

Kwan Seum Bosal Engine

Il Am Sunim

Probably everyone remembers their first retreat. I was lucky enough to sit my first one with Zen Master Seung Sahn. In a small house on the outskirts of Warsaw, fifty or so people in one room elbow to elbow, knee to knee, sitting together, eating together, and sleeping together. We called it matchbox-style practice.

Try mind. Bread.
And potatoes and onions.
Fifty people eating together
Get energy. Find the true way.
.....
November in Warsaw.
The sky is dark.
Fifty faces are shining.¹

That was my first experience of together practice.

Doing things together was one of the last things I wanted to do, and practice was new. I would say that this retreat was a game changer for me—or maybe even life changer. Years later, during one of the last visits to Poland during a Q&A session at the public meeting, Zen Master



Photo: Musangsa Archive

Seung Sahn said, “Anyone who comes to me and shaves their head to become a monk will get enlightenment.”

Becoming a monk already had been on my radar, but I wasn’t ready yet. *Pabbajjā* in Pali or *chulgha* in Korean means “to go forth,” and it refers to when someone leaves home to practice dharma in a community. But even though we are leaving our physical home, we still carry a lot of stuff, like a backpack.

Man Gong Sunim said that to practice dharma, we need dharma friends, a teacher, a place. Dharma friends are where together action begins. When Zen Master Seung Sahn was asked “What practice is most challenging?” he said “together action.”

In the past, in Korea, when people needed to wash a large number of potatoes, they put them into a big pot, whirling them with a big stick so a lot of dirt could fall off quickly when they rubbed each other. Together practice is like that. On the one side, that is challenging, but, on the other, it supports our practice. And we can quickly and clearly see our karma, our “backpack” that we always carry with us.

In Musangsa Temple, we have winter and summer Kyol Che. In between, there is spring and fall Hae Jae. Kyol Che means “tight dharma,” and Hae Jae means “loose dharma.” That tradition came down to us from Buddha’s time: during the rainy season, monks couldn’t travel, so they would sit and meditate together.

Early February last year, I went to Poland to participate in winter Kyol Che in Falenica near Warsaw. The news emerged that the new virus was already in the air, so I was a little hesitant, but finally I decided to do this. As everyone knows, the coronavirus swept the world, borders were quickly shut down, and planes grounded. Since my Korean visa was about to expire, I called the Korean embassy, and they told me: “Sir, a day after tomorrow there is a plane to Seoul. You can catch it if you want.”

Then I was able to return to Korea. Summer Kyol Che at Musangsa was already running, and after two weeks of quarantine, I was able to enter. It struck me that all of this was happening by itself, without really any effort on my part, like some hidden engine was running the whole situation

Someone later told me, “That was Kwan Seum Bosal.”
Well, maybe it *was*. ♦

Il Am Sunim is from Poland. He began practicing Zen at the Krakow Zen Center in the early 1980s. In 2008 he moved to Korea and began his monastic training at Musangsa Temple. He took bhikkhu ordination in 2012 and is currently a resident at Musangsa

¹ Excerpt from “From a Letter to the Polish Sangha” by Zen Master Seung Sahn in *Bone of Space* (Primary Point Press, 1992).