

My Encounter with the Kwan Um School

Yap Ching Ching

I wish you well. I am Ching Ching, and my dharma name is Shin Jae. I am the current administrator of the 2020 Whole World Is a Single Flower conference in Malaysia. I had been practicing Zen for six years before I was introduced to the teachings of the Kwan Um School of Zen, and the main benefit I had gained was the relaxation of body and mind. I enjoyed sitting meditation greatly and, to me, longer sitting sessions meant better practice. However, the biggest challenge I had was difficulty in controlling my breathing. This problem had persisted for years.

A few years ago, I participated in an eight-day retreat at Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple in Malaysia. The retreat was guided by Zen Master Dae Bong. Initially, I could not accept the teachings of hitting the floor and don't-know mind. From my understanding, the Buddha taught us to cultivate wisdom and compassion. The way to "stream-entry" (the first step toward enlightenment in the Theravada tradition) teaches right thinking, but kong-an practice teaches us to put down our thinking and only don't know. To me, those teachings contradicted right thinking and encouraged delusion.

24] Later, I found out that putting down thinking means simply putting down thinking that attaches to "I, my, me," and that don't-know does not mean intellectual ignorance. "I, my, me" are troublemakers, and when we let them go we let go of trouble and return to nonself or emptiness, also known in the Kwan Um School as returning to zero or before-thinking mind. The buddhadharma teaches emptiness, the idea that everything has no intrinsic nature. In kong-an practice this is conveyed in a simple manner: When we hit the floor, the hand in contact with the floor makes a sound. At that moment, the sound is just the sound, and there is no "I, my, me." That is the training of nonself or primary point. It helps me greatly, and especially in overcoming my difficulty in controlling breathing during sitting and cutting off my attachment to pursuing comfort during sitting meditation. All I need to do is just go back to breathing, and not make anything.

Kong-an practice also benefited me a lot. Last summer, I went to Musangsa to participate in the Haeng Won (work study) program, and that winter I joined the winter retreat in Gaksu, Hong Kong, for nine weeks. These two experi-

ences helped me truly grasp the practice and use of kong-ans. At the beginning I was eager to pass the most kong-ans in the shortest time, but later I learned that giving the correct response to the kong-an does not mean I am able to really attain it. For example, my homework is one of Ko Bong's Three Gates: "The whole universe is on fire. Through what kind of samadhi can you escape being burned?" Although I know the answer, I am still unable to attain it 100 percent. I realized that we get the correct answer to a kong-an not by thinking, but by perceiving clearly the situation and keeping correct relation and function.

During the two retreats, I also found my life's direction under the guidance of Zen masters and Ji Do Poep Sas. Now I am practicing to keep clear mind from moment to moment and only just do it. This gives me a lot of confidence in Zen Master Seung Sahn's teachings. I am grateful to the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn, and to all the teachers. I hope that more people will have the same opportunities as I have to learn the teachings. Therefore, I vow to share the teachings of the Kwan Um School of Zen, which is another reason I became the administrator of WWSF2020 Malaysia. It is my sincere wish that more people, especially my fellow Malaysians, have the opportunity to learn and practice Zen, which points directly to our mind, keep clear and enjoy helping all beings, and move toward the spirit of "The Whole World Is a Single Flower." I take this opportunity to welcome all teachers and students of the Kwan Um School of Zen from around the world to join us in 2020, to enjoy the warmth and smiles of the multiracial and multicultural society of Malaysia. I end with my sincere vow to help realize the wish of "The Whole World Is a Single Flower: Zen blooms everywhere." ♦

Yap Ching Ching graduated with a masters of science in the psychology of child development. She is an early childhood educator and home tutor, and a long-term volunteer in Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple. She started practicing in 2007, and has been following the teachings of the Kwan Um School since 2017. In addition, Ching Ching is an administrator for the WWSF2020 Malaysia conference.

