

to sleep beside them, sit beside them and eat together with them, do everything with them, every day and every night. So never hate anybody close to you if you want to choose this path. It's really not easy.

There's another point. When we start to move from our family life to our community life, another difficulty appears. I think many of us have this experience. We used to tell our parents, "I don't care, it's my life." After you become a monastic, you have no right to say these words. What you need to learn is always to be aware of the needs of the community and what the temple needs. This is the temple culture and the monastic way. This is what we need to learn after we become a nun or a monk. Not for myself, but rather what the temple needs, what the community needs. That's really difficult to do, because when the temple way challenges "my way," this I-my-me will create lots of suffering inside, and imbalance and tears. But in the end, if we can digest all this experience and all these situations, we find that this actually helps our nun's life to mature. It helps our center to become stronger and our direction to become more clear in order to do our inside and outside job and to support the whole community. Thank you.

A Malaysian nun, Bon Sun Sunim began practicing in the Kwan Um School in Singapore in 1998. In 2002 she began haengja training at Mu Sang Sa Temple. In 2003 she ordained as a nun at Su Bong Sa Zen Monastery. Since then she has practiced and continued her nun's training in Hong Kong. During all these years she also often joined Kyol Che retreats at Mu-sangsa. Currently she is the head nun at Su Bong Sa in Hong Kong.

You Are No Longer One of Ours

Bo Haeng Sunim

A monk's life is not easy. The first time I tried and did not succeed. When I was a haengja, I did not come to the ordination ceremony at which I was supposed to become



Photo: Allan Matthews

a monk in Poland. Instead, I stayed in Lithuania. Later I tried again. I had a meeting with Zen Master Seung Sahn, and he gave me permission to try again. To make the decision to become a monk is very private. I didn't know what it meant, because I'd never been a monk before. I had seen Catholic monks in Lithuania. But when I saw Buddhist monks in the market outside the monastery, I would think, "Why is this monk outside the monastery? Monks must stay in the monastery." This was because in Catholic countries we usually never see monks outside. I know a Benedictine monk. He took precepts, left his previous life and went to the monastery, and he cannot go out. Like desert monks. I really believed, "Oh my God, if I become this kind of monk, my life is over."

But I went to Korea, and in 2001 I became a monk. My teacher, Dae Bong Sunim, gave me precepts, and I got the name Bo Haeng, meaning "Wide Action." It's



Photo: Allan Matthews

not a good name for me, because I don't know how wide my action is even now. At that time, when we bowed to Zen Master Seung Sahn after the ceremony, he said very sternly, "Why become a monk? This is very important. If you become a monk for yourself, it's better not to do this. Only to help people. This direction." We were happy and felt like celebrating. But I remember he spoke strongly to us, almost like shouting. Not like congratulations, but more like a warning. I remember his eyes and his speech, deep and enduring, as if it were yesterday. Afterward, I became the housemaster, and later the director, of Hwa Gye Sa International Zen Center. Later on I became the *ipsung* (head monk) at Mu Sang Sa Temple. And I've served in many other positions. Taking on these responsibilities is part of normal monastic life.

In 2004, I returned for the first time to Lithuania. All my friends already knew my circumstances. I had stayed in touch, and called them sometimes before I took

full precepts. “Hey, I want to come back to Lithuania. I don’t want to become a haengja,” and so on and on. But my friend just said, “No! Don’t come home to Lithuania until you become a monk. Don’t give up. Just do it!” That’s not what I wanted to hear, and so I went back to the mountains and cried for twenty minutes, “I want to go back to Lithuania.” I asked Dae Jin Sunim, my guiding teacher, “I am 40 years old. I went by myself to the mountain and cried. I don’t want to become a monk. I miss my Lithuanian friends.”

“How long did you cry for?” he asked. “Maybe 40 minutes.” “OK, next time, maybe 30. It’s normal.” That’s all he said.

It’s not easy. And when I finally went back to Lithuania, I met all my friends. The Lithuanian people already knew I had become a monk. It was in the newspapers and on TV. So when I returned, journalists were already there to cover it. All my friends came from school, and from the Russian army—from everywhere. And they all had something to say. So I gave a talk. I didn’t know what to say, so I made a slideshow about Korean temple life. Hwa Gye Sa’s big bell, the International Zen Center, and so on. I explained what a temple is, what Buddhism is, what our life was like. Many Catholic nuns came. And one priest. All these nuns were writing while I was talking. And then afterward, they came to me and said, “You know what you did? You are no longer one of ours. You think you are Buddhist, but you are not. Because you kind of lost your parents, lost your country and went to a different country, and now you come back. You better not come again.” That was my reception.

This really touched me. Because I thought I had done a good job. I only wanted to help people. But later I found out that when I first returned to Lithuania, many people had the same thing to say. “Yeah you’re a good man, but you’re not ours anymore. You gave a good talk, but you’re not one of ours.” Because Lithuania is 85 percent Catholic. And I was always in the newspapers. The story was always “That Buddhist monk this, that Buddhist monk that.” And people always seemed to have the same reaction. “Yeah, you’re very smart. Your talks may be good, but you’re no longer one of ours.” I was really upset. Afterward, I even changed what I wore. I put on black, like a Catholic priest, you know? I would go to the countryside, to many people, old country people, and we had many meetings. Sometimes 200 people would come. I would travel to meet with Catholic nuns. Nobody was receptive.

Then I went to visit a very very old Catholic priest, a really old friend of mine. Usually if you even become a yoga teacher in Lithuania, you’re out of the church. If you become a Buddhist, you’re really out. It’s really strong. If you feel like doing yoga, it’s better if you don’t. Without my friend the priest, I don’t know what I would have done. He went to the Sorbonne in Paris, and then

later became the abbot of an important temple. He’s a Dominican priest. I asked him, “Do you know what is going on here?” He told me, “Don’t worry.”

I said, “But yoga is not bad.”

He answered with a smile, “Yeah, yoga is very bad. So bad that I go to do it in the nighttime, so no one can see me.”

Finally, I went to see a very old monk. He is from France, but speaks Lithuanian. I could tell right away that he had strong feeling about all this. “No, you don’t like Christ . . .” And it went on from there.

I said, “I need permission from you, because I am helping people. Many people are interested in Buddhism; many people are interested in yoga; many people are interested in Hinduism. Many people, thousands in Lithuania. And you Christian monks are very good. But something is changing. I am here to help. Together. Not just myself.”

He clearly was not happy about this. So then I asked, “Are your monks’ lives easy from the very beginning?”

He smiled. “Don’t ask me this.” And he started talking, and we started talking together, about how hard it is to stay celibate. And his friend, a priest, joined the conversation, and one monk from America. We talked with each other like any monks talking together. I said, “I have 250 precepts.”

“Oh, too many. We have only three.” “How can you keep 250? We cannot keep three!” It really began from there.

Afterward, I did a kind of public relations tour. The next time journalists came. We all sat together and started talking about Lithuania, about our problems, about corruption, about money, about eating meat, about killing, about criminals. One monk and I decided to go together to visit a jail. At that time, I had groups in different jails, so the next time I went, he came along with me. We talked with them about apologizing for what they did. We discovered that like psychotherapy; he’s like a religious person, and we found we worked well together. We made a newsletter, and then some people started to believe in me. I went again and again, in, 2009, 2010, 2012. And then, when we would go into the countryside, people would no longer condemn me. Because everybody could see that I was together with the other monks.

After a while, things calmed down enough so that now I am making a Zen village in Lithuania, an ecological village. In Lithuania, we have 20 ecological villages. We do so to help prevent global warming. People on their own decided, “OK, I don’t want anything from the government.” They want to become independent and make this village. Now in this village we have a school where children can learn, because the village has some teachers. Not depending on the government, living on their own, not using too much electricity, not using the internet: there are 20 ecological villages, each with maybe 20 houses. I

was inspired, and so I decided to make this kind of Zen village, and we have a good place now.

But it happens slowly. And I need support. But people in Lithuania won't support you if you're not Catholic, because all the rich people are also Catholic. Now before coming here, we just had a big conference, with a prominent Christian monk, Krishna monk and myself. Almost 700 people came. We had strong interaction with the audience. Most of them, of course, use the internet and Facebook. So all of a sudden, we are getting support from social media. And to my surprise, one guy calls and says, "I can help."

So slowly, OK. This took from 2004 until now—13 years until people believed in me. I understood about this from watching Zen Master Seung Sahn. While I was in in Hwa Gye Sa Temple, when I stayed at Mu Sang Sa Temple, I made problems for my teachers—many, many problems. And now I see I kind of had it easy. Because of how monasteries are, I became the head monk. That's just the way it works, getting these positions. I wasn't very important, but had responsibility. When I went back to my country and people started believing in me, many people wrote me. I wrote a book, and people knew about me more and more. And I had this realization, "Wow, these people really believe."

I immediately changed my behavior. Changed my karma. This is the meaning of what Zen Master Seung Sahn told me: "You must help people." Because when people trust you, your behavior has to change. It's not easy. It doesn't happen quickly. But I changed. Now I see how I used to lie—to myself, to others. Now I cannot lie too much. I cannot behave like I did before. After telling everybody, "Lying is not good," I realize, "Oh my god! This means I cannot lie!"

If you talk to people like this, and they really trust you, then now they also check you everywhere you go. They look at what I do. They look at what I say. If I say, "Coffee is not good for you," and then I start drinking coffee, of course they will wonder. They'll say, "Hey! Yesterday you said coffee is not good. So why are you drinking coffee?"

Now that people believe me a little more, trust me a little more, they start teaching me. Now we are coming together. I already have many connections, maybe a thousand people who already know what I'm doing and help out. Arunas is also here today. He helped me a lot. These people have really already decided, "OK, I will help you." This really gives me faith. Now I understood how important a monk's life is—not alone, but together. Any time I have a question, I call Dae Bong Sunim and ask what can I do. Already I've performed maybe ten marriage ceremonies, a hundred baby ceremonies. Monks need support, more and more. It's not about money, just belief and trust and together action, in this country, which is not Buddhist.

Thank you very much.

Bo Haeng Sunim began Zen practice in 1989 and became a monk in 2001. Each year he participates in the summer and winter Kyol Che retreats at South Korean temples and at the head European Kwan Um Zen School temple in Warsaw. In addition, he leads Zen retreats in Lithuania. Bo Haeng Sunim has founded Zen groups in many cities. He also regularly meets with laypeople, visits prisoners, gives lectures at business conferences, and participates in TV and radio programs—all the while making Zen teaching more accessible.

The Monastery That You Have to Have Is Inside

Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

[Zen Master Jok Um asked, "I'm wondering if you've experienced the same kind of 'you don't belong here,' since you're both from Lithuania. I'm wondering how you experienced that and how you've coped with it."]

Well, actually, wearing the uniform, you kind of stand out anyway. I forget that I look different. It happens a lot when I go to Lithuania. I go to the bus station and suddenly everyone turns to look at me, and I just look back behind me wondering, "Is something happening?" So I do stand out in the gray monastic uniform. When I'm in Asia, because there are not so many white people wearing these clothes, again everybody will look at me and wonder why a white person would become a monastic. There are many times when people will treat you differently. So it's not necessarily that you don't belong here, but people kind of question what this is.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Monastics are like a don't-know army", so that's what I am doing, and I'm very happy. I'm just giving 'don't know' to everybody! It's just like a big question: "Who are you?" It is very interesting. You see

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Photo: Allan Matthews