

Tribute to Oleg Šuk JDPSN

Remembering Oleg, Our Dharma Friend and Teacher

I met Oleg in February 1990, after Andrzej Czarnecki (Do Am Sunim at the time, before he returned to lay life) gave the first Zen dharma talk ever in Bratislava, Slovakia. The lecture hall of the philosophy department was full, with more than five hundred people. After the talk, they announced that people who were interested in Zen could stay to discuss the next steps leading to regular practice. Oleg and Lumír from Prague were leading those discussions. Oleg had already been practicing Zen for about a year. Back then, I was keeping silence for four weeks, so I didn't talk to them. I was practicing meditation by myself at that time, in no specific school or tradition—just meditation.

I later went to England to practice meditation with Ajahn Sumedho, a teacher in the Thai Theravadan tradition. After my return to Bratislava at the end of July 1990, I met some friends who practiced different styles of meditation, tai chi, or yoga. One of them, Pavol Lachkovic, was practicing the Kwan Um Zen style of practice. He told me a story about Oleg and him taking over the together-practice responsibility.

Oleg was moving to Kosice at the beginning of the summer, so he came to Pavol with a small plastic bag filled with one cushion, one chanting book, and a little moktak the size of a clenched fist. He approached sixteen-year-old Pavol, telling him, "I'm leaving for Kosice to live there, and now you will be responsible for organizing the practice of our school in Bratislava." In those days, many people used to come to practice—thirty to forty each time.

We just kept practicing. Later in 1990, we started to organize weekend Yong Maeng Jong Jin retreats in Bratislava, with teachers coming from Poland and even the United States. People from Kosice started their own group, led by Oleg. They used to come to our retreats in Bratislava or other places

in Slovakia. My relationship to Oleg wasn't at all warm or close at that time. We felt a kind of tension caused by irrational competition between both groups. We didn't talk to each other so much, and just kept our groups practicing regularly without any cooperation between them. Sometimes we exchanged letters describing the situation and strategy of the groups, what teacher shall we invite, what kind of retreat shall be organized, and so on.

In 1992 we had the first one-week retreat with Zen Master Wu Bong, who was still called Jacob Perl JDPSN at the time. Many people came from all over Europe—the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Hungary. My wife, Janka, was cooking for us for the first time. She was quite tired and exhausted each day—we didn't help so much in the kitchen—while almost eighty people attended. Then, one evening, Oleg came to see me and Janka, telling us, "Guys, would you like me to do a massage for you—first you, Janka, as you work so hard for us, then you, Lubor." So, after Janka and I got Oleg's wonderful massage, the energy between us changed, and we became close friends from that moment on.

Then we experienced a lot of together practice, four retreats each year, and in the summer, a one-week YMJJ.

One retreat led by Jane McLaughlin-Dobisz JDPSN (nowadays Zen Master Bon Yeon), right after Su Bong Sunim's death in July 1994, was really one to remember. The practice was strong and sincere. There were 108 young people from many countries, so it was a big international retreat. Each night after the daily schedule ended, we continued informal practice, remembering our dear teacher and celebrating our meeting together. We used to go to sleep quite late, often after midnight. But always, at 5:00 we woke up for 108 bows without any problem. Then during the day, we tried to sleep whenever and wherever possible.

In the middle of the week there was a dharma talk planned. No one was eager to give an introductory talk;

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Photo: Bratislava & Kosice Zen Centers

everyone was embarrassed to speak in front of so many people. After lunch we took a rest, sleeping in the dharma hall. Then Jane just went to sleeping Oleg, woke him up, and asked, “Oleg, could you give an introductory talk this afternoon?” “Sure, I can, no problem,” he answered and just kept sleeping. Then his talk was wonderful, full of dharma energy and, of course, jokes.

From 2003 to 2007, I was called to work in the top management of Slovak public TV, so I didn’t practice so much in the Zen center and rarely attended retreats. Then, in 2007, I went to Paris to sit a one-week retreat with Zen Master Wu Bong. Oleg was participating as well. We met there one day before the retreat.

We hadn’t seen each other for many years. That day it was constantly raining. He wanted to take me out to

downtown, to show me his most favorite places, museums, cafes, parks, and libraries. He told me news about his family, sangha, and friends from the time since we’d last seen each other. He talked about his dharma success and the inka training program he had just entered. A lot of talk, a long walk around the center of Paris. Then, sitting at the table and drinking an afternoon coffee under a big umbrella at the terrace, observing the cold December rain, I mentioned that he was wearing just the usual summer sneakers, completely soaked by the rainwater. He was totally wet and cold, but still keeping his no-problem just-for-you smile on his face.

Oleg received inka from Zen Master Wu Bong in 2009. From that time, he was not only our friend, but first of all our guiding teacher. We used to have four to six retreats a year until his death on September 14, 2020.

We had a lot of short and long retreats in Surya Centrum, a wonderful retreat place one hour north of Bratislava. We enjoyed a together practice there, walks in the hills and quiet woods, perceiving the fresh air, watching the wavy stalks of grain. My wife supported our practice through her wonderful art of cooking. We ate a lot each time. The food used to be so wonderful.

During one retreat Oleg told me, “OK, Lubor, we will try to eat less now; we’re getting fat.” So I replied, “No problem, we can try.” Then, during the formal meal, I saw his bowls, full of food again. Then I looked into his eyes, and his eyes told me, “Sorry, I couldn’t resist. We’ll try next time, OK?”

Until his last days, he kept teaching us, giving online dharma talks and kong-an interviews. He was always happy to teach, using his deep practice insight combined with his funny stories and jokes. He used to tell me very often that all things are so clear in front of us. All we need to do is to see them clearly and be happy and spread this happiness to this world.

Oleg was always telling jokes that just came to mind. I remember one of them: During a demonstration against the government in Russia, the police arrested a man who was holding a blank banner in his hands. A policeman asked him, “Why are there no letters written on your banner?” and he answered, “Why do you need any letters? All is clear.”

Lubor Kosut



Fireflies

We were on retreat in Kopaska—a hut in the Slovak forest in the mountains—with Oleg JDPSN, Zen Master Dae Kwang, and George [Hazlbauer] JDPSN. It was already early in the evening, and it was slowly getting dark. Oleg advised walking meditation in

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Photo: Bratislava & Kosice Zen Centers

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

MYONG HAE

*July 25, 1973 –
August 2, 2020*

Sunim





IN LOVING MEMORY OF

OLEG ŠUK PSN

FEBRUARY 26, 1964 –
SEPTEMBER 14, 2020



Photo: Bratislava & Kosice Zen Centers

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18] the forest for those who were interested. Everyone was hanging around. Zuzka and I put things in order in the kitchen. Oleg repeated his advice after a while, but no one responded. Meanwhile, the sun was setting over the horizon, and it was getting darker in the forest. For the third time Oleg shouted, “Either we’re going now or we’re not going anywhere!” I knew Oleg wasn’t screaming; it seemed strange to me, and I thought that if he could, he would give us all a hit to the head, because we did not see or overlooked something. We somehow concentrated and went outside. We walked one after the other, until we came to a place where it suddenly darkened. At that moment, tiny lights came on in the forest. They looked like stars from the sky, but they were on earth. Small flying lights. Lanterns, light on the road. Fireflies! They fly only a few days a year. It was extremely beautiful, and we all stood there happy in the middle of a quiet glowing forest. Oleg said, “We almost screwed up because you were messing around.” Everyone started to grumble. We went back quietly and laughed.

Viera Pamulova



Jailhouse Kong-ans

I remember the last retreat with Oleg JDPSN ending with the ceremony for Buddha’s Enlightenment Day. It was in our new retreat center in Slanske Nove Mesto, in the countryside near Kosice. Not so many people attend-

ed, so we could enjoy more attention from our teacher.

I remember how we sat one afternoon in the kitchen, just before the retreat started. Oleg smiled at me with his familiar smile, and his vivid blue eyes immediately attracted my attention and interest. When he started to speak, I was not surprised that he already had handy, as always, some Zen kong-an tasks for us.

He said simply, “I have here something new. We will play. These are the jailhouse kong-ans.”

Before he started to speak, he explained how they were created, and why they are called jailhouse kong-ans. Oleg was known by his habit of always having some joke or story to tell at hand.

When he finished, I asked him, “May I answer it just now?” I felt amused by it, with a feeling of victory. The kong-ans were things like “How can you kill a fly drawn on the wall?” Or, “There is a ball before you. How can you get it in the net drawn on the wall?”

It turned out during kong-an interviews—which always woke me up—that again Oleg caught me and directed me very well. My triumphal feeling quickly faded away, like a cloud in the sky. And again, in his presence, I felt the familiar present moment, a moment in which only the kong-an interview was occurring.

And these were just the moments and interviews with him that were most beneficial for me during my Zen practice. I am very thankful to have known Oleg, both as a man and a Zen teacher. ♦

Denisa Matuszak Nagyova