto:kwanumzenbsas@gmail.com)

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 501/661-1669  
[lucyhysauer@gmail.com](mailto:lucyhysauer@gmail.com)

Morning Star Zen Center  
*Zen Master Hae Kwang*  
 1599 Halsell Road  
 Fayetteville, AR 72701-3902  
 479/530-1098  
[btaylor@uark.edu](mailto:btaylor@uark.edu)

### California

Dharma Zen Center  
*Paul Park JDPSN*  
 1025 South Cloverdale  
 Avenue  
 Los Angeles, CA 90019  
 323/934-0330  
[info@dharmazen.com](mailto:info@dharmazen.com)

Empty Gate Zen Center  
 Gong Mun Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Soeng*  
 2200 Parker Street  
 Berkeley, CA 94704  
 510/845-8565  
[info@emptygatezen.com](mailto:info@emptygatezen.com)

### Connecticut

New Haven Zen Center  
 Mu Gak Sa  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 193 Mansfield Street  
 New Haven, CT 06511  
 203/787-0912  
[info@newhavenzen.org](mailto:info@newhavenzen.org)

### Delaware

Delaware Valley Zen Center  
*José Ramirez JDPSN*  
 P.O. Box 240  
 Newark, DE 19714  
 302/533-8819  
[dvzinfo@gmail.com](mailto:dvzinfo@gmail.com)

### Florida

Cypress Tree Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 647 McDonnell Drive  
 Tallahassee, FL 32310  
[ctzg@webdharma.com](mailto:ctzg@webdharma.com)

Gateless Gate Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 P.O. Box 12114  
 Gainesville, FL 32604  
 352/336-1517  
[gateless.gate.zen.center@gmail.com](mailto:gateless.gate.zen.center@gmail.com)

Orlando Zen Center  
*Ken Kessel JDPSN*  
 515 S. Crystal Lake Drive  
 Orlando, FL 32803  
 407/897-3685  
[orlandozencenter@gmail.com](mailto:orlandozencenter@gmail.com)

South Florida Zen Center  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 7110 SW 182nd Way  
 Southwest Ranches, FL  
 33331  
 954/263-4653  
[southfloridazengroup@gmail.com](mailto:southfloridazengroup@gmail.com)

### Illinois

Dharma Flower Zen Center  
*Zen Master Hae Kwang*  
 861 Clay Street  
 Woodstock, IL 60098  
 815/236-2511  
[dharmaflowerzen@gmail.com](mailto:dharmaflowerzen@gmail.com)

Ten Directions Zen Community  
*Zen Master Soeng Hyang*  
 c/o Craig Coatney  
 PO Box 1091  
 Wheaton IL 60187-1091  
[director@tendirectionszen.org](mailto:director@tendirectionszen.org)

### Indiana

Indianapolis Zen Center  
*Lincoln Rhodes JDPSN*  
 3703 North Washington  
 Blvd.  
 Indianapolis, IN 46205  
 317/921-9902  
[director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org)

### Kansas

Kansas Zen Center  
 Nam Pung Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 1423 New York Street  
 Lawrence, KS 66044  
[kansaszencenter@gmail.com](mailto:kansaszencenter@gmail.com)

Prairyerth Zen Center  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 c/o Rebecca Otte  
 8000 SW 23rd Street  
 Topeka, KS 66614  
 785/224-4678

Tallgrass Zen Center  
*Lincoln Rhodes JDPSN*  
 P.O. Box 304  
 Alma, KS 66401  
[tallgrasszen@yahoo.com](mailto:tallgrasszen@yahoo.com)

### Maine

Northern Light Zen Center  
 Buk Kwang Soen Won  
*Zen Master Soeng Hyang*  
 202 Meadow Road  
 Topsham, ME 04086  
 207/729-6013  
[nlzc@gwi.net](mailto:nlzc@gwi.net)

### Massachusetts

Cambridge Zen Center  
 Dae Gak Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Yeon*  
 199 Auburn Street  
 Cambridge, MA 02139  
 Office 617/576-3229  
 Fax 617/576-3224  
[director@cambridgezen.com](mailto:director@cambridgezen.com)

Cape Cod Zen Center  
*Barry Briggs JDPSN*  
 169 North Main Street  
 South Yarmouth, MA 02664  
 508-760-1814  
[capecodzencenter@yahoo.com](mailto:capecodzencenter@yahoo.com)

Open Meadow Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Haeng*  
 212 Marrett Road  
 Lexington, MA 02421  
 781/652-8303  
[openmeadowzen@yahoo.com](mailto:openmeadowzen@yahoo.com)

### Mexico

Mexico City Zen Centre  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
 Tajín #617-1  
 Colonia Narvarte  
 Mexico Distrito Federal  
 C.P. 03300, Mexico  
 +52 555 6051489  
[kwanumzendf@gmail.com](mailto:kwanumzendf@gmail.com)

### Nevada

Zen Center of Las Vegas  
 Dae Myong Sa  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 Chaiya Meditation  
 Monastery  
 7925 Virtue Court  
 Las Vegas, NV 89113  
 702/293-4222  
[zencenteroflasvegas@gmail.com](mailto:zencenteroflasvegas@gmail.com)

### New Mexico

Deming Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 575/545-4665  
[info@demingzen.org](mailto:info@demingzen.org)

### New York

Chogyo International Zen Center  
 of New York  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 400 East 14th Street, Apt. 2E  
 New York, NY 10009  
 212/353-0461  
[info@chogyezencenter.org](mailto:info@chogyezencenter.org)

Three Treasures Zen Center  
 of Oneonta  
*Zen Master Wu Kwang*  
 14 Wayman Drive  
 Otego, NY 13825  
 607/988-7966  
[abbot@thethreetreasures.org](mailto:abbot@thethreetreasures.org)

### Oklahoma

Red Earth Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Hae*  
 Windsong Innerspace  
 2201 NW I-44 Service Road  
 Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
 405-248-7480  
[contact@redearthzen.com](mailto:contact@redearthzen.com)

### Pennsylvania

Zen Group of Pittsburgh  
*Tim Lerch JDPSN*  
 125 1/2 Harvard Avenue  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
 412/491-9185

### Rhode Island

Providence Zen Center  
*Hong Poep Won*  
 Head Temple, North America  
*Zen Master Bon Haeng*  
*Nancy Hedgpath JDPSN*  
 99 Pound Road  
 Cumberland, RI 02864  
 401/658-1464  
[director@providencezen.org](mailto:director@providencezen.org)

### Washington

Ocean Light Zen Center  
 Hye Kwang Sa  
*Tim Lerch JDPSN*  
 9269 California Ave. SE  
 Seattle, WA 98136  
[info@oceanlightzen.org](mailto:info@oceanlightzen.org)

### Wisconsin

Great Lake Zen Center  
 Dae Ho Soen Won  
*Zen Master Dae Kwang*  
 828 East Locust Street  
 Milwaukee, WI 53212  
[info@glzc.org](mailto:info@glzc.org)  
 Isthmus Zen Community  
*Zen Master Ji Haeng*  
 c/o Ron Heinrich  
 890 West Wingra Dr.  
 Madison, WI 53715  
[info@isthmuszencommunity.org](mailto:info@isthmuszencommunity.org)

## Asia

### Seung Sahn International Zen Center

**Mu Sang Sa**  
**Head Temple, Asia**  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
*Zen Master Dae Jin*  
 Chungnam, Gyeryong-city  
 Eomsa-myon, Hyangjeok-  
 sankil 129  
 South Korea (321-935)  
 Office +82 42 841 6084  
 Fax +82 42 841 1202  
[info@musangsa.org](mailto:info@musangsa.org)

Hoeh Beng Zen Center  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
 18-A Jalan Raja Bot  
 50300 Kuala Lumpur,  
 Malaysia  
 +60 3292 9839  
 Fax +60 3292 9925  
[hoehbeng@hotmail.com](mailto:hoehbeng@hotmail.com)

Pengerang International  
Zen Center  
Kwan Yin Chan Lin  
*Gye Mun Sunim JDPS*  
Lot 109 Telok Ramunia  
81620 Pengerang Johor,  
Malaysia  
+60 7 826 4848  
kyclzen@singnet.com.sg

Singapore Zen Center  
Kwan Yin Chan Lin Meditation  
Center  
*Gye Mun Sunim JDPS*  
No. 21, Lorong 25 Geylang  
Singapore 388299  
+65 6392 0265  
Fax +65 6392 4256  
kyclzen@singnet.com.sg

Su Bong Zen Monastery  
Gak Su Temple International Zen  
Center  
*Zen Master Dae Kwan*  
32 Leighton Road  
5/F Starlight Hse  
Causeway Bay, Hong Kong,  
China  
+852 2891 9315  
Fax +852 2575 0093  
info@subong.org.hk

## Australia

Brisbane  
*Zen Master Dae Jin*  
27 Bredden Street  
Chapel Hill  
Brisbane QLD 4069,  
Australia  
+61 407 821 081  
(Hae Kwang—Frank Storey)  
kwanumzen.oz@hotmail.com

Gold Coast 1  
*Zen Master Dae Jin*  
23 Sundance Way  
Runaway Bay QLD 4210,  
Australia  
+61 402 289 923 (Julie-Bup  
Wol)  
goldcoastzengroup@hotmail.  
com

Gold Coast 2  
*Zen Master Dae Jin*  
(Retreat Centre)  
102 Bonogin Road  
Mudgeeraba QLD 4213,  
Gold Coast, Australia  
+61 402 289 923 (Julie-Bup  
Wol)  
+61 437 070 897 (Kathy  
Brackenridge-Bup Hwa)  
kwanumzen.oz@hotmail.com

## South Africa

Jung Shim Zen Group  
*Zen Master Dae Bong*  
P.O. Box 690  
Wilderness 6560  
Republic of South Africa  
+27 823 773 280 (Gerry)  
alreadyone@webmail.co.za

## Europe

### Austria

**Kwan Um School of Zen Vienna**  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
Kwan Um Zen Schule Zen  
Zentrum  
Kaiserstraße 44-46, 2nd floor,  
Apt.8  
Vienna 1070, Austria  
+43 680 55 396 11  
(Knud Rosenmayr)  
info@kwanumzen.at

### Belgium

Brussels Zen Center  
**Head Temple, Belgium**  
*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*  
Rue de l'Oiselet. 16A  
1080 Molenbeek  
Brussels, Belgium  
+32 497 596 659  
(Koen Vermeulen)  
info@kwanumzen.be

### Czech Republic

Brno Zen Center  
Dae Gak Sa  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zenové centrum školy Kwan  
Um v Brně  
Výletní 7  
62300 Brno, Czech Republic  
+420 775 988 882 (Ondráš  
Přibyla)  
kwanumbrno@gmail.com

České Budějovice Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
c/o Vit Erban  
Krajinská 384/40a  
370 01 České Budějovice  
Czech Republic  
+420 774 123 974 (Vit  
Erban)  
ceskebudejovice@  
kwanumzen.cz

Liberec Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
Dr. Milady Horákové 1  
Liberec 46001, Czech  
Republic  
+420602756401  
(Jakub Kopecký)  
zen.liberec@gmail.com

Olomouc Zen Group  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zen group školy Kwan Um v  
Olomouci  
c/o Petr Klásek  
P. Bezruč 4  
783 35 Horka nad Moravou  
Czech Republic  
+420 603 449 959 (Petr  
Klásek)  
olomouc@kwanumzen.cz

### Prague Zen Group Soeng Kwang Sa Head Temple, Czech Republic

*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
Zen centrum školy Kwan Um  
Praha  
Kwan Um, Shambala center,  
Varsavska 13,  
Prague 2, 120 00, Czech  
Republic  
+420 728 836 211 (Vera  
Hrusova)  
praha@kwanumzen.cz

Vrážné Zen Center  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
c/o Vrážné Zen Center  
Vrážné 3  
Jevíčko 569 43, Czech  
Republic  
+420 608 169 042 (Jiří  
Hablbauer)  
abbot@vraznezen.org

Zlín Zen Group  
*Oleg Šuk JDPSN*  
Zen group Kwan Um ve Zlíně  
Lhotka 44  
763 02 Zlín  
Czech Republic  
+420 739 672 032 (Kamila  
Karlíková)  
krmila@email.cz

### France

**Paris Zen Center**  
**Saja Hoo Soen Won**  
**Head Temple, France**  
*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*  
Centre Parisien de Zen Kwan  
Um  
35 Rue de Lyon  
75012 Paris, France  
+ 33 613 798 328  
(Eanjo Kim)  
contact@kwanumzen.net

### Germany

Bad Bramstedt Zen Group  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
Warnemünde-Ring 19  
245767 Bad Bramstedt,  
Germany  
+49 419 2306 8360 (Uwe  
Schmidt)  
bad-bramstedt@kwanumzen.  
de

### Berlin Zen Center Chong Hye Sa European Head Temple

*Muchak JDPSN*  
Gottschedstraße 4  
Aufgang 5  
13357 Berlin, Germany  
+49 304 660 5090  
berlin@kwanumzen.de

Cologne (Köln) Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Michael Chung  
MAINDO Akademie  
Maarweg 141  
50825 Köln, Germany  
49 1777156558  
(Michael Chung)  
koeln@kwanumzen.de

Dresden Zen Center  
Oh Sahn Sa  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
Louisenstraße 15  
010 99 Dresden, Germany  
+49 176 7008 2636 (Ronny  
Herzog)  
dresden@kwanumzen.de  
www.kwanumzen.de/dresden

Hamburg Zen Group  
*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*  
c/o Shambhala  
Meditationszentrum  
Hansastrasse 19  
20149 Hamburg  
Germany  
+49 (0) 179 466 2706 (Sung  
-Yon Lee)  
hamburg@kwanumzen.de

### Great Britain

#### London Zen Centre

**Ja An Sa**  
**Head Temple, Great Britain**  
*Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila  
Malinowska)*  
Ilex House, Crouch Hill  
Holly Park  
London N4 4BY, Great  
Britain  
+44 207 502 6786  
+44 774 297 9050  
zen.london@hotmail.co.uk

The Peak Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Kubong-Sa  
Matlock Bath, The Peak  
District  
Great Britain  
+44 1629 580392 (Peter  
Voke)  
jibul@kwanumzen.org.uk

### Hungary

Budapest KUSZ Zen Group  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
+36 70 457 0486 (Tamás  
Mészáros)  
mesztamas@gmail.com

Szeged KUSZ Zen Group  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
+36 30 5864090  
(Kasza Péter)  
szongdzsin@vipmail.hu

## Israel

Haifa Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
c/o Ofer Cohn  
Bikurim 50  
Haifa, Israel  
+972 53 4319816  
(Ofer Cohn)  
ofercohn@gmail.com

Hod Hasharon Zen Center  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
 c/o Rowena Gill  
 16a Ha Tchelet Street  
 45264 Hod Hasharon, Israel  
 +972 54 4831122 (Yuval Gil)  
 hasharonzencenter@gmail.com

Pardes-Hanna-Karkur Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
 c/o Boaz Franklin  
 15 Beit El St.  
 Pardes Hanna 33087, Israel  
 +972 54 6522812 (Boaz Franklin)  
 zen.pardeshanna@gmail.com

Tel Aviv Zen Group  
*Zen Master Ji Kwang*  
 c/o Yael Bar Levy  
 24A reines St, 2nd floor Apt 3  
 Tel Aviv, Israel  
 +972 50 4321501  
 (Avichai Ornoy)  
 +972 54 7289466  
 (Yael Bar Levy)  
 telavivzen@gmail.com

#### Latvia

Jurmala Zen Group  
 Kwan Ji Sa  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 c/o Tatjana Tračevska  
 Raina street, 83  
 LV-2016, Jurmala, Latvia  
 +371 29191137 (Tatjana Tračevska)  
 kwanumzen@inbox.lv

Riga Zen Group  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 c/o Inga Konosonoka  
 Nīcgales iela 19-15  
 LV-1035, Rīga, Latvia  
 +37192733256 (Inga Konosonoka)  
 inga\_kono@inbox.lv

#### Lithuania

Kaunas Zen Center  
 Kam No Sa  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 c/o Tomas Stonis  
 Verkiu 25c  
 LT-44466 Kaunas, Lithuania  
 +370 601 56350  
 +370 698 29299  
 108tomas@gmail.com

Klaipeda Zen Group  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 c/o Linas Svirinas  
 Klaipeda, Lithuania  
 +370 600 00370  
 (Linas Svirinas)  
 jaunatis@gmail.com

Šakiai Zen Center  
 Son Kwang Sa  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 Šakių KC, Nepriklausomybės  
 717  
 LT-71122 Šakiai, Lithuania  
 +370 686 56392 (Vytautas Smirnovas)  
 smirnovas.vytautas@gmail.com

#### Vilnius Zen Center

**Ko Bong Sa**  
**Head Temple, Lithuania**  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 Mokyklos 21A  
 LT-08413 Vilnius, Lithuania  
 +370 675 16008 (Modestas Kazlauskas)  
 songji108@gmail.com

#### Poland

Gdańsk Zen Center  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 ul. Sztormowa 9,  
 Gdańsk Żabianka, Poland  
 tel. +48 507-587-532  
 (Emilia)  
 gdansk@zen.pl

Katowice Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 c/o Waldemar Pawlik  
 ul. 3 maja 38/22  
 40-097 Katowice, Poland  
 +48 501 430 062 (Waldemar Pawlik)  
 katowice@zen.pl

Kraków Zen Center  
 Do Miong Sa  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 ul. Stradomska 17/4  
 31-068 Kraków, Poland  
 +48 530 677 081 (Slawek Golanski)  
 krakow@zen.pl

Łódź Zen Center  
*Igor Piniński JDPSN*  
 Łodzki Osrodek Zen  
 ul. Piotrkowska 93/14  
 90-423 Lodz, Poland  
 +48 509 241 097 (Igor Piniński)  
 lodz@zen.pl  
 opole@zen.pl

Płock Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 ul. Antoninów 1  
 09-520 Łąck, Poland  
 +48 607 317 084 (Alicja Pełkowska)  
 alap7@gazeta.pl

Rzeszów Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 c/o Artur Sikora  
 ul. Plac Wolności 2/205  
 35-114 Rzeszów, Poland  
 +48 797 019 351  
 (Artur Sikora)  
 rzeszow@zen.pl

Szczecin Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 c/o Dariusz Pozusiński  
 ul. Bazarowa 5/12  
 71-614 Szczecin, Poland  
 +48 508 431 216 (Dariusz Pozusiński)  
 kwanum.szczecin@gmail.com

Toruń Zen Group  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 c/o Piotr Iwanicki  
 ul. Rybaki 40/6  
 Toruń, Poland  
 +48 609 696 060  
 torunskagrupazen@gmail.com

Wałbrzych Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 c/o Marek Elżbięciak  
 ul. T. Chałubińskiego 17/2  
 58-301 Wałbrzych, Poland  
 +48 502308996 - Marek  
 +48 511968917- Grażyna  
 walbrzych@zen.pl

#### Warsaw Zen Center

**Wu Bong Sa**  
**Head Temple, Poland**  
*Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN*  
 ul. Małowiejska 22/24  
 04-962 Warszawa-Falenica,  
 Poland  
 +48 (22) 872 05 52  
 +48 795 366 572  
 kwanum@zen.pl

Warsaw Zen Group  
 ul. Dąbrowskiego 1 m 2  
 Warszawa, Poland  
 +48 632 193 003 (Leszek)  
 zen.warszawa@gmail.com

Wrocław Zen Group  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 ul. Olbińska 3/16,  
 50-537 Wrocław  
 Poland  
 +48 727 626 195  
 (Karol Bazgier)  
 elff@op.pl

#### Russia

**Saint Petersburg Zen Center**  
**Dae Hwa Soen Won**  
**Head Temple, Russia**  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*

The Buddhist Temple in  
 Saint Petersburg  
 Kwan Um School of Zen  
 Datsan Gunzechoinei  
 Primorsky pr. 91  
 197374 Saint Petersburg,  
 Russia  
 +7 (921) 373-95-35  
 contact@kwanumzen.ru

Rostov Zen Group  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 c/o Leonid Kosmynin  
 "Dromtonpa" Buddhist  
 Dharma center.  
 pr. Sokolova, 85,  
 Rostov, Russia  
 +7 904 504 2111  
 (Leonid Kosmynin)  
 poephaeng@gmail.com

Veliky Novgorod Zen Center  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 ulitsa Bolshaya Moskovskaya  
 86, kv. 30  
 Veliky Novgorod  
 Russia 173000  
 +79816016567 (Myong Gong Sunim)  
 sunim@zendao.ru

#### Slovakia

**Bratislava Zen Center**  
**Myo San Sa**  
**Head Temple, Slovakia**  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 c/o Peter Košút,  
 Hanulova 5  
 841 01 Bratislava, Slovakia  
 +421 905 368 368 (Lubor Košút)  
 bratislava@kwanumzen.sk

Košice Zen Center  
 Sin Dzong Sa  
*Oleg Suk JDPSN*  
 c/o Dušan Silváši  
 Letná 43  
 040 01 Košice, Slovakia  
 +421 903 134 137 (Dušan Silváši)  
 kosice@kwanumzen.sk

#### Spain

Barcelona Zen Center  
*Zen Master Bon Shim*  
 Bori Centro Zen  
 c/o Bárbara Pardo  
 c/Beates 8, 3º, 2ª  
 08003 Barcelona, Spain  
 +34 655033018 (Bárbara Pardo)  
 boricentrozen@hotmail.com

#### Palma Zen Center

**Head Temple, Spain**  
*Jo Potter JDPSN*  
 Centro Zen Palma  
 Plaza Bisbe Berenguer  
 de Palou nº 1, 1º, 2ª  
 07003 Palma de Mallorca  
 Illes Balears, Spain  
 +34 686 382 210 (Tolo Cantarellas)  
 palmacentrozen@gmail.com

## Prison Groups

Arizona State Prison Florence  
 East Unit

Lowell Correctional Institution,  
 Florida

Lowell Annex, Florida  
 Florida Women's Reception  
 Center, Florida

Northeast Correctional Center in  
 Concord, Massachusetts

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means in each moment we open unconditionally to all that presents itself to us. By doing this, our innate wisdom and compassion will naturally breathe and flow into our lives.

The Zen centers of the Kwan Um School of Zen around the world offer training in Zen meditation through instruction, daily morning and evening meditation practice, public talks, teaching interviews, retreats, workshops, and community living. Our programs are open to anyone regardless of previous experience.

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