

# What Is Most Important for All of You? The International Initiative

Kathy Park JDPSN

*Presentation on the International Initiative given during the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference at Providence Zen Center, October 10, 2017*

I'd like to quote one thing from our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. During a dharma talk he gave in Poland many years ago, when the Polish sangha was forming, he said, "Practicing by myself is no problem, but organization is very important. If we have strong organization, then our own center also becomes strong for each of us. Then helping each other and saving all beings is very easy."

I like that. It's very simple. First, I'd like to talk about our school for some of you who are new to it, and for some of us who may have forgotten, or for whom it's not clear.

The first thing I'd like to share are a few principles of our school. By *principles* I mean real tenets of our organization. The first principle is that the four practicing groups—monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen—practice together. That's the basic foundation of our Kwan Um School of Zen. The second principle is that we are bound by a teachers' compact that is signed by anyone who becomes a Ji Do Poep Sa, which also includes anyone who becomes a Zen master in our school. This is how we keep our teaching all together. The third is that we're unified in our teaching forms. Our school exists in many countries, but the bone of the teaching is unified, shared and constantly revised. Those are our principles, and with that, we have our added treasure, which is a wide, global network of Zen centers and sanghas all over the world.

You've seen or heard from many people these few days from the European sangha, the Asian sangha, and the sangha of the Americas—not only the United States but also Canada, South America and Central America. Our school is growing and reaching out, and that global network is rich with diversity, equality and mutual respect. Our global relationships are rooted in love, compassion and understanding, which come from our deep practice of don't know—the foundation that keeps us together. Like it or not we're a family.

In the last few days that I've been here, returning to Providence Zen Center and being at this conference, I feel a lot of love. I feel like I'm back with my family, and that's a wonderful feeling. I believe everybody feels that way. I was talking with Zen Master Soeng Hyang about how things feel smooth here at this conference and there's so much generosity, support and faith, as well as a lot of together action, which is at the heart of our teaching and a true treasure.

The International Initiative was founded about eighteen months ago, and there are a few things to clarify. Our school transformed over the years after Zen Master Seung Sahn passed away. Everybody knows he was a charismatic and strong leader, so we had this hierarchy that all of us followed, and it was wonderful. After he passed away, things transitioned and we had to grow up or grow out. Our sangha restructured loosely into three separate regions: Europe, Asia and North America, the latter of which is now the Americas. The three regions are governed by the respective regional teachers' groups. Overseeing them is the International Council, comprising the head Zen masters of the three regions and the school Zen master. The International Initiative came along in 2016, initiated by the head Zen master of our school, Zen Master Soeng Hyang, who envisioned a more visible global outreach of our practice and teaching. I thought Bo Haeng Sunim's sharing earlier was really interesting. [See the article "Don't-Know Army" in this issue. —Ed.] He said that when he returned to Lithuania as a young monk, he was an outsider in a Catholic country and was not easily accepted. He had to work step by step for some time to gain trust. I realized that for all of us regardless of our situation, condition or any practicing situation, following the path of truth is difficult. But difficulties are also our teachers. So how can we help each other?

The International Initiative functions along a guideline of decentralized, mutually beneficial collaboration and cooperation. Our working structure and communication is parallel among the regions by listening, sharing and coming to consensus together as much as possible. That's not always easy. Our main focus has been on outreach, not only to help spread the dharma, but also to find more resources, whatever they may be, and use them to support our growing practicing communities. I think our centers are already doing this to some extent wherever they are. What the International Initiative focuses on specifically is developing more ways to use media. The Kwan Um Online Sangha program is now running, and people from countries such as Denmark, the Philippines and Australia are signing up for membership and participating in regular online practice. This program specifically reaches people who are in difficult circumstances or are in remote areas too far from any local Kwan Um center.

The brand new international KUSZ website was just launched. In addition, many of us use various social media apps to stay connected. And International Initiative

*(Continued on page 22)*

(Continued from page 18)

continues to develop new ways to communicate and work together better, making room for creative growth to connect more with each other and the world. This conference is an example of how that is already being manifested.

We say Zen means understanding your true self: what am I? We are having this conference on ecology, on climate change and various things. What is most important for all of you? Is it on an individual, personal level? Is it at a local level where you live? Perhaps at your local Zen center level? Is that what's most important? Or is it on a national level that we are hurting the most? Or is it something on a global level? The state of the earth's ecology is undeniably telling us right now that the global situation is actually our responsibility. What is most needed right now? Somebody said some years ago that the most important thing needed was time. Today, I don't think it's time that's most important. What I've heard these few days in this conference—our foremost concerns, questions and ideas—point to only one thing: clarity. There's such lack of clarity in everything, and many people are confused and overwhelmed with information. The late Zen Master Wu Bong would say, "Let's look at the ecology of our own mind." What's really happening in our own mind? Can we become clear, digest our understanding and turn it into wisdom and clear action? All of us already have the seed of dharma light inside us, otherwise I don't think anybody would be here today. Zen is not an easy practice, but all of us have some taste of what it means to wake up. As Zen Master Seung Sahn said, when our own center is strong, helping others is easy. A clear mind supports a clear organization, and

22]



Photo: Allan Matthews

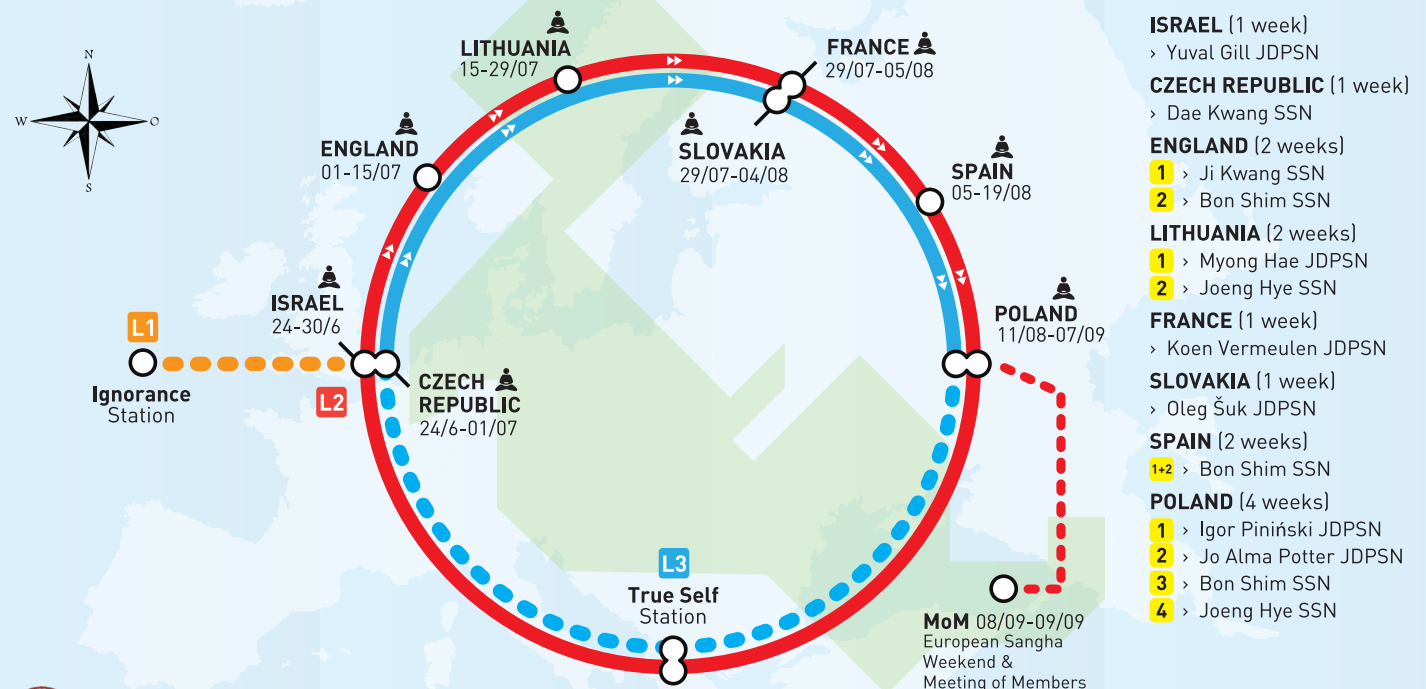
vice versa. Let's make our center stronger together and our dharma light brighter, so that it shines further to more and more people and all beings as much as possible.

*The International Initiative is a hub for the KUSZ to do outreach and support our ever-growing global practicing community. We work as a worldwide online team in areas such as administration, graphic design, technology, fundraising, visioning and much more. The initiative needs your support! To become part of the International Initiative, provide professional skills, volunteer your time or share ideas and feedback, please contact [global@kwanumzen.org](mailto:global@kwanumzen.org). Or visit the KUSZ international website at [www.kwanumzen.org](http://www.kwanumzen.org). You can join the Kwan Um Online Sangha (KUOS) at [www.kwanumzen.org/online](http://www.kwanumzen.org/online). To participate in KUSZ climate change projects, contact [ecology@kwanumzen.org](mailto:ecology@kwanumzen.org). ♦*

# SUMMER RETREAT MAP

*The journey to your true self*

Join us across Europe for our **SUMMER RETREAT PROGRAM 2018**



Kwan Um  
School of Zen Europe

Meditation Dharma talks Intro for beginners

[WWW.KWANUMEUROPE.ORG/SRP2018](http://WWW.KWANUMEUROPE.ORG/SRP2018)