

Primary Point

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*Myong Hae Sunim JDPS
July 25, 1973 – August 2, 2020*

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PRIMARY POINT®
Kwan Um School of Zen
99 Pound Rd
Cumberland, RI 02864-2726

2020 - 2021

Musangsa 90-day Kyol Che

Winter Kyol Che November 29, 2020 - February 26, 2021

Summer Kyol Che May 26, 2021 - August 22, 2021

Led by Zen Master Dae Bong, Guiding Zen Master
Hye Tong Sunim JDPS, Guiding Teacher
& Visiting Teachers from the Kwan Um School of Zen

For information* & registration, go to 'click here for more' below. *Kyol Che guidelines may be subject to change according to Covid19 regulations.
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Providence Zen Center

Flowers in spring
Cool wind in summer
Leaves in autumn
Snow in winter.
If you dont keep anything
in your mind
for you it's always a good
season.

- zen master Seung Sahn

Summer Kyol Che
2021

July 5th - August 6th

Winter Kyol Che
2021

January 4th - April 2nd



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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive Primary Point, see page 31. The circulation is 1,400 copies.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editor's Note	4
Departure Poem for Venerable Myong Hae Sunim JDPS <i>Zen Master Dae Kwan</i>	4
Accept Life As It Is <i>Zen Master Dae Kwan</i>	4
Tribute to Myong Hae Sunim JDPS.....	5
Biography of Myong Hae Sunim JDPS	5
The Steps to Be Ordained: The Procedure in the Kwan Um School of Zen, Musangsa Temple <i>Hye Tong Sunim JDPS</i>	12
“Top man cannot see his own karma” <i>Zen Master Dae Bong</i>	14
Let the Gentle Breeze Send Off the White Clouds <i>Gye Mun Sunim JDPS</i>	14
A Monk Means No Monk: Living a Monastic Life <i>Hye Tong Sunim JDPS</i>	15
Dharma Defenders <i>Chuan Wen Sunim JDPS</i>	16
Getting Old <i>Kwan Haeng Sunim</i>	17
Sharing on Practice as a Monastic <i>Won Hye Sunim</i>	18
Build a Better Robot <i>Won Il Sunim</i>	19
Not a Drop of Regret <i>Beop Il Sunim</i>	20
Turn Appearance into the Path <i>Beop Hwa Sunim</i>	21
Inside and Outside: Spending the Past Year at Musangsa <i>Matt Jiang</i>	22
Online Sangha Q&A <i>Kathy Park JDPSN</i>	23
Kwan Um School of Zen Centers	28, 29, 30
Membership in the Kwan Um School of Zen–America.....	31

[3



Cover: Photo of Myong Hae Sunim JDPS by Francis Lau.

Editor's Note:

It is with great sadness that we dedicate this issue of *Primary Point* to the memory of Myong Hae Sunim JDPS and Oleg Šuk JDPSN, who both passed away recently. It is a great loss for our sangha and for this world. May their memory live on as inspiration and courage to keep us on the Buddha Way. May they be at peace.

A tribute to Myong Hae Sunim is in this issue with reflections from those who knew her from the Asian sangha. Myong Hae Sunim spent the majority of her practicing years as a nun in Asia, and was also known as Ming Hoi Si in Cantonese.

An additional tribute to Myong Hae Sunim from the European sangha will be in the next issue of *Primary Point*, Spring 2021. That issue will also contain a tribute to Oleg Šuk JDPSN.

—Kathy Park JDPSN, *Primary Point Editor for Asia*

Departure Poem for Venerable Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

Zen Master Dae Kwan

Bright Mind Deep Ocean
Bright as the Sun
Deep Wisdom Like Ocean
Life After After Life
Keep this Beginner's Vow
Help Beings from Suffering
Sun never sets
Moon always shines
Ocean swallows all the water in the universe
That is you, Ming Hoi

4]

We are grateful to you, Myong Hae Sunim
JDPS, for your selfless great work for our
Hong Kong Sangha.
Please come back quickly to fulfilling your
Great Bodhisattva Vows.
May you become Buddha!

Namu Amital Bul
Namu Amital Bul
Namu Amital Bul

Accept Life As It Is

Zen Master Dae Kwan

Myong Hae Sunim JDPS's sudden passing was a great shock to our global sangha.

Zen Master Su Bong and Myong Hae Sunim JDPS both gave us the great teaching of impermanence. When "it" knocks on our door, nobody can escape it. This is the greatest teaching they gave us, so we have to treasure what we have and sincerely make the best use of our life. Though their physical bodies are no longer with us, both teachers are always in our hearts. In fact, they are closer to us now than when they were alive. They continue to support us from a different dimension. I really don't worry about Myong Hae Sunim anymore. When I heard the news, inside I felt very calm and knew what to do. In fact I could feel from my lower belly her joy of completing her job in this lifetime. She tried so hard, never gave up, and left with no regrets. As a teacher, she taught students *Primary Point* thousands of times. Every time it was also a rehearsal for



Photo: Francis Lau

her to return to before thinking, to no life no death.

When our time comes, it is the best time to attain this point. Myong Hae Sunim completely attained this point, then let go. She attained the Hyang Eom up a tree kong-an, so I don't feel sad for her. Some of us could feel her joy even though everyone misses her so much. She is finally free from her body and karma from this lifetime. Next life she will get a more high-class vehicle to come back to this world and again practice, again become a teacher and continue to fulfill her bodhisattva vow.

We might have lost someone very dear, someone whom we could trust and who was helpful to everyone. We have to accept the truth that her lifespan was short and welcome everything as it is. Myong Hae Sunim JDPS's greatest teaching to us was her smile and strong try-mind for others. Please make this practice yours; then Myong Hae Sunim never left us! ♦

Tribute to Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

Editor's note:

Many of those who wrote tributes are monastics and have omitted the monastic title *Sunim* from their names out of humility, as monks and nuns never use the title to refer to themselves. In these cases, we have included the title in square brackets following their names, in order to allow readers to know which of the writers are in the monastic community.

A Poem for Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

To Bright Ocean

You carried a broken house
all over the world.

How did you become
so strong . . . and kind . . .

A friend to everyone.

Changing buildings,
another challenge.

You went first
to open the Path for others.

We meet soon ~
Opening eyes, I see you.
Hearing the wind and water,
hear you.

Dae Bong [Sunim] hapjang
Phoenix Dragon Mountain, Korea
2020.08.27



Dharma Sister Life after Life!

I came to Hong Kong in 2003 after I had completed haeng-ja training in Musangsa Temple in Korea. Something that really shocked me was the dharma sisters here, especially Myong Hae Sunim. She could wake up at 4:30 a.m. and keep working nonstop until 11 at night! After being together for a longer time, and sometimes having accompanied her to visit her Chinese doctor, I came to understand that her body was too weak that she just couldn't fall asleep in such short breaks during the day. In fact, bodily pain was never an obstacle for her perseverance of "only go straight, just do it"!

I remember there was a period when her body was very sick, and she needed a wheelchair to help for longer walks. By some chance, she got to know a qi gong teacher who was teaching Yi Jin Jing exercise. From that point, she dragged her painful body every day, step by step, heading to the park to learn the exercise. After she returned to the

► Biography of Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

Myong Hae Sunim JDPS was the first Buddhist nun from Lithuania. She heard of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching for the first time in 1991 and sat her first retreat with Zen Master Su Bong when he visited Lithuania in 1993. Myong Hae Sunim moved to Hwa Gye Sa Temple in South Korea in 1996 to train as a haeng-ja. She then relocated to Hong Kong after becoming a nun in 1997 to train under Zen Master Dae Kwan. Myong Hae Sunim remained in Hong Kong for more than twenty years and served as head nun, vice abbot, and second guiding teacher of Su Bong Zen Monastery. After receiving inka from Zen Master Dae Kwan in 2016, Myong Hae Sunim became the second guiding teacher of Su Bong Zen Monastery and the guiding teacher of the Lithuanian sangha. She led many retreats in Hong Kong, Lithuania, and other parts of Europe before passing in her home country in August 2020.

Zen center, besides practicing the qi gong exercises, she did lots of mantra practice too. During that period, sometimes she would have some emotions, because of not being able to do together action and join practice with everybody, and also when outside people couldn't understand her situation. In fact, eventually she overcame all those mind obstacles, and later she got special permission from the qi gong teacher to teach us qi gong in the Zen center. Something amazing is, if she felt interested in something, she would really do it with 100 percent passion, make a deep investigation, and finally became proficient.

I learned a lot from Myong Hae Sunim all these years, especially when organizing activities. In Hong Kong, our teacher usually would perceive the timing and climate, location advantage, and human situation at that moment. In case the planned schedule wouldn't work well with the above criteria, all plans and rundown could be completely changed anytime. Usually people would just get shocked, feel strong emotions and helplessness with the sudden



Photo: Courtesy of Su Bong Zen Monastery

6]

change. But for her, she would just put down her own opinion, 100 percent trust Sifu's intuition and decision at that moment, try her best to find different solutions promptly, and rearrange all plans to go the same pace with Sifu, even if that might cause her to do ten times more work to cope with the sudden changes.

In many difficult situations, she would just come back to what she was doing at each moment and continue her responsibility, only keep her try mind, and adjust herself to be more flexible to help others. For Myong Hae Sunim, there is no "give up" in her dictionary, even when all other people would complain, give up, or leave, she would definitely stay with her obligation and her practice until the end.

My dearest sister, I believe life after life you will never be able to forget us; we will meet again. Best wishes to you, wishing you come back soon with a healthy body, again strong practice, become a great teacher and help all beings from suffering!

Bon Sun [Sunim]



A Tribute to Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

I am looking at the picture on the altar. Her photo.

It was sent to us by the Lithuanian sangha with the caption, "Myong Hae Sunim JDPS—a bodhisattva of no rank—who walked with us for a while." It's really beautiful, very formal. But something is off; something is missing. I realize what is missing on this picture is her smile, the dimples on her cheeks.

It's this smile—a ray of light—that I remember whenever I think of her.

It was in Hong Kong where we met for the first time. Me, just after my ordination, and her, a very experienced practitioner and well-seasoned nun. She was so commit-

ted, really serious about practice and a little intimidating. Yet this forgiving smile would instantly break any barriers between us. I felt understood and accepted. I felt unconditional love shining straight from Ming Hoi Si's heart. This genuine smile was a sign of true humanity and her authenticity. It never seemed fake or forced. When Sunim smiled, it was so easy to forget how hard it was for her sometimes. All the pain, all the suffering . . . but she didn't give up. You could see all this in her eyes. Sad eyes, loving smile. Great sadness, great compassion.

I admired her sacrifices, her perseverance and dedication. But it's this smile that left the deepest imprint in my heart.

And when I look outside and see the rays of light, I know it may be just the sun shining. But it may be Ming Hoi Si smiling from her new destination. And then, tears in my eyes, I smile back. Thank you, Myong Hae Sunim!

With palms together,
Won Hyang [Sunim]



Why Not?

Myong Hae Sunim was one of those teachers who doesn't try to be a teacher, doesn't hold this kind of an attitude, and yet, just by being herself and through her daily behavior, she was giving the greatest teaching. I didn't know her for long, but even the short time we spent together has become a great teaching and a wonderful memory for me. Here I would like to share just one episode of practicing with her.

During the winter Kyol Che 2019–2020 in Gak Su Temple, during the work period I was assigned to help Myong Hae Sunim in the garden. One day we were walking down from the main building to the place where we had to do some work. We were laughing and joking about

something, and I don't remember why, but I started saying "No, no, no," in a funny voice. Myong Hae Sunim turned to me and, laughing, asked: "Why 'No'?" She did it in a very playful way, with a big smile, but this question suddenly hit me: "Really, why 'No'?" I switched to saying "Yes, yes, yes," and she looked back at me with a grin and didn't say anything else. And this question stuck with me: "Why 'No'?" Why do I like saying no so much? Not always with my mouth, sometimes with the attitude, sometimes just in thinking, but in many situations where it would have been better to say yes, which means just to accept the situation as it is, I prefer to say no. Why do I have to do that?

In monastic life, saying yes is very important. My Soto Zen teacher used to say that acceptance is the ultimate monastic practice. In Korea, before becoming a monk, a person has to go through a so-called haeng-ja training, which consists of working for the temple and always saying yes. Anything you are told to do, in any situation, just always say yes. It's not so difficult when you know that you are not given a choice. It's something that you consciously decide to go through in order to become monastic. The tricky part starts after you actually become one. "Do I still have to say yes to everything I'm told? Why? I've done it for a whole year, I'm not a haeng-ja, I don't want to do that anymore." This is something that I have heard so many times from so many people in the temple. I've heard it in my own head, too. There's some kind of pleasure in having the freedom to say "No!" It feels like you have power, control over the situation; you have a choice. But why choose "No"? This is a good question that, actually, can change a lot in life. It's a very gentle and deep teaching that Myong Hae Sunim gave me, just joking around, among many others. Thank you, Myong Hae Sunim!

So Ya [Sunim]



I was from the Myong family. I first ordained in 1997 at Tae Go Sa Temple in the Mojave Desert. By that winter the family name had changed to Kwan. I didn't know about Myong Hae Sunim until, on my return to the monastic life in the summer of 2013, I did haeng-ja training at Musangsa. At the end I was sent to Hong Kong for five days in order to process my visa. First and foremost it was Dae Kwan Sunim and the wonderful functioning of her Zen center, and her nuns. Myong Hae Sunim was her right hand, perfectly synchronized, a beautiful expression of dharma. Dae Kwan Sunim, great Zen master that she is, is known for being tough on her students. One thing I noticed right away about Myong Hae Sunim: she was completely immune, able to work with that energy quite well. She was energized by it because she was aligned correctly with the teaching. It was something remarkable to see. When you meet someone who has completely be-

come the path, you know them instantaneously. That's how I felt about her. I was completely in step with her. So healthy, so nourishing to have contact with someone like that. I wanted to see her again, to be part of her practice life, to support her. In those five days I made quite a deep connection to her—never expressed. And the way it often is on the path, I never saw her again. I'd planned to go back to Hong Kong, to spend time with them again. I was very moved by their sincere effort, the wonderful dharma of Su Bong Sa Temple. Human life. The lines don't always meet. I don't know why her time was so short. I don't know why I'm the one still alive.

Won Il [Sunim]



Tribute to MHSN

Bum! Here we are left to ourselves. It is always like this when somebody we lived with either as a friend or family member passes. She was here; we expected to see her the next day and many times further on but no, and here we are. One day in my house garden I found a small bird lying on the ground. I picked it up still alive, and after a while the shiver went through it, and then it was still in my open hand. It is common to every one of us appearing in this world being young and vigorous, then changing, changing, and finally becoming bent by age and passing away. Seeing how much suffering it brings, I was pissed off about the law that governs this world, but later on by the means of Zen practice, I saw that this state of mind does not make it any better, and we have to see beyond opposites. Like Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, arrive at the checkpoint regardless of the track, yet nobody can guarantee your life. Myong Hae Sunim passed unexpectedly in her most fruitful time. How sad. I didn't know her personally, yet our minds connected when she picked from a choice of Zen sticks offered to her before the inka ceremony, and the one she picked was the one I was asked to make. It was plain and light just like I could see she was in photos and in how people described her. What happened a few weeks ago makes us look upon ourselves and ask about the strength of our own practice seeing Myong Hae Sunim's commitment to help others. And by this event, it is yet another impact of hers making our practice stronger. Leaving society, living in society, it is not easy, but that is the way of monastics, the way Myong Hae Sunim chose, and the way she was doing that is very inspiring. The Heart Sutra says no form, no emptiness—and yet the last line: arrived, arrived, to the other shore, Great Joy. Great Joy beyond opposites.

Na Mu Amita Bul

Ji Yong [Sunim]



I heard about Myong Hae Sunim for the first time from one Russian student who trained in Hong Kong.



Photo: Courtesy of Su Bong Zen Monastery

The student spoke only Russian, and Myong Hae Sunim was helping her with translation and giving advice from her monastic life. From that story, Myong Hae Sunim became a good example for me, as I also study Chinese. She learned Cantonese from scratch, and Hong Kong people said she spoke just like a Chinese. So I was inspired by her skill.

Later on, I met Myong Hae Sunim in Russia on a retreat. Everybody was excited, because we don't have so many Russian-speaking teachers. I remember that she was always smiling, and her energy was filling up everyone. That way, she taught us without using words.

One year later, I met Myong Hae Sunim in Lithuania. When we came to the retreat place, we had to set up the dharma room, and Myong Hae Sunim was first to spread the yoga mats. Also, even though she had a lot of body issues, she gave interviews seven days in a row, from morning until evening. Thus, she taught us through her actions. Myong Hae Sunim was a great bodhisattva!

During the retreat Sunim organized interesting practices, which I had never done before. We were walking in a field carrying bowls filled with water. She would come up to everyone, trying to poke us. To me, she said, "Want some ice cream?" If I got distracted, I would have spilled all the water. It's the same as our mind. When you do something and get distracted, you could lose concentration and screw everything up. It was good teaching from her.

Also, there was a chance to listen to our chanting from outside. A bunch of people would go out of the dharma room, and you could feel the energy of the chanting. This way, she got us interested in practice.

That time, Myong Hae Sunim also gave a dharma talk. She gave homework for everyone. Before going to sleep and after waking up, Sunim suggested we thank the universe for every day we lived, and the new day, thinking out new words of gratitude every new day. With such an attitude, no doubt, she lived a fulfilled life.

Another thing she mentioned was about meditation posture. When your back is crooked, it is called lax. When your back is straight—relax. I like that teaching. Nowadays, every time I notice my back is crooked, I remember Myong Hae Sunim's teaching, as if she was never separate from us. This talk really hit me, and Myong Hae Sunim became my favorite teacher.

After the retreat, we went to her house for lunch. Despite the fact that interviews were over, she believed that we still could bring up a good answer for our homework. I realized that she not only believed in herself 100 percent, but went further, and believed in her students.

Her last lesson to us was her death, which reminds us not to waste time and practice hard.

Beop Il [Sunim]



A Lifetime of Giving

I didn't know how much Ming Hoi Si had touched my life until I received the news of her passing. When I first glanced at the message from Zen Master Dae Kwan, I had assumed that one of Ming Hoi Si's parents passed away—they were older and she was in Lithuania with them. When I read the message more carefully, I simply could not believe it. She was only forty-seven with no terminal illness—how could she die suddenly? I later learned on Facebook that a drunk driver had taken her life and that of her driver, Rasa Umbrasiene, a mother of two. What a tragedy! I'm not a crier, but I broke down when I saw via Zoom the sadness on the face of Ming Hoi Si's mother.

Ming Hoi Si came to Hong Kong about twenty-five years ago as a young nun who spoke no English or Cantonese. She struggled to learn the languages and understand the local culture, but she worked extremely hard and practiced with diligence, sincerity, and grit. After nearly twenty years of practice, Ming Hoi Si became a Ji Do Poep Sa, a guiding teacher in our Kwan Um School of Zen. She was the first Lithuanian to become a Buddhist nun, and then the first Lithuanian to become a guiding teacher in our school. The Hong Kong and Lithuanian sanghas, along with our global sangha, celebrated with great joy, and we all looked forward to seeing her blossom as a teacher. We never knew how little time we would have with her as a teacher—her passing and that of all sudden passings give us a deafening reminder that everything is impermanent. You never know when your last breath will be, so don't take it for granted. Take each breath with deep gratitude, and live each moment as though it's your last.

Ming Hoi Si means so much to me because she was someone who was kind to me without expecting anything in return—a true bodhisattva. When I was sick at one retreat, Ming Hoi Si gave me a packet of thirty vitamins—all to be consumed in a day! When I finished the first pack, and I felt better, she gave me a few more. There were so many vitamins that I started trying to get others to help me finish the packs. Later when I developed severe eczema, she gave me a bag of yellow chrysanthemum and told me to apply them to my damaged skin. As someone who had many health issues herself, Ming Hoi Si studied the tools of alternative medicine and shared her knowledge and medicine with anyone who needed them. She did so with compassion and with the singular hope that you'll get better. This is true love.

Since I traveled half the year for seven years in my previous job, Ming Hoi Si knew how hectic my life was. She said to me once, "Remember your practice." This simple reminder hit me hard and has reverberated within my mind until this day. Of course I should always remember my practice—breathing deeply and slowly and being completely present with my surroundings and those I'm with every moment, not worried about the past or anxious about the future, but rather just understanding the changing nature of my function, be it as a friend, a colleague, or a stranger, and doing it 100 percent each moment. Ming Hoi Si's one-time simple reminder of just three words has helped me to remember my practice for years.

Once Ming Hoi Si became a guiding teacher, she was authorized to teach kong-ans, Zen puzzles that Zen teachers use to test the minds of their students. Common ones include "When you die, where do you go?" and "How do you not step on your shadow?" When Ming Hoi Si first



Photo: Courtesy of Su Bong Zen Monastery

started teaching kong-ans, she would spend up to an hour with each student, not letting them escape until they've perceived the meaning of the kong-an and experienced the discomfort of true don't-know. And her persistence lasted beyond the kong-an room. One time when we were hiking, and all of a sudden I forgot what kong-an Ming Hoi Si had asked me, she did not leave my side for nearly an hour, poking and prodding until I gave her the correct answer. She wanted so much for me to grow as a student.

My last conversation with Ming Hoi Si took place about two months before she died. It was my birthday on June 2, and she told me from Lithuania that she had a present for me and asked if I wanted it. I said, "Of course!" She asked, "Are you sure?" I answered with confidence, "Of course!" "OK, I offer you a kong-an interview," she explained. We then had a short and delightful chat on Zoom. She told me she was very busy teaching in Lithuania and had hoped to return to Hong Kong for our winter retreat. And though I did not give her a correct answer to my kong-an, she guided me in a manner that allowed me to surprise Zen Master Dae Kwan with the correct answer at my next interview. Zen Master Dae Kwan astutely asked, "Did you work with another teacher?" Of course I had, and looking back, I'm so grateful I had said yes to this last birthday gift from Ming Hoi Si.

10]

Zen Master Dae Kwan told us that we're not Ming Hoi Si's students if we cry and don't smile. My practice is not there yet, and I can't help but be sad that Ming Hoi Si left us so suddenly and so soon. May we continue to walk this path of practice with Ming Hoi Si. May she continue to inspire us and teach us. And may we all yearn to follow her example of giving without wanting anything in return. May we become enlightened and live a life for others, just as Ming Hoi Si had done.

Thank you, Sunim, for all that you've done for us. We will miss you and will hold you dear in our hearts always.
Minh Ngan Tran



Sharing of Myong Hae Sunim, JDPS

My father passed away about three years ago. At that time, my mom was very sad. A few days after my father's death, one dharma brother invited Myong Hae Sunim and a few other dharma brothers to have dinner. I was helping out Sunim at the Zen center that day, so I was also invited to have dinner with them. However, I wasn't comfortable leaving Mom at home alone, so I asked both Sunim and that dharma brother if my mom could also join us. They both were happy about that.

My mom is not into Buddhism and is not an easy person. She sometimes also stares at monastics. Our family and relatives are all Catholic. I was a bit worried about what reaction my mom would have when she saw someone with no hair and dressing in "strange" clothing. I asked Sunim if I could call her *gwai por* ("foreigner" in colloquial Canton-

ese), so that it would be easier for my mom to accept her identity. Sunim was fine with that. I was touched that Sunim offered an easy way for others to approach monastics.

When my mom first saw Myong Hae Sunim at dinner, she did not look at Sunim in a weird way. (Myong Hae Sunim was also very smart, keeping her head covered with a warm hat!) Then my mom was amazed that the *gwai por* could speak fluent Cantonese and eat in a local style with chopsticks! After that it was my surprise that my mom did not find Sunim disgusting, but rather she was respectful to Sunim and kept pouring tea and picking out food for her. Several times Mom picked out some food that was not suitable for Sunim's health condition. I tried to stop her, but Sunim did not utter a word, and just received the food with both hands holding the plate or bowl and ate! I can still remember that some of the food she ate could really cause her body harm, when her body was so sick already. I was so touched. I understand that Sunim tried to make good karma with everyone in each situation no matter who they are. There was no "I," no "my body," no "my situation," and so on.

Definitely there is lots more to share. With this sharing, I believe Sunim's silent but strong practice and virtue can really soften or even connect with someone like my mom, and can even transform the situation and karma. Her compassion and bodhisattva actions are good teachings for me. I am grateful that I can encounter such a great teacher in this lifetime, even though I got to know her better only during the last two to three years.

Thank you very much again, Ji Do Si. Please pick up your Zen stick and give your teaching again soon!

With respect,
hapchang and three bows to you
Monica Wong (Hye Won)



4 September 2020

Thank you Myong Hae Sunim JDPS!

So lucky to know you in this lifetime, so good to have you be our Ji Do Poep Sa, but it was not expected that you would leave us with this big hit. Wow, such a powerful life teaching!

Many moments appeared in my mind when I started to write this note.

I still remember clearly on your big day becoming our Ji Do Poep Sa, many Zen masters, teachers, sunims, dharma sisters and brothers were there joining the celebration like a big party—everyone was so happy and excited because many of us were waiting for this day to come. We become one in the picture—one BIG smile—JOY!

From other people's sharing, I only know you were very sick for many years. I remember in recent years, most of the time you needed to sit in a chair when doing meditation, dharma talks, and in the interview room. Every time when I asked you, you always gave me a simple answer to comfort me: "I just sat on the mat too long for interview.



Photo: Courtesy of Su Bong Zen Monastery

I am OK, I'm getting better." Now I know you just didn't want us to worry. Your direction—bodhisattva way—is so clear with no hindrance.

Guess you forgot, a few years ago, one Sunday, we helped to clean up Wai Sau Yuen [*one of the buildings at Gaksu Temple —Ed.*], and you found a small, one-inch-tall bodhisattva statue in the temple and you gave it to me. Guess what? The statue is now with me whenever I do my practice at home—so blessed.

With your courage, thanks for using this life teaching to encourage us to make our direction clear and to keep our practice with no hesitation.

Miss you and hope one day we will meet again!

Namu Amita Bul!

Namu Amita Bul!

Namu Amita Bul!

Carmen Tse



I still remember that night when I first met Myong Hae Sunim. I was still a middle school student on summer vacation, and my dad took me to Su Bong Monastery to listen to Zen Master Seung Sahn's teachings. It was also the first time I met Myong Hae Sunim there. At that time, there were thousands of questions in my mind. I even shared my experience with my friends the next day.

"Why aren't the monastics Chinese?"

"Why aren't the foreigners Christian nuns, but are instead Buddhist nuns?"

"And why be a monastic when you look so beautiful?"

Over the past twenty years, we have been meditating, hiking, and growing together. She has accompanied me through all the ups and downs in my life. In addition to being a nun, Myong Hae Sunim is more like a friend and a big sister, and also a good friend of our family. She is a take-action type of person. I remember one time when I was standing at the door, about to leave after a three-hundred-bow practice, I said to her, "Myong Hae Sunim, the chocolate cake you made is so delicious. Is it difficult to make? Teach me next time!" She replied without a blink, "It's very simple. You go to the supermarket to buy Marie biscuits now. Don't do it next time. Let me teach you to make them now!" She truly lived out the just-do-it teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn! No need for "next time" at all.

August 2 is the Lotus Lantern Completion Day. Myong Hae Sunim has led students to make lotus lanterns every year for the past twenty years. So for Hong Kong students, Myong Hae Sunim is the representative of Lotus Lantern. When my family had dinner that night, my father received the news of Myong Hae Sunim's passing. Everyone couldn't believe it or didn't want to believe it, but after calming down, everyone said, "Is this the scene Myong Hae Sunim wants to see? She just wants to see everyone smiling!"

Since receiving the news, I am confident that Myong Hae Sunim has headed to a good place. I am grateful to Sifu for the forty-nine-day special chanting. This chanting is more important to us than Myong Hae Sunim. It provides an opportunity for the students to practice and to overcome this grief.

Becky Chu

The Steps to Be Ordained

The Procedure in the Kwan Um School of Zen, Musangsa Temple

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS

Each Buddhist tradition has a different procedure for an aspirant to be ordained. Most of those who became monastics in earlier times in the Kwan Um School of Zen were trained and ordained by Zen Master Seung Sahn alone, yet still based on the tradition of the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism. When he moved back to Korea in the early 1990s, he naturally followed the situation in Korea, which already had more than 1,500 years of Buddhist tradition. With the monastic community and training system still very much alive, most of those who wished to follow him and also be ordained were sent to the Chogye Order's monastic training. As time went by after he passed away, Musangsa Temple has become somewhat of a head temple for monastics in the Kwan Um School. At the same time, it is also active in supporting lay practitioners by providing various programs, including three-month Kyol Che retreats twice a year.

12]

Since the founding of Musangsa Temple, there have been some changes in the procedure to be ordained there. These processes evolved because some aspirants were not able participate in the Chogye Order's training, while others were simply not motivated to go through the Chogye training, wishing only to be ordained at Musangsa without leaving the teaching tradition and legacy of Zen Master Seung Sahn.

Here I'll introduce some important points in the current ordination procedure for those interested in undertaking the training at Musangsa, without going into all the differences between the Chogye Order and the Kwan Um School.

When one has decided to become a monastic at Musangsa, after which they will be recognized as a sunim in Kwan Um School, they must be legally single, have no dependents (for example, children who still need their care), have no debt, and have no outstanding legal issues. Also, they should be in sound health both physically and mentally, so that they can perform any tasks asked by the temple and the sunims to demonstrate their ability to complete the training. If they are sure of their direction and fulfill the conditions, the first step is to apply for the haeng-won program. It has been developed at Musangsa to allow practitioners from all over the world to get in touch with the Korean monastic root of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching. *Haeng* (行) literally means "action," and *won* (願) means "vow." These words also form Zen Master Seung Sahn's original dharma name,

Haeng Won (行願). The program offers an experience of immersion in the daily life of a Zen temple, following the work and practice schedule, in exchange for Zen training with room and board.

The daily training consists of approximately five hours of formal practice and five hours of work practice. As for those who are seriously interested in being ordained, the program is a good opportunity to see if they are sure about pursuing this path before they officially request approval to undertake the training to become a monastic.

When someone wants to apply for the haeng-won program, they must be currently a member of Kwan Um School. Their guiding teacher must write a recommendation letter directly to the Musangsa office. Sometimes, there are people who have no experience with any of the centers in the Kwan Um School, but they wish to come to Musangsa to practice and apply for the program. These people have to stay at Musangsa as a regular guest for a period of time designated by the guiding teachers, after which the guiding teachers decide whether they can enroll in the haeng-won program.

When the participant is close to the end of their haeng-won program, if she or he wishes to take the further step for the monastic path, they should let the guiding teachers or one of the director sunims know about their intention. At least three months of haeng-won program participation is required to be approved to move on to the haeng-ja training, which is the next step.

Again, *haeng* (行) literally means "action," and *ja* (者) means "person." The term used to be translated as aspirant, postulant, or apprentice in English. A haeng-ja is a person who is taking work as their main practice, learning to serve all people who come to the temple, while keeping harmony with everybody and dedicating their lives to helping all beings. Haeng-jas work for the temple or have a Zen center job to learn how a practice community is run. At Musangsa Temple, one must train as a haeng-ja for one year or more before being ordained as a novice sunim. The training is finished only when the guiding teachers and director sunims accept the haeng-ja as ready for novice ordination.

When a haeng-ja is recognized as having the potential to be ordained, one of the senior sunims will become his or her personal monastic guiding teacher. This sunim is called an *eun-sa sunim*, who will support and guide their monastic life in the initial stages. *Eun* (恩) liter-

ally means “beneficent,” and *sa* (師) means “teacher,” implying a monastic guiding teacher or guarantor when a haeng-ja takes ordination. Eun-sa sunims often support novices, not just in their practice, but also with material needs like clothes and other household necessities.

Some monastics come to realize some time after ordination that they want to leave their eun-sa sunim because they wish to practice with another teacher, or for any other reason. Then they can go forward, with the agreement of their eun-sa sunim, if at all possible. Even if that happens, usually the relationship with the eun-sa sunim is kept. The eun-sa sunim is sometimes called a “father monk” or “mother nun” in a figurative sense.

At Musangsa, another important supervisor for the haeng-ja is the *gyo-mu sunim*, who is the educational director. The *gyo-mu sunim* is in charge of education not just for the haeng-jas, but also of the novice monastics. Basically, the haeng-jas will be overseen by all the director sunims, for example, the hwe-ju sunim, ju-ji sunim, seon-won-jang sunim, ip-seung sunim, do-gam sunim, won-ju sunim, gong-yang-ju sunim, and also the jo-shil sunim, the head Zen master of the temple. (Please refer to the annotations below for these titles in temple.)

As the haeng-ja training is finished, one is ready for novice ordination, but only when there is consensus among the guiding teachers and director sunims for a haeng-ja.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “Haeng-ja means no opinion, no idea. Only follow the haeng-ja situation. Only say yes.” It sounds very tough, yet it’s the true meaning behind the training to be ordained as a monastic, who has renounced worldly life and will eventually have to renounce his or her own world too, that is, the ego.

Zen Master Seung Sahn also used to say, when asked what should be the correct reason to become a monastic, “There are two kinds of sunims: ‘feeling sunim’ and ‘correct sunim.’” Some people become monastics because they think “Ah, I feel like I was a sunim in a past life!” or “I feel like my karma is to be a monastic” or “I want a simple life, and I like the temple.” They have a feeling. But feelings and situations always change. If they become a sunim because of their feelings, then when things change, their sunim direction and life will be broken.

“Correct sunim” means someone perceives this world—everything is impermanent, they only want to find their true self and help others—and perceives their job, then becomes a sunim. That person will not lose their direction even when situations or feelings change or become difficult.

Even if someone becomes a sunim because of their feelings, if they practice hard and try to keep a clear direction in their practice, finally they can find their true self and can live a bodhisattva life without worldly concerns.

If one finds that the monastic path is the best for his or her life in order to find their true self and help all beings, all the steps toward being ordained will become a precious gift. It’s true that a lot of pain and sacrifice may await the aspirant, but that’s why it’s called haeng-ja—an aspirant who just acts to serve all beings.

Temple Positions Listed in Order of Seniority

jo-shil (祖室): *Jo* (祖) literally means “patriarch” and *shil* (室) means “room.” Jo-shil literally means the living quarters of a Zen master. The term is usually translated as the spiritual master, that is, the head Zen master in a Zen monastery.

hwe-ju (會主): *Hwe* (會) literally means “gathering” (specifically a dharma gathering), and *ju* (主) means “host.” The position is usually for the community elder, who is an elder monastic and has made a significant contribution in founding or refounding the temple in Korea.

ju-ji (住持): *Ju* (住) literally means “reside” or “abide” and *ji* (持) means “maintain” or “take care.” It is translated as abbot. Traditionally the job was given to a monk or nun in the temple who had gone through all the trials and tribulations of temple life and had practiced for a quite long time, and was also committed to live as a resident there to take care of running the temple and help the community members with their needs when they live or visit. These days ju-ji sometimes refers to the head administrator of the temple, depending on the structure of the temple.

seon-won-jang (禪院長): *Seon* (禪) literally means “Zen,” *won* (院) means “hall” or “house,” and *jang* (長) means “chief.” The seon-won-jang is the leader or the head director of the Zen hall, who supervises the general practice in the Zen hall or Zen center.

ip-seung (立繩): *Ip* (立) literally means “stand,” and *seung* (繩) means “monastic.” Translated as “head monastic,” this title is for the exemplary monastic who is in charge of discipline at the living quarters in a Zen monastery and who assists the seon-won-jang.

do-gam (都監): *Do* (都) literally means “capital,” and *gam* (監) means “oversee.” The head of general affairs, or superintendent at a Zen monastery. The do-gam usually oversees any issues for the facility and construction and sometimes supervises occasional work projects.

won-ju (院主): *Won* (院) literally means “hall” or “house” and *ju* (主) means “host.” It’s translated as “housemaster,” who takes care of the household and cleaning of each area in the temple, assigning daily jobs to residents and visitors.

gong-yang-ju (供養主): *Gong* (供) literally means “offer,” *yang* (養) means “nourish,” and *ju* (主) means “host.” It’s translated as “kitchen master,” the one who cooks the meals and takes care of the food for the community. The kitchen master often gives the haeng-jas jobs in the kitchen. ◆

“Top man cannot see his own karma”

Zen Master Dae Bong

In times past in Asia and during the spread of the dharma in the West, newly recognized Zen masters frequently went off on their own to practice and teach the dharma, often starting their own centers of teaching. One time I spoke with Zen Master Seung Sahn about this and asked him, “Why did you create teacher groups to oversee our school?” He said, “Top man cannot see his own karma.”

I feel this is brilliant. Teachers working in groups as peers helps us to see our own karma and helps our practice and wisdom to grow. Teachers themselves—and thereby all students—benefit from this arrangement. During our lifetime, it has been possible to travel

fairly easily, meet each other, share our experiences and practice, and get feedback from our peers. Students get to meet and study with different teachers of the same school. This situation is a treasure.

As we are experiencing during the current pandemic, traveling is not so easy now—in many cases, impossible. We are fortunate to still be able to connect digitally. Someday even that may not be possible. I hope we will continue to connect, support, share, and learn from each other while we can. This is one of the great strengths of our school and the practice and teaching which Zen Master Seung Sahn gave to us. ♦

Let the Gentle Breeze Send Off the White Clouds

14]

Gye Mun Sunim JDPS

*Fortunate is the one who donned the monastic robe;
The universe gained another who is unattached;
Stay when conditions exist, go as conditions are
extinguished;
Let the gentle breeze send off the white clouds.*

If one wishes to practice, one may do so at home; it is not necessary to stay in a monastery.

The intrinsically kind person is able to practice at home; the evil-minded stay in a monastery without practicing. A clear and pure mind is not dependent on lay or monastic identity.

When it is time to come, come; when it is time to go, go. There is no anticipation, no reluctance, no indecisiveness. There is no my-dignity, my-interests, and so forth. Only the conditions of meeting, parting, separating, and joining are considered. It is beyond control, yet it is not a coincidence. Birth and death are the same. Just live in simplicity and purity, right here, right now. With this frame of mind, even if one is busy with work, “The universe gains another who is unattached.”

If you are still attached to worldly causes and conditions, you are bound to make another round in this realm. This could be an unaccomplished ambition, a star-crossed relationship, or perhaps the great compassion and pity for humanity of a bodhisattva. ♦



Painting: James Gouijn-Stook

A Monk Means No Monk: Living a Monastic Life

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS

When I was a high school student, I was enthralled by the Buddhist film, *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* I had almost no interest in Buddhism at the time, and I didn't intend to see the movie to learn about Buddhism. Like no other film I had ever seen, the movie dwelled on the stillness of our reality, seeming to record like a documentary, the moment-by-moment realities of the few characters and their interactions in the film. Not to overpraise this movie—it was in fact a little bit slow and boring at times, but the film's impact was deep and lingered with me for a good while.

For the majority of this film, we see only three characters, and the other main “actors” were earthly, idyllic shots of the sky, the birds, the wind, the field, and a quiet temple. Dwelling on daily life at a small hermitage, the film's plot centers on an old monk showing the young monk with whom he was entrusted how to live as a monk, largely without any dialogue.

Among those scenes, the young monk, most likely in his twenties or thirties, is full of anguish. A flashback in the middle of the film illuminates his past, showing his troubled life before becoming a monk. As a child, he lived with his mother, who is blind and could not walk by herself, in a shabby dwelling on the outskirts of the city. Through a life stemming from this human suffering, the young man decided to devote his life to the Buddhist teachings. In deciding to follow this path, he concludes to leave his mother, who cannot live a normal life. The film shows a striking image of the monk running away from home crying, full of suffering.

Even after leaving, the young monk struggles with self-confidence, never forgetting that he abandoned his single mother, selfishly pursuing a monastic life for his own purpose. He often feels skeptical about his life choice to become a monk, and often shows rebellious behavior against even his trusted master. The elder monk is an unfriendly teacher, who often scolds and uses harsh measures to teach his young disciple.

One day the younger monk becomes incredibly angry, and—I'm unable to remember the exact lines—cries out something like, “The world of *samsara* is full of suffering sentient beings. But you dwell in this idle hermitage in a

mountain and just enjoy your nirvana. Is that why you became a monk?” The older monk shouts back without hesitation, “Do you really think I want to be buried here on this mountain? Because fools like you keep coming up to this mountain, I have to remain here!”

The reason the old monk needs to bend his back is on account of the fools. Said in a more refined, noble way, we could call this the ultimate purpose of Buddhism, the direction I myself follow. Yet, many monastics feel as though they are imprisoned for that very reason. In a situation where I myself have not achieved peace, the source of that is the duality of the self. Personally, I too have had many painful experiences. So, what is the solution?

I once heard an impressive story about Zen Master Su Bong. Soon after he became a monk, having a doubt about his monk's life he asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What does it mean to be a monk?”

Seung Sahn said, “A monk means no monk!”

Upon hearing his teacher's answer even in his poor English, Su Bong was greatly inspired.

All of us want to be “something,” but you should be something of “nothing.” You should be a monk as “no-monk.” You should be a mom or dad as “no-mom” or “no-dad.” You should be a lover of someone as “no-lover of someone.” You should be a teacher as “no-teacher.” You should be a practitioner as “no-practitioner.” You should seek enlightenment of “no-enlightenment.” If that happens, you live as a true monk, a true parent, a true lover,

and will become a true teacher. When you don't hold the idea that you are a “practitioner” but just keep going straight with “only don't know,” you become a true practitioner and then true enlightenment blossoms by itself moment to moment.

“Only don't know and just do it.” At the moment when it's fully attained, all opposite ideas disappear. You are the universe, and the universe is you at that moment. You and everything become one. The name for this is substance, or primary point. It's your true nature and true self. In true self, there is no subject or object. In true self, there is no inside and outside. You and everything just become one. Therefore, in



Photo: Courtesy of Mu Sang Sa

[15

(Continued on p. 25)

Dharma Defenders

Chuan Wen Sunim JDPS

Historically, since the time of the Buddha, protecting or defending the Dharma also means to protect and support the Buddha and the Sangha so that they are able to safely propagate the Buddhist teachings for the benefit of all living beings. The establishment of Buddhism must categorically comprise the three jewels, namely the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Of the three jewels, although the Buddha is the most precious, and the Dharma is the most supreme, it is the Sangha that is the most crucial.

Since the parinirvana (death) of the Buddha, the sangha has staffed and maintained Buddhist temples and places of practice, and preserved and passed down Buddhist scriptures. Similarly, the monastic sangha teaches and propagates Buddhist culture and traditions to lay followers.

Most Buddhists in Asia have this understanding of

the three jewels. Hence, laypeople are often called dharma protectors or defenders of the three jewels. In this regard, the activities of Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple are run by members of the monastic sangha along with laypeople working collectively in tandem.

One example of this kind of cooperation is the Whole World Is a Single Flower 2020 International Zen Conference, which illustrates the together-action practice of both monastics and laypeople.

Ever since we successfully bid for the right to organize the conference in 2017, preparatory work on the ground got underway. Many activities were organized to attract more people to learn and practice this invaluable Zen tradition. We also embarked on a three-year-long donation drive through our “piggy bank” program with the theme “A Dollar a Day, Fulfillment in a Thousand Days, Zen Home, Zen Community, Zen World—Whole World Is a Single Flower.” The objective of this program is to enable laypeople to provide financial support in a relaxed manner for the conference while cultivating the merits of practicing dana.

Toward this end, the driving force behind the committee members’ willingness to shoulder this three-year-long program is primarily their own gratitude to the Zen tradition of the Kwan Um School and the teachings received from the guiding teachers. Consequently, they have grown, encountered breakthroughs, and found the meaning of life and its direction—that is, to gain enlightenment and help all beings.

During the sharing session at the temple upon my return from attending the Whole World Is a Single Flower in 2017, I discovered that a few of the committee members who had participated in Kyol Che before had actually wanted to go with me to the United States. However, after considering the cost, they had to cancel their plans. Subsequently, upon hearing of the successful bid, all of them were delighted and willing to help in the work of organizing, so that more Malaysians may be able to participate in this auspicious occasion without having to travel abroad.

Since that time, many countries have enforced restrictions of movement and border controls, and Malaysia is no exception. Subsequently, most of the temple activities now have to be conducted online. Recognizing this, the conference program subcommittee established a Zoom tech team. As a result, we have successfully conducted many activities online such as chanting the Great Dharani on Fridays, “vow-in-action” classes, and Vesak Day celebrations. We’ve also done a number

(Continued on p. 25)

16]

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传闻指导法师
Chuan Wen Sunim JDPS

马来西亚佛光山住持
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一花指导老师
Kathy Park JDPSN

马来西亚国际禅修中心协调员
Coordinator of The International Initiative
Project For The Global Kwan Um School of Zen



06.06.2020

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GREAT DHARANI CHANTING · MEDITATION · DHARMA TALK · Q&A

英语 · 华语 (有翻译) English, Mandarin (Translation is provided)

07.06.2020

9:30AM - 12PM 星期日 SUN

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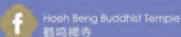
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Getting Old

Kwan Haeng Sunim

I've been practicing at Providence Zen Center since November 2012. I ordained at Chik Chi Sa Temple in Korea in April 1999 at the age of forty-one. So these days I have attained the aging process as an experience, as opposed to just an idea of getting old. Bowing was always a very grounding practice for me, and while I bowed it would occur to me that I'm not always going to be able to do all 108 bows during morning practice. Well, that time has arrived. I no longer have that tool in my dharma toolkit, at least for the time being. Bowing the full prostrations has always been a help to me in my life. It was a simple way for me to attain the moment and let go of anger and desire mind. Also I have had some very pleasant insightful moments while bowing.

In 1987, after sitting a three-month retreat at Shin Won Sa Temple, I became a haeng-ja, the step one takes before ordaining, which requires one to work in the temple at various tasks for at least a year before ordaining as a novice monk. I always did extra bows all my practicing life, and when I became a haeng-ja, I gladly joined the monthly event called *sam cheon bae* or three thousand bows. From 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. we would bow. We bowed for fifty minutes at a time, with ten-minute breaks in between. Then at 11 p.m. we would take a forty-minute break before continuing. I enjoyed this practice so much that I would do it during the ninety-day Kyol Che retreats at Hwa Gye Sa Temple without missing any retreat practice.

While I lived at Hwa Gye Sa, I taught English once a week. With the English classes and the Sunday dharma practice of meditation instruction, two rounds of meditation followed by a dharma talk, I had quite a bit of contact with the sangha. On occasion people would ask me for advice—sometimes about life-changing questions. Should I quit my job? Or should I go to school full time? Or should I get married? After finishing school, should I go traveling before starting my career? Instead of advising them on what decision to make, I would suggest they try the *sam cheon bae*. Often the reason for such indecision is a lot of thinking. Trying to weigh the pros and cons doesn't always work with a question that doesn't have a right or wrong answer, but which has an answer that works for the person asking the question. The thing you have to do is stop thinking about the problem and let your don't-know mind give you an answer. This is the mind before thinking. Another way of saying that is let your intuition give you an answer. Your intuitive mind, don't-know mind, and before-thinking mind are all the same mind.

During the *sam cheon bae* we would bow at a good

pace, often shouting *Amita Bul*, and that left us huffing and puffing and soaked with sweat. At some point you let go of your thinking and just try to do the next bow and then the bow after that, and the one after that. Your don't-know mind appears as only-doing-it mind. Afterward, what would often happen after a day, a few days, or a week later while going about your business, an answer to your question appears. That is your answer—not the Buddha's answer, not your parents' answer, but your answer. That is your don't-know mind in operation. I had fond moments just as the bowing session ended to be just standing there exhausted, breathing hard and not thinking. This puts you right in the moment.

So then you may think what does 108 bows in the morning do? Why do that? Often in the morning we wake up in not so good a mood. Maybe some monsters chased you in your sleep, or you got in an argument with someone. Personally, my dreams used to be nightmarish. And this angst would follow me into work. After a few interactions with my workmates they would understand that I got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning. But if you get up and do 108 bows in the morning you can let go of this angst and become clear. To do this, though, you have to get into the habit of bowing. To see our minds and deal with our habits or karma that cause us and others suffering, we have to make practice a habit. That is not to say that thinking is bad, but as a friend once told me, "Your thinking mind is a good servant but a bad master." Naturally we have other practices such as sitting meditation, chanting, kong-an interviews, together action, and *soen yu* breathing exercises.

But I'll always have a special place in my heart for bowing. ♦

Kwan Haeng Sunim met Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1986 at the Cambridge Zen Center. In 1997 he went to Korea to train at Hwa Gye Sa Temple in Seoul. He received novice monk's precepts in 1999, and in 2003 he received full bhikkhu (monk) precepts and lived and practiced in Korea until 2012.

In 2012 Kwan Haeng Sunim returned to the United States and the Providence Zen Center, where he continues to serve as the head dharma teacher and hosts the Sunday dharma practice program. He also serves as head dharma teacher for each ninety-day winter Kyol Che retreat. In addition, he records and edits dharma talks, and he maintains the Zen center's social media presence by posting ads, memes, and videos every week on FaceBook and Instagram.

[17

Sharing on Practice as a Monastic

Won Hye Sunim

A question one often encounters in monasteries (and hospitals and supposedly prisons too) is, how did you end up here? So first I will talk about what led me to the monastery and then about my monastic life.

I first encountered meditation in the context of martial arts training. There are significant parallels between martial arts practice and Zen practice. Historically, the two used to be intertwined in many areas and eras. For instance, the limitations of intellectual understanding are very clear when a punch is flying your way. After reading books on Zen, my friends from the martial arts world decided to try to practice sitting meditation together regularly. Soon we saw we needed to connect with an experienced teacher. I met two teachers who were practicing in the Japanese tradition, but I kept my eyes open, looking for a place with more intense practice. The Kwan Um School had just opened a residential Zen center in Prague, where people could practice every day, morning and evening. Short retreats were organized about every two months with a teacher from abroad. I started to come to the Zen center and eventually moved in. At that time the interest in residential training was such that we had a waiting list. (Ten years later the interest declined to the point where the Zen center was closed down.)

During the time when I lived in the Prague Zen Center, I was studying environmental chemistry and technology. Later on I had the opportunity to study also in Germany, Japan, and China. In Germany I could join a group in the Kwan Um School. In Japan I stayed one summer at a practicing temple; later I came back several times just to attend short retreats. This was my first exposure to monastic life. Even in China I attended a chanting retreat. In the meantime I also joined retreats at Musangsa Temple in Korea. All this time I was studying environmental science, especially pollution analysis and cleanup. In many case studies I searched for the cause of the environmental problems, and then for the cause of that cause. I always ended up with desire, anger, and ignorance. I guess the same would happen in any other field. Unfortunately, most scientists do not take these three poisons into account. I came to the conclusion that focusing solely on science and technology while disregarding the mind cannot bring about sustainable solutions. Unless the mind changes, we will just keep making the same mistakes, maybe more efficiently. Is there a way to train the mind? Meditation. Where can one focus on training the mind full-time? In a monastery.

Talking about monastic training, I should first stress that there is no one uniform training system. Monastic training differs considerably from country to country, between different monastic orders and even between individual monasteries. Even in the same order and the same monastery the training is always changing, developing, adjusting—and may even depend on the situation and the team that happens to

run a particular temple at a particular time. So my experience by no means shows the one universal system of monastic training, just the situations I happened to encounter on my way in certain places at a certain time. Maybe each individual just runs into their own karma?

I first joined a three-month retreat at Musangsa as a lay participant. Next I worked as an apprentice for half a year. Then the circumstances concerning immigration regulations, especially the way to obtain a long-term visa, along with Chogye Order training regulations, lead me to join the Chogye Order apprentice training, which consisted mostly of learning the Korean language for half a year. After receiving novice monk precepts, I kept studying the language for another half a year. The next year I spent with one of our senior monks who was undergoing chemotherapy, because hospitals in Korea often expect a family member to stay with a patient and take care of any nonmedical needs. Next I again had to join a Chogye Order novice monk training program. There were three options: Buddhist studies at a university, traditional sutra school temple, or a meditation temple. So I spent four years at a meditation temple. Here, we sat three-month summer and winter retreats. In spring and autumn we would spend between fifty and thirty days on a schedule similar to a retreat but with more time devoted to lectures than meditation. We were also very practically learning about community life governed by strict hierarchy but with rules and customs changing unexpectedly all the time.

After receiving full precepts I returned to Musangsa. Now I am learning to adjust back to temple life in the Kwan Um School again. By this time Musangsa residents could get a long-term visa, and both apprentice and novice monks can undergo training at Musangsa.

It is not easy to say how my training has changed me. It has surely had an impact on a few people around me, including my family. Personally I think that throughout the monastic training one can experience tapping into a reservoir of peace, clarity, and stability. But at the same time, encounters with various people keep reminding us that we need to keep practicing and learning so that we can see each moment as new and fresh and act exactly as the situation demands. I try to pay attention and see more and more how, when acting together with others, we usually act based on our own assumptions rather than becoming one with the situation and the people involved. ♦

Won Hye Sunim is from the Czech Republic, and started practicing in the Kwan Um School in 2001 at the Prague Zen Center, where he was a resident from 2003 to 2007. He has lived in Korea since 2011, where he became a monk in 2013. He underwent novice training from 2014 to 2018 at Baek Dam Sa Temple, and he took bhikkhu precepts in 2019.

Build a Better Robot

Won Il Sunim

Practice can foster an evolution of consciousness similar to the transformation from child to adult, where the primal urges are subdued by the will—a wisdom that only comes with experience. These human things are reflected in the teachings—for instance, the evolution from the early teachings of the Buddha through to the Mahayana. First he taught correct behavior, our orientation toward the path. Later he revealed that there is no self-nature, that everything is ultimately of the pure and clear dharmakaya. The revolution within the self is another paradigm. It's really the heart of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching: the movement from the small self to the true self. How to accomplish it? An old master summed it up quite well:

If you cannot abandon your life, just keep to where your doubt remains unbroken for a while: suddenly you'll consent to abandon your life, and then you'll be done.

—*Ta Hui, Swampland Flowers*

Abandoning your life is another topic for another day, but I should add that everything depends on it—and good luck. The trouble with reading these old masters is that their instructions can be fairly abstract. I know what he's getting at, because I've already been through this. If I'd heard this earlier on, I would have had the wrong idea, like trying to cut everything to become *pure*. Let me give you another metaphor. It takes a long time to develop into a mature adult. Like building a robot, it takes a lot of programming. What happens when we're more fully developed? For most of us, though all of the software is in place, we keep entering more and more code, redundant information, layers and layers of software, some of which is never utilized. The entity we constantly labor over—why do all of the work to develop a persona, an identity, and never put it to use? Why else but to give this wonderful machine, flawed as it is, to the One. Everything clicks into place. Your life becomes harmony.

At some point I “gave my consent.” It was in a moment of meditation where I finally threw in the towel. Not because of my poor meditation technique—it was everything, my whole life. I was just *done*. Suddenly I was able to meditate deeply: a permanent change. Though the conditions of my life were the same, my experience of reality was, and continues to be, inextricably altered. Instead of struggling against the weight of the world, life became a beautiful, enigmatic work of art: deep and complex—extraordinarily beautiful. It became something to marvel at and enjoy.

My emotions changed. All of them. Not the content, but the experience of them. With no tether, they played out in immeasurable arcs. I'd never thought about it this

way, but the path is nourishing and emotionally healthy. It can be. If there's no tether, no requirement that things resolve in a particular way, emotions aren't pulled by their own gravity back into a vicious cycle, but allowed to be felt and known, and released. Like light gradually merging back into the energy field, emotions reabsorb into the fabric of consciousness and return to the One. It's freedom from suffering by being fully alive. The difference is one of perspective.

A recent piece in the *Washington Post* had this headline: “Time to ditch ‘toxic positivity,’ experts say: ‘It's okay not to be okay’”:

“By far the most common [phrase] is ‘It's fine,’ ‘It will be fine,’” said Stephanie Preston, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. “You're stating that there really isn't a problem that needs to be addressed, period. You're kind of shutting out the possibility for further contemplation.”

To be honest, to demand honesty and clarity in your interaction with the world, is a requirement for knowing the self. Is this what Seong Am Eon referred to when he demanded that we never be deceived?

Mind reveals itself, the expression of the One through the medium of emotions—for these conditions and properties it appears thus. It is truth, expressed this way. Further, if there is no self to be affected, any emotion resolves to a deep, direct experience of mind. It sounds out the depths, leaving only an ecstatic vibration of energy.

When you're sitting in meditation you realize quite early on that there are two aspects to consciousness: the everyday mind and the observer. When the observer consciousness becomes really strong it can see beyond the wall of self—a crucial development on the path. This is the astounding thing: the observer is the true self—very easy to access, always present. The observer is a master of working with energy and taking care of the demands of human life. Allow it. Don't waste your energy worrying about the content. Ultimately in allowing it to function the way it was designed, you become, not a robot, but fully human. Then we say, white is white, black is black, the street today is crowded and hot. Marvelous!

Won Il Sunim has been involved with American Zen since the late 1980s. A resident of the Providence Zen Center for several years, he was also with Dharma Zen Center in Los Angeles and Taegosa Temple in the Mojave Desert before moving to Korea to become a Zen monk. He recently completed training at Baekdamsa Temple and is now a bhikkhu (monk) in the Chogye order.

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.

Turn Appearance into the Path

Beop Hwa Sunim

My name is Beop Hwa, and I received novice precepts on September 25, 2020, at Musangsa Temple.

When I started to practice at the Chogye International Zen Center in New York City more than ten years ago, I barely knew about meditation or spiritual practices. I casually went there to meet people in different circles and hoped to expand my horizons. Then, in my first interview, Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe) gave me a question: “What kinds of thought did I make and how did I live my life so far?” It was like when Neo in the movie *The Matrix* took the red pill and opened his eyes to the truth. I started to go to the Zen center regularly, but after experiencing such suffering at a Yong Maeng Jong Jin, I said to myself, “Never ever I will go to another retreat!” However, now I am in a retreat for twenty-four hours a day. You never know what will happen to you.

Sometime later, I needed to move back to Korea. Before coming back, I was traveling in Sri Lanka and planning to move on to India, but when I discovered that Musangsa hosted a three-month retreat the coming winter, the traveling seemed far less interesting. I signed up for the retreat and sat for three months. On the final day of the retreat, Dae Bong Sunim gave a talk on practicing and saving all beings. Although it was something that he had mentioned in his dharma talks frequently, and I had vaguely understood what that means, it sounded much clearer than before, and I wanted to explore further. I asked Dae Bong Sunim if I could stay in Musangsa, and he suggested that I try the haeng-won program, which is for people who want to experience temple life in exchange for Zen training and work with room and board. During the six months of haeng-won, which included the three-month retreat, I began to see my karma, and many questions arose in my mind that were overwhelming at times. After the haeng-won program concluded, the temple gave me some work, so I worked as a volunteer and practiced there for over four years. Although it was challenging both physically and emotionally at times, I was lucky to spend that time in Musangsa. I found there was dharma in everybody and everywhere to teach me and help me to see them as they are and to have the right relationship with them. Without that period of time, my haeng-ja (training to become a nun) time would have been much harder.

One time, Dae Bong Sunim answered the question of karma: “It is like mud in a bottle. It is hard to see through the bottle when it is filled with muddy water. But if you leave it for some time the mud sinks and it is much easier to see the bottom of the bottle and sky through the clear water.”

One day, suddenly this story gave me a big question, so I asked Dae Bong Sunim, “Mud is still at the bottom of the bottle. How can we get rid of it completely? Otherwise, we have to carry it all the time!” His answer was, “Pour off the clear water and use that for all beings. Pour

off the mud and use that for all beings. Use the bottle for all beings. Don’t hold the clear water, mud, and bottle. Digest it and use that for all beings.” A few days later, I said to Dae Bong Sunim that I want to become a sunim. He asked me why. I answered him that practice and helping all beings from suffering is the path of a true human being, and he and other monastics are already walking the path, and I would like to do it as a sunim as well.

After a year, Dae Bong Sunim told me to go to Hong Kong instead of staying at Musangsa for haeng-ja training. This was a surprise, but it gave me a “don’t-know situation, don’t-know mind,” so I could just follow the situation. During my haeng-ja training, I had to wake up at 3:30 every morning and do lots of work until I went to sleep at 10 or 11 at night. When difficult things appeared in my mind, I constantly thought about Dae Bong Sunim’s teaching: “Look inside why you are hindered by this one; reflect on your inside.”

For a year of haeng-ja training, I fortunately had a chance to stay at three temples: Musangsa, Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong, and Jeung Hung Sa, a Korean temple. I studied under inspiring teachers who devoted their time to educate haeng-jas and sunims. It was quite a journey of transformation, and I naturally learned how to make harmony and serve people regardless of time and the place. Although these temples all have very different ways of haeng-ja training, it seems all well designed to help one to enter the monastic path.

Before going to Hong Kong to become a haeng-ja, Dae Bong Sunim gave me a wonderful teaching that really touched something deep in me and helped me throughout my training:

“Most important is to see this moment’s karma clearly and to help. Then you can turn any situation into the great bodhisattva way. Turn appearance into the path. Turn whatever appears into the path. When we can do that, that is true freedom and the great bodhisattva way to save all beings. You already did it and are doing it and keep doing it for all beings.”

Thank you to teachers and sanghas.

Beop Hwa Sunim is Korean, and began practicing at the Chogye Int’l Zen Center in New York in 2006. She received five precepts at Musangsa Temple in 2010, and after the three-month winter Kyol Che there in 2014 and 2015, she lived there as a lay volunteer until 2019. During that time she received ten precepts to become a dharma-teacher-in-training. In October 2019 she became a haeng-ja at Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong, and after a year of haeng-ja training, she received monastic precepts at Musangsa in September 2020.

[21

Inside and Outside: Spending the Past Year at Musangsa

Matt Jiang

“Maybe practicing at Musangsa Temple for a year will give me more peace and confidence.” I journaled these words in August 2019 on my one-way flight to Seoul, as I reflected on what I was getting myself into. I had just graduated from university without a job or sense of direction. All I knew was that I wanted to deepen my meditation practice. Talking to sangha members at Cambridge Zen Center, I learned it was possible to live and practice full-time at Musangsa, the head temple of the Kwan Um School in Korea. I hoped to gain some clarity after a difficult college experience left me unsettled and confused. So I made the unorthodox decision to spend one year at Musangsa. These past twelve months as I sat silently inside the temple’s dharma room, in a Zen oasis, the entire world outside entered a new period of suffering and uncertainty. Now back home in the United States, I reflect on my experience.

When I first arrived at Musangsa, the sunims (monastics) happily welcomed me into their lives. Every day we would wake up at 4 a.m. for morning meditation and go to sleep at 9 p.m. after evening meditation. During the day, we would do work around the temple and eat prepared meals together. After adjusting to the daily schedule, I soon felt at home. But somehow even in this tranquil outside environment, I did not have a peaceful mind inside. As I became more aware through practice, I noticed more and more of my deluded thinking. I obsessed over trivial problems in the temple like whether my laundry had enough time to dry. I recognized how often I was silently judging and getting angry at other people. On top of everything, I felt like a bad practitioner for having these thoughts. Even my motivation to practice, to relieve my own suffering, came under fire as I learned correct direction means practicing for all beings. “Why am I so selfish? I don’t have correct direction!”

I sat all three months of winter Kyol Che, continuing to wrestle with my karma and my reactions to my karma. Though our teachings are wonderful, they can become hindrances if you become attached to them. I felt like I had to keep a clear mind and know my correct function all the time, otherwise I was doing something wrong. With guidance from our teachers, I recognized that all of this is just thinking. Rather than being concerned about taking the correct action or keeping the correct state of mind, just put it down.

After winter Kyol Che ended in February, I heard for the first time about a novel virus killing people in China. In the next few months, COVID-19 spread and wreaked havoc on almost every country in the world. Meanwhile at the temple, already quarantined from society, we just continued our schedule of work and meditation. I had the feeling of being in a remote bunker in the middle of an apocalypse. I was in some artificially quiet inside world—like a dharma room—while the outside world was on fire.

But this dharma room is important. It helps us train the real inside world—our minds—so that we can better handle whatever situation appears in the outside world.

Soon it was summer Kyol Che, and I used the opportunity to keep a very tight practicing schedule. Miraculously, as I kept trying and letting go of my checking mind, a little bit of self-acceptance appeared. I could say “I’ve seen this kind of thinking before. Now, what am I doing?” and suddenly my karma was no longer a big deal. My inside world grew more resilient. This relief also came with more empathy for others’ suffering and a greater desire to help.

Finally, a year had passed and I left Musangsa to return to civilian life. I am now faced with more pressures and complex situations than during my idyllic year at the temple. I have to manage relationships, find a job, and make difficult decisions. Some people have to deal with even more devastating loss and hardship because of the pandemic. To be honest, I still often find my inside world in turmoil, pulled around by things in my outside world. But as much as I can, I take a deep breath, put it down, and ask myself, “Who is thinking these thoughts?” Then, if I am upset from being stuck at home with family, sometimes the anger disappears and I just see what’s in front of me. I’m grateful to at least have a home and people to share it with. Or if I am obsessing over details like which pair of headphones to buy, maybe I relax and see the unimportance of it all. If I am unsure how to help someone, I can try something without being too attached to the outcome. And sometimes if I am stuck on what seems like a big decision, like what career to pursue, I might realize that thinking more about it will only give me a headache. Even if I decide to go down one path, there’s no way of knowing how life will unfold. The only thing we can know with certainty is what we are experiencing right here, right now.

Zen gives us a path to cope and help with life’s suffering. I had a unique opportunity to live at Musangsa for a year. But wherever we are practicing—in a temple or on our cushion at home—the reason for cultivating our inside world is so we can more wisely respond to whatever happens in our outside world. What is wise, what is correct? Sometimes we don’t know, and the only answer is to keep on just doing it. When you just do it 100 percent, then what is outside and what is inside? Just reading this article! ♦

Matt Jiang is a recent college graduate from the United States. He first started meditating with a phone app recommended by his therapist, before beginning to practice with the Kwan Um School at Cambridge Zen Center. He hopes everyone keeps a strong practice, finds peace and happiness, and saves all beings.

Online Sangha Q&A

Kathy Park JDPSN

Question: After the news that Myong Hae Sunim died unexpectedly, I see teachers and students respond with both *Ji Jang Bosal* and *Namu Amitabul*. When do you use *Ji Jang Bosal* and when *Namu Amitabul*? Are they interchangeable?

Kathy Park JDPSN: There is a little confusion about that so here is the clarification. *Namu Amitabul* is usually chanted when someone wishes to go to the Pure Land, especially in Chinese Buddhist culture when someone dies. Many people have been writing *Namu Amitabul* for Myong Hae Sunim, perhaps since they are Asian, and it sometimes just reflects the local culture. In Korea, we don't have strong Pure Land Buddhism, so either *Ji Jang Bosal* or *Amitabul* chanting are OK for the deceased. However, the chanting for Myong Hae Sunim JDPS that is officially being done daily hosted by Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong (her original home temple) and other Zen centers in our school is *Ji Jang Bosal*. That is because we believe Myong Hae Sunim has a strong bodhisattva vow and will want to continue in her next life to return and practice Zen for the benefit of all beings. *Ji Jang Bosal* is the bodhisattva of great vow. What really matters is our own sincere intention when we chant. Laypeople don't do different kinds of chants for sunims or teachers; what we chant is the same for all.

Question: Hello! I have quite a strange question, but still . . . What does our school think about tattoos in general? And especially about lettering of mantras?

KP PSN: Tattoos are not good or bad. Some Buddhist monks in Thailand make tattoos on their bodies, and even if they do that, they are very respectful of using Buddhist symbols or images, especially of having the Buddha's face on body parts. For example, you never put the Buddha or a bodhisattva's image on the lower part of your body. Also, in Buddhist cultures in Asia, one usually has respect for any Buddhist images or forms, so they do not wear pendants with Buddhas or have Buddha statues in the room where they have sex. To add, even in most of our Zen centers in the West, when we enter a dharma room, or see a Buddha statue or image or altar, we don't sit with both feet facing toward it, as a sign of respect. In Korea, having a tattoo is much more taboo, since historically, tattoos were brought into Korea by Japanese yakuza and samurai, so they represent gangster life. When someone who has tattoos wants to ordain as a Buddhist monk in Korea, they have to remove all of their tattoos in order to do it. These are some practices to be aware of if we encounter different Buddhist cultures. If we understand these things, then when we say we are Buddhist and act with respect in various situations,

they believe it. Tattooing mantras or Buddhist symbols for protection is not uncommon, but the question is why do that? For Zen students, one of Buddha's basic teachings is about impermanence. Everything goes—even this body—so you may feel that you get protected by tattooing some mantra, but eventually, you cannot keep it. These days tattooing is a fashion everywhere, so it's not outrageous to do it. But if you attain impermanence, then having tattoo, not having tattoo, all are no problem. More importantly: how is your own mind a refuge in itself? Use this precious human birth with great respect, love, and wisdom for all beings with complete freedom.

Question: I was just reading the Temple Rules for the first time. I'm a little confused and overwhelmed by them. Are they for everyday life? Or literally for when you are in an actual temple? I'm not a very good rule follower! All thoughts are welcome!

KP PSN: Good question. The Temple Rules were created hundreds of years ago by the renowned Zen Master Pai Chang in China for Zen practicing communities, and they have been useful ever since. They do apply to actual temple or Zen center life and how we practice, but the bone of the teaching in each of the guidelines points to our own attitude, speech, and actions in daily life, regardless of whether we live in a Zen center or not. Some rules may seem outdated or not applicable, but overall, they point to a set of guidelines that, when we know how to use them, can be of great benefit to ourselves and all beings. Keeping or not keeping rules is really based on our intention, our direction. Why do that? Any rule, if we attach to it or if we keep it for one person's selfish reason, may not be so good. But if guidelines can be useful for a community to create harmony and give direction, it's possible that it can help everyone to practice better. That is why precepts and temple rules evolved in the Buddhist tradition over time, to support the diverse sangha to practice more skillfully with a foundation of ethics for community life. Due to COVID-19, many of us are isolated, but still we have the connection of family, friends, and community all around us. Through these relationships we can see our own karma and develop compassion and wisdom for ourselves and others. We can reflect on these teachings and see how they might also work in our daily life. Here is a wonderful teaching from Zen Master Dae Kwang about the Temple Rules for Zen practitioners: <https://kwanumzen.org/teaching-library/1997/08/01/what-is-a-zen-retreat>

Question: [In response to a discussion about kong-an practice.] I have to admit, kong-ans are something I've

[23

avoided a little bit. I was told that I'd passed the first gate—the one about the dog—but since then I don't seem to have had the energy to sit with the next one, and I avoid it probably because I can't put down my anxiety about getting things wrong. I'm clearly a long way from don't-know mind!

KP PSN: Your comment reminded me of when I first started practice. It's the kong-an's job to get us to that uncomfortable place, when we are confronted with not knowing, not having an answer, not being smart like we'd like to be. I was always terrified of interviews for a few years. But every time I felt that fear, finally I realized that I didn't want the pain of suffering I experienced in life before practice. So each time the fear of going for an interview was becoming far less, and it actually started to get exciting. With a little bit of courage each time, interviews can deliver us the experience of becoming free of our innermost fears, and it's a safe place. I've always been so grateful for kong-an teaching as a unique part of our tradition.

Question: What are the shamanic roots and influences of our tradition? The story of Zen Master Seung Sahn's enlightenment is full of chanting and magic, and so must be many other stories like that.

KP PSN: The realm of magic is 270 degrees in the Zen Circle, after you have attained the absolute (180 degrees), and it then allows you to connect with universal energy. Then you can get a lot of power. Shamanism as a belief system exists in many cultures, because people have been able to access that energy, and it helps them connect with the earth, nature, and invisible realms. That's not good or bad. It's been a way for humans to understand the world we are in, to connect in the relative realm. Shamanism was practiced in Korea long before Buddhism was introduced. In Korean Buddhist history, it is evident that the dharma integrated naturally into the existing shamanistic culture, as well as with Confucianism and Taoism, which were already practiced there long before. People generally pray for protection and good fortune to the mountain gods, so Buddhist temples naturally built a small mountain god shrine for local people to come and continue to pray. Then the mountain god also protects the temple. Then as people understood that Buddhism does not reject anything but accepts and harmonizes with them, they started to understand what is Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When the Korean alphabet Hangul was first invented by King Sejong in the fifteenth century, since common people love to chant and sing, the

very first text written in Hangul was a Buddhist song, because people were chanting it all the time, and it was the easiest way to help people learn a new alphabet. Whether it is shamanism, Buddhism, or any other practice, it all boils down to intention. Why do that? If a person's intention is selfish or ill-willed, then even universal energy can turn you into a demon. If someone has a pure intention to help all beings, that energy can help you to become a bodhisattva.

As you know, Zen Master Seung Sahn chanted the Great Dharani all day with very little food or sleep for a hundred days during his solo retreat when he got enlightenment. The Great Dharani is the mantra of the bodhisattva of compassion, Kwan Seum Bosal. Zen Master Seung Sahn was chanting this with only one intention: "What am I?" He had a great vow to understand himself and help this suffering world. Even with this sincere vow and strong try-mind, nine times he packed his bag to quit and leave, and then again the next day started all over again. Just like the Buddha, his greatest obstacles were the maras, or demons, that appeared before him just before he got enlightenment. That's how difficult it

was to keep clear, keep going, and not give up on his direction. When you get more energy from practice, then the 270 degrees is the experience of freedom mind. Zen Master Seung Sahn was seeing Kwan Seum Bosal, mysterious little boys, and lots of odd things during that time, and they were testing him. Are they real or delusions? After Zen Master Seung Sahn finished his retreat, a few years later another monk went to his hermitage because it had be-

come a famous place, and he also did a hundred-day retreat. He wanted to get enlightenment just like Zen Master Seung Sahn got it there in that same place. He was practicing hard and got lots of energy and one day Kwan Seum Bosal appeared and told him to jump off from the cliff in front of the hermitage. He did, and fortunately he didn't die, but was severely injured and had to stop his practice. Anything is possible. So 270 degrees is very attractive, but also the most dangerous moment, and many people fall down. As Zen students, our practice is to not attach to anything. Then who is the master of energy? So we must become more clear, and use that energy just as Zen Master Seung Sahn did to try, try, try and transcend from 270 to 360 degrees, and attain the realm of truth. Then one more step is necessary. Jump out of the Zen Circle altogether, and attain the correct function of our life. That's our job. ♦



Photo: Courtesy of Musangsa

(Continued from p. 15 **MONK NO MONK**)

your true self, no idea of “I” or “you” exists. No idea of “I’m your dad” or “I’m your mom” exists. No idea of “I’m your lover” or “I’m your teacher” exists. No idea of “I’m a monk” or “I want or have got enlightenment” exists.

When you just do it without any delusive thought, your mind is like a clear mirror that reflects everything as it is. Blue comes and just becomes blue. White comes and just becomes white. The scent of a flower, sweet sugar, the sound of a chicken crowing; everything becomes truth. When you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think clearly, you have already attained the truth. Then what?

Zen Master Seung Sahn taught that the true meaning of life is to take one more step from there—how to use the truth you’ve attained to help all beings.

How should you live as a mom or dad? What is the correct job as a teacher? How can one give their lover true love? What is the job as a monk and what should one do if one attains enlightenment?

In any kind of lifestyle, it’s essential for you to return to the primary point, the original emptiness that is your true nature, moment to moment, if you wish to live a true life. You should keep trying to return to your true nature where all the opposite ideas originally don’t exist, whether they’re good ideas or bad ideas. That is to become something of nothing. That lets you become truly something for someone and all beings. That is called the great bodhisattva way.

Not long ago, when I heard the news that my hometown

had suffered heavy rain and a great amount of flood damage, my mom was still living alone in my hometown, so I made a phone call to her. Now she is eighty-five, and as always, she said she was OK, because my brothers and sisters are living close by to take good care of her. And as usual, she told me, “You were such a smart kid, I always thought you would succeed. Now that I am old, I wonder if I can see your virtues. You don’t marry and don’t have a family. You have given up all the fun and delightful things of this world but just became a monk. So, should I say, ‘I have lost a son!’? Have compassion for your mother . . .”

With a smile, I always replied, “Mom, I have given you the gift of a much larger family! All the same, I’m sorry for causing you any distress.”

She replies as she always does. I think she’s been saying the same thing for about ten years: “It’s just a joke. I can’t help saying it! Moms will be moms! Just thinking about my life and your life without saying anything would make me too sad. Now, in my truest of hearts, I hope that even as a monk, you have a healthy, happy life and that you follow your heart and find happiness in this life. Truly, this is my wish. Don’t you know your mom’s heart?”

This is Buddha mind. I too wish my mother to be healthy and happy until the moment she parts from this life. Truly, this is all I wish for her. That’s exactly what I wish for all sentient beings.

August 31, 2020

Hye Tong

[25

(Continued from p. 16 **DHARMA DEFENDERS**)

of the WWSF 2020 activities such as “Vesak Month, Wake Up Day”; a training course called “Dharma Defender, Count Me In”; a Zen workshop called “The Magical Pouch for Access to Unimpeded Happiness”; and “Walk the Bodhisattva Way with Zen Mind.”

In doing these, many people have spent numerous nights and weekends practicing and rehearsing, as well as familiarizing themselves with the technical requirements of online platforms and video editing. Based on the experiences gained, sangha members of Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple finally decided to conduct the already-canceled Whole World Is a Single Flower 2020 International Zen Conference entirely online. Of course, we are forever grateful to the support and consent given by the Kwan Um School of Zen to our proposal.

We have observed that many of our lay sangha members have improved their relationships with family members, bosses, and colleagues, as well as among friends. They have fewer worries as a result of practicing meditation and kong-an interviews. Moreover, we have also organized additional activities so that our members can realize their potential, while also attracting new members to practice Zen. More important, we have provided opportunities for members to observe whether they have been able to return to don’t-know mind in dealing with people, keeping correct situation, correct relationship, and correct function from moment to moment. The practice also helps them build

confidence in don’t-know mind and realize the importance of always returning to their true self. In case they feel inadequate, we advise people just to continue doing 108 bows every day.

Hence, we vow to spread this invaluable Zen tradition of our school to as many people as possible. I strongly believe that through continuous and persistent trying, we will eventually be able to make our vow into reality. Naturally, our bodies may feel tired in doing this, but our minds are full of energy and joy. We are indebted to each and every member of the organizing committee. Guided by the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn—continuous effort to gain enlightenment and help all beings—we are making history by organizing the first-ever Whole World Is a Single Flower Zen Conference in an online platform, thirty-three years after its inception in 1987.

The spirit of the Whole World Is a Single Flower is not only the compassionate vows of Zen Master Man Gong and Zen Master Seung Sahn. Rather, it is also the compassionate vows of all eminent teachers and buddhas in the past, present, and future. To turn the dharma wheel and fly the Buddhist flag continuously is indeed the mission of all sangha members. It is also our practice. Life after life, only don’t know, try and try for 10,000 years, gain enlightenment, and help all beings.

Translated from Mandarin by Lim Kee Leng.

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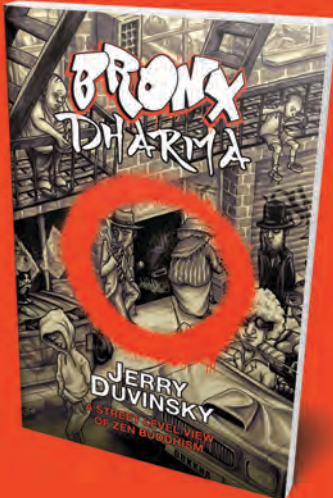
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Prison Groups

Lowell Correctional Institution,
Florida

Lowell Annex, Florida

Florida Women's Reception Center,
Florida

MCI Framingham, Massachusetts

Old Colony Correctional Center,
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MCI Shirley, Massachusetts



Join Our Sangha Today!

The Kwan Um School of Zen

The heart of the Kwan Um School of Zen is our practice. Zen Master Seung Sahn very simply taught "Don't Know". This

means in each moment we open unconditionally to all that presents itself to us. By doing this, our innate wisdom and compassion will naturally breathe and flow into our lives.

The Zen centers of the Kwan Um School of Zen around the world offer training in Zen meditation through instruction, daily morning and evening meditation practice, public talks, teaching interviews, retreats, workshops, and community living. Our programs are open to anyone regardless of previous experience.

The School's purpose is to make this practice of Zen as accessible as possible. It is our wish to help human beings find their true direction and we vow and to save all beings from suffering.

Becoming a Member in North America

Your membership in a participating center or group makes you a part of the Kwan Um School of Zen sangha (Buddhist Community). Your dues help support teaching activities on local, national, and international levels. Membership benefits include discounted rates at all retreats and workshops at KUSZ member Zen centers and a subscription to Primary Point Magazine. *(In other parts of the world, contact your local affiliated Zen center or regional head temple.)*

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