

Not a Drop of Regret

Beop Il Sunim

Before moving to Musangsa Temple, I planned to get a Buddhist education. I graduated from high school and decided to apply for documents for a Korean government scholarship. There was one seat provided for Russia, and I decided to try, no matter what. Eventually, I failed.

After that, there was one way left: to become a monk. I applied for the haengwon (monastic work-study training) program, and there were a couple of months left to arrange my affairs in Russia. At the same time, my mother also decided to become a nun, and in order to support her, we headed to Lithuania together to participate in a retreat with Myong Hae Sunim, who promised to help my mom with documents. The retreat went pretty well, except for one small detail. One of the days, on a walking meditation in a forest, I got a tick-bite and I fell ill.

We returned to Russia and I was admitted into a hospital with a terrible headache and feeling on the brink of death. There was no way to leave the room for one month, and the situation became unclear. Would I manage to recover? Should I postpone the trip to Korea? Only don't know. Eventually, everything went all right, and I was discharged from the hospital. This became the final challenge before becoming a monk.

I went to Musangsa, and after spending a couple of months as a haengwon, waited for haeng-ja training, but my haengwon program was extended. I was upset and asked Dae Bong Sunim why that was so. He quoted Man Gong Sunim: "A monastic is a person who has become one with the universe," explaining that it doesn't matter what happens outside, when inside you keep clear. That was a good lesson.

Meanwhile, I had to go back to Russia for some business. I arrived at the airport but couldn't find my flight on the list, so I decided to go to the information stand. They said that the flight was canceled and that they had already informed me. Anyway, I had no other choice and then had to go to the airline office, where luckily they changed my ticket to the next day. Surprisingly, they provided me a room in a hotel. I thought to myself, bad situation is a good situation.

But the adventure didn't finish there. On my arrival in Russia, I had to get home. In the airport, a strange taxi driver pulled me aside, and not thinking too much, I agreed. When we arrived at the house, he overcharged me by a lot. I immediately got scared, but had to pay him. Therefore, everything turned upside down. Now a good situation becomes a bad situation.

I stayed in Russia for a few weeks to change my passport, but it took me a while to apply for the documents. The officials said there was a chance to pick up the passport on the day I had a flight back to Korea. In the morning before my departure I called them, but the document wasn't ready. So I relaxed. Suddenly, on the way to the airport, I got a message that the passport was ready, so I had to go get it. Eventually, I made it in time for the flight. This situation taught me how to

let attachments go, and let things go their own way.

I came back to Musangsa and became a haeng-ja, a monk-in-training. Before that, there was an interview. Dae Bong Sunim asked me: "What's your goal?" I answered: "Sitting and talking to you." Then he said: "One more step: How may I help you?" This interview gave direction to my practice, and I thank Sunim for that.

After a couple of months of being a haeng-ja, I was assigned as Dae Bong Sunim's attendant. It turned out to be a very interesting job. I realized it's pleasant for me to take care of somebody. Once again, Sunim reminded me about practice direction by asking me during another interview: "With which mind do you clean my room?"

Also, I got a job taking care of the cats around the temple. Initially, I just had to feed them twice a day. But suddenly one of the cats got sick. We had to move him into a room and prepare him medicine with each meal. Furthermore, I had to change his litter box twice a day. Even though it seems problematic, every time when I saw the cat, I felt a rush of energy, and I felt happy to keep cleaning up after him.

From time to time, some situations appear when you need to use your intuition. But because of my lack of experience, this did not always end up successfully. For instance, once I started to talk during informal breakfast, when it was silent all around. I could have guessed, as everybody was keeping silent, that I should also keep silent. But afterward, they let me know about my mistake and I apologized. This also was a good teaching for me.

Despite the schedule repeating itself day after day, different situations always appear in our temple that provide some new experiences. This life couldn't be called boring. Once we were walking with Dae Bong Sunim, and I shared that suddenly I had become bored. He quoted Seung Sahn Sunim: "If you look closely at boredom, there's something interesting in it." With this mindset, whenever I would get bored, it became easier to come back to practice.

Sometimes, Ja Eun Sunim helps me with practice. They taught in Hong Kong that all the offerings come from the ten directions. Keeping this in mind, you start to treat things in a different way. Clothing, food, healthcare—these all are covered by donations from laypeople. As a layperson, I treated my clothes carelessly, and threw them out when they got old. But here, looking at the other monks, you realize why they patch their clothes.

Thus, life in a temple always gives you some teaching. There is not a drop of regret that I left my home. I think this is the only way for me to help all beings.

Beop Il Sunim started practicing in the Saint-Petersburg Zen Center in 2009 with Zen Master Wu Bong. He attended a retreat in Lithuania, and then in 2018 he moved to Musangsa Temple. In 2020 he ordained as a novice monk. Currently, he serves as an attendant to Zen Master Dae Bong.