

# Out of the Dharma Room, Into the Park

Dušan Silvasi

Košice Zen Center was founded in 1990 in the city of Košice in the Slovak Republic. Several years ago, we noticed an absence of young people at our regular dharma talks and practice sessions. Thinking about current lifestyles, we decided to integrate some meditative physical exercises into our practice in order to encourage new people to attend. Together with my wife, Oli, we started a project called Moja Pohoda, which means My Equilibrium.

It was a new way for our sangha to introduce Zen practice to a wider public through events that combine our usual practice with yoga and *soen-yu* (breathing exercises). To our surprise, these activities have proven to be popular also among young people. We are very happy about that.

We launched Moja Pohoda almost seven years ago. We began by contacting the organizers of a well-known local summer festival, Summer in the Park, organized by a cultural center run by the government. We proposed having a free hour-long Zen and yoga event, thinking that it would be a great opportunity to share the dharma and introduce the Košice Zen Center to like-minded people. The first response was no—the organizers said that their festival is for culture, not sports.

We didn't give up! Oli found a student cellist who was happy to accompany us with live music during practice. It took more communication with the organizers, but a few weeks later they said yes. So we got ready and prepared printed handouts with information about Zen practice and the Košice Zen Center. To the organizers' surprise, many people came to our outdoor practice. Since then, they have invited us to join the summer festival every year. We offer free events, including yoga, *soen-yu*, a short dharma talk, and sitting Zen meditation. Usually about a hundred people attend each event. Such a strong together action every time creates a wonderful mind of togetherness.

This activity has caught the interest of local radio and television stations, and every year they interview us and ask participants for their comments. The feedback from participants is wonderful and inspires others to join. The purpose of this event is to provide the somatic experience of a calm, quiet mind, deep, relaxed breathing, and the awakened, peaceful, tranquil presence that comes with Zen and yoga practice. The psychological aspect of Zen seems to be a welcome added bonus for young people, and distinguishes our events from practices focused mainly on physical exercise and well-being. Based on the success of these summer events, we started to offer regular weekly Zen and yoga practice sessions, drawing more new people to come and join us.

To spread the word, we print new handouts for the festival each year. These have helped us build our mailing list and our online community on Facebook. Some of the new people gradually became regular sangha members and also participate in retreats in our newly

built retreat center in the beautiful countryside near Košice.

We also organized other special events such as Zen and yoga in the Slovak National Fine Art Gallery, artistic workshops, and outside-the-Dharma-room events. As the first event of this nature, we had a public mandala painting with practice in the Fine Art Gallery.

More than thirty young people attended and tried painting mandalas. The event included yoga and then Zen sitting. Another time, about twenty people came at 7 a.m. to practice Zen and yoga in the Fine Art Gallery. It was an extraordinary experience indeed!

Another special event was a dharma Q&A with our guiding teacher, Oleg Šuk JDPSN, with whom we presented photos from visits to Korean temples and shared a taste of Korean temple food.

To provide some brief information about this project, we also created a new website, linked to our Kwan Um School of Zen–Slovakia website. The new website has a more personal look, and dharma is shared there in personal stories and experiences with Zen practice in a blog format.

In March 2019 we were invited to give a one-hour Zen and yoga program at a major international competition for young computer programmers from thirty countries, Hack Kosice 2019. The feedback was amazing, and we hope to share the dharma again at Hack Kosice 2020. Recently, I gave a talk about Zen practice at the small software company where I am employed. Everybody attended, and now we have short morning meditation sessions three times per week, with nearly all of my colleagues joining. I am planning to give similar talks in other software companies here in Košice.

We keep on trying and we are still looking for new ideas to share the wonderful and powerful teaching of our great Zen Master Seung Sahn. Each exercise with Zen practice brings a new audience. Currently, in addition to the Zen and yoga program, we are offering a new somatic movement practice based on principles of Body-Mind Centering® combined with Zen meditation. In our experience, some somatic movements help the mind to settle down for Zen meditation, especially for people new to Zen practice.

What new approaches are you trying in your sangha? We would appreciate if you share your ideas and experiences, and we look forward to your responses. Please email us at [kosice@kwanumzen.sk](mailto:kosice@kwanumzen.sk). Thank you! ♦

Hapchang,  
Dušan Silvasi  
Abbot of Košice Zen Center  
Slovak Republic

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*Dušan Silvasi has practiced in the Kwan Um School of Zen since 1993, is a senior dharma teacher, has served as abbot of the Košice Zen Center since 2000, works as an IT specialist, teaches karate, and is the father of two daughters.*