

# One Flower, One World

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Zen Master Man Gong (1871–1946), the grandteacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn, survived 35 years (1910–1945) of Japanese occupation in Korea. The Japanese tried to unroot the Korean monastic tradition and replace it with the Japanese monastic tradition, which has different rules in which monastics are allowed to eat meat, drink alcohol, and get married. The Japanese dictated that only married monks could be abbots at each of the 25 major temples. While most monastics surrendered to the Japanese occupiers, Zen Master Man Gong did not waver in the face of oppression and strongly upheld the traditional forms; 600 monastic practitioners followed him, and they formed a community of traditional monastics on Deok Sung Mountain (also known as Geum Gang Mountain). Despite the bad situation, at the end of World War II, Zen Master Man Gong wrote in calligraphy “The Whole World Is a Single Flower” to represent equality, harmony and peace. Each one of us is not different or separate from one another; we are of the same root.

In the spirit of this legacy, Zen Master Seung Sahn founded a triennial Whole World Is a Single Flower conference in 1987 to bring people of different countries and traditions together to open minds. Zen Master Dae Kwang explained, just as meditation is a technique, this kind of conference is also a technique to create experiences that would widen minds and increase wisdom. When we leave our home and our comfort zone, we have to put down familiar assumptions and keep a wide-open mind to follow different cultures and be open to different kinds of experience. If we get culture shock, we return to primary point and become one with the situation. This conference technique lets many practitioners come together to learn from one another, helping them to understand themselves and how to help other people.



All over the world, many people suffered during World War II. Singapore was occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945. My grandfather was a teenager when the Japanese took over control of Singapore from the British. The Japanese started registering all men between the ages of 18 and 50. Since he was just a few days short of his 18th birthday, my grandfather wasn't sure whether he should

be registered. A few good Samaritans noticed this kid in the queue and pulled him out of it, saving him from a violent death, as these men were put on trucks and driven to Changi Beach to be executed. Over this period, the Sook Ching (“purge”) massacre resulted in the execution of more than 40,000 Chinese men judged by the Japanese to be hostile to their occupation.

The culmination of the bombing of Hiroshima led to the Japanese surrender of Singapore. One of the retreating Japanese soldiers inadvertently strayed from his unit and was begging for food. While my grandfather was boarding a bus nearby, there were people shouting “Don't help the Japanese ghost!” Just as the bus started to drive off, my grandfather reached out and threw his entire lunch—actually just a plain bun—to the Japanese soldier. The soldier picked up the bun and gobbled it down.

That was primary point: clearly perceiving the truth of the situation and responding to it with compassion and wisdom—when someone is hungry, give them food.

When we practice according to the Dharma, we learn to build a strong center and believe in ourselves 100 percent. Practice helps us to cut through delusions and become confident to carry out this common legacy of equality, harmony and peace. Like my grandfather, we all can return to this before-thinking mind in any situation. The single flower is complete in my grandfather, and originally in each and every one of us. Zen Master Man Gong pointed out that the biggest sin for a worldly person is to interrupt the inheritance from their ancestors. For students of the Buddha, there is no greater sin than not inheriting the Dharma. ♦

Xinxiang first encountered Zen practice in early 2000 at Kwan Yin Chan Lin (KYCL) Zen meditation center. She returned to take the three refuges and five precepts with Gye Mun Sunim JDPS in 2017. Xinxiang practices Iyengar yoga under the guidance of one of the first three yoga teachers in Singapore history. Most of her young adulthood was invested in getting MBA and CPA qualifications while working in the banking and financial services sectors as a vice president in the front office. She retired in February 2019 to practice Zen Buddhism full time. Currently, Xinxiang also volunteers at KYCL as the interim office manager and secretary for the Whole World Is a Single Flower 2020 conference in Singapore.



Photo: Kwan Yin Chan Lin  
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