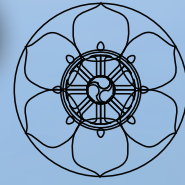


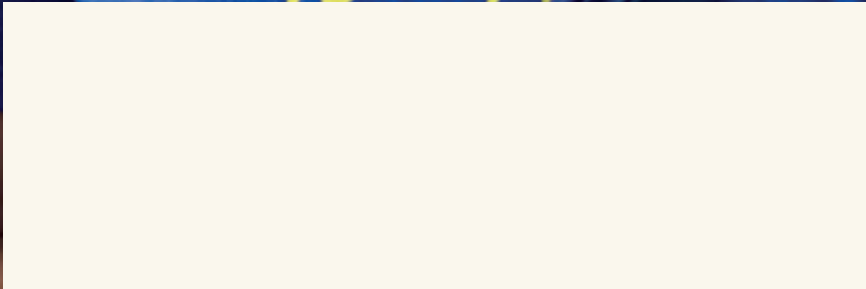
# Primary Point



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*Oleg Šuk JDPSN  
February 26, 1964 – September 14, 2020*



PRIMARY POINT®  
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2021 - 2022  
Musangsa  
Kyol Che

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

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\*Kyol Che guidelines may be subject to change according to Covid19 regulations. For online teaching program updates: <https://www.musangsa.org> <https://www.facebook.com/musangsa/>  
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Led by Zen Master Dae Bong, Guiding Zen Master  
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## Providence Zen Center

Flowers in spring  
Cool wind in summer  
Leaves in autumn  
Snow in winter.  
If you don't 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

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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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Cover: Photo of Oleg Šuk JDPSN by Lubor Kosut.



## 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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Photo: Jan Sendzimir

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# Tribute to Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

## Myong Hae Sunim's Funeral

I attended the funeral for Myong Hae Sunim JDPS in Vilnius, Lithuania. I arrived on Saturday and went from the airport directly to the funeral home. The funeral home was new and beautiful, and I was told that Myong Hae Sunim was the first to use that room. It is a spacious place with a wide-open entrance hall, wood floors, and soft gray colors.

I bowed three times to the floor to Myong Hae Sunim, whose urn sat among hundreds of white roses and lilies, and then I went to her mother, who had spent a vacation in my home in Vienna some years ago with her daughter. What could we say . . . no words.

During that day I greeted the members of the sangha, and we also visited the family of Rasa, the other woman who was in the car with Myong Hae Sunim during the accident. The sangha and I chanted for Rasa and her family.

We chanted for Myong Hae Sunim and sat together silently for hours, contemplating the incredible difference she had made in our lives.

In the morning, I visited Myong Hae Sunim's room alone—silently remembering her, and softly touched her gray clothes. She did not have many things. Hanging on a doorknob was a little bag—her teaching bag. All Zen teachers have their little bags with the kong-an books and pens and notepaper ready to go for interviews. Her suitcase was propped there for trips to lead retreats. Her computer was sitting silently waiting for her to come and write emails to sangha members.

In another room, she had been drying great quantities of herbs and flowers. She was making tea this year for all the students and monastics in Hong Kong. It was a room filled with a thousand colors and the rich fragrance of fresh herbs. It smelled heavenly.

Sunday was the burial day. In the morning we went again to the funeral home and sat with the family and friends. The Catholic bishop was also invited by her father. I greeted the bishop and told him that I hoped it

would be OK for him if we chanted for Sunim. He was a very special bishop—the best bishop in the world. He respected the path that Sunim had taken, and of course we could chant! Later I told him I would vote for him to be the next pope.

We chanted *gate gate paragate parasamgate* on the way to her new earth home. As we lowered the urn with her ashes into the ground, it suddenly began to rain. A cool rain poured over all of us. It rained only as we put the urn into the earth—neither before nor afterward. It felt like a rain of purification, and it felt that the pain and sorrow was being washed away. It was a rain pointing to the very moment. In that moment there was only rain upon our bodies and upon the earth. Nothing else.

When our beloveds leave us, we can choose to celebrate their lives. We can choose to remember them joyfully and lovingly even though we feel sad. It is up to us. That is Zen.

*Zen Master Hyon Ja (Alma Potter)*



## Letter to Myong Hae Sunim (Wherever You Are)

*I would like to say a few words in the form of a farewell letter to our dear Myong Hae Sunim, thanking our sangha for their help, and recalling anecdotes from her stay in Palma.*

—Tolo Cantarellas JDPSN

Dear Sunim,

I have to thank you for the opportunity to meet you at a retreat in Borisa Temple, where I appreciated your genuine way of teaching kong-ans. Then you visited us in Palma de Mallorca in the summer of 2018, together with two students (Nicole and Raquel). We visited our beautiful island, and I could appreciate how every moment was savored by you, as if it were the last one. You enjoyed and honored every flower, every landscape, our Mediterranean Sea.

When you visited the Caves of Drach in 2019, you were so amazed that you did not stop taking pictures of the shapes, colors, and shades of that underground and unreal world, so much so that you even went behind the guards, who respected your enthusiasm and let you take a closer look as they were leading others out. You promised to take these photos to your parents as soon as you could.

At that time, I was preparing myself for the inka ceremony. We didn't waste a moment in dharma combat then, but your advice at that time was useful to me



*Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Europe*

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much later.

You returned the following year to visit us for a retreat, and my situation had changed. Months before, my sister had suffered a cerebral vascular accident from which she had not recovered, and she died after fifteen days. I had physical problems also, and all of this was aggravated by my being the main breadwinner for my family. For all of those two months before the inka ceremony, it was for me an insurmountable mountain. You told me that you were there to help me, that somehow my life had led me there, and I had to take this opportunity.

The next time we met was at Borisa, during the inka ceremony. I again gave you reason to advise me that I would not be alone, that I would feel the help of buddhas and bodhisattvas. It then seemed to me that in that situation I was just another protagonist, and as a result, I was very clear, calm, focused, and enjoyed the ceremony. It was for me a great learning experience.

“think differently” and try to free themselves from suffering and help others. Sunim was helping us, and after we got a Buddha statue, she said, “If you want your Buddha statue to be not only a piece of metal, we should do a ceremony.” We started to prepare, and she was constantly in contact with her teacher, Sifu Dae Kwan Sunim. Actually, Sifu visited the center with Sunim a couple of years ago and liked the place very much. Myong Hae Sunim had never done such a ceremony alone, so she was preparing and consulting with Sifu carefully.

At the same time, seven monks from Tibet arrived in Vilnius to perform sacred Tibetan Buddhist rituals and to create a mandala there. Organizers called me and asked if they could stay in Zen Forest. I agreed and invited them to participate in the ceremony. When Myong Hae Sunim found out that seven Tibetan monks were going to participate in the ceremony as well, she had doubts. Actually, other sunims from Korea and Hong Kong also thought that monks from Tibet might want

to do a ceremony themselves and would not be happy if they had to participate in the ceremony led by a sunim from Korea. It was an interesting and unique situation. However, the monks accepted the invitation without any hesitation. They came to the ceremony dressed in their beautiful robes and special hats and even brought their horns, which added a mysterious touch to the beautiful ceremony’s importance. Myong Hae Sunim gave a beautiful dharma talk based on the story about a thief who, after robbing a monk, became a monk himself, and everybody was touched.

A sunim from Hong Kong and monks from Tibet. Different Buddhist schools met in the small Lithuanian village of Čiobiškis. Tibet, Hong Kong, Korea, Lithuania. The world is one. There are no differences if mind is clear.

A few years later at Myong Hae Sunim’s funeral, a Catholic bishop participated. He was asked to visit her family. At the very beginning, the situation was quite awkward. But the bishop was so modest and wise. With his body language he was kind of offering condolences. His talk at her urn was subtle, wise, and touching. Later, when we arrived at the cemetery, the rain started. Right after the ceremony, it stopped. Many years earlier, in the video of Master Seung Sahn’s funeral, we can see young Myong Hae Sunim standing under an umbrella.

After the funeral we all, including the bishop, went to Sunim’s home. Her mother and Sunim herself are perfect gardeners. We all were picking bilberries and talking about how all religions become one when you are a loving person



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Europe

Myong Hae Sunim, I wish that you continue to be happy where you are, but if you have not yet crossed the threshold of the Pure Land, remember the vow of the Buddha, not to cross into nirvana until the last sentient being has done so. We need you, Sunim.

With Respect and Admiration.

Hapchang,  
Tolo



## Myong Hae Sunim: Uniting Religions

Some years ago, I asked Myong Hae Sunim to do a Buddha’s eyes ceremony in the Zen Forest Meditation Center, the spiritual center we are creating in Čiobiškis, Lithuania. This place is meant to be a meditation and cultural place not only for Buddhists, but for all faiths, for people that



and have a lot of compassion. The bishop was old and wise. And he already was retired from all official Catholic business. Otherwise, the officials would not have let him go to a Buddhist nun's funeral and do all the procedures that they do only for Catholics. But it only proves that when you forget about ranks and official status and so on, and you look at the essence of the situation in front of you, then you see many more things in common than differences.

One more interesting thing: At the Buddha's eyes opening ceremony there was a woman who had cancer. She and Sunim had a talk. The woman looked happy afterward. In about a year the woman's daughter called me and said that her mother was in the hospital dying. She asked if Myong Hae Sunim could visit her. While she was still conscious, she asked her daughter to find Sunim for her. When Sunim arrived the woman did not show any signs of consciousness. Neither doctors nor relatives knew whether she heard or understood them. Sunim took her hand and started to chant the Great Dharani. After a while the woman opened her eyes and smiled.

*Linas Ryskus*



## The Playful Bow

I first met Myong Hae Sunim (or rather Ming Hoi Si, as she was known in her Hong Kong sangha) in the late fall of 2016, the year I decided to finally pull up the anchor and set out to make sense of life, death, and everything in between. I had just arrived in Hong Kong in time to join the winter Kyol Che at Su Bong Zen Monastery, after having spent much of the year traveling around Southeast Asia, indulging in all the merrymaking that a backpacker's life so abundantly offers—only to realize that my perceived situational freedom, far away from the chains of conventional life, was not really as liberating as I had imagined it would be.

Enthusiasm is hardly something that an average backpacker would bring into a three-month silent, winter confinement, inside a somewhat secluded monastery on a mountainous island, away from all the fun and games that bustling cities usually offer. Yet that is precisely what I brought. And what a transformative, liberating experience that was!

At that time, my exposure to Buddhism in general, and Zen in particular, was limited to a couple of books I'd read, a dozen YouTube clips, a few Wikipedia articles on the topic, and a ten-day retreat I had done earlier that year. Needless to say, the notion of the beginner's mind did not only thoroughly apply to me, but it reached such levels of perplexity that even a few weeks into the Kyol Che, I found myself still

struggling to make sense out of who this so-called "Sifu" was (Cantonese: 師傅 meaning "teacher"), and when was the actual Zen master going to finally join the retreat.

I'll leave it up to the reader's imagination to picture the look on my face when Ming Hoi Si skillfully enlightened me by pointing out that, in fact, Sifu and Zen Master Dae Kwan are not different, but rather the same person who I had been seeing in the Dharma room for a while now. An open jaw, a look to the side and a short "aha" revealed a subtle mix of shyness, embarrassment, and a profound sense of relief. The first "same or different" kong-an had been attained.

This "realization" marked the beginning of a student-teacher journey that lasted until just recently, when on August 2, 2020, a fellow practitioner relayed to me the news of Ming Hoi's unfortunate passing.

I cared deeply for Sunim. Words fall short in trying to express the magnitude of the impact she had on my life, despite the relative brevity of our rapport. From her first teaching, up to the last one (and in my mind her passing is the greatest



*Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Europe*

dharma talk she ever delivered), she had been more than just a teacher. She'd been almost like a family member—a senior, wiser sister I could turn to in hardship, a friend if you will. She was a trusting companion through the treacherous waters of samsara, always one WhatsApp or Instagram message away, ready to make time for an online kong-an interview long before online interviews were a thing.

Her selfless, kind, and generous support over the years, coupled with her warm approachability, wisdom, and dedicated, compassionate teaching, begets in me a sense of dharmic indebtedness, in which her passing is not to depress, but rather, inspire and fuel my commitment to practice and the resolve to realize my own deathless nature. Just as an athlete passes the baton to their teammate at the end of their run, so too, I feel, Sunim is passing the light of her dharma to each of us.

People say that in moments of great tragedies, the situ-

ation in which one finds oneself upon observing the fact becomes permanently stored in one's memory. This rings true for all the deeply impactful events and news I've witnessed and received in my life, and certainly applies to this one too.

I received the sad news of Ming Hoi Si's passing while dog-sitting for a friend. With a broken heart and tears in my eyes, a deep, deep resounding *noooooooo* echoed from the roots of my being—giving rise to a feeling of gross unfairness, a feeling I know all too well to want to evoke it often.

As the dog kept performing its playful bow, nudging me to throw him the toy, I closed my eyes, wiped away the tears, gathered my hands in *hapchang*, and bended in a half-bow to mirror that of the dog.

In our global sangha, and especially my dear friends and fellow practitioners in Hong Kong and Lithuania—there are those who certainly knew Myong Hae Sunim far longer and better than I ever could, which is something I have the deepest, most humble respect and appreciation for. I hope that in sharing these sentiments, I am doing justice in paying tribute to Myong Hae Sunim / Ming Hoi Si, in a way that is not only honoring your own deepest sentiments but perhaps even reflecting them. May you all be well, happy, and free.

*Woof Woof, the dog is wagging his tail.  
Myong Hae Sunim just threw him a bone.  
Gaspar Sopi*



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## Myong Hae Sunim—Remembrances from the Spanish Sangha

We met Myong Hae Sunim only three years ago when we invited her to Borisa Temple on short notice, and she just said “Sure, how can I help you?” And that's what our relationship has been like since that day—she was always ready to help, always joyful and completely selfless. Myong Hae Sunim JDPS was both a dharma friend and a great dharma teacher to us, teaching us in the best way possible: through example. Finally, she gave us a powerful teaching: this could be the last day of your life, maybe the last moment. Are you giving your very best, like Myong Hae Sunim did? Because after all, it is not so much about how long you live, but how much you live. How do we use our limited time here?

In her honor, we named our little hermitage for solo retreats Bright Ocean, which is what her name translates to. After some time we realized that is exactly the view you have from the window on many mornings: a sparkling sea like a silver mirror. May everyone who sees this bright ocean be truly inspired by Myong Hae Sunim, practice strongly like her and continue her work, and in this way never be separated from her.

Myong Hae Sunim, like the flowers you loved and cared for so much, you helped so many of us to bloom. You yourself bloomed as a great bodhisattva. Flowers blossom and fall, but your fragrance will be forever with us.

*Barbara Pardo JDPSN and Tonda Horak*



Her always smiling and tender face and the unexpected kong-ans that she sometimes asked in our “free” time during retreats shook me and brought me straight to don't-know mind. She was and she is a great inspiration to me. I am very grateful.

*Hector Mediavilla*



I met Myong Hae Sunim very recently, at a retreat during lockdown due to the pandemic. A small group practiced at Borisa Temple, and some others practiced at home. We all had one online interview with her. She spent a lot of time explaining to me how to practice with kong-ans. She was very patient, and her smile was always present on her face.

She told me about her experience of being confined. Through her room's window every day she could see some birds, from their birth until they flew free. She witnessed how the parents made the nest, how they fed them and how they encouraged them to fly. When the baby birds could fly, they no longer gave them food in the nest, but they flew a little bit out, thereby encouraging them to come out of their comfort zone, since they had acquired enough maturity to leave the nest.

Myong Hae Sunim then told me that I too was mature and that I also had wings, and that the experiences you have in the nest are different from those you have flying. She then encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone and to go to the next retreat in person. After that, I attended a two-week retreat at Borisa, keeping her teachings in mind. Since then, I practice every day online with the sangha and have sat several retreats in our retreat center. She is always present on my flights.

*Carmen Gonzalez*



One day during retreat, a Zen student complained that silence was not kept 100 percent. Myong Hae Sunim replied, “Do you prefer people to keep silence and hate each other or talk a little and love each other?”

*Anonymous*



A very nice, strong and serious sunim went for a kong-an interview with Myong Hae Sunim JDPS. She asked him a question. He answered, “Don't know,” and was ready to go back to sit in the dharma room. She looked at him and said, “I know you know the answer, and I will not let you go until you give it to me.” After an hour staring at each other, he gave the correct answer and could return to the dharma room.

*Anonymous*



# We Believe in Our Thinking, We Don't Believe Our Eyes

Myong Hae Sunim JDPS

From a dharma talk given during the summer retreat in Vepriai, Lithuania, 2018

**Question:** Some teachers say that this body does not exist at all.

**Myong Hae Sunim JDPS:** [*pointing to another student*] Hit him!

**Q:** OK, I understand, but then the question. I believe I have this body, but maybe that is my problem. And maybe then those teachers are liars. But as long as I think I have this body or even that I am this body, then there is that fear of death, the fear of losing this body.

**MHSN:** Here is the difference: "I have this body" versus "I am this body." This is a fundamental difference. If you say "I am this body," there is a big problem. If you say "I have this body," you know what to do with it. If you say, "I am this body," then you have that fear, because if this body disappears, you disappear. Are you really this body?

**Q:** Now, to be honest, I'm sure I'm this body. Buddhist theory says otherwise. But my strong belief is that I am this body.

**MHSN:** OK, let's just say that's so. Now look at that. When you were born, what size were you?

**Q:** Well, I don't know, [*holds hands apart about the size of a baby*] maybe like this.

**MHSN:** How big are you now?

**Q:** Like this. [*Stands up.*]

**MHSN:** How did you get from that small to so big?

**Q:** I don't know, by itself.

**MHSN:** By itself? Cannot be!

**Q:** I did nothing myself.

**MHSN:** I don't think so. You did. You do it every day.

**Q:** Eating?

**MHSN:** Eating. Good. If you didn't eat, you wouldn't grow. So this body is an accumulation of the food you eat. People who eat rice are smaller; those who eat meat are taller. People who follow one diet have one body, eat differently. If you eat a lot, your body will grow very big. You can clearly see that your body has a connection to food. Where does food come from? From the earth. So this is an accumulation of things coming from the earth. You buy a lot of things. Buy a house and load a lot of things inside. And then you say, "It's my stuff." You don't say, "It's me."

So here is the problem when you identify that collection of things as yourself. One begins to think in this way, because there's no other experience than those received through the body. If you say, "I believe I am this body," you are using logic, but not direct experience. Better look straight ahead. Your body is changing. It grew because you ate food. It is just an accumulation of food. That is, if it accumulates, it

belongs to you. You accumulated; you got it from somewhere else; it wasn't you from the beginning. You ate, and it became your body. The same is true with memory. Same with our impressions, or mind. Minds are different in different cultures. Why? The environment is different, the impressions they get are also different. It all accumulates in people's minds, and they are different. These are again accumulations in our minds. Therefore, we have to be careful about who we contact, because it goes into our head. Therefore, even during meditation, we experience that from this, or from this, some memory comes to life. The longer we sit, the deeper the memories appear, the more spam begins to rise to the surface. It's not you; it's your accumulated memory.

Identifying with all this causes us suffering. Because if something happens to that "wealth" we have accumulated, we are scared. If I identify with this stick [*holds up the Zen stick*] the same as with my hand, then if you do something with the stick, I will suffer. And I suffered similarly when I was a kid. I had a toy that I loved very much. My brother had fun with it. He didn't need to touch me for it to hurt. He slammed the toy, and I cried like crazy. Because my identification with that toy was so strong, if anything happened to that toy, I felt like it happened to me.

So identification became a problem. It's not the body that is the problem, and neither is it the tool or toy in your hand, but rather the identification with the body or that tool. A knife in your hand is neither good nor bad. How you use it can be good or bad. Your body belongs to you, but if you identify with it, you become frightened, because we have nothing else in our experience. That's why when we sit down, we start watching: Hmm, logically, maybe I'm not this body; the body belongs to me. Maybe I'm not this mind; the mind belongs to me. But so far as I belong to that mind, I am a slave to that mind. If the mind tells me something, I'm 100 percent sure—hence the suffering. If I suddenly start thinking from either this or that, that he wants to kill me, [*points to a student sitting next to her*] what will happen?

**Q:** Bad things.

**MHSN:** Yeah, not-so-good things. My world will be completely different. And something like this is constantly happening in our lives. We see a man and start judging: hmm, he doesn't like me, or maybe he wants to do something for me. But we don't know! But if we start to appreciate, to create something, we create it as a new reality. And we start to act accordingly. We believe in our thinking. We don't believe our eyes. ♦

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# Biography of Oleg Šuk JDPSN

Zuzka Šuková

Oleg was born in Kazakhstan in the town of Serebrjansk. His maternal grandparents lived with his mother during the Stalinist period, in exile in the far north of Russia. Perhaps because of this, and due to his upbringing, he was very modest and minimalistic through his life. As a child, he was pale as a dandelion. And very gentle: when in kindergarten, he never understood why the children around him would shout and bicker. He was constantly drawing and painting, even at night—so much so that his parents were seriously worried. Even in childhood, he was patient and meticulous. He made an army of three hundred small soldiers from clay, each one a different and original piece. In youth he practiced karate, judo, and other martial arts sometimes, trying to run up the walls. He loved the rough wilderness of Kazakhstan and spent a lot of time outdoors. He understood nature and animals, even sometimes trying to sneak animals into his parents' house.

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He was strong and clear as a diamond. He never diverted from his goals and direction, which he would not trade for anything or to anyone. He usually understood well how things work; he somehow always knew how to repair what he had, while enjoying a minimalistic lifestyle. Until the end of his life he was joyful, honest, and clear, almost as if from some other world. At the same time he was sharp, clear, and aimed straight to the point, just like he did with his humor.

Oleg studied architecture in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan. In 1983, he continued his studies of architecture at the University in Bratislava, in Slovakia. It was there that I met him. His eyes were clear and blue, the same as his soul. Through them, blue skies looked at you. Since then we were together to his last day. I discovered him as gentle, receptive, and compassionate, very modest and minimalistic. He used things and brought them back to life. From even something as simple as a piece of old wood, he managed to create something new and original—a small sculpture or a picture. He loved working with different materials.

He was a truly versatile artist, who exploited a multitude of graphic and design techniques. He created sculptures, drawings, and realized interiors; made handmade

paper, decorations, and jewelry; drew cartoon jokes; designed children's playgrounds; wrote books—including a fairytale about a little red riding hood that danced with wolves; and he left behind thousands of pieces of art, calligraphy, writing, and poetry. His Zen was an art, and his art Zen-ish, his paintings often minimalistic.

His entire life was like poetry. He wrote haiku as well. His creativity had a dreamlike beauty and emerged almost instantly. His caricatures and drawings won several international awards. Through his entire professional life, he taught children and adults to draw and paint. They always found with him peace and safety. They always sat after school listening to music, meditating on colors, tea, and solemnity.

Right after graduation, we started to practice Zen. Af-

ter years of practice he received inka and became a Ji Do Poep Sa. He was a wonderful Zen teacher. Many looked forward to attend his talks, meetings, and interviews. He taught through his art, his soul and humor, specific to him only. Clear, sharp, solid, kind, never losing his direction. Even after thirty-seven years of living together, his wisdom—whether in private life, at talks, or during

kong-an interviews—always struck me clearly, precisely, and profoundly.

Calm, patient, and focused, he was an absolute artist. Even when he was hospitalized in the 100-percent sterile environment of intensive care, and later on during COVID self-isolation, just before his death, he created about fifty paintings. He was not particularly keen on mass media; however, through personal contacts, via his life, creativity, and art, he reached thousands and touched our hearts and souls.

One of his last thoughts was, "There is a need to bring more joy to our lives."

The great Russian poet-clown Vyacheslav Polunin said: "Find out who you are and fill up by it the entire space around you." Oleg succeeded in that. He filled up, infused our lives with gentleness, kind humor, beauty, and dreams.

## Oleg's Haiku

*...tonight I will write nothing,  
I will just watch...*



Photo: Bratislava & Kosice Zen Centers



# Transcendental Wisdom Is Useless to You If You Cannot Use It

Dharma Talk in the Tea Room Dobromila, Piešťany, Slovakia on November 26, 2011

Oleg Šuk JDPSN

Our teachers taught me, and they also teach Lubor. [*Lubor Kosut is an older dharma teacher and abbot of the Bratislava Zen Center. —Ed.*] I also learn. We still say that we actually have to communicate more with people about what they want to hear, not what we want to tell them. So whatever we are interested in, from the point of view of Buddhism and specifically Zen, feel free to ask. What we will be able to answer, we will answer. What we will not know, maybe we will find a common answer. And in fact, this lecture may lead to a discussion.

I came here for you; take this opportunity. Tomorrow we will have an introduction to Zen practice, where we will try different techniques: how to sit in meditation, how to walk in meditation, how to sing in chanting meditation, and a few other formal practices that we do in Zen, because there is everyday Zen and formal Zen. Formal Zen means that we practice together. This is a common practice. We meet together; we meet at a certain time, in a certain place, and then we have formal chanting or, for example, formal sitting meditation. We have walking meditation, and it is a serious practice, because then a person puts down the self-mind, and their mind becomes bigger. Then we just sit. Even though I don't like it, even if something hurts, everything goes aside and we do what it is, 100 percent. Then, of course, when we finish the formal practice, we try to live what we achieve during this practice, the insights, the wisdom or the stupidity that we sometimes get when we put aside our wisdom, [laughs] so we try to use it in our everyday life, in family, with friends, at work. Our teacher said, "Transcendental wisdom is useless to you if you cannot use it." For example, in discussion with your wife or children or in your work [laughter]. We try to learn why we practice, in order to use it in completely different situations. Whether you go for walks or sit on the bus, cook dinner for your loved ones or for people you hate, it depends on who has what kind of family situation, so you do everything 100 percent.

Our teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, taught us one wonderful piece of wisdom: "Try, try, try for ten thousand years." Then you can't hold on to yourself. Because your self can last a maximum of ninety years, even with antibiotics and all sorts of medical drops, [laughs] but then you will have to leave it behind. But if you have a

clear direction, that clear direction will guide you, not looking at time and space. Then you will find your, as we say, real self, your great self. Our teachers have taught us from the beginning that you are all Buddhas. We just forgot about it. It is a slightly different approach than in Christianity.

I teach at art school, and there are small children coming to me. Once, such a sad boy was sitting unhappily; somehow I couldn't reach him in art class. So I asked him, "What are you so sad for?" And he said, "Yesterday my pastor said I was sinful." Six years old! [laughs] So I explained to him that he should not be sad, that his pastor saw things differently.

So Buddhism teaches us that we are already Buddhas; whether we are sinners or not, we are already Buddhas. And it took a while for our surroundings, society, and education to make us the buddhas that we are: people who are looking for their true selves and their buddhahood. And sometimes it takes us a while to figure it out again and learn not only to figure it out, but also to use it. It's not enough to realize it, but you also have to know how to use it. And use it not only for yourself but for the whole world. Because this world is currently facing quite difficult problems. And it is not just a financial crisis. All human questions, philosophical and spiritual, go to one question. To a question that is very simple and primordial, the question "Who am I?" "Who am I and where am I going?"

Zen teaches us to look for an answer and gives us a methodology for finding an answer to this question. It does not give us a guide or a manual that will say who you are. It does not give you any dogmatic answers that you have to learn and trust. Zen teaches you to find your own answer to this question and learn to use it, as I said. We do not have dogmatic answers about who you are and what your essence is. Because as many as there are of you, there are so many unique answers to this question. The answers do not depend on Zen; they do not depend on the Buddha himself or on Buddhism. Because the Buddha was not a Buddhist, [laughs] just as Christ was not a Christian.

[laughs] And that's why this teaching is so fresh. So here I would also end my introduction to this issue, and now it is time to ask questions. You don't have to be afraid to ask any questions, because there are no silly questions, as we say, there are silly answers. [Audience laughs.] ♦



# 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

*(Continued on p. 18)*



*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

(Continued from p. 15)

**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*



# Try Mind Never Ends

Koen Vermeulen JDPSN

Nowadays there are all kinds of initiatives encouraging people to take care of our environment. The European Tree of the Year is one of those. The winner of this contest is the tree with the most beautiful story. The Belgian candidate this year is a tree from Ypres. This city faced a dramatic period during the First World War. Mustard gas, the most dangerous gas developed for war purposes, is also called yperite after this city. It was indeed here that it was used for the first time. A few months after the start of the war, the mobile war gave way to the trench war. The Germans were looking for an efficient means of clearing the Allies from their trenches, given that classical artillery was having little impact. That is the reason why yperite was developed. However, the artillery didn't stop and destroyed the whole city.

Just to give an idea how bad it was: When my great-grandfather returned to the city after the war, he tried to find the tomb of his wife, who had died a few years before WWI. He could not find it. Even more, he was not even able to locate the cemetery.

It therefore seems logical that no tree in the city survived the four years of war. And yet about ten trees defied the violence of war, thanks to their position on the inside of the ramparts of this old medieval city. The ramparts protected the trees from the incessant shelling. All of the trees were, without exception, heavily damaged or destroyed, but the stumps of these ten trees survived.



Photo: © BailletLatourBoomvanhetJaar

YPRES, PANORAMA EN 1919  
PRÈS DE LA PORTE DE NÉLON

From the stumps, the trees managed to recover spontaneously and grow out again. However, these survivors were again oppressed during the Second World War. Only one of them, pictured in the photos above and below, survived both world wars and is still standing firmly.



Photo: © BailletLatourBoomvanhetJaar

This story points to the fact that nature never gives up, although everything in our world does perish. This is also true for human beings. Nobody can escape death, but this is not the end of the story.

The question of life and death is a vast topic. But in Zen, we make it simple:

When you are alive, what?

When you are dead, what?

I have a story about Oleg Śuk JDPSN that gives a good hint. Unfortunately, our good friend and teacher left us this year after a long illness. Our sangha was invited to participate in the forty-nine-day practice that is traditionally held after the passing of the deceased. Traditionally, this is seen as the period between two lifetimes. According to Buddhist teaching, the bodhisattva Ji Jang Bosal helps the deceased during those forty-nine days.

The night before the end of the forty-nine-day period, I woke up to chant Ji Jang Bosal. Although I tried hard, it was difficult to not fall asleep. My head felt heavy and I was not able to keep my body straight. I started a mental conversation. "Come on, Oleg! You need to keep clear! Tomorrow there is a ceremony for you. You need to be ready. Let's practice together!" I admit that I was encouraging myself more than Oleg. It didn't help very much though, and my head kept falling down. So, I tried again: "Oleg, we must keep trying. Let's keep clear!" Then, suddenly my back slowly became straight, my head found its correct position, and my mind became clear.

I have some experience with night practice, but this I never felt before. I did not straighten my back myself! It just happened by itself! Was it Oleg who tried to help me? I don't know, but we can already do one thing. Let's decide to keep trying for ten thousand years nonstop. The bodhisattva way never ends.

When alive: how can I help you?

When dead: how can I help you?

Try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop. Attain enlightenment and save all beings from suffering. ♦

# Why Do You Believe in Buddhism?

Barbara Pardo JDSPN, Gasper Sopi, and Veronique Struis interview  
Knud Rosenmayr JDPSN in January 2021

**Question:** Before we jump straight into difficult topics, let's just start with a simple question. How have you been?

**Knud Rosenmayr JDPSN:** I'm fine, thank you. As you know, I had some body-changing issues, but I feel OK now.

**Q:** You've been practicing since 1995 after meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn. What attracted you to his teachings?

**KR PSN:** At that time, I was searching for something, maybe similar to many twenty-year-olds. So I asked Zen Master Seung Sahn during a retreat, after he commented on one of the kong-ans, "Why do you believe in Buddhism?" I thought at that time this would sum up all my questions. He simply said: "Me? I don't believe in Buddhism. I ask you 'Who are you?'" I answered "I don't know." Then he said "Only keep don't-know. That is Buddhism." That's what attracted me to his teaching.

**Q:** Were you already attracted to Buddhism before meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn?

**KR PSN:** I didn't know much about Buddhism and Zen before meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn. At that time, I was traveling through Korea and Asia, and it felt more like a coincidence that I met him and his teaching.

**Q:** What was the most challenging part in your journey with Zen?

**KR PSN:** At the beginning when I started practicing was the most challenging time. Lots of checking and judging.

**Q:** Have you ever pondered a monastic life? Why or why not?

**KR PSN:** Yes, that thought did pop up. However, for me it didn't ripen in a way that my whole body and heart would go along with it.

**Q:** In your experience, what has your practice added to your life?

**KR PSN:** Your question! Well, that's what practice does. It doesn't add anything, but we do. We create life and death, work, family, wealth, and health. We sometimes may create a good feeling when we practice, a feeling of freedom, a feeling of lightness, and so on. But in reality practice only takes things away. All the way down. Then, what remains?

**Q:** Has anything fundamentally shifted this past year\* in the way you approach life, for example has dealing with personal uncertainty led you to insights that were previously obscured? For example, has the poem "The Human Route" taken on a greater meaning?

**KR PSN:** I love that poem. It points to the core. What is most important? What is it really? For some people it is the love for this and that. Maybe their family, their job, their car, their partner. But soon all this

will be gone. Everything is always changing. Can we live with this change without holding

or making anything on top of it? When

I got my medical diagnosis, it felt like medical reports were making life and death. But in truth they don't—they

are just reports. Usually they're printed on white paper with black ink. It is our thinking that makes life and death. Sometimes

we don't see that, because we

are too occupied with other things that we like or dislike. And we may or may

not want these things to distract us. So taking a pause and truly looking

and listening can reveal a lot of our hidden making. Sometimes we call that

practice.

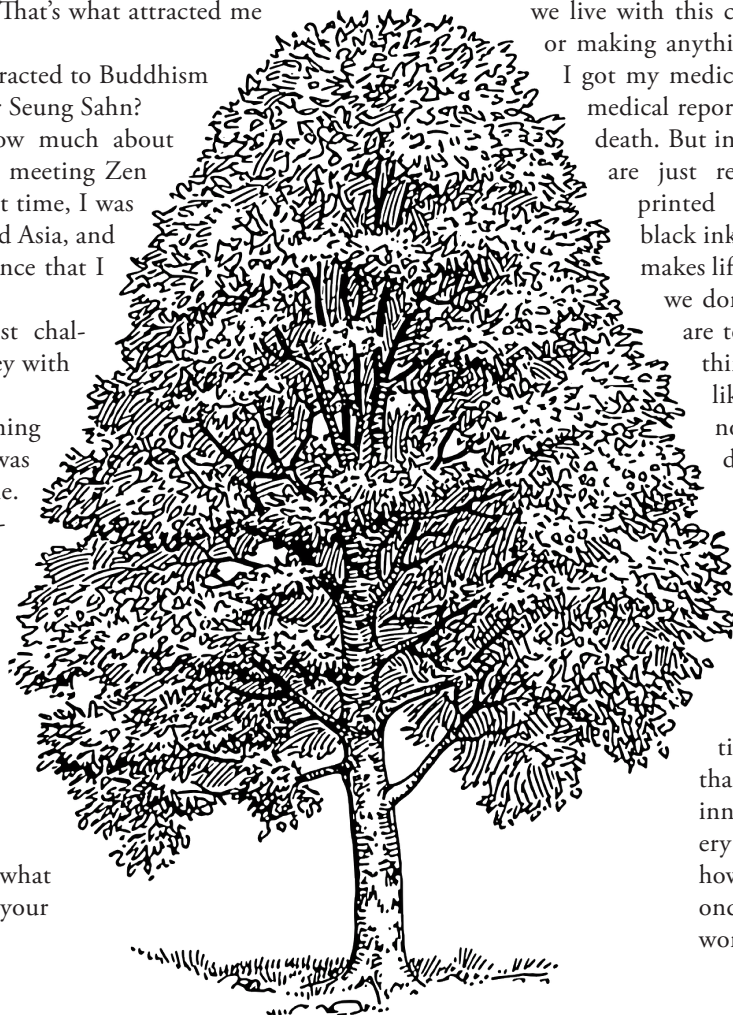
**Q:** In one of your dharma talks you mentioned the three pictures

that we usually put on an inner altar and worship every day. The first picture is

how I want to be. The second picture shows how my world should be. The third

picture shows how I am.

The third





picture is how this “me” should be seen by others. How do we practice with these three pictures?

**KR PSN:** Put it all down! That’s how we practice with them. We usually put these three pictures—how I want to be, how my world should be, and how I should be seen by others—on an altar, an inner altar. It may be a Buddhist altar, a Christian altar, a Muslim altar, or an atheist altar. We may practice meditation or not, but no matter what we do, every day we bow to these pictures on our inner altar. In fact we give our whole life to our I-my-me altar. We would literally die for these pictures. Can we live without constantly worshipping these I-my-me pictures? Can we do that? I’m not saying to condemn these pictures either. That’s putting them on another inner altar. But could we maybe not hang them anywhere? Just leave them. Notice them when they appear, neither putting them on an altar nor hiding them in the basement. Maybe they will end up side by side with many other pictures connected by the same wall.

**Q:** This year has been extremely challenging in so many ways. The world continues to face fundamental questions of life and death. On top of that, both you personally and the Kwan Um sangha have been facing a lot of uncertainty. A lot of coming and going. Could you share your views in this context?

**KR PSN:** That’s good. Now we can wake up! Not making anything. Only wake up and help this world. If we feel that we are facing a challenge, that means we can learn. For me this last year has been a very good learning experience. Don’t know about the world, but I hope all of us have learned something this past year. When we truly learn something, then we meet our true teacher.

**Q:** Considering everything that is going on, is there a silver lining to all of this? Are you hopeful for the future of humanity? Or, is it that, to use a phrase from Zen Master Seung Sahn, “more suffering is necessary” before something will really change, and this world will awaken?

**KR PSN:** Don’t know. Hope is an interesting concept—hope always makes despair. You can’t have the one without the other. If we make hope, we inevitably also make desperation. When the news about the new vaccine against the coronavirus came out, the mood of many people suddenly changed. It’s the same as when a doctor tells us about a positive change that may happen. Energy comes up and we feel the effect on our body and mind. That is not good or bad—it is the same coin, just two sides. We usually prefer one side, and when the other one appears we want to turn it as soon as possible, thinking that the turning is progress.

**Q:** How can our Zen practice help us in times like these?

**KR PSN:** Teachers keep saying the future is just a dream, the past is already gone, and the only thing that we have is this [*bits the floor*]. But no one really believes

this teaching. It seems to go in one ear and out the other. That’s why practice is so important. In the hospital, I had the privilege to meet many cancer patients as roommates. There was a plumber, an electrician, a CEO, and others I spent some time with. Talking to them, it seemed there was always that underlying question. How long? How much time? Will I be able to see my kids grow up? And so on. That is a good question for everyone: how much time do you have?

**Q:** Looking back, is there any advice you would give the younger Knud?

**KR PSN:** It feels hard to relate to the idea of a younger Knud, not to mention giving that idea advice. What are the younger or older forms of ourselves? Sometimes we may ask ourselves whether we would do something different or make a different decision if we had the chance to do it again. If that is the case, everything would be new and different to begin with.

**Q:** What is your advice in the approach to kong-an practice and its role in the process of awakening?

**KR PSN:** Kong-an practice can be a very useful tool when we let it work. That means letting it bring us back to don’t-know. Often we don’t like that, because we don’t want to be confronted with don’t-know. Can we trust this don’t-know and its way of working? Then we are already there.

**Q:** Do you have (or have had) a personal kong-an? What is your favorite one and why?

**KR PSN:** The one you just asked is my favorite. Tough one! It only comes alive in the moment you ask it. Any kong-an has to be looked at anew.

**Q:** What is the last book you read and what did you think about it?

**KR PSN:** *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben. He is a German forester who talks about trees and the way they communicate. Very good book. We can learn a lot from trees.

**Q:** What’s a fun fact about you that the sangha doesn’t know yet?

**KR PSN:** Sitting here answering your question. Maybe my wife would have a different answer to your question.

**Q:** What would be your message to the world in general, and the global Kwan Um sangha in particular?

**KR PSN:** I was reading about the beech trees in a forest recently. In a beech forest, the trees help feed each other exchanging nutrients. So when a tree gets sick or old, the surrounding trees help that tree. These trees in the forest understand that they are all connected. I would like to thank the Kwan Um sangha for their great support—this is incredibly helpful. To come back to your question: what can I do for you?

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\* In 2020 Knud Rosenmayr was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer

# The Alchemy of Immortality

Fernando Pardo

This summer I watched the World Is a Single Flower online talks with my children, Barbara (JDPSN) and Daniel. One day they were talking about how the members of the first generation of Zen masters and Ji Do Poep Sas from the Kwan Um School were becoming venerable elders. I share age with this generation. It won't take long for some of us to disappear as dictated by the law of impermanence; it is something natural that we must accept. But somehow this bridge generation between Zen Master Seung Sahn and the new generations will achieve a kind of symbolic immortality. They will always be remembered as the bodhisattvas who faithfully transmitted

vessels containing ergot of rye, similar to the psychedelic known as LSD. It was said that whoever went to Eleusis achieved immortality. In front of the entrance of the temple was an inscription in Greek that said "He who dies before he dies, does not die when he dies." It's an excellent definition for Zen enlightenment, for what is to achieve our true nature, but to die before we die?

The Spanish mystic Saint Teresa of Ávila said "I die because I do not die." And let's remember the Zen poem:

*Life is like a floating cloud which appears.  
Death is like a floating cloud which disappears.  
The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.*

In Zen we speak of the unborn. The *Heart Sutra* reminds us of "no old age and death, and also no extinction of them." This space of immortality is not only Buddhist; it is a world heritage. Finally we will discover that Nam Cheon's cat is the Schrödinger's cat of quantum physics: "Alive? Dead? I won't say it, I won't say it."

A few weeks before I started writing this text, I received bad news: I have been diagnosed with a fairly serious illness whose prognosis is complex. As I have mentioned, I am already at an age when the horizon of disappearance could be not very far. I have had a full life and I am fortunate to have two wonderful children who lovingly care for me. Despite having lost two brothers, my beloved wife with whom I lived for over forty years, and recently my mother, I am grateful for the life I have had.

Some people have asked me if the practice of Zen has helped me to accept such negative news and if it makes sense to continue practicing. Actually the question is poorly formulated, for as a great master said, Zen is useless in the space of relative truth. A Zen practitioner who receives news of this type reacts like any human being, with fear, anger, sadness. But promptly one fully recognizes the teachings on karma and impermanence. Nowadays my mood is serene, and I live moment by moment. Regarding the question of whether I am going to continue practicing, I am going to do it with greater intensity than ever, because I have decided to have a race with death, which if I lose I hope to accept with good sportsmanship. What else can I do? On the contrary, if I achieve my true nature, I will die before I die, so I will not die when I die. ♦

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*Fernando Pardo has a degree in philosophy from the University of Barcelona and owns a publishing company, La Liebre de Marzo, which has published many books by Zen Master Seung Sahn in Spanish translation. He is the abbot of Bori Zen Center (Barcelona).*



Photo: Allan Matthews

his teachings. The best tribute you can give them as new practitioners is to continue to maintain the teachings in their original essence over time.

But today I would like to talk about *real* immortality, which is not the immortality that mortals pursue within relative truth! I am talking about immortality in the space of absolute truth. This clear and pure thing—our true nature—does not depend on life or death.

I have recently been reading an interesting book titled *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name*. This well-documented book describes the path that goes from the Eleusinian Mysteries (beginning about four thousand years ago) to Christianity, passing through the Dionysian rites. The Eleusinian Mysteries were celebrated for thousands of years. Any Greek who had not committed homicide could attend, and throughout various ages such prominent figures as the philosopher Plato and the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius attended. In these mysteries, an elaborate ritual was performed in which participants went through a process of death and rebirth. Currently there is no doubt that a potion containing psychedelic plants was ingested in these rituals. A hypothesis that historians have found difficult to accept has been confirmed by analysis of small



# This Time, Don't Let Heat Kill You

Moran Chaimovitz

Humanity is being hit with a giant climate Zen stick. Droughts, floods, and storms have always been part of the natural cycle, but this time there's clear scientific evidence that the extreme conditions are happening more frequently because of human actions. These actions come out of our corporate, government, and social ignorance and greed. Everyone is polluting the planet firsthand somehow, while we depend on and support the system that does the heaviest pollution. This is the impact of our civilization's economic norms over the last century, and we're running out of time to prevent a tipping point that will destroy nature's equilibrium.

I am a worried parent of two children living in Israel. Life in Israel was always turbulent, but as the predictions state, past religious and territorial wars over this small piece of land are nothing compared to what's coming to the Middle East region. I am writing this out of fear for all our children's future, but with no intention to seed despair. I want to state the situation as it is explained by science, so we can perceive the correct situation, relationship, and function with our future challenges and their solutions.

As implicated in Dong Sahn's "No Hot or Cold" kong-an, there is really no place to hide and avoid the climate crisis implications. The whole ecosystem will be affected, and extreme weather conditions will catch us, our children, and our grandchildren.

Adding to ignorance and greed, I think you can also include hate toward indigenous cultures, their lands, and their ways of life, which don't seem compatible with growing the Western lifestyle. Our way of living has distanced itself from nature and become ignorant to the fact that we are part of nature. No wonder we call hate, greed, and ignorance the three poisons. We've seen the poisonous results in full global scale during recent years: increased wildfires, hurricanes, floods, droughts, and waves of immigration.

No one really knows what will happen. There are optimistic predictions and pessimistic predictions, which depend on how fast we will change our economic course in the next ten to thirty years. We truly don't know if we will succeed, or how long would it take to stabilize the climate and natural habitats. But as Zen Master Seung Sahn said, we need to try, try, try for ten thousand years, for our future and our children and all sentient beings. We can't run away from this karmic debt.

Zen Master Seung Sahn begins the introduction to *The Compass of Zen* with a very ecological statement:

Human beings not only make each other suffer. Nowadays, we bring much more suffering to all of the other beings in this world. We hurt the air, the water, the grass, the trees, everything. Human

beings cut down whole forests, and take away the green belt. We pollute the water, the air, and the ground. Human beings always say they want freedom, but actually they are the number one dictators in this world. So nowadays it is very important that human beings wake up.

I feel that nothing really changed since the book was published in 1997. As a child growing up in the late 1980s, I clearly remember the campaigns to save the ozone layer, the Amazon forest, recycling, acid rain, oil spills, and animals on the verge of extinction. It's all still happening. So, what can we do?

When Buddha saw the sick, old, and dying people and realized the impermanence of our human condition, he understood it was inevitable. But there's a compassionate way to care for the sick and old, and we can hold ceremonies for the dead. These natural transitions create our society's care work in hospitals, clinics, hospices, and so on. This means that although we might need to live through a scary ecological transformation, there's still a need to prepare for it and to make it as painless as possible in the worst scenario. In the best scenario, that's not all we can do.

At this time we have a choice. We have between ten and thirty years to fix the situation. This is enough time for us to grow old and for our children to become adults. We have enough time to slow down and maybe even prevent total catastrophe.

Clear action comes from clear discernment. Without clear discernment, there is no wisdom. From clear discernment, compassionate and wise action can emerge. How, then, does that connect with Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching of correct situation, correct relationship, and correct function?

We need to attain the correct situation—understand that the climate predictions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are real and valid. We can already see more fires in California, Brazil, Australia, and Siberia. More hurricanes, typhoons, and floods. The ocean's acidity levels are rising, and fish stocks are declining. The climate predictions are now coming to realization more rapidly, because humanity is actually increasing its damaging activities as the world's population and economies grow. Our actions so far haven't been enough, and our goals to decrease carbon emissions have been too low.

Correct relationship—understand these extreme changes are caused by human activity and decisions: our "normal" way of life. It's not about taking the blame. It's about taking responsibility as beings who are part of nature but not the owners of nature. We need to change the story of humanity as nature's conqueror, which is the

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dominant story in Western and Western-influenced societies. We need to wake up to the fact that we are indeed destroying nature, and if we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves. Sending a team to populate Mars won't help save our planet. We can't cut out the lungs and boil the heart while pretending to save the brain.

Correct function—like the eightfold path, we have numerous ways to fix our economy and habits. We can change our view on nature, our livelihoods, our efforts to make a change, our focus on sustainable economy, our actions to stop carbon emissions, our speech and the stories we keep telling as a culture. We can start talking about the scientific facts; we can demand that our media, politicians, and education systems include these facts in their plans, programs, and policies. These facts cannot stay with the scientific community and the environmental groups alone. The climate facts need to be as universal as  $1+1=2$ .

We can demand that our elected officials plan and execute clean energy reforms before 2030. COVID-19 proved we can take quick action when needed. We can divert our pensions, savings, and financial holdings away from polluting corporations' stocks and bonds. We can work to install solar panels on our roofs and the roofs of public buildings. Drive electric cars. Buy locally to reduce the dependency of polluting international shipping.

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We still have time. It's not too late to use our ten thousand bodhisattva hands and create a sustainable economy. One in which our way of life doesn't exploit land, people, and natural resources for profit while ignoring its effects on nature. A system that uses renewable energy sources and plant-based products. Both can create healthier societies and reduce diseases and mortality rates caused by heart issues, cancer, obesity, pollution, malnourishment, and lack of clean water. This can save billions in healthcare costs, which we can invest in making our technologies green. These new industries and their development can create jobs for millions. The system can educate and empower people to create sustainable lifestyles and organizations. It can emphasize values that transcend our destructive lifestyle.

So, a monk asked Zen Master Dong Sahn, "When cold or hot come, how can we avoid them?" "Why don't you go to the place where there is no cold or hot?" Dong Sahn replied. The monk said, "What is the place where there is no cold or hot?" Then Dong Sahn said, "When cold, cold kills you; when hot, heat kills you."

I say, this time, don't let heat kill you. ♦

*Moran Chaimovitz is a dharma-teacher-in-training at the Tel Aviv Zen Center, father of two by day and sleep deprived by night, Israeli-born, married, marketer, spiritual practitioner, and none of the above as well.*

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# Starting Here!

Rich Goodson

My journey to Zen began when I was six or seven. At that age, since both my parents worked, I usually stayed with my grandparents during the school holidays. I was bookish and a bit of a loner—and I was desperate to read things. But my grandparents owned only two books: a Bible and a Methodist hymnbook. From these—to my parents' amusement—I got a taste for poetry and a taste for God. I must have been quite a strange and precocious little boy!

I was always questioning and searching. In my late teens, disillusioned with Christianity, I discovered the Baha'i Faith. It seemed to answer two questions that had been bugging me for years: Why are there different religions? And which religion is the right one? The Baha'i faith said all religions were appropriate for the time and place in which they appeared. It claimed it was the latest chapter in an evolving story of religions—so in fact they were *all* right. But, crucially, the Baha'i faith was the most appropriate for the whole of humankind at this point in its history. I was a Baha'i for ten years, till my late twenties. I was devoted to it.

But in my late twenties I finally faced up to the fact that I was a gay man and simultaneously realized that as a gay man I would never be fully accepted as a Baha'i. I did not have the strength to fight for my acceptance. Something had to give! Very painfully, I put God—and all my beloved religion—on the shelf, and with it my meaningful, purposeful life.

I then spent six years in a relationship I didn't feel fully present in, and six years dancing in nightclubs, trying to forget who I was. We can give ourselves a million "good" reasons to forget who we are and not face up to what is. My reason was a crippling fear and shame connected with being gay. I didn't even feel present in my own body. But it wasn't just the gay thing. Shame, I realized, seemed to run in my family, in its DNA. Even my own mother believed that my being gay was *her* punishment for getting pregnant with me before she was married. So she felt—and still feels—shame too. So much karma. Karma upon karma!

But with no God to forgive me, where was I to go to put all this shame down?

I suppose my spiritual search began again in my late thirties, now happily married to my husband, Robin, when I began practicing a secular form of meditation to combat work stress. Soon I was hungry for more! I knew that meditation should be more than just a fix for my stressful life! I realized I was still hungry for that feeling of belonging and purpose that I'd once known in the Baha'i faith.

And so I began my serious engagement with Buddhism. Zen suited me. Maybe its simplicity reminded me of my grandparents' stark, back-to-basics approach to spirituality. I was drawn to its rigor and discipline, but also to its tradition of poetry (because I'm a poet) and to its long history of crazy maverick teachers! After trying out various traditions of Zen

I finally found myself taking the five precepts with the Kwan Um School of Zen on a snowy day in December 2017, with Zen Master Bon Shim. I was given the name Ji Do, meaning Way of Wisdom. Thank you, Zen Master Bon Shim, for giving me my name, and to Jibul (Peter Voke), my first teacher, at Peak Zen!

So why, after exploring different traditions, did I end up in the Kwan Um School of Zen? There are many reasons. One is that it has a genuinely internationalist vision, unlike some schools I'd encountered, which offered "British" or "American" continuations of Asian lineages. I'm attracted too by its rich variety of practice forms. And, of course, by Zen Master Seung Sahn's uncompromisingly direct and humorous way of teaching! But also by the fact that being a monastic isn't the be-all and end-all—everyone can be themselves, as they are, and fully embrace this tradition in their everyday lives. And the rigor and discipline? It's all there. But it's balanced with lightness and joy.

So there you are. That's how I got to Zen. I took my time, but I got there in the end! I'm like the tortoise who took the long route to the finish line! And now, as I enter my fifties, I know intuitively that I'm home. I know that the Kwan Um School of Zen is where I belong. For years I led parallel lives that never quite fit together; I was not fully present in any of them. But they were all slowly converging on the path I'm on now. I need look no further. I'm here! And it's an inexplicable and beautiful feeling. I'm very grateful!

However, just because I'm "home" doesn't mean I'm resting on my laurels. It doesn't mean that anything is finished, or has been attained. When, during my precepts ceremony, Zen Master Bon Shim asked me what I thought Way of Wisdom meant, I said, "Starting here." And that's how it still feels. Because every day I'm starting here, resetting to zero, trying my best to digest the karma of my life and make it useful to others.

After teaching English to refugees in the United Kingdom for the last twenty-five years, I'm now retraining to be a counselor. My future, especially in these strange times, is unknowable—but my direction is crystal clear. I want to continue to help refugees, and I also want to help those who are struggling with shame and who do not feel present in their life. I want to help people find their home, whatever that might mean for them, and to help them be as present as possible.

Life is always ending, but it's always beginning too!  
Kwan Seum Bosal. ♦

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*Rich Goodson has been practicing with the Kwan Um School of Zen since 2015. He is a published poet and has a PhD in creative writing. He lives in Nottingham, England, where he teaches English and math to refugee and migrant teenagers.*

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