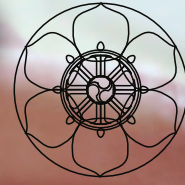
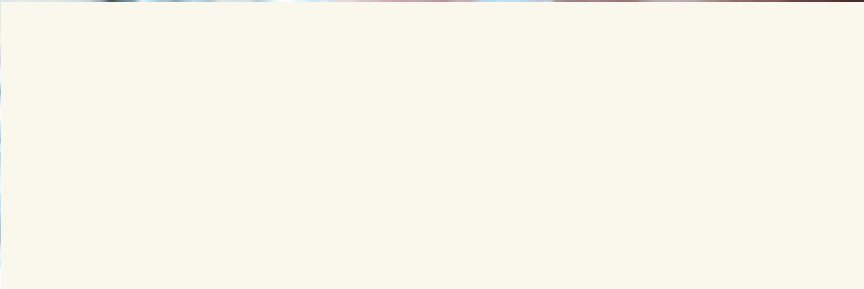


Primary Point



Volume 38 • Number 3 • Fall 2021



PRIMARY POINT®
Kwan Um School of Zen
99 Pound Rd
Cumberland, RI 02864-2726
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MUSANGSA 2021-2022

Kyolche

Winter

NOV 19, 2021 - FEBRUARY 15, 2022

Summer

MAY 15, 2022 - AUGUST 12, 2022

LED BY ZEN MASTER DAE BONG, GUIDING ZEN MASTER
HYE TONG SUNIM JDPS, GUIDING TEACHER
& VISITING TEACHERS FROM THE KWAN UM SCHOOL OF ZEN

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Primary Point
99 Pound Road
Cumberland, RI 02864-2726 U.S.A.
Telephone 401/658-1476
www.kwanumzen.org/primary-point
online archives:

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Published by the Kwan Um School of Zen, a nonprofit religious corporation. The founder, Zen Master Seung Sahn, 78th Patriarch in the Korean Chogye order, was the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. In 1972, after teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, he founded the Kwan Um sangha, which today has affiliated groups around the world. He gave transmission to Zen Masters, and inka (teaching authority) to senior students called Ji Do Poep Sas (dharma masters).

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.

The views expressed in *Primary Point* are not necessarily those of this journal or the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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Founding Teacher
Zen Master Seung Sahn

School Zen Master
Zen Master Soeng Hyang

Editor-in-Chief
Zen Master Jok Um

Editor for Europe
Barbara Pardo JDPSN

Editor for Asia
Bop Yo Sunim

Managing Editor
Tamarind Jordan Stowell

Managing Editor for Europe
Veronique Struis

Books and Culture Editor
Jess Row

Layout and Design
James Gouijn-Stook

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Ben Gleason

Proofreader
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Eugene Lim

Publishing Manager
Paul Majchrzyk JDPSN

IN THIS ISSUE

The Power of Together Action <i>Zen Master Seung Sahn</i>	4
The Original Spirit of Together Action <i>Zen Master Dae Bong</i>	5
Inka Ceremony for Bon Sun Sunim	6

POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

Together Action Is Not Empty Speech <i>Not for Me Zen Master Dae Kwan</i>	9
Don't Check, Just Do It! <i>Francis Lau</i>	9
Mind-to-Mind Transmission <i>Hye Won</i>	10
My Experience of Working Together <i>Ji Duk</i>	10

Behind the Scenes of the Twelfth Whole World Is a Single Flower International Zen Conference

<i>Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple</i>	11
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Separated, Yet Connected

<i>Minh Ngan Tran</i>	14
-----------------------------	----

Power of Dharma

<i>Bon Myong Sunim</i>	15
------------------------------	----

POWER OF SHARING

When Someone Is Hungry, Offer Them Food <i>Grace Bruneel</i>	15
Enough Mind <i>Zen Master Dae Kwan</i>	16

POWER OF PRACTICING TOGETHER

Together Practice Never Stops <i>Hye Tong Sunim JDPS</i>	17
Kwan Seum Bosal Engine <i>Il Am Sunim</i>	19
A Roaming Cow Again <i>Beop Seong Sunim</i>	20
Cicadas Mean Summer, Crickets Mean Autumn <i>Eunjoo Ha</i>	21

WHY DO YOU EAT EVERY DAY?

On Being a Human Being <i>Bo-Mi Choi</i>	22
Eating Is the Most Important <i>Kong Tan, under the guidance of Gye Mun Sunim JDPS</i>	23
Eat? What's the Point? <i>Myong An Sunim JDPS</i>	24
When Tired, Sleep. When Hungry, Eat <i>Andrzej Stec JDPSN</i>	25
Kwan Um School of Zen Centers	28, 29, 30
Membership in the Kwan Um School of Zen—America	31

[3

Cover: Bop Yo Sunim wrote, "Zen Master Dae Kwan led us to wash each other's hands with clean water during the Buddha's Birthday ceremony, to repent for the actions done by body, speech, and mind that intentionally or unintentionally hurt others, allowing us to purify the greed, anger, and ignorance in our minds." Zen Master Dae Kwan comments, "Clear water, clear mind / Bathing Buddha's hand. / Your hands are Buddha, my hands are Buddha. / Let's bathe Buddha hands and make clear life with clear relationship and function." Photo by Francis Lau.

Editor's Note: We would like to thank Kathy Park JDPSN for her generous service to our journal as Asian regional editor. She has stepped down, and Bop Yo Sunim is now in that role. Bop Yo Sunim is from Japan. She started to practice at Mexico City Zen Center in 2007 and later moved to her home temple of Musangsa to begin her monastic training. Currently she lives and practices in Hong Kong under the guidance of Zen Master Dae Kwan. Our current issue is a reflection of Bop Yo Sunim's efforts, for which we are grateful.

The Power of Together Action

Zen Master Seung Sahn

4] We live together and act together. Acting together means cutting off my opinions, cutting off my condition, cutting off my situation. Then we become empty mind. We return to white paper. Then our true opinion, our true condition, our true situation will appear. When we bow together and chant together and eat together, our minds become one mind. It is like on the sea. When the wind comes, there are many waves. When the wind dies down, the waves become smaller. When the wind stops, the water becomes a mirror, in which everything is reflected—mountains, trees, clouds. Our mind is the same. When we have many desires and many opinions, there are many big waves. But after we sit Zen and act together for some time, our opinions and desires disappear. The waves become smaller and smaller. Then our mind is like a clear mirror, and everything we see or hear or smell or taste or touch or think is the truth. Then it is very easy to understand other

people's minds. Their minds are reflected in my mind.

When people do things together, they make some of the same karma together. The Buddha taught when you walk down the street and just brush shoulders with some person, that is because you have made karma with that person for more than five hundred lifetimes. That is very interesting! Imagine how much karma you have made with your parents and brothers and sisters to be born in the same family with them! A man and woman meet and fall in love, or two people meet and become best friends. This is not an accident. It is the result of many, many thousands of lifetimes spent together, doing similar things with one another. Then in this life, their karma with one another connects. They feel like they have always known each other. And this also happens with practicing people. You go to some dharma talk and sit in the room with many people you don't know. You probably wouldn't have anything to do with each other, and no reason to be friends. But all of you have the same interest in hearing the dharma. This is because in previous lives we have all gathered together to hear this teaching. Chinese people have the same general karma together, so in this life some people are reborn Chinese. Korean people shared the same general karma together in Korea, so that is why they are reborn as Korean. The same is true for Americans, Japanese, Germans—any country or group.

Since you share similar karma with certain other people, you can use this karmic affinity to hurt or help them. Nearly everyone is deeply attached to their thinking, so they are attached to their karma. They are completely asleep, and cannot help other people. If you cut off all thinking and all desires, you will wake up. If you keep a thinking mind, however, then, your daily life is a dream. Waking up from this dream is more difficult than waking from an ordinary dream, so you must try very hard. When you wake up, then you can control your karma. With no special effort this helps those around you. So you must wake up! ♦

Note: This article consists of excerpts from *Dropping Ashes on Buddha* (Grove Press, 1994) and *The Compass of Zen* (Shambhala Publications, 1997).



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archive

The Original Spirit of Together Action

Zen Master Dae Bong

Zen Master Seung Sahn used many teaching words to show us the way to practice Zen. What made his teaching so powerful and inspiring is that his speech and his actions were one. He was a living example of someone who was living what he taught.

A student once asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “You often say our practice has two parts, meditation and wisdom. I understand meditation. How do we get wisdom?” The Zen master answered, “Don’t-know mind, together action, and correct kong-an practice.”

Together action! One of his favorite teachings was together action. Is that even a normal English phrase?

The Zen master’s early American students used to say

other as possible. Dae Soen Sa Nim was on the US West Coast at the time. When he returned to Providence and saw how his students were living, he said, “Eating together is more important than practicing together.” That is, living a human life together, doing things that we all do every day.

In October 1977, Linc Rhodes and George Bowman, two of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s senior students, decided to work together. They formed a small construction company and asked me to join. Our idea was to be able to control our work schedule so we could take time off to sit three-day retreats every month and seven-day retreats at the Zen center three times a year, whenever Dae Soen Sa Nim visited Providence Zen Center. At one point we were given a job painting the outside of one of eight houses a builder was building. This company had its own carpenters, but they hired other companies like ours to paint, install the electricity and plumbing, do the concrete work, and so on. Linc suggested we follow our Zen master’s teaching and do together action with the company that hired us—start work, take lunch breaks, and end work at the same times they did.

We did that and soon they liked us very much. We all ate lunch together every day. They joked with us about our living in a Zen center and about our being vegetarian. But they gave us all eight houses to paint, which was work for over a year. And they let us take off time whenever we wanted. Together action.

This is how we make connections with others, appreciate others, and learn how to live well with others.

The big hindrances for humans nowadays are our opinions, our greed, hatred, and ignorance. Today people only make friends with others who think the same and have the same opinions, whether they are religious, political, or economic, and so on. But when we act together with others with a don’t-know mind, we have to put down our opinions, our condition, our situation. Then we can begin to understand ourselves and others more clearly and appreciate that they are also human. We can see what causes suffering, and our empathy, compassion, and wisdom can grow. And the natural human connections between people grow.

These days it is evident to everyone that human beings cannot live harmoniously with others. We cannot even live harmoniously with our natural environment to the point that, not only are countless beings suffering, but we ourselves may not be able to survive as a species. But we can always learn how to live with and connect with others, if we try.

By the way, these days how is together action going with your own eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind?

Try, try, try- ◆



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archive

of him, only half-joking, “One of the worst things he did to us is together action.” We all know that doing things together with others can be annoying and difficult. Yet this is one of the greatest and most far-reaching teachings.

Together action doesn’t mean only bowing, sitting, chanting, eating, and working together in the Zen center and on retreats. It means all the time. When you are with family, when you are at work, when you go shopping or to restaurants, when you are driving on the roads, when you are flying in airplanes. Our whole life is together action with others and with nature. Every moment is an opportunity to understand ourselves and others better and to get wisdom. And yet we often don’t like it or do it unskillfully, creating suffering for ourselves and others.

I heard that when the first eight Zen students who were living with Zen Master Seung Sahn in Providence moved into an old building the group had bought, they all headed to the corners of the building to get as far away from each

INKA CEREMONY FOR

Bon Sun Sunim

On March 6, 2021 Bon Sun Sunim received inka at Su Bong Zen Monastery, Hong Kong

DHARMA COMBAT

Lizzie Coombs JDPSN: Thank you very much for being here and answering questions. There is something I don't understand. Each one of us already has it. So why is teaching necessary? Can you help me?

Bon Sun Sunim: You already understand!

Coombs PSN: Please teach me.

BSSN: For all beings.

Coombs PSN: Oh, for all beings. Thank you for your teaching, Sunim!

BSSN: Thank you.



Knud Rosenmayr JDPSN: Thank you for doing this. I have a question. I have been reading about trees lately. I wonder if you could help me with one question. Why do trees grow from the ground to the sky?

Bon Sun Sunim: You already understand!

Rosenmayr PSN: Oh, I ask you.

BSSN: Why don't you go and ask the tree?

Rosenmayr PSN: Oh, very strong dharma tree. Thank you for your teaching!

6]



Question: Congratulations, Sunim! My mom (Ding Ding) is so happy today.

Bon Sun Sunim: Hello, how are you Ding Ding and Arnold?

Q: Ding Ding is so happy to see you here, but she has forgotten who you are. How can I help her to remember you?

BSSN: Don't you understand?

Q: She really forgot, please teach me.

BSSN: Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal. Let's chant Kwan Seum Bosal together.

Q: Ah, good! She still remembers how to chant Kwan Seum Bosal. Thank you!

INKA SPEECH

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

The master is the guest, the guest is the master.

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

There is no master, and no guest.

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

The master is the master, the guest is the guest.

Three statements—which one is correct?

KATZ!

Welcome to the inka ceremony held on Zoom by Su Bong Zen Monastery. Thank you to all the respectable teachers and all the guests for joining today's ceremony.

A long time ago during the Tang Dynasty in China, when Zen Master Joju was an eighteen-year-old novice monk, he went to visit Zen Master Nam Cheon. On that day, Zen Master Nam Cheon received this guest while he was lying on his bed. When he saw this little novice monk, he asked Joju, "Where did you come from?"

Joju said, "From Auspicious Form Monastery."

Nam Cheon asked, "Did you see an auspicious form?"

Joju replied, "I didn't see an auspicious form. I only see a lying Buddha."

Nam Cheon right away sat up from his bed and asked, "Are you a novice with a master or a novice without a master?"



Photo: Su Bong Zen Monastery

Joju replied, “I am a novice with a master.”

Nam Cheon asked again, “Who is your master?”

Joju moved closer, leaned in close, and said, “The winter is cold, dear old master, please take good care, and I wish you good health.”

After that, Joju practiced with his teacher, Zen Master Nam Cheon, for many years.

I remember when I was a primary school student, I didn't know what to do whenever the teachers asked me to write an essay about my ambitions. I had nothing to write. I never thought of becoming a doctor, a nurse, a policewoman, a schoolteacher, or an accountant like my classmates. One time, I saw some sunflowers grown by my mom blooming behind our house. The flowers were bigger than my face, and the trees were taller than my height. Every morning, the flowers were facing east; every afternoon they faced the middle, and every evening facing west. They were so amazing, Sunflowers understand their direction, and they know what they want to do every day!

What about me? I don't know what to do with my life! Why do I sleep? Why do I eat every day? Later I read some book in the library, and it says that sunflowers understand their master, and their whole life they only follow the sun. That is the mission of their life.

In my early twenties, I started to practice at the Zen center in Singapore, Kwan Yin Chan Lin. Right away, I felt connected with Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching. And later, in November 1999, I went to Hwa Gye Sa Temple in Korea for a three-month winter Kyol Che. During the free time while on retreat, I hung around with the haengja-nims and asked them many questions. When the Kyol Che finished, I suddenly had an ambition to become a haengja, and for my whole life to support everyone in their practice.

During those years, I also saw my mom suffer from heavy sickness. I saw how she struggled in the hospital bed before she passed away. It was such a painful experience that I couldn't help her in the face of death, even though at that moment, I was sitting right beside her.

In 2002, I went back to Korea again to join a three-month summer Kyol Che in Musangsa Temple. Inside my mind, I wondered how I can help my parents. The next person to face death will be my elderly father. During that retreat, I completely kept silence, spending all my free time with extra practice and my mantra until at some point, the mantra just kept rolling day and night, day and night, turning my body in bed: Ji Jang Bosal, Ji Jang Bosal . . . In the middle of all the dreams, Ji Jang Bosal just appeared and continued. In the morning before I opened my eyes, I heard from inside Ji Jang Bosal. And I don't know for how many days this situation continued.

One day during a sitting session, while continuing Ji Jang Bosal, I felt a little tired and not clear, so inside I reminded myself, “Keep clear! Who is chanting!?” And suddenly I was so shocked, I couldn't breathe! At the same

time that I was asking this question, inside there was another person chanting who was so clear and calm! Who was that? Which was my true master? The one who was chanting? Or the one who was asking? Inside was there one or two? What was this? Who am I? All these questions just gushed out from deep inside. I was completely shocked and stuck!

As the retreat continued, after some time, thinking appeared, and I couldn't keep my Ji Jang Bosal mantra consistently anymore. I was so disappointed. Then I tried to chant the mantra again and concentrate, intending to catch the moment when thinking arose or when the mantra stopped. After making a strong effort and failing many times, I became impatient. Finally I was so mad, and a really strong question from inside appeared. “Is it that the mantra stops first or that thinking arises first?” And suddenly everything disappeared for some moment; the master and the guest all disappeared. Only, the floor is yellow. It can't even be described, because even language disappeared, and thinking couldn't function without language.

This very first experience of Kyol Che completely changed my life. All the time I was looking outside for the answer of my life—from school, from the library, from wiser people—but eventually the true question and answer were already inside. When we come back to the land of before thinking, the truth is just in front of us. The truth becomes clear; our life becomes clear; our karma also becomes clear. The only thing is how do we use the truth, our life, and karma to help others.

Later I became a haengja and then a monastic. I was

[7



Photo: Su Bong Zen Monastery



Photo: Su Bong Zen Monastery

8]

so lucky to become Zen Master Dae Kwan's student. By living together with her all these years, my practicing life has been nourished by her teaching every day, from her speech, her actions, the way she lives her life, and the way she helps others.

I remember the time we were facing the big crisis of almost losing our temple on Lantau Island. When the situation came and we needed to talk with the government, and possibly even get involved with a court case, some people tried to discourage her from continuing to make an effort; some people blamed her, and some people even threatened her. One day when we were talking together, I said to her, "Sifu, your situation at this moment is the same as the man up on the tree hanging from a branch by his teeth! Open your mouth, you are dead. Close your mouth, you didn't do your job as a monastic to protect the temple." When the crisis temporarily came to an end, I could see that her answer to this kong-an was, "Correct!"

Whenever any job or crisis appears, she seldom considers herself; she never treats that as a problem or burden. She only keeps a positive mind full of passion to solve the problem. In fact, in the most heated moment, she could just say sorry to those who misunderstood her and those who scolded her in public. She could kneel down and bow to the student who blamed her. That was a really big teaching in my life!

In the Tang Dynasty, when Zen Master Joju was old, a visiting monk came to ask, "For a long time I have heard of the stone bridge of Joju, but now that I've come here, I just see a log bridge."

Joju said, "You just see the log bridge, but you don't see the stone bridge."

The monk asked, "What is the stone bridge?"

Joju replied, "Asses cross, horses cross."

Joju's bridge, generation after generation, only helps people to cross from this shore to the other shore of wisdom.

Thank you, Sifu, for your teaching. You are like Joju's bridge for all the students on this practicing path! I learned so much from your life!

Also I would like to thank Zen Master So-eng Hyang and Zen Master Dae Kwang for your teaching and for always giving me lots of encouragement. Thank you Zen Master Dae Bong and the late Zen Master Dae Jin for your great teachings and for building Musangsa for us to do Kyol Che all these years. Thank you Zen Master Hyon Ja, thank you Barry JDPSN, thank you Knud JDPSN, for your teachings of the kong-an practice. Thank you to all the dharma sisters in Su Bong Zen Monastery for practicing and working together for many years, thank you for your encouragement and tolerance.

And lastly I would like to thank Gye Mun Sunim JDPS from Singapore. Without his effort to make a Zen center in Singapore, I might not have had the chance to practice Zen and become a monastic in this lifetime. Thank you very much for your teaching!

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

When we come back to before thinking, the sky is blue, the floor is brown.

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

When you are able to see clearly, what do you bring for going out on a rainy day? What would you do when leaves fall on the floor in front of Gak Su Temple?

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

Spring sun shining on Gak Su Temple,
Green sprouts and flowers blooming everywhere
Butterflies and bees are busy working
Sprouts, flowers, butterflies, and bees never look for
spring

They understand that they are spring
What is our obligation in this season?
Just do it! Just do it!

春日照耀覺修寺,
綠芽花兒在盛放,
蜜蜂蝴蝶採蜜忙,
花兒和蜂蝶不會去尋找春天,
他們明白自己就是春天
什麼是我們在這個季節的職責?
只是去做!只是去做!

Thank you to all the teachers, Zoom working team, and all the participants today. After the ceremony, please stay for dinner.

Thank you to all the guests on Zoom for joining this ceremony. Let's have tea when we meet. ◆

Together Action Is Not Empty Speech

Not for Me

Zen Master Dae Kwan

In Hong Kong, we have an annual 1,000-People Meditation Event. It started about six years ago, when Hong Kong began to go through some turbulent times and people's minds were unsettled. Venerable Chang Lin, together with *Buddhist Compassion Magazine* and the Centre for Spiritual Progress to Great Awakening, joined together and created this event. The intention was to help people with no meditation experience to start practicing, calm their minds, and see how meditation could transform their lives.

Venerable Chang Lin invited several Buddhist temples, including Su Bong Zen Monastery, Plum Village, and the Tergar Meditation Centre. Each temple would share some practices and guide participants to take a pause, go back to their breathing, and experience meditation together. And to encourage participants to continue their practice at home, each participant was given a set of sitting cushions as a souvenir.

The first year's response was overwhelming. To join the event, people needed to buy their tickets online, and all tickets were sold out in the first three hours. With such an encouraging response, 1,000-People Meditation soon became an annual event. Later on, two more temples joined—Awareness Spiritual Growth Centre and Tung Lin Kok Yuen.

It is a three-day event, and was held in different venues for the first four years. For the past two years the event has been held through Zoom because of COVID. The response was very good, with more than ten thousand cumulative viewers.

It is wonderful that temples of different traditions join hands and do together action. More than a hundred vol-

unteers offered their hard work and loving support. The following are some sharings from our students who have supported this event as volunteers.

Don't Check, Just Do It! That Is the Miracle

Francis Lau

I had the precious opportunity of joining the 1,000-People Meditation in the recent years, and the experience was invaluable.

Organized through the collaboration of different Buddhist temples of various traditions, the annual event attracted more than a thousand participants every year. In the first year, Su Bong Zen Monastery was responsible for the venue. It had to organize all volunteers coming from different backgrounds, and to place a thousand cushions within an hour and a half. All the cushions were to be placed neatly in straight lines and rows in a space the size of twelve standard basketball fields. All the sudden changes and challenges encountered were totally a test to our practice on the cushion.

There was one episode to share: One morning, the admission time was supposed to be 10:00 a.m. At 9:00, while I was feeling relieved that the last row of cushions had just been perfectly set, suddenly there was an announcement onstage. There was a space problem with the stage, and all thousand cushions needed to be moved backward by about ten feet. All the volunteers' jaws dropped. How could that be possible? There were only thirty minutes left, and everyone was exhausted! It seemed to be an impossible task, unless some miracle happened.

And a miracle did happen! All the volunteers put down their work and gathered together. We all stood behind the last row of cushions, ready for instructions coming from the sunim onstage. Through the loudspeaker, Sunim gave us the rhythm. More than a hundred volunteers bent down, took up the cushions and, "1, 2, 3, step back," then "1, 2, 3, step back," and "1, 2, 3, step back . . ." It was just like planting rice seedlings! Within twenty minutes, all thousand cushions were moved to their new positions, smoothly and neatly. It was a truly touching moment. Everyone was overjoyed with the miracle!

Coming from different temples and all walks of life, the volunteers were just strangers with

Photo: Su Bong Zen Monastery Archive



different skill sets. Yet in front of challenges, they put down their I-mine-me, and did together action without any chaos or complaints. There is only one mind—serving others! Everyone became master of “don’t check, don’t hold, put it all down, and just do it!”

Francis Lau, volunteer at the Su Bong Zen Monastery, assists with graphic design, photography and video production. In 2002 he began practicing Zen meditation at Su Bong Zen Monastery and received five precepts. He went on to receive ten precepts in 2016.

Mind-to-Mind Transmission

Hye Won

Working with other Buddhist centers’ volunteers during the four-day 1,000-People Meditation in early June 2021 was an amazing experience.

On the first day, I was assigned to the live-streaming desk. The person in charge wanted me to play some slides and was showing me how to do it. I thought, “Well, this is very simple.” I could notice my pride-mind talking. Ultimately the job turned out to be not so simple due to my fatigue and cloudy mind, so I turned down the job politely.

Another time, other teams were discussing how to give a smooth video cue to the control room. Though we were on different teams, they seemed to have included us. We listened to each other, exchanged ideas and came to a solution together. The teams’ actions showed what listening really means. Listening to others does not only mean following instructions, but also listening to what people really need. When I went back to the venue the next day, I realized I could not be indifferent anymore. I was touched by the teams’ inclusiveness, warm-hearted culture, and open mind.

When one has “don’t-know” and “how can I help” mind, one will be clear about what is correct situation, correct relationship, and correct function—not over-helping or providing any help not needed. The next day, other teams were asked to arrange devices for a monastic while they were busy. Something interesting happened. I just went to them naturally and helped with the cabling. Then, they needed someone to fill up some cushions, and I sat down on a cushion and started working on that. They guided me with actions, and we just enjoyed filling up cushions together!

Though we had been strangers two days ago, we had by now built up a strong bond and trust. In a video streaming session, a volunteer stepped out from the control room. The bond was so strong that I already understood why she came out. When we looked at each other, I took away my mask and whispered “video delay.” She smiled and nodded her head. She came out again after thirty seconds. Then, I showed her a thumbs-up with another

hand pointing to my ear implying the video and audio were normal. She wore a warm smile and went back to the room. It was like a mind-to-mind transmission!

This experience showed me that with practice, all teams, despite being from different Buddhist centers, had become one! The moment when the live streaming finally completed, everyone cheered, jumped up, and high-fived. We felt grateful and looked forward to sharing our together sweats and laughter again soon!

Hye Won first found Su Bong Zen Monastery via Google in 2010 after returning to Hong Kong from overseas and was looking for a place with air-conditioning and fun, free activities to settle her mind. She started practicing at the monastery one year later. She took five precepts in 2012 and continued her practice until now. In 2020, she took ten precepts at Su Bong Zen Monastery.

My Experience of Working Together

Ji Duk

For me, I’m glad to be working in the Zen center. Although I don’t know much about the work of technical support, I am blessed to have two good team members, Francis and Monica. They both taught me and helped me a lot. All jobs given to me are fresh and interesting, and I always follow my teammates’ guidelines and instructions. I hope I can help and support them.

I am happy to be one of the volunteers in this year’s 1,000-People Meditation. As always, I tried to cooperate and work with everyone. We would discuss the whole process first and do rehearsals. When problems appeared, everyone would give advice and work together to solve them.

What worried me the most was the live streaming of the Zen center on the last day. Less than ninety minutes before the streaming was to start, I needed to explain to Sifu a whole new way for her to see her own notes during the talk. I was nervous and worried that there was not enough time to make all the arrangements. When I walked into the room and tried to explain to Sifu, she reminded me not to panic and to focus on my breathing. This helped me to pause and return to the present moment. Slowly I become less nervous. With Sifu’s permission, I left the room and started to organize the new arrangement and related cables with the help of other volunteers. At that time, I had forgotten to be nervous; I just did it without much thinking and totally focused on the event. ♦

Ji Duk first met Zen Master Dae Kwan in March 2019. At that time, she took the opportunity to ask questions about sitting meditation. A week later, she joined the introduction to Zen meditation class and afterward started practicing at Su Bong Zen Monastery. In 2020, she took five precepts and began work as a volunteer.

Behind the Scenes of the Twelfth Whole World Is a Single Flower International Zen Conference

Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple

Already one year has passed since the conference was held. It was held in such a smooth manner despite its shift to an online platform during the preparatory process. Primary Point sent a set of questions for the organizers to reflect on. We asked them to reflect especially on the power of working together during the process—because without people coming together and working together, it would have been difficult to manage such a big event. Five organizing members had a Zoom meeting to reflect on the questions.

Question: The Whole World Is a Single Flower 2020 was the first WWSF conference that was held online. How many people joined the conference? Where were they from?

Do Hwa Sunim, chief coordinator: After two-and-a-half years of preparation and promotion, the conference attracted the attention of Zen practitioners from more than twenty-five countries. The number of registrants for the conference was more than a thousand, and the average number of attendees was 680 for every session.

Q: What do you consider to be the best gift you received from organizing the conference online?

Chuan Wen Sunim JDPS, guiding teacher: Our technical team has gained much experience from hosting WWSF 2020 online, and that gave us confidence in conducting other events online. After WWSF 2020, members of the technical team have stayed committed to supporting other online programs of the temple, and have become a

great pool of expertise for the temple. We have even received requests from other local Buddhist organizations for advice and support in holding and hosting events through an online platform. We are very happy to help them.

Also, the online conference allowed people to transcend geographical boundaries. We welcomed not only local participants but also many from China, Taiwan, and Singapore. Of course, members of the Kwan Um School of Zen (KUSZ) from places such as Korea, the United States, and Europe joined also. There were also participants who did not know about the Kwan Um School. They had the opportunity to learn about the school's teachings for the first time.

Looi Wei Li, head of the conference program subcommittee: We can now connect with Zen practitioners all around the world, even with people from some countries who are restricted from entering Malaysia. The switch to having the conference online has helped us to realize our vow to spread the spirit of the Whole World Is a Single Flower to every corner of the world.

Q: Could you share the participants' feedback about the conference?

Chuan Wen Sunim: A nun from Taiwan told me that the answers and sharing by Tim Lerch JDPSN were full of Zen. An example she quoted was during the Q&A when a participant asked, "What do you mean by the receiving culture?" Tim replied, "I have received your question." She

[11

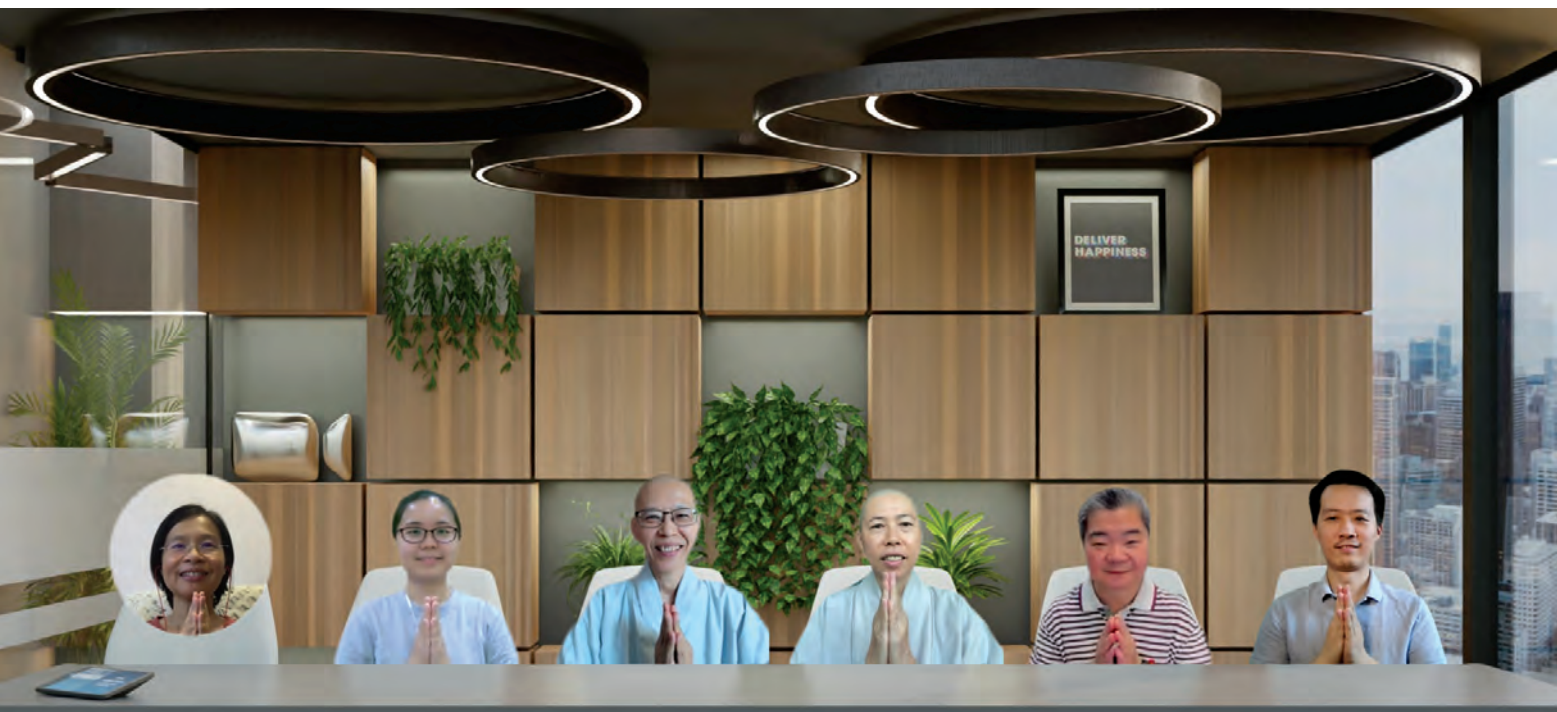


Photo: Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple

said at that moment she truly tasted what Zen was.

Another participant observed during our teachers' talks that Zen practice was intrinsic in their lives—Zen is in everyday living, and everyday living is Zen. He realized that the teachers were not imparting knowledge, but rather they were sharing the experience of their practice.

This conference helped many people understand and have confidence in the teachings of the Kwan Um School, which was one of the objectives of the conference. After the conference ended in October 2020, I started a Zen meditation class for beginners, which now has about sixty participants. Most of them applied to join after their experience with the conference.

Looi Wei Li: We have also received much positive feedback from the organizing committees and volunteers. They were impressed with the simplicity and practicality of the Zen teachings shared by our teachers, as well as the smooth running of the events.

Q: We would love to hear about your journey in organizing the conference. Do Hwa Sunim mentioned you took two-and-a-half years to prepare and promote the conference. What did you do? And more important, how did you do it? How many people were involved in the preparation?

12] Do Hwa Sunim: When we received the decision from the Kwan Um School that Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple would host the conference, we made it a long-term project. It included a fundraising “piggy bank” project, which was launched as the first program of a series. In 2018, we focused on the introduction of Zen teachings and the conference itself. And in 2019, the emphasis was to further increase the public awareness and appreciation of our school's teachings. We organized a number of activities: volunteer's camp, workshop, kido, and dharma talks with our school's teachers.

Ng Siau Sun, secretary: The initial organizing committee consisted of thirteen subcommittees and eighteen

committee members. We were all so excited to host—but alas! COVID-19 hit.

Soon afterward, the organizing committee decided to apply to have the conference online, and it was approved by the school. We regrouped quickly. Naturally, many of the subcommittees were replaced by a big online conference tech team, which consisted mostly of younger committee members. Under the guidance of Chuan Wen Sunim, Do Hwa Sunim, and the organizing chairperson, Datuk Lim Kee Ling, the tech team put in a great effort to make the online conference a reality.

Looi Wei Li: The tech team was formed in June 2020, three months before the online conference, with fifteen members. In the three months of preparation, we explored many platforms for online events and finally decided on using Zoom. We provided technical advice on the event flow, arranged the workforce and planned the execution. Our weekly online live events served as an ideal training ground for the online conference tech team.

Many people may be surprised to know that there were about forty-five volunteers on duty during every session of the online conference, including people in charge of hosting, screen sharing, recording, the chat room, the Q&A admin, timekeeper, technical support for participants, and local and international interpreters. It took good planning and clear instructions from the head of the tech team, plus much cooperation and commitment from the volunteers, to make this online conference a success. This is the power of together action and the beauty of the practice.

Q: What were the difficulties that you encountered along the way? How did you overcome those obstacles?

Lim Kee Leng, organizing chairperson: We were fortunate that we did not encounter many difficulties in terms of interaction or communication. I attribute this to the frequent reminders by Chuan Wen Sunim of the spirit of “just do it” and the mindset of “we are all dharma protectors, so count me in!” The global COVID-19 pandemic posed the first real challenge we faced in organiz-



Photo: Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple



Photo: Hoeh Beng Buddhist Temple

ing the conference. We had to make a decision to cancel the in-person conference in March 2020. Luckily, we had confidence to move the conference to online only, because we already had experience holding online programs.

Ng Siau Sun: We had a team of interpreters who had started to train for the online conference three months in advance, but the rest of the interpreters had joined more recently. At a rehearsal less than two weeks before the conference, Chuan Wen Sunim requested that the new interpreters be reassigned to interpret only for the emcee and moderators. She observed that these interpreters were not ready to interpret for the main speakers, and more experienced interpreters should take over for the benefit of those who understood only Mandarin. This change caused unhappiness among the interpreters. And as the team leader I felt particularly bad, because I had disappointed those members who were replaced. But the objective of our team was clear: to benefit the participants from the teachings of the speakers. When we were reminded of the objective, we put aside our disappointment and unhappiness and did our part to support those who were on duty.

Q: Is there something you have learned from this experience that you would like to share with us? Are there changes in your life or practice after the conference?

Ng Siau Sun: I see that Zen practitioners, even guiding teachers and Zen masters, differ in upbringing, cultures, personalities, interests, and preferences, but we see that we are one when we put down the differences and work toward the same objective. It has reminded me that whomever I work with, we are a single flower. I accept that we are different, but I don't see the differences as conflicts.

Loui Wei Li: I got to meet and learn from many teachers who shared their different experiences and unique teaching styles. But all experiences shared and teaching styles point to the same thing – don't know. This is the best illustration of the Whole World Is a Single Flower. I see the faith, dedication and a heart of "How may I help you?" in all the teachers. I see the light of true freedom and happiness shining from within them. Moment to moment, how may I help you?

Lim Kee Leng: For me, the most beneficial thing I attained is greater insight into the teachings of the Kwan Um School—most notably through the various sharings and teachings of Zen masters, Ji Do Poep Sas, and speakers throughout the conference, especially on how to apply Zen in everyday life, and also in addressing the current global issues. It has inspired me to be more diligent in my Zen practice.

Do Hwa Sunim: Through this conference, I have had the opportunity to frequently and closely interact with teachers and other sangha members from the Kwan Um School. It has helped me to gain an in-depth understanding and appreciation of together action. Just like the Whole World Is a Single Flower, we are indeed one.

Q: Could you please give some words to conclude?

Chuan Wen Sunim: This end is another beginning. We are most grateful to the Kwan Um School of Zen for giving us the opportunity and providing us full support in hosting the conference. It was an opportunity for us to experience the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn: together action; putting down our own ideas; situations, and opinions; only go straight with a clear direction; and just do it. ♦

Separated, Yet Connected

Minh Ngan Tran

COVID-19—an invisible virus that brought our world to a halt.

In Hong Kong, when Myong Hae Sunim JDPS, our beloved second guiding teacher, died suddenly in Lithuania last August, the pandemic prevented our shaken sangha from gathering in person to support one another. Our astute Sifu immediately told us to convene on Zoom every night from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. to practice together and chant Ji Jang Bosal for forty-nine days straight. Our global sangha joined us, especially our dearest dharma brothers and sisters in Lithuania.

Every night, on the way home from work, at dinner, on my evening runs, I listened to the chanting and appreciated especially all the sharing at the end. Sifu called on different people she saw on the screen and asked them to say something. Before we logged off each night, Sifu reminded us to smile as we waved our greetings to Myong Hae Sunim's mom in Lithuania.

Following Chinese Buddhist traditions, we held a special memorial ceremony every seventh day for seven Saturdays—still all on Zoom. Every Saturday morning, I was so happy to go buy fresh flowers for the virtual memorial. It gave me so much joy to be able to honor our dear teacher with this shared love of flowers—Myong Hae Sunim always enjoyed tending to gardens wherever she went.

Most nights I was alone, but every night I was happy to see and hear everyone on Zoom. By then our Zen center had been closed for more than half a year, and we had been Zooming all along. I was grateful that our teachers, sunims, and sangha members around the world had adapted to practicing together online so quickly. This constant virtual support and together practice have helped many of us through the trials and tribulations of life amid COVID-19.

Another source of dharma joy and connection for me has been a virtual study group that came together spontaneously more than a year ago. Hungry for more sangha time, a small group of us has gotten together every Thursday on Zoom to discuss an appointed chapter from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. We begin with the content of a given chapter, but that content is just the springboard for wider and freewheeling conversations about our individual and collective experiences with the practice. We discuss our struggles and triumphs with kong-an interviews; we recall favorite encounters and exchanges with different teachers; we share how we've used the practice in our daily life, from fights with loved ones to difficult colleagues at work. All the while we laugh and encourage each other to return to this beautiful training of putting it all down,

removing our ego, and gaining greater clarity in each moment so that we can be more useful to those around us and this world.

What underpins these conversations is our shared passion for the practice and our loving friendship built from more than a decade of practicing together. Gathering with these dharma friends in this manner has revitalized my practice and reinforced my commitment to this path. No matter how busy I am at work, for more than sixty weeks already I look forward to every Thursday night for our *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* study group.

This invisible virus is like our karma. We cannot see it, but it's always there and controlling us when we are not clear. How can we use our karma to benefit others? I am grateful that this pandemic has brought together our global sangha in the most unexpected ways, from solemn events of memorials



and funerals to celebratory events of inka and transmission ceremonies. My sincere thanks from the bottom of my heart to all of you who have taken the time to click on a Zoom link so that we can connect and practice together.

May we continue to keep the strongest don't-know mind in these uncertain times. May we continue to help one another to stay on the path. Wherever you are, know that your dharma brothers and sisters are here for you. ♦

Minh Ngan Tran was born and raised in the Chinese Mahayana tradition. He encountered the Kwan Um School of Zen as a student at Yale University in 2005 and has practiced with the school ever since. He relocated to Hong Kong in 2011 and took five precepts in 2012 and ten precepts in 2014 at Su Bong Zen Monastery under the guidance of Zen Master Dae Kwan.

14]

Power of Dharma

Bon Myong Sunim

Sifu teaches us that the direction of creating an event is to have harmony, communication, and to put down our ideas to make the event a success with a happy ending. In the temple rules, it says humans have two kinds of jobs. First is one's inside job, which is to keep clear mind. Second is one's outside job, which is to cut off all desires and help others. In my experience, if I do the inside job well, the outside job will be done well too.

In the temple, the resident nuns would take up different roles and responsibilities. For example, we have the dharma room sunim, the kitchen master, the housemaster, the teacher's attendant, and so on. When there is an event, all sunims and lay volunteers would come together to make the event. Usually, this is the time to test my practice. I am not a very organized person and am not in the habit of writing down all the work flow and arrangements before the event. Sometimes, because of unclear communication, misunderstandings happen and create problems for others. In the end, these problems come back to me. Cause and effect is always clear. So, I started to reflect on how I can use dharma to transform my weakness, put down my opinion, open up to learning new things, and transform my karma.

One time, the sunims and volunteers were setting up the altar, preparing for an event with a timeline. An emergency happened: a toilet pipe burst! As the housemaster was not

around, I needed to find someone to come fix the problem right away. If I just walked away without communicating clearly, I would have created frustration in others, who in return would say something about Bon Myong leaving the scene without any word. And upon hearing their speech, I would feel unhappy, and negative emotions would appear.

I remember Sifu always teaches that whenever any situation appears, first I should remind myself not to be so impulsive. So I paused, used my in-breath and out-breath to calm myself. Then I could see clearly, hear clearly, and with a clear mind, I said to the volunteers, "Please continue this work. There's an emergency in the temple that I need to take care of. Once I'm done, I will be back and work with you again." I finished by explaining clearly the rest of the tasks. The volunteers felt assured and at ease.

I am happy that I could use dharma to help transform my emotions into harmony, manage the whole situation, get us into a win-win situation, and have a happy ending. This is the power of working together and the power of dharma. ♦

Bon Myong Sunim became a haengja in 2002 at Su Bong Zen Monastery. She took novice precepts in 2003 and bhikkhuni precepts in 2008. She has been living and practicing at Su Bong Zen Monastery since then.

[15

POWER OF SHARING

When Someone Is Hungry, Offer Them Food

Grace Bruneel

COVID-19 has brought about many big changes in everyone's life. With the widespread loss of jobs, new groups of people are joining the poverty line. In 2021, Su Bong Zen Monastery raised some funds and worked with different organizations to distribute vegetarian lunchboxes and daily necessities to the needy. More than eleven times, Zen Master Dae Kwan, together with the sunims and volunteers, distributed more than 8,500 lunchboxes to the elderly, the poor, and the homeless.

In the past, recipients of lunchboxes were usually elderly, but now we are seeing more and more young families, in which both parents suddenly lost their jobs, coming to receive lunchboxes. We are grateful to the organizations who responded creatively and with sensitivity, so that these activities could still go on in the worst of times. One of the organizations, Food Angel, even introduced lunchbox vending machines, which work with QR codes. In this way, families can get their lunchboxes safely simply by scanning QR codes with their phones.

The last distribution was done in memory of Myong Hae Sunim. The organization announced there would be lunchbox distribution together with bags of rice and other gifts from Su Bong Zen Monastery. As past experience had shown its popularity, we expected about two hundred people. We ordered 230 boxes so that there would be some left over. Still, 260 people turned up, and we were short by thirty lunchboxes. We had to solve this situation on the spot, because we wanted to make everybody happy. After some discussion, finally wisdom appeared, and the problem was solved. The last thirty sets of lunchboxes and gifts were divided into sixty portions. The last sixty people each got a little bit less, but all got lots of happiness! ♦

Grace Bruneel started to visit Su Bong Zen Monastery in the 1990s and started practicing in 2000. In 2002, she took five precepts, and in 2012 she took ten precepts. She's been practicing under the guidance of Zen Master Dae Kwan and helping the Zen center with translation.

Enough Mind

Zen Master Dae Kwan

Zen Master Dae Jin once told me that when Zen Master Seung Sahn was invited to lead a retreat and give a dharma talk at a temple in Taiwan, Zen Master Seung Sahn discovered during a break that his monk's bag was stolen. At the end of the dharma talk, the abbot made an announcement to the audience about what had happened. Many people felt sad and ashamed. How could someone do this to a visiting Zen master? Immediately they started collecting money for our teacher. But he said to everyone: "Since the money was lost, that's my karma—let it be. All of the money that has been collected should be donated back to the temple."

This is Zen Master Seung Sahn's great teaching of the power of enough mind. He would accept his misfortune without taking advantage of his karma.

Enough mind is one of our important Zen teachings. If we have enough mind, then we will not chase after our desire, greed, and illusory thinking. Enough mind helps us to become clear and keeps us from being hooked by any outside situation. When we are clear and have enough mind, it will be natural for us to share whatever is needed by others. There is no ego involved. There is no such idea or concept that "I" am helping "you."

I was fortunate to witness and study with Zen Master Seung Sahn during the last ten years of his life. I learned directly from him what is enough mind. There were many ways that he demonstrated the nature of being enough, and he taught us with his actions. He was always willing to share his dharma to those who were willing to learn. He'd shout at those who were stubborn and thick-skinned to wake them up. I always enjoyed listening to his kimchi English on how understanding cannot help you! One more step is necessary to make correct life with great love and great compassion, and then help save others from suffering.

He always had a special place in his heart for those who were in a lower position, such as those who worked in the kitchen and those who used their labor to make a living. He always shared with them a big smile and some money or presents that he brought from Korea or other travels. Wherever he stayed in any hotel, he always put some money on the pillow for the housekeeping staff. Whoever gave him service, he would reward them with a present. Not only that, but he also respected those who were senior to him, bowing to them and covering them with a shawl when they were cold. When one of our students, an old illiterate woman, lost her son, he held her hand and chanted Kwan Seum Bosal with her. He told her that our physical body has life and death, but when you chant Kwan Seum Bosal, that mind has no life or death. If you

focus on that, your son is always with you. Such wonderful dharma, which was so human and which saved a suffering mother!

Another time when we were in Sri Lanka traveling to give talks, some Korean sunims came to join his dharma talks. After the talks, Zen Master Seung Sahn invited them to meals and gave each of them three hundred dollars. All the sunims were touched by his kind offering. He told me that they lived abroad, so they needed money. When students gave Zen Master Seung Sahn money, he would use the money to help others, buy Buddha statues, build Zen centers, and give less fortunate students air tickets to travel to retreats or just to travel together with him so that they could broaden their life experiences.

I sincerely hope all Zen practitioners attain this enough mind. Zen Master Seung Sahn once said that this world is already rotten. If you want to fix the outside situation, the best way is to find the seed of this rotten fruit—the seed of our true nature that always feels enough. When we are enough, love and caring will appear by itself, and wisdom will be there to help us to act appropriately.

Thank you, Buddha and all the patriarchs, for this precious teaching. Special thanks to our great teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, for presenting this teaching directly to us so that we don't have to waste our time to search for it. All we need to do is to let go of our attachment to anything that arises in our mind, and to apply this teaching to our everyday life wholeheartedly. The power from the seed of sharing is in all of us all the time—we just need to recover it. ♦

16]



Together Practice Never Stops

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS

The summer three-month-long intensive Zen meditation retreat (Kyo! Che) will be finished in two weeks. The culmination of practice at the end of Kyo! Che (called Hae Jae) coincides with another important event in the Buddhist calendar called *Baek-jung*. On this day, Buddhist temples all over Korea hold a special chanting practice (kido), including a prayer ceremony for the deceased. Participants pray for a blissful rebirth in Buddha's Pure Land for family members and all other spirits.

The origin of the day is quite interesting. Among the ten main disciples of the Buddha Shakyamuni, Moggallana was said to be the most accomplished in terms of transcendent

monks on the day they finish their long retreat would be of greater benefit to his suffering mother. Buddhist monks and nuns practice diligently on the great matter of life and death. Through supporting this practice and dedicating the merit to his mother, Moggallana could free her from the consequences of her deeds.

Today, Korean temples celebrate Baek-jung day with special practices on the fifteenth day of a summer lunar month. Monks and nuns chant Ji Jang Bosal during the kido because he is the bodhisattva who vowed to save all beings from the hell realms. At their local temples, many Buddhists write the names of their deceased family members on mortuary tablets.

Monks and nuns enshrine these tablets in the Ji Jang Bosal hall or the Amita Buddha hall.

At Musangsa Temple, every year we hold a forty-nine-day Ji Jang Bosal kido, ending on Baek-jung day. This is also the start of Hae Je for the summer Kyo! Che retreatants. At Musangsa, we place the mortuary tablets in front of the Amita Buddha painting in the Buddha hall. These days, our international sangha members can also send in names of their deceased loved ones to be written on a mortuary tablet.

When I see so many mortuary tablets, I used to think, "After all the struggle and exhilaration we experience, life culminates in three black Chinese characters on a piece of white paper." (Korean people's names usually consist of only three syllables). When they were alive, all of these people had different bodies, faces,

names, honors, joys, and sorrows. However, when we part from this life, we leave letters in black ink on white paper.

In fact, even the paper, ink and their names cannot be said to have been left behind by each person. No matter what kind of life they lived, the place all of them originally come from and return to are the same. The mortuary tablets seem to teach us that we can do the best together practice when we are tablets all lined up in a row without our human bodies—or any notion of "I" whatsoever!

Funeral ceremonies have many similar teachings. The prominent Zen master U! Sang (625–702 CE) wrote a gatha (a Buddhist verse) called the *Song of Dharma Nature* (*Beop-seong-ge* in Korean). He compressed the meaning of the vast Avatamsaka Sutra (written in about 600,000 Chinese characters) into only 210 Chinese characters. Now, monks and nuns recite these verses at the end of the funeral ceremony as



Photo: Musangsa Archive

tal powers. One day, Moggallana used his powers to connect with his recently deceased mother. He saw her suffering torment as a hungry ghost in hell. According to Buddhism, those people who cannot control their greed in this lifetime will suffer as a being with a tiny mouth and neck—making eating challenging—yet they have huge bellies, causing them inexhaustible hunger.

Moggallana was understandably distressed. The woman who had given birth to him in this life was currently suffering in her next life. So, he decided to rescue her from hell using his transcendental powers. When he asked the Buddha if it was a good idea, however, he was surprised by the answer. The Buddha Shakyamuni told him that his transcendental power might help her for now, but the law of cause and effect (karma) dictated that one day she would suffer from her greed. The Buddha told him that offering food to the

a dedication to the spirits. The first few lines, from a translation that appeared in *Primary Point* in 2014, are as follows:

The nature of all dharmas is perfect.

It does not have two different aspects.

*All the various dharmas are unmoving
and fundamentally still.*

They are without name and form, cut off from all things.

*This is understood by enlightened wisdom, and not by any
other sphere.*

The one is in the many, the many are within the one.

The one is many, the many are one.

*Numberless kalpas are the same as
one moment.*

*One moment is the same as
numberless kalpas.*

Before the pandemic came, we often emphasized together action or together practice in our sangha. Since then, we can't always join each other in person, and the way we see together practice has changed. In a situation where we can gather and practice together, we can support each other to find our true nature more effectively. That means together practice gives us the power to see our true nature, which all of us and everything share. But if we cannot gather to practice together, what will be our together practice?

18] Remember that "The one is in the many, the many are within the one. / The one is many, the many are one." Every-

thing is originally not separate if our mind returns to don't know—the primary point, our true nature. The sun doesn't think about together practice. The sun just shines every day for millions of years. Our sun, and others like it, harmonizes and illuminates our galaxy. A river doesn't think about together practice. It just flows and nourishes our world. They both just attain their true nature without thinking.

Our true nature is no different from that of the sun and river. We practice together to return to our true nature. In fact, living as a human, this life is already a type of together practice. What is important is whether we can return to our true nature wherever we are and in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Even though our bodies are in different places, we become one if we all practice only don't know. This means we have already attained together practice. Keeping this only don't know overcomes any barrier to together practice, whether it be space and time, or life and death.

I miss our international sangha members even more than ever, since it has become so difficult for us to travel overseas. But I'm sure that the best thing I can do is try to live with our simple and clear way, "Only go straight, don't know!" moment to moment, and the hope of seeing everyone again soon grows stronger.

What are you doing right now?

The manuscript has just been finished.

Outside the window, the sky is blue and cicadas are buzzing loudly. ♦

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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

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



Photo: Musangsa Archive

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

A Roaming Cow Again

Beop Seong Sunim

A Roaming Cow

I grew up in a small village in the countryside in Korea. It took thirty minutes to get to the nearest town by bus. I spent all day outside playing together with other kids. How blissful it was growing up in nature. Even tiny dew-drops on the grass made me curious, and every corner of the village provided me new experiences every day. All the neighbors were my family, and they had no hesitation to serve me meals. The whole village was my home. I was like a roaming cow.

Later, I was forced to attend a highly competitive school system, where the only valuable thing was “I am a winner.” I believed that was the only way to be happy. That small view crushed my soul and clouded my youth. So I was desperate to find the way out. I started to practice and wanted to become a monk.

The First Retreat

In 2002, I joined the winter retreat at Musangsa Temple, just one year after being ordained as a novice monk. You can imagine how harsh the first retreat would be. Before, I used to sit for one hour every day. Eight hours of sitting put me in the hell of suffering. Two formal meals were disasters. I was a person who ate slowly. It ran in my family. I couldn't eat enough. I had to bow

five hundred times a day. That was what my teacher requested. I was too hungry to practice. No snacks were allowed. Not fair. I used to grab some snacks whenever I felt hungry in the Korean temple. So I ate a lot for an informal dinner. Too sleepy on the cushion. To be honest, I had no idea what to do on the cushion. My homework was Joju's “Mu” kong-an. But it didn't make any sense at all. I asked myself, “What is wrong with the difference between Buddha's and Joju's answers? Different people can have different opinions!” I got lost on the cushion. I ended up fidgeting like a roly-poly toy. I was totally frustrated, until I got to see the other people. I realized the person next to me never fell asleep. There were several senior practitioners who sat like rocks. Their rigorous and grounded vibes touched me. I found what to do on the cushion. I was good at the competition! I decided to stay awake more than others. I did bite the bullet and stood up whenever I fell asleep. Sometimes I stood for almost half of the day. I pushed myself through to the end of the retreat. I felt confidence build up inside. Even though I couldn't even pass one kong-an, I had a try-mind, which has led my practice up to now.

A Roaming Cow Again

About two decades have passed since the first retreat. Times changed a lot. I got the hang of the retreat schedule and the interview turned into the most exciting of moments. The change inside was deeper. Through a bunch of retreats, I got to know how to practice; trying to be a loser instead of a winner. Every day, losing something inside was practice. That was how I became a simple person with simple needs. I became a roaming cow again. As my mind became simple, everything I perceived became clear and even inspiring. Due to the pandemic, only nineteen participants are practicing in this summer retreat. But we are not alone. The white wall in the Zen room reveals complete stillness. Two spiders in my room are practicing silence. The grass in the garden tells me why it grows only three inches. Three temple cats are practicing just-do-sleep all day. Thousands of cicadas are chanting mantras. All the beings are actually in the retreat, and all of us together practice don't-know mind and just-do-it mind. ♦

Beop Seong Sunim became a haeng-ja (monk-in-training) at Hwa Gye Sa Temple in 2000. He ordained as a bhikkhu in 2007 and practiced both in traditional Korean monasteries and at Musangsa Temple. Currently he serves as education director at Musangsa.



Cicadas Mean Summer, Crickets Mean Autumn

Eunjoo Ha

I used to be one of those people who starts going to the Zen center to practice when suffering appears, only to stop all of that when things get better. Then one day, I got confused and noticed that there is something wrong in this life, something that I tried to keep up with but couldn't. The world seemed to be going too fast and becoming too complicated, and I doubted if that was what I was looking for. But I was too timid to look deeply enough into this problem, because I was strongly attached to my job, my relationships, and other things that seemed important.

Soon, the company I was working for had financial problems and let many employees go. I was one of them. It was a hard time, and I felt resentment toward the people who had made the decision. But much later, I realized that those people were true bodhisattvas who gave me a strong shock to wake me up. Instead of getting a new job or carrying on with my previous life, I traveled for some months, and then returned to Korea and signed up for two months of the winter retreat at Musangsa Temple. It was my first long retreat. I would later keep coming back to join these retreats for some time, and eventually I decided to move into Musangsa.

Twice a year, Musangsa holds three-month silent retreats, once in the summer and once in the winter. Musangsa is rare among Zen monasteries because monks, nuns, and laypeople from all over the world live, work, and practice together. I worked in the kitchen most of the time, and sometimes did other chores and special projects around the temple.

We wake up at 4 a.m., go to bows, do chanting, and some people continue the full formal practice schedule, sitting for many hours throughout the day. There are also working people like me, who attend formal practice according to our schedule or the jobs that we are given. For the first few months, I was trying to adjust to temple life and build relationships with people from different cultures. Although living in the temple was challenging and frustrating at times, I ended up staying for four years, and I realized later that practicing with a sangha was a powerful experience.

Our guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Bong, often tells us that together action is very important because it helps us put down our opinion, be able to follow others, and make harmony with everyone else. It is one of the most wonderful teachings, but it is not an easy thing to do. The problem was that my direction wasn't

clear, so I wasn't clear. When I would meet some irritating situation or person, I would easily get agitated and let out my negative emotions, rather than reflecting the situation back to myself.

Most of the time, it wasn't about a particular situation or person. Instead, I was bringing emotions from something that had happened in the past. Many situations forced me to see my own limitations, which I felt I was supposed to overcome by accepting others and putting down my opinions. Instead of making harmony and doing together action with others, though, I failed to follow them and created conflicts on many occasions. I got so tired sometimes, because of nonstop garbage thoughts and getting caught up in my emotions. My mind became like muddy water.

Many times I didn't want to get up at four in the morning. But my roommates woke up and turned on the light and were getting ready for the day. So I followed them. Many times I thought about skipping some of the formal practice and formal meals. But everybody in the temple would go to the Buddha hall to chant, go to the dharma hall to sit, and go to the dining room to eat the formal meal. So I made an effort to follow all of those as well. After some time of continuing to do the same thing every day, I got used to the daily schedule and my mind became quiet.

There is something deeply satisfying about doing a retreat together with people, because I always feel that I get tremendous support from this practicing group. For three months we spend most of the time together, either in the Buddha hall or the dharma hall. Everyone is doing the same thing without being able to talk about it.

A ringing bell means there are kong-an interviews. We go to the interview room and have a long interview with the teacher. They put on their kasa, sit on the cushion, and are ready for us. The moktak (wooden drum) early in the morning means wake up. The moktak after sitting means eating time. We go to the dining room, and all the food is ready for us. The chugpi (bamboo clapper) in the dining room guides the formal meal. The first three hits of the chugpi signals us to lay out our bowls. The second three hits of the chugpi means to eat. The final three hits of the chugpi means the end of the formal meal. The moktak after some rest means sitting. We go to the dharma hall and sit. The first three hits of the chugpi in the dharma hall means sit. One

(Continued on page 24)

[21

On Being a Human Being

Bo-Mi Choi

The short—and enlightened—answer would not be what you expect. In my early days as a Zen student, the (correct) pithy Zen answer to this question would merely confound me. Was I not eating (a) to prolong my biological existence, i.e., because I was hungry, and (b) to enjoy one of the few pleasures afforded to being born into a *human* body? And how was it at all possible to eat for any other reason? Back then, the small “I” in me didn’t get that this question, which on the surface addresses an activity as mundane as eating, was not so much about the metabolic sustenance of sentient life (though it is about that, too). Rather, this question was, on a much deeper level, pointing to what it means to be truly a human being.

What is the difference between human beings and animals? Let me propose the following: I have yet to encounter an animal that cultivates its foods and creates elaborate rituals around preparing and consuming food like we humans do. I’d even dare to argue that the practice of eating—along with all the adjacent cultural practices connected with it such as planting, tending, harvesting, cooking, and sharing food in celebrations—differentiates us from animals and is unique to our species.

On a sheer logistical level, it is quite mind-boggling when trying to conjure up in one’s mind the numberless hands involved in the process that made it possible for me to enjoy one single meal. Big agrobusiness creates the illusion of food appearing on our tables as if by magic. But the food that sustains us every day was at some point planted by someone, harvested by someone, packed by someone, transported by someone, and unpacked by someone before we even get to buy it in the supermarket. Contemplating the fact that our nourishment depends on the hard labor as well as the bountiful resources of the planet we inhabit is awe-inspiring and humbling. And when viewed from this perspective, every meal deserves a special ritual to acknowledge the magnitude of the endeavor of feeding ourselves and others.

One of my favorite forms in our Zen tradition is the formal meal during retreat, an eating ritual like no other. Like anything worthwhile, it takes some time to fully get the hang of it, but once you do, it’s the most beautiful of forms—efficient, elegant, and meaningful. It would take another essay to do this form justice in all its intricate details so I will, for the purposes of this piece, just touch on the most relevant aspects. In the formal meal, we eat together in silence, following a set of guidelines that help us embody the teachings in action: (1) you only

take what you need to sustain yourself (otherwise, you are literally left with an embarrassment not so much of riches but your desire mind staring back at you in the form of unsightly leftovers in your bowl); (2) you are responsible to clean up after yourself (enacting the notion of “leaving no trace,” except for clear water to be given as an offering at the end); and (3) by following the exact forms of the meal, you function seamlessly within a larger whole, beginning and closing your meal with everybody else (and thereby tapping into what psychologists call the synchronous energy of a group, which the inner mammal in us needs and thrives on).

On a personal level, the most indelible memories of my childhood revolve around my parents’ valiant efforts in feeding us traditional Korean dishes, even as our family found ourselves in the foreign land of Germany at a time when kimchi was not known beyond the confines of the Korean peninsula. We had our own family food rituals according to the changing seasons and the weather. In the summer, my father would light up the charcoal grill and we’d sit on the terrace enjoying *bulgogi*, a Korean national dish of marinated beef. When it rained, my mother would take to making *pajeon*, savory scallion pancakes, like they do in Korea when the rain keeps people indoors. And on New Year’s Day, she’d feed us *mandu guk*, the dumpling soup that is traditionally served on that day. Family time always involved enjoying some delectable treats or the making of such: whole afternoons were spent making Korean dumplings from scratch, and my parents would repurpose an Italian pasta machine to roll out the dough for the skins to wrap the dumplings. In my family, food was not a substitute for love, but it was how love was expressed. To this day, my mum will spend days in the kitchen to prepare my favorite dishes whenever I go home to visit my parents.

I recently learned that in Korean, the word for “family” literally means “the people with whom you eat.” The English expression “breaking bread” as a way of forging a more intimate connection with another person carries a similar connotation. Sharing food together is the single most effective means of building community, a fact that I can personally vouch for from anecdotal evidence. Having cooked dinner every Tuesday evening for over a decade for my housemates at the Cambridge Zen Center, I know by experience that when food is prepared with care and shared with others, great joy ensues—not only in those who get to eat the meal but in the cook herself who gets to

partake in the happiness around her.

Alas, the well-known Zen parable about the difference between hell and heaven illustrates this very point, and not surprisingly, eating features centrally in it. A young person asks the sage what was the difference between hell and heaven, whereupon the sage opens a door to a room called Hell. Here, people sit at a huge banquet overflowing with delicious food, but they are emaciated, distressed and deeply unhappy. The problem is that they only have extremely long spoons, which make it impossible to get the food into their own mouths, so they end up hungry as they try to eat. The sage then opens the door to the room with a sign that says Heaven. We encounter the exact same scenario, except the people are joyful and happy. The difference? They use the long spoons not to feed themselves but to feed each other across the banquet table!

“Why do you eat every day?” It took some years for me

to attain this teaching, but once I did, it is hard to imagine a better, more correct answer, because it beautifully captures the eternal truth of our irrefutable interdependence, of the fact that none of us is adequately equipped to survive on their own. More important, the teaching not only points to the normative direction of our existence but also contains what makes our life worth living: if it weren't this way, how could I survive, not merely in a physical sense, but live a life of *meaning*? If life is fundamentally suffering, then what makes this life worth living, if it weren't for other sentient beings? And the great love that surrounds us? ♦

Bo-Mi Choi is a senior dharma teacher in the Kwan Um School of Zen. She has lived and practiced at the Cambridge Zen Center since 2004 and served, until recently, as its director of development and outreach. She also leads a weekly meditation group at Harvard University, where she teaches philosophy and critical theory.

Eating Is the Most Important.

Kong Tan, under the guidance of Gye Mun Sunim JDPS

There is a saying from the Three Kingdoms period in China: “To the king, his people are heaven. To the people, food is heaven.” In the preface of the Diamond Sutra, at mealtime, the World-Honored One (that is, the Buddha) would get dressed to seek alms together with his disciples. Once the alms-round was completed, he returned, finished eating, put the *sanghati* (kasa) and bowl back in place, washed his feet, and, without further ado, arranged the seat to sit in samadhi.

Only the Elder Subhuti saw through the dharma intention of the World-Honored One as he carried out this concerted mundane routine with his disciples. The Elder Subhuti was in awe of the silent dharma of this mundane routine. He exclaimed: “How rare you are! The World-Honored One. The Buddha supports and cares for all bodhisattvas with kindness, entrusts and beseeches all bodhisattvas with kindness.” Then he proceeded to invite the dharma on behalf of the assembly by asking two questions, which gave rise to the Diamond Sutra. The Elder Subhuti asked, “The benevolent men, benevolent women with aspiration and resolution to attain the Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi mind, how should they dwell? How to subdue their own minds?” The World-Honored One said, they “should just like this dwell, just like this subdue their own minds.”

The Just-Come One (that is, the Buddha), who came from the true way, carried himself as one of the common people. He silently taught the sangha by being a role model. Every day at mealtime, he would get dressed, walk, look for food, eat, tidy up, sit in meditation, and help all beings who had affinity with him. Every day since his complete and

perfect enlightenment, he was like this, just like this, until he entered parinirvana. He did this to benefit others. That is no-self form. The sublime prajna dharma can flow with ease even from trivial routine forms. That is no-dharma form. With no doer and nothing to be done. Food is not so important to the Buddha anymore, yet he looked for food and ate together with everyone. That is the inclusiveness of together action; that is teaching without words and speech. Support, care, entrust, and beseech all who have aspired and resolved to the great mind, and that is no non-dharma form. This is sublime existence in emptiness.

As the Buddhist saying goes: “Borrow from this illusory existence to see true emptiness.” For survival, from primitive to modern humans, all go out to look for food every day. Instead of being affected by the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, how wonderful it would be if all of us aspire and resolve to follow our role model, the World-Honored One. After work, eat; after eating, immediately return to quieten down in order to contemplatively reflect on original mind. We are grateful to the Buddha for demonstrating how to live every day in active dharma of the three practices (precepts, meditation, and wisdom). To use the tangible body of the human being to realize the foremost truth of emptiness, neither grasp nor eradicate. Use the tangible body of a human being to attain our original self, do our original job, help all beings from suffering. ♦

Kong Tan started to practice in Kwan Yin Chan Zen Center in Singapore in 2002 and took five precepts in 2018. She is a volunteer in the Zen center.

[23

Eat? What's the Point?

Myong An Sunim JDPS

Why do you eat every day? This question seems innocuous, almost banal. When Zen Master Su Bong first asked me in a kong-an interview, I was a little nonplussed. I answered, "Because I'm hungry," thinking, "It's pretty obvious isn't it?" He shook his head. No, not the answer he wanted. In my mind, it was a perfectly serviceable answer and I felt mildly irritated by his rebuff. It was only after more meditation practice that I discovered that there was a greater depth to the question.

Food and eating are central to the fabric of our lives. Many of us love to eat. Some of us live to eat. We often eat to celebrate, to romance, to commiserate, and to comfort. We love to talk, think, and share about food. At restaurants, you will see patrons snap photos of their meals, sharing them *ad nauseam* on social media. We celebrate, even idolize famous chefs like rock stars, because they make great food. We buy their books and watch their TV programs by the millions.

24]

Eating well is a pleasure that unites us across cultures. We strengthen our social bonds with friends and family over shared meals. We treasure intimate moments with our loved ones over dinner. Our favorite foods can elicit strong memories, and we sometimes crave them so much that we're willing to go a long way just to get a taste of them.

All living things have to eat. It's a question of survival. Our bodies are biologically well-adapted to telling us when they need food. We feel hungry; our stomach starts to rumble. Hunger is unpleasant and we have little patience to endure it. The only way out is to eat

some food.

Most of us now take food for granted. It is available on demand, a few taps of a smartphone away. Not so for the 800 million people around the world who have to go to bed hungry each night, or the 2 billion who are malnourished. For them, the search for food occupies their daily existence as they endure a simple hard truth—food means life.

Those of us who are blessed with an abundance and variety of food often carelessly waste it. In certain Asian countries, ordering more than you can eat is a symbol of affluence and privilege. Leftovers are thrown away. Globally, one-third of all food produced for humans is wasted each year. This unthinking waste of our food brings into sharp focus the question "Why do you eat every day?"

Many Zen students easily find the answer to the kong-an after some practice. I have found that merely answering the question correctly is just the first step. On closer inspection, it directs us to a deeper, more fundamental question: Why are you alive? What does it mean for you to live on this earth?

These questions nudge us to look at our own lives more closely. They prick us to wake up from our soporific dullness to the reality of our existence. Without such questions, it is easy to fall into sleepwalking through life.

Awakening to "Why do you eat every day?" and embracing it as a part of our lived experience leads us on a path to a meaningful life. Putting it into practice, moment to moment, is the work of a lifetime. ♦

(Continued from page 21)

hit of the chugpi means walking meditation. We follow people in single file and walk around dharma hall. The second three hits of the chugpi means the end of sitting. Rain means bring an umbrella. Cicadas mean summer. Crickets mean autumn.

I would like to share an inspiring quote by Zen Master Dae Bong.

We will be able to be responsible for what appears in our life and use it in a way that really benefits everybody. That is what Buddha did, and that is what everybody came here want-

ing to learn how to do. We all can, because that is our true nature.

The whole universe is keeping correct situation to help me. That means when I keep correct situation, I also can help everybody. ♦

Eunjo Ha took five precepts in Providence in 2006. She joined the winter retreat at Musangsa Temple in 2015 and continued to live and practice at the temple for four years until 2019.

When Tired, Sleep. When Hungry, Eat

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, “If you want to get something then you need two things: Clear direction and a trying mind.” To find a clear direction, he would suggest answering the question “Why do you eat every day?”

To help us stay on track and get better results, we usually ask a teacher for further instructions, asking, “What kind of practice should I do?” and “How should I do it?”

However, only having a clear direction and instructions will not get the job done. We need to put them into practice not once, but over and over and over again. That is what we call a trying mind. In the Lotus Sutra, Buddha explained correct effort by using the analogy of rubbing two sticks together to get a fire going. “If we stop rubbing them together just when the sticks start to get warm, we will never start a fire.” That’s why we need to keep trying, and it requires sustained physical and mental energy. In today’s lifestyle, our energy is easily drained due to stressful and hectic activities throughout the day, and poor quality of sleep at night.¹ Perhaps there is another question we could ask to solve this problem, and that is “When to do this practice?”

One of the fastest growing branches of medical science is circadian medicine. This medicine is based on the simple fact that most living forms, including animals, plants and microbes, are affected by the twenty-four-hour cycle of light and darkness. Circadian rhythms are physical, mental, and behavioral changes that follow that cycle. The interesting thing is that not all organisms follow that cycle in the same way. Our circadian rhythms depend on chronotypes, which are determined genetically. In the case of humans, 351 inherited genes² will determine our chronotype. Those chronotypes have major impacts in diverse areas, from athletic performance to personality traits underlying behavioral and emotional problems, risk-taking, and even morality.³ Every system in our body is operating on an inner clock, and if we are aligned with our chronotype, those systems operate optimally.

Traditionally there were three chronotypes: early-rising “larks,” late-rising “owls,” and neither early nor late risers, the “hummingbirds.” Lately, Dr. Michael Breus, known as the “Sleep Doctor,” redefined the chronotype groups and renamed them.⁴ “Humans are mammals, not birds, and we share similar behaviors with other mammals.” Dr. Breus names four chronotypes: early risers become “lions,” known to hunt in the morning; late risers are now “wolves” the nocturnal hunters; nei-

ther early nor late risers become “bears” the anytime hunters. There is one more group, the insomniacs, those who are light sleepers. That group is named “dolphins,” mammals that sleep with only half of the brain.⁵

Knowing our chronotype can help us find the best time to wake up, eat, exercise, work, and go to bed, but also when might be the best time to meditate and even answer a kong-an.

Of course, for the question “When to practice?” the Zen answer would be “right now.” Unfortunately due to everyone’s different circadian rhythms, not every “now” is equal. That is quite obvious during group retreats. Morning sessions are favorites for “lions,” who can do 108 bows at 4:30 a.m. without a problem and will not be drowsy on the cushion afterward. “Wolves” will thrive during evening sessions, while “bears” will experience that they pick up clarity in the afternoon. Zen retreats are based on group effort. Wakeup, meals, meditation periods, and going to bed are at the same time for all participants, so everyone has to put down their personal chronotype for the time being—and practicing intensely together with others for a limited time helps us do that. Challenging our comfort zone from time to time is important, but those challenges are rarely sustainable for longer periods. Retreats are done occasionally, but what we do between them defines our practice in the rest of our lives.

There is an “after retreat” syndrome that many of us experience. We try hard to keep the momentum, attempting to copy and paste retreat schedules into our daily routines—mostly the morning part. I’ve talked to many students who become frustrated that they are unable to wake up early at home and do their practice. They blame their “weak willpower,” laziness, and they can even start doubting whether Zen is for them. According to Daphne Leprince-Ringuet in *Wired*, “No matter how hard you try you’ll never be a morning person”⁶ . . . unless you are a “lion,” of course. For most of us, willpower is overrated.⁷ Instead of simply trying to force yourself into a routine that doesn’t work for you, try finding out what is your chronotype, resetting your circadian rhythm, and scheduling your daily practice accordingly. These strategies can help us better than using our limited willpower in a blunt fashion. Also, thanks to technology, we can leverage the power of together action and practice with others during our optimal meditation times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of our school’s Zen centers to start streaming practice via

Zoom. The Kwan Um Online Sangha creates programs such as twenty-four-hour retreats online, twenty-one-day Zen challenges, and online kong-an interviews, all of which cater to almost every time zone. When you visit the online sangha calendar⁸ you can virtually always find a group to sit with, 24/7, around the world. Here is a formula for successful practice: ask not only why, what, and how to practice, but also when. Then the old Zen saying, “when you are tired, sleep; when you are hungry, eat” will work for you.

If you are interested in learning more, you can find our 360 Zen Studies Series program, “Energy in Zen: Exploring the Sources of Energy in Our Practice” here: <https://kwanumonline.mykajabi.com/store>

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<http://kwanumzendf.blogspot.mx>

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dewit@fastmail.net
<http://coldmountainzencenter.org>

ARIZONA

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cochisezen@icloud.com
<http://cochisezencenter.org>

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Merrie Fraser JDPSN
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Zen Master Hae Kwang
Fayetteville, AR
479-530-1098
btaylor@uark.edu
<http://morningstarzencenter.org>

CALIFORNIA

Dharma Zen Center

Paul Park JDPSN
Los Angeles, CA
323-934-0330
info@dharmazen.com
<http://dharmazen.com>

Empty Gate Zen Center—

Berkeley

Gong Mun Sa
Zen Master Bon Soeng
Berkeley, CA
510-845-8565
info@emptygatezen.com
<http://emptygatezen.com>

Empty Gate Zen Center—

Monterey

Zen Master Bon Soeng
Monterey, CA
831-241-3084
scott.stillinger3@gmail.com
<http://emptygatezen.com>

Empty Gate Zen Center—

Santa Clara

Jason Quinn JDPSN
San Jose, CA
viceabbot@emptygatezen.com
<http://emptygatezen.com>

CONNECTICUT

New Haven Zen Center

Mu Gak Sa
Zen Master Jok Um
New Haven, CT
203-787-0912
nhzcenter@gmail.com
<http://newhavenzen.org>

DELAWARE

Delaware Valley Zen Center

José Ramirez JDPSN
Newark, DE
302-533-8819
dvzinfo@gmail.com
<http://dvzc.org>

FLORIDA

Cypress Tree Zen Group

Zen Master Jok Um
Tallahassee, FL
ctzg@webdharma.com
<http://webdharma.com/ctzg>

Gateless Gate Zen Center

Zen Master Jok Um
Gainesville, FL
352-614-0512
gateless.gate.zen.center@gmail.com
<http://gatelessgate.org>

Orlando Zen Center

Zen Master Jok Um
Orlando, FL
orlandozencenter@gmail.com
<http://orlandozen.com>

South Florida Zen Group

Carlos Montero JDPSN
Southwest Ranches, FL
954-324-3925
southfloridazengroup@gmail.com
<http://southfloridazen.org>

IDAHO

Empty Gate Zen Center—

Boise
Zen Master Bon Soeng
Boise, ID
208-661-6277
clintonjamesmith@gmail.com
<http://emptygatezen.com>

ILLINOIS

Ten Directions Bronzeville

Sitting Group
Zen Master Jok Um
Chicago (Bronzeville), IL
director@tendirectionszen.org
<http://tendirectionszen.org>

Ten Directions Zen

Community
Zen Master Jok Um
Wheaton, IL
director@tendirectionszen.org
<http://tendirectionszen.org>

INDIANA

Indianapolis Zen Center

Lincoln Rhodes JDPSN
Indianapolis, IN
317-921-9902
director@indyzen.org
<http://indyzen.org>

Empty Circle Sitting Group

Lincoln Rhodes JDPSN
Hobart, IN
dharmainc@aol.com
<http://emptycirclezen.com>

KANSAS

Kansas Zen Center

Nam Pung Sa
Zen Master Bon Hae
Lawrence, KS
kansaszencenter@gmail.com
<http://kansaszencenter.org>

Kansas Zen Center-Kansas

City
Zen Master Bon Hae
Kansas City, MO
kansaszencenter@gmail.com
kansaszencenter.org

Prairyerth Zen Center

Rebecca Orte JDPSN
Topeka, KS
785-224-4678
prairyerthzen@gmail.com
<http://prairyerthzen.org>

Tallgrass Zen Center

Dennis Duermeier JDPSN
Manhattan, KS
785-537-8713
tallgrasszen@gmail.com
<http://tallgrasszen.blogspot.com>

MAINE

Northern Light Zen Center

Buk Kwang Soen Won
Terry Cronin JDPSN
Topsham, ME
207-835-1480
northernlightzencenter@gmail.com
<http://nlzc.info>

MASSACHUSETTS

Cambridge Zen Center

Dae Gak Sa
Zen Master Bon Yeon
Cambridge, MA
617-576-3229
director@cambridgezen.org
<http://cambridgezen.org>

Cape Cod Zen Center

Terry Cronin JDPSN
Massachusetts
capecodzencenter@yahoo.com
<http://capecodzen.com>

Open Meadow Zen Group

Zen Master Bon Haeng
Lexington, MA
781-512-2518
openmeadowzengroup@gmail.com
<http://openmeadowzen.com>

Plymouth Zen Group

Terry Cronin JDPSN
Plymouth MA
781-733-9361
plymouthzen@gmail.com
<http://plymouthzen.com>

NEVADA

Zen Center of Las Vegas

Dae Myong Sa
Zen Master Ji Haeng
Las Vegas, NV
702-293-4222
zencenteroflasvegas@gmail.com
<http://zenlasvegas.com>

NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque Open Sky Zen

Group
Albuquerque, New Mexico
505-920-5795
afssager3@gmail.com

NEW YORK

Chogye Int'l Zen Center of

New York
Zen Master Wu Kwang
New York, NY
212-353-0461
info@chogyezencenter.org
<http://chogyezencenter.org>

Three Jewels Binghamton Zen Group

Zen Master Wu Kwang
Binghamton, NY
607-988-7966
mkllo@stny.rr.com
<http://binghamtonzencenter.org>

Three Treasures Zen Center

Zen Master Wu Kwang
Otego, NY
607-988-7966
abbot@thethreetreasures.org
<http://thethreetreasures.org>

RHODE ISLAND

Providence Zen Center
Hong Poep Won
Head Temple, North America
Nancy Hedgpeth JDPSN
José Ramirez JDPSN
Cumberland, RI
401-658-1464
director@providencezen.org
<http://providencezen.org>

WASHINGTON

Ocean Light Zen Center
Hye Kwang Sa
Tim Lerch JDPSN
Seattle, WA
206-462-4155
info@oceanlightzen.org
<http://oceanlightzen.org>

WISCONSIN

Great Lake Zen Center
Dae Ho Soen Won
Zen Master Dae Kwang
Milwaukee, WI
info@glzc.org
<http://glzc.org>

Isthmus Zen Community

Madison, WI
608-405-2436
info@isthmuszencommunity.org
<http://isthmuszencommunity.org>

► Central America

PANAMA

Panama Zen Group
Panama City, Panama
panamazen@gmail.com

► Africa, Asia & Australia

AUSTRALIA

Phoenix Zen Centre
Deagon QLD
+617 32697393 (Peter Dae Haeng)
daehaeng@gmail.com
<http://phoenixzencentre.org>

Gold Coast Zen Group

Runaway Bay, QLD
+61 435249330 (Julie Bup Wol)
goldcoastzengroup@hotmail.com
<http://kwanumzen.com.au>

CHINA

Su Bong Zen Monastery **Gak Su Temple International Zen Center**

Zen Master Dae Kwang
Hong Kong, China
+852 2891 9315
info@subong.org.hk
<http://subong.org.hk>

KOREA

Kwan Um Daejeon Zen Group

Andrzej Stec JDPSN
Kathy Park JDPSN
Daejeon, South Korea
+82 10 2031 8813
info@kwanumdaejeon.org
Facebook: kwanumdaejeon

Kwan Um Seoul Zen Group

Yorlin Zen Center
Andrzej Stec JDPSN
Kathy Park JDPSN
Seoul, South Korea
+82 10 2031 8813
info@zenseoul.org
<http://zenseoul.org>

Seung Sahn International Zen Center

Mu Sang Sa
Head Temple, Asia
Zen Master Dae Bong
Hye Tong Sunim JDPSN
Gyeryong, South Korea
+82 42 841 6084
office@musangsa.org
<http://musangsa.org>

MALAYSIA

Desaru Zen Meditation Center

Gye Mun Sunim JDPSN
Johor, Malaysia
kyclzen@singnet.com.sg
<http://kyclzen.org>

Haeng Won Zen Centre

Zen Master Dae Kwang
Myong An Sunim JDPSN
Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
+60 10 3739886
haengwonzc@gmail.com
<http://haengwon.org>

Hoeh Beng Zen Center

Zen Master Dae Bong
Chuan Wen Sunim JDPSN
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
+60 3292 9839
hoehbeng@hotmail.com
<http://hoehbeng.org>

Pengerang International Zen Center

Kwan Yin Chan Lin
Gye Mun Sunim JDPSN
Johor, Malaysia
+60 7 826 4848
zen@kyclzen.sg
<https://www.kyclzen.sg/>

SINGAPORE

Kwan Yin Chan Lin Zen Meditation Center

Gye Mun Sunim JDPSN
Singapore
+65 6392 0265
zen@kyclzen.sg
<https://www.kyclzen.sg/>

► Europe & Israel

AUSTRIA

Vienna Zen Center
Knuud Rosenmayr JDPSN
Vienna, Austria
+43 680 55 396 11
info@kwanumzen.at
<http://zen-meditation.wien>

BELARUS

Minsk Zen Group
Igor Piniński JDPSN
Minsk, Belarus
+375 (25) 528-71-90
ommani4@gmail.com
Instagram.com/zen_minsk

BELGIUM

Brussels Zen Center
Koen Vermeulen JDPSN
Brussels, Belgium
+32 497 596 659
koen.vermeulen@buddhism.be
<http://www.kwanumzen-meditatie.be>

CZECH REPUBLIC

Brno Zen Group
Dae Gak Sa
Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Brno, Czech Republic
+420 775 988 882
+420 777 933 353
kwanumbrno@gmail.com
Facebook: ZenBrno

Liberec Zen Group

Sam Bo Sa
Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Liberec, Czech Republic
+420 602 756 401
zen.liberec@gmail.com
<http://www.zenliberec.cz>

Litoměřice Zen Group

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
+420 774 122 543
kubbiss@seznam.cz

Olomouc Zen Group

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Olomouc, Czech Republic
+420 603 449 959
olomouc@kwanumzen.cz
Facebook: olomouc.zen

Prague Zen Group **Soeng Kwang Sa**

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Prague, Czech Republic
+420 602 796 371
kwanumpraha@gmail.com
<http://kwanumzen.cz>

Tábor Zen Group

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Tábor, Czech Republic
+420 776 148 494
derossi@email.cz
Facebook: kwanum.tabor

Vrážné Zen Center **Head Temple, Czech Republic**

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Vrážné, Czech Republic
+420 608 169 042
abbot@vraznezen.org
<http://vraznezen.org>

Zlín Zen Group

Jiří George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Zlín, Czech Republic
+420 739 672 032
krmila@email.cz
<http://zen-zlin.webnode.cz>

FRANCE

Paris Zen Group
Koen Vermeulen JDPSN
Paris, France
+33 613 798 328
contact@kwanumzen.net
<http://kwanumzen.net>

GERMANY

Bad Bramstedt Zen Group

Arne Schaefer JDPSN
Bad Bramstedt, Germany
+49 419 2306 8360
bad-bramstedt@kwanumzen.de
<http://kwanumzen.de/bad-bramstedt>

Berlin Zen Center

Chong Hye Sa
European Head Temple
Zen Master Gu Ja
Berlin, Germany
+49 304 660 5090
berlin@kwanumzen.de
<http://kwanumzen.de/berlin>

Cologne (Köln) Zen Group

Zen Master Ji Kwang
Köln, Germany
+49 170 456 5432
koeln@kwanumzen.de
<http://kwanumzen.de/koeln>

Dresden Zen Center

Oh Sahn Sa
Arne Schaefer JDPSN
Dresden, Germany
+49 176 7008 2636
dresden@kwanumzen.de
<http://kwanumzen.de/dresden>

Hamburg Zen Group
Arne Schaefer JDPSN
Hamburg, Germany
+49 162 690 0684
hamburg@kwanumzen.de
http://kwanumzen.de/hamburg

HUNGARY

Budapest KUSZ Zen Group
Zen Master Hyon Ja
Budapest, Hungary
+36 70 457 0486
mesztamas@gmail.com
http://kvanumzen.hu

Szeged KUSZ Zen Group
Zen Master Hyon Ja
Szeged, Hungary
+36 30 586 4090
szongdzsin@vipmail.hu

ISRAEL

Haifa Zen Group
Zen Master Ji Kwang
Haifa, Israel
+972 53 431 9816
ofercohn@gmail.com
http://kwanumisrael.org/haifa.php

Hod Hasharon Zen Center
Koen Vermeulen JDPSN
Hod Hasharon, Israel
+972 54 483 1122
hasharonzencenter@gmail.com
http://kwanumisrael.org/hod-hasharon.php

Pardes-Hanna-Karkur Zen Group
Zen Master Ji Kwang
+972 54 652 2812
Pardes Hanna-Karkur, Israel
zen.pardeshanna@gmail.com
http://kwanumisrael.org/pardeshanna.php

Tel Aviv Zen Group
Koen Vermeulen JDPSN
Tel Aviv, Israel
+972 53 271 4595
relavivzen@gmail.com
http://kwanumisrael.org/tel-aviv.php

LITHUANIA

Kaunas Zen Center
Kam No Sa
Kaunas, Lithuania
+370 601 56350
+370 698 29299
108tomas@gmail.com
Facebook: KwanUmLietuva

Šakiai Zen Center
Son Kwang Sa
Vilnius, Lithuania
+370 686 56392
smirnovas.vytautas@gmail.com
Facebook: KwanUmLietuva

Vilnius Zen Center
Ko Bong Sa
Head Temple, Lithuania
Vilnius, Lithuania
+370 675 16008
songji108@gmail.com
http://zen.lt

POLAND

Gdańsk Zen Center
Zen Master Joeng Hye
Gdańsk, Poland
+48 507 587 532
gdansk@zen.pl
http://gdanskzen.wixsite.com/zen-gdansk

Katowice Zen Center
Chon Mun Sunim JDPSN
Katowice, Poland
+48 501 430 062
kwanum.katowice@gmail.com
http://zen.pl/katowice

Kraków Zen Center
Do Miong Sa
Igor Piniński JDPSN
Kraków, Poland
+48 530 677 081
krakow@zen.pl
http://zen.pl/krakow

Łódź Zen Center
Igor Piniński JDPSN
Łódź, Poland
+48 509 241 097
lodz@zen.pl
http://zen.pl/lodz

Płock Zen Group
Zen Master Bon Shim
Płock, Poland
+48 607 317 084
alap7@gazeta.pl
http://zenplock.pl

Rzeszów Zen Group
Zen Master Bon Shim
Rzeszów, Poland
+48 539 77 11 40
rzeszow@zen.pl
http://zen.pl/rzeszow

Toruń Zen Group
Zen Master Joeng Hye
Toruń, Poland
+48 609 696 060
torunskagrupazen@gmail.com
Facebook: torunskagrupazen

Warsaw Zen Center
Wu Bong Sa
Head Temple, Poland
Zen Master Joeng Hye
Warsaw, Poland
+48 22 872 05 52
+48 515 100 273
kwanum@zen.pl
http://zen.pl

Wielkopolska Zen Group
Bogumila Malinowska (Ja An)
JDPSN
+48 609 926 797
Mgawrysiak108@gmail.com
sliwki-w-czekoladzie@wp.pl
www.facebook.com/Wielkopolska-Grupa-Zen-860900127415485/

Wrocław-Wałbrzych Zen Group
Igor Piniński JDPSN
Wrocław, Poland
+48 606 940 686
+48 661 111 516
zen.wroclaw@gmail.com
http://zen.pl/wroclaw

RUSSIA

Rostov Zen Group
Won Haeng Soen Won
Bogumila Malinowska (Ja An)
JDPSN
Rostov, Russia
+7 904 504 2111
+7 905 432 9090
+7 908 513 5778
mail@zen-rostov.ru
http://zen-rostov.ru

Saint Petersburg Zen Center
Dae Hwa Soen Won
Head Temple, Russia
Bogumila Malinowska (Ja An)
JDPSN
Saint Petersburg, Russia
+7 900 651 01 20
contact@kwanumzen.ru
http://kwanumzen.ru

Veliky Novgorod Zen Center
Bogumila Malinowska (Ja An)
JDPSN
Veliky Novgorod, Russia
+7 981 601 6567
sunim@zendao.ru
http://zendao.ru

SLOVAKIA

Bratislava Zen Center
Myo San Sa
Head Temple, Slovakia
Zen Master Joeng Hye
Bratislava, Slovakia
+421 905 368 368
bzc108@gmail.com
www.bratislavazen.sk

Košice Zen Center
Shin Jong Sa
Jiri George Hazlbauer JDPSN
Košice, Slovakia
+421 903 134 137
kosice@kwanumzen.sk
Facebook: kwanumzenkosice

SPAIN

Barcelona Zen Center
Zen Master Bon Shim
Barcelona, Spain
+34 690 280 331 (Mauro Bianco)
boricentrozen@hotmail.com
http://boricentrozen.com

Bori Sa, Retreat Center
Zen Master Bon Shim
Alta Garrotxa (Girona), Spain
+34 655 033 018
+34 872 005 192
boricentrozen@hotmail.com
Facebook: boricentrozen

Granada Zen Group
Zen Master Hyon Ja
Granada, Spain
+34 671 284 810
granadazen@gmail.com
http://zengranada.blogspot.com

Palma Zen Center
Head Temple, Spain
Tolo Cantarells JDPSN
Palma de Mallorca, Spain
+34 686 382 210
palmacentrozen@gmail.com
http://centrozenpalma.org

UNITED KINGDOM

London Zen Centre
Ja An Sa
Head Temple, United Kingdom
Bogumila Malinowska (Ja An) JDPSN
London, England
+44 774 297 9050
london.zen.kwanum@gmail.com
http://londonzencentre.co.uk

The Peak Zen Group
Lizzie Coombs JDPSN
Matlock Bath, England
+44 7400 028488 (Peter)
jibul@kwanumzen.org.uk
http://thepeak.kwanumzen.org.uk

York Zen Group
Lizzie Coombs JDPSN
+44 7502 607665 (Lizzie)
kuszyork@gmail.com
www.yorkzen.com

Prison Groups

Lowell Correctional Institution,
Florida

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Florida

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Massachusetts

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