

Drifting Clouds, Flowing Water

Chon Mun Sunim JDPS

Let's rewind to the mid-1990s. The Kwan Um School of Zen was already established. Several of Zen Master Seung Sahn's older students had received formal transmission and become Zen masters themselves, and a couple of new mountain temples had been established. Locations for both Taegosa Temple (Mountain Spirit Center) in California and Furnace Mountain Center in Kentucky were chosen because of the auspicious feng shui (風水, or in Korean, *pung su*) in those areas.

At that time, one of my closest dharma friends, Hyon Mun Sunim, had just become ordained and took up residence at Mountain Spirit Center to practice there and help Mu Ryang Sunim in his project of building the temple. Following his firsthand experience of the good feng shui in Taegosa, he got the idea of finding a piece of land in the Polish mountains that would be suitable

for building a temple there in the future. He showed detailed maps of both areas to Zen Master Seung Sahn during his visit to Poland in 1997. Zen Master Seung Sahn examined both maps and chose the land in Wisła due to the great feng shui of the area. He showed on the map where the Buddha hall should be located and which direction the Buddha statue should face. After talking more about the land, he looked straight into Hyon Mun Sunim's eyes and told him not to do anything on this land for the foreseeable future because it was not yet the right time; if they moved too quickly, it would not work and they would lose the land.

Hyon Mun Sunim got Dr. Tadeusz Sztykowski and his wife, Kasia, interested in the project, and they graciously offered to buy the land in Wisła and hold it until a later time. And that's what happened.

Fast-forward fifteen years. In 2012, three years after my ordination, I visited Tadeusz and Kasia at their home in Massachusetts, and they offered to transfer the ownership of the land to me. The legal work took place in 2013 with the pro bono help of an attorney in Poland. She and many others generously offered their help to us. I guess the right time had come to do something with the land.

After I became the owner, something didn't feel quite right. I did not want to own the land as an individual. Hyon Mun Sunim and I talked with Zen Master Wu Bong about the property's ownership. It did not take us long to decide to establish a foundation that would take over the land from me. My last conversation with Zen Master Wu Bong, a month before his passing, was about that. Later on, some of Wu Bong Sunim's ashes were spread on the land during a simple ceremony.

It took around two years to get the bylaws written and to work out the details of the associated legal work—sunims cannot do much during summer and winter *Kyol Che*, after all. Quite a few people helped us on the way: Tadeusz Mięłowicz from the Kraków Zen Center wrote the bylaws. Anna Kaszewska (the lawyer who helped with the ownership transfer) drew up the articles of incorporation for the foundation. Jurek Pawłowicz (who found the land) became the



Photo: Courtesy of Unsu Foundation

for building a temple there in the future. He spent a couple of months riding in a car with some Polish Zen students around the different mountain ranges in southern Poland. At that time, one of Hyon Mun Sunim's best childhood friends—also a dharma teacher—happened to live with his family in the town of Wisła in the Beskid Mountains in southern Poland. He found two and a half acres of land for sale there. Hyon Mun Sunim found another piece of land in the Bieszczady Moun-

first director and offered constant help and support. And these are just a few people among many who have been helping us.

And so, through all that effort and energy, the Unsu Foundation was established in the fall of 2015 and formally registered in Polish law in February the next year.

Unsu is the Korean pronunciation of two Chinese characters, 雲水, meaning “cloud” and “water.” In this case, a better translation is “drifting clouds, flowing water.” This term has been commonly used in Buddhism to describe a practicing itinerant monk who wanders from monastery to monastery seeking a good place to practice and a keen-eyed teacher. (To be clear, Unsu is the name of the foundation that owns the land. The temple itself does not yet have a name, and will get its own name later.)

Who are the members of the foundation? All of the sunims from our worldwide monastic sangha, not just the Polish monks and nuns. Our monastic sangha owns the place.

In 2017, we decided that it was time to start living and practicing on the land. We bought a used camping trailer and Hyon Mun Sunim spent the summer retreat there. He took apart an old shed, and after the retreat it was rebuilt into an insulated garage, and the trailer was moved inside. The place got a new nickname: the “Trailersa.” I did the first winter retreat there with no running water and a wood stove that had to be installed at the beginning of the retreat. After that, conditions slowly improved. A new seventy-meter deep water well was drilled, windows were put in, a tent to store firewood was installed, and a storage container was brought in. A new 150-meter road was constructed, so now the place would be more accessible by car—even though a four-wheel drive is still necessary most of the year. With money raised for us by the Singapore sangha, we bought additional parcels of land, and now we have about six acres. All the work done on the land was made possible by the generous donations of many people.

Throughout those several years, every summer and winter one sunim has been doing a hundred-day solo retreat there. One of my Korean dharma friends, Heo San Sunim, sat there in 2018 in the summer. Il Am Sunim did one winter ango, the time between Kyol Che retreats. Hye Tong Sunim practiced there one summer. In September of 2019, I came for just one winter, and

because of the pandemic I ended up staying there for almost two years. It’s the best place to quarantine, by the way.

Slowly, more and more people in our sangha in Poland have not only become aware of what we’re doing there, but have contributed what they could to help—by offering their time, donating food and necessities, or supporting us financially. And more and more often, people come to visit and join us in work and practice. Members of the Katowice Zen Center (the Zen center nearest to us) are particularly generous with their time and help.

Together with Igor Piniński JDPSN and his Original Buddha Temple project, we planted around 1,300 new trees in the spring of 2021. And this summer, following the idea and the lead of Igor PSN, we held the first group retreat on the land, a one-week forest Yong Maeng Jong Jin attended by eighteen people. Afterward we held a large precepts ceremony.

In the fall, the trailer left the building and took up



Photo: Courtesy of Unsu Foundation

residence in a new tent, becoming our guest quarters. “Trailersa” was no more. After some simple adaptations to the interior, this winter (2021–2022) is incomparably more comfortable for the sunim practicing there during Kyol Che.

Things continue to happen and the place keeps changing. Why did we decide to start this project? There were a few reasons.

As of now, there is no place in Europe that sunims

from our KUSZ lineage can call a home temple, that is, a place that is run according to monastic rules and serves first and foremost the needs of the monastic sangha. Sunims can visit Europe only for shorter periods, since it is not possible to take residence in one of our school's centers for an extended time—either because of limited space, financial constraints, or simply because of the difficulty of being the only monastic living among lay students. The monastic and lay lifestyles are quite different. What we need in Poland (and in Europe in general) is a place that European sunims can call home, where they can keep their possessions and—most important—practice. In light of the growing community of European sunims in Korea and the absence of a monastery in Europe, we intend this mountain place in Poland to address this need.

When talking about that, I find it helpful to use the example of Musangsa—the main temple of the Kwan Um School in Korea. Although it is a part of the school, it is owned by the monastic sangha. And the rules in

unique nature of this place and of the fact that we do not intend it to become another Zen center in Europe “competing” for students with local centers. The main idea of the project is well-received in the European teachers group and has the full support of the other Polish teachers and the Polish sangha in general. We also made it clear from the start that we will not do any fundraising within the Kwan Um School because that could divert already scant financial resources away from our Zen centers.

Our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, generously spread the seeds of dharma throughout the world. Some of the seeds took root in Poland: it was the first country in Europe where our Kwan Um School of Zen established centers. His efforts and widespread teaching would not have been possible without his great bodhisattva vows. But the realization of these vows to help all beings was possible on such a vast scale only because he was a Buddhist monk. To have the dharma flourish and manifest in a complete way, a fourfold sangha is needed, consisting of bhikkhus (monks), bhikkhunis (nuns), upasakas (laymen), and upasikas (laywomen). Sunims could not exist without the support of the lay sangha. And while it is hard for laypeople to devote so much time to practice, study, helping others, and together action, sunims don't have anything else to do.

So what is the plan or the goal? Immediately, there is none, at least not in the strict sense. Establishing a temple is called in Korean *gae san* (開山), “opening the mountain.” One just goes to the location and begins practicing, and continues to practice there until the mountain opens up. How does one know when that happens? The place will start accepting you. The local community will start accepting you. It is a process, and it is impossible to sidestep. And it has been slowly happening—for example, in a couple of instances local people referred to me as “our monk.” One just has to live there for a while to gain their trust.

In the meantime, we have patience: patience to practice and just be there. All that's important is to maintain a clear direction and keep a strong practice and try mind. The mountain will show us. If it opens up a little—the result will be a small temple. If it opens up wide—a bigger practicing place will appear. Just follow the situation. And, as Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say: “Only try, try, try for ten thousand years, nonstop.” Please come and visit. ♦



Photo: Jeff Hazlbauer

Musangsa are a bit different than in our Zen centers. Everybody is welcome there, but while at Musangsa one has to follow the rules established by the monastic sangha. Sunims are the hosts; laypeople are the guests. When monastics come to any of our Zen centers it is the other way around—they are the guests, and they have to follow the rules established by the lay sangha.

I had a chance to talk about this situation with other teachers in Europe, and everybody is well aware of the