

## Editor's Note

What you hold in your hands is an edition of *Primary Point* that was compiled by the European sangha. When we embarked on this editorial journey in late summer 2020, we found ourselves faced with a number of doubts and challenges. So many things transpired over the course of last year—not just globally but also within our sangha—that we struggled to find a suitable approach for this edition, one that would be pious enough to pay due respect to the many life-and-death situations our community has had to face, while at the same time ensuring that we also offered somewhat less mournful contributions. With the passing of Myong Hae Sunim JDPS and Oleg Śuk JDPSN, our sangha lost two inspiring teachers last year, and so we commemorate them in this issue with stories and pictures from the European sangha members. In 2020 we also lost Roger Keyes, the late husband of Lizzie Coombs JDPSN, whose commemoration will be included in the next issue. As for the less somber topics, we include various other submissions from both students and teachers offering reflections on the vitality of our sangha.

## Transmission Ceremony for Zen Master Hyon Ja

*On September 26, 2020, Alma Potter received transmission from Zen Master Bon Shim in a virtual online ceremony and became Zen Master Hyon Ja.*

### DHARMA COMBAT

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**Question:** I heard a Zen master talking about a child who had died. At first the Zen master was greatly upset, then the Zen master thought that the child was where it always had been and felt better. When you and I talked about people who were ill or had died, you were very upset. Which one is correct teaching—to accept that the child is where it always has been or to be upset about the death of the child?

**Zen Master Hyon Ja:** [*Wiping away tears*] Ji Jang Bosal, Ji Jang Bosal.

**Q:** Thank you so much for your heart energy teaching!



**Question:** Hi Alma. You have been teaching your dharma to us for so many years now. Today, Zen-master dharma is being transmitted to you. Which dharma do you prefer—the dharma you have been teaching or the dharma after transmission?

**Zen Master Hyon Ja:** I prefer you!

**Q:** [*Laughs loudly.*] Thank you!



**Bon Sun Sunim:** Lovely to see you and everyone in Vienna Zen Center. You receive dharma transmission today to become a Zen master in Zen Master Seung Sahn's lineage. How will you go above this lineage?

**Zen Master Hyon Ja:** How can I help you, Sunim?



**Question:** I love art. For some time, I have wanted to draw a Buddhist drawing. I want to draw the three jewels, that is, the Buddha, dharma, and sangha. I already know how to draw the Buddha and the sangha. But I don't know how to draw the dharma. Can you help me to know how to draw the dharma?

**Zen Master Hyon Ja:** Paint yourself into the picture!

**Q:** [*Opens mouth and then laughs.*] Oh, thank you! That is high-class dharma.

### DHARMA SPEECH

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

The Sixth Patriarch said to [one of his disciples] Fada, If your mouth recites while your mind does not practice, then the sutra “turns” you.

If your mouth recites and your mind practices, you “turn” the sutra.

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

No sutra,  
No practice,  
No turning!

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

What shall we do?

KATZ!

Old and new friends appear on the monitor as we all take part in this Zoom transmission.

Because the pandemic made meeting face to face impossible, we decided to transmit this ceremony using Zoom and the internet—so it is a first of its kind. One might say that it is not traditional; it isn't the way it always used to be done. However, as practitioners of Zen, I think all of us enjoy the chance to wake up yet again. I hope we can leave the word *traditional* outside the door with our shoes for now and enjoy!

The different style for this transmission is important—it shows an attempt to respond and adjust in times of uncertainty. We tried, tried, tried, and we found a way to come together. We turn our attention to many little windows on the monitor and greet each other. We get the wonderful chance to see dharma friends we haven't seen for a long time!

This ceremony was scheduled for April this year. The Vienna Zen Center had everything prepared: more than one hundred participants registered, a big meeting hall was reserved, hotels booked, spicy Mexican food and a salsa dance teacher for the party afterward. But when the coronavirus pandemic moved into the world, everything changed. In one day all our plans evaporated.

Uncertainty completely took over our lives. The Sixth Patriarch told Fada that if he only recited the word, the sutra would turn him. But if he both recited and practiced, he would turn the sutra.

In the same sense, would uncertainty turn us, or would our practice and the wisdom arising from practice help us turn uncertainty into a ceremony that would reach our sanghas?

An eminent teacher told me long ago that our fate knocks on the door three times. The coronavirus was the first knock. We buckled up and locked down and increased our practice. But there was much more to come.

The second knock was when my dear friend and colleague became gravely ill.

The third knock crashed over my head and through my heart, when beloved friends, two great Zen teachers in Europe, Myong Hae Sunim JDPS and Olek Śuk JDPSN passed away within six weeks of each other. The impermanence of their leaving felt so permanent.

In the beautiful book *The Hidden Lamp* I read this kong-an:

A grieving woman said to [the] Chan Master, "Master, truly—presence is impermanent, but absence is permanent."

[He answers] "Indeed so."

What did the woman understand?

The absence of Myong Hae Sunim and Oleg Śuk's bodies



Photo: Jan Sendzimir

is permanent. But the bright light they radiated while with us still shines for us.

Recently when talking with my Dharma brother Barry Briggs JDPSN about this, he sent me the following poem by Kobayashi Issa:

*This dewdrop world  
Is only a dewdrop world  
And yet, and yet . . .*

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These last two phrases, "And yet, and yet . . ." point to our tentative existence, which is fragile and impermanent, constantly transforming from one thing to another.

"And yet . . .": These two words contain the entire hopes and wishes and longing of all human beings. It is this longing that brings us back to the great question: What am I? What is my purpose on this earth?

"And yet . . .": If we had a second chance, what would we do or say? Which risks would we take, and would we say the loving words we meant to say but didn't? What if we could live our lives always as if it were our second chance?

"And yet . . .": we try again—and again—to be true human beings. We turn our eyes inward and we never stop our investigation. This is what the Sixth Patriarch pointed to when he said that with wisdom and practice, we turn the sutra.

We name this ceremony a transmission, so naturally we wonder what is being transmitted? Looking at all of this from a broad perspective, the Buddha's teaching of skillful means appears through tiny little pictures of all of us being transmitted through the air.

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, some of us grumbled that we would never use the computer to connect; others playfully tried everything possible and pushed all the buttons. It is said that some of us follow the goddesses willingly and others of us are dragged. Which one are you?

For me one of the most powerful transmissions happened

on my first visit to Zen Master Seung Sahn in the early 1990s at the Los Angeles Zen Center. I asked to see him in person, because I wanted to check him out.

I already greatly valued his teaching, and I had come to love the little sangha in Berlin. But during my years with another spiritual teacher, somehow everything had gone very wrong. I never took the responsibility to meet the other teacher personally. I didn't want to make the same mistake twice. It was important for me to personally meet Zen Master Seung Sahn, and by doing so take responsibility for my participation in his community.

I went into the meeting prepared with three questions.

The first question was about the suffering I had experienced with the other teacher, and Zen Master Seung Sahn listened intently. His answer was astonishing: without missing a beat, he said, "ALREADY PAST!" It was a real mind-stopping moment.

My second question was "How do I respond to the teacher's students asking me what I know about him?" In an instant Zen Master Seung Sahn said "Tell them you forgot!" He wasn't telling me to lie to them. It wasn't even about them. He was pointing again to the very moment in that room with him.

The third question was about constructing a Zen temple in Berlin Germany. We had a small sangha at that time, and because of the generosity of a sangha friend, we started discussions about creating a big Zen center. Should we wait until the sangha grew? Or should we start right away to build? He told me, "This is the only real question you have asked today. Start right away to build."

When I left that first meeting, it was clear to me that even if I never saw him again, I had received the full attention of an awakened mind and it had changed me forever. Almost thirty years later I am here, participating in the school he established. The Berlin Zen Center has offered a place for the practice of Zen meditation to everyone since then.

These are "interesting" times. The coronavirus pandemic

has revealed with razor sharpness our fragility, our vulnerability. We live in a time of huge planetary catastrophes, as we notice with great sadness the fires and floods and storms across the globe. People by the millions are beginning to emigrate toward other places on the earth.

We also face an enormous uncertainty in how we communicate: by immersing and isolating ourselves in the ever-increasing use of the internet and smartphones, people find themselves very alone.

We perceive the great increase in "my opinion, my ideas, my way" and notice a tremendous increase in mental suffering and anguish. Where is the wisdom to digest the trillions of words spoken about our dilemma?

It is painfully apparent that the condition of the world is turning people. What would our condition be if it were the other way around? If through action based on wisdom, we would turn the world instead?

What are the skillful means needed for these times? The practice has given us the treasure of sangha. It is our place of refuge and flowers in our together action.

*[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]*

The Buddha taught infinite dharmas to help infinite karmas.

*[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]*

No dharmas—no karmas—no time.

*[Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.]*

Infinite ways to help all beings! Let's start!

KATZ!

Soon we turn our computers off. We will make lunch for the family, and let's share an extra portion with the neighbor. ♦

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