

# When Will the Cypress Tree Become Buddha?

## Bon Sun Sunim

I recently finished a two-month solo retreat in Cameron Highland, a mountain province in Malaysia. My daily schedule included a thousand bows. But this was impossible in the beginning, because within one week of my retreat I injured my leg, and my skin broke out as a result of allergies. Zen Master Dae Kwan, my guiding teacher at Su Bong Sa Temple in Hong Kong, and Chuan Wen Sunim PSN at the Kuala Lumpur Temple, had both encouraged me to consider relaxing in this retreat, as life in our temple in Hong Kong and my work as a monastic is already pretty tough.

In that moment of injury and allergy, I stopped and remembered what my teachers had advised. I relaxed and followed the developing situation and *listened* to my body. Doing this, along with some luck, my body slowly improved. This helped me to learn when I should do more and when I should do less. My body taught me the middle way. Slowly, by paying attention to what my body could really do, I found that I could do the daily thousand bows toward the end of my retreat.

One day during my retreat I was stretching on the balcony and I remembered the following story:

A student asks Joju: “When will the cypress tree become Buddha?”

Joju answers: “When the sky comes down to the earth.”

I was enjoying the sun shining on me and feeling my body stretching, when I suddenly experienced that the sky already had come down to the earth and in reality, sky, earth, this person and everything were never separate! This day was a tremendously happy day for me.

During this solo retreat, I would sometimes think of my temple—Su Bong Sa—and the many people who come regularly and connect with and help us. At the same time, I remembered people who came or knew of us but who did not connect with us, no matter how hard we tried to offer the Dharma to them. I perceived my

mind becoming heavy and sad thinking of them. At those moments I would consciously return to my breath and ask “What is this?”

When I did this, my mind would soften, lighten up and fill with love. Everything was OK: no problem. I experienced my mind like a huge digestion system with me that functions only when one’s mind becomes clear and bright. It can digest anything.

Now I am back in Su Bong Sa, taking care of the many things that appear in the typical Hong Kong life. I am grateful to the friend who first brought me to the Zen center when I was 23 years old. I am grateful to the owner of my retreat place, where I spent these two months in the lovely sunny and cooling environment. What I most appreciate about my retreat is the wonderful time I spent with my very best friend. This friend was born in the same year, the same month, the same day and exactly the same time as me. This very friend will leave the world in the same year, month, day and time as I will. You know who that is? My breath. ♦

---

*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 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 Sang Sa Temple. Currently she is the head nun at Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong.*

[15



Photo: Francis Lau