

# Primary Point



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# MUSANGSA 2023-2024

# Kyolche

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So when we do a retreat together, we put down all our opinions—my opinion, my situation, my condition. Then the correct opinion, correct situation, and correct condition appear.  
After a retreat, you have dharma energy and take away this world's suffering. That's our practice, our lives and our job.

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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 1,400 copies.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

<b>When You Completely Attain Your True Self, Then Everything Is Complete</b>	
<i>Zen Master Seung Sahn</i> .....	4
<b>You Can Change Your Karma. Your Mind Can Do Anything. Recollections of Zen Master Seung Sahn</b>	
<i>Zen Master Bon Shim</i> .....	6
<b>The Berlin “Crash Visit”</b>	
<i>Zen Master Hyon Ja</i> .....	7
<b>In This Life, Getting a Little Bit of Happiness Is Important</b>	
<i>Tolo Cantarellas JDPSN</i> .....	8
<b>Becoming a Monk Is Not Special—It Is a Kind of Technique</b>	
<i>Zen Master Dae Kwang</i> .....	10
<b>Inka Ceremony for Jan Sendzimir</b> .....	12
<b>Inka Ceremony for Dušan Silváši</b> .....	15
<b>Zen in the Cloud</b>	
<i>Agata Hae In</i> .....	20
<b>Let’s Do It! Perspectives from the Lviv Zen Center</b>	
<i>Won Hak Sunim</i> .....	23
<b>Zen Comic</b>	
<i>Marta Muñoz</i> .....	25
<b>Kwan Um School of Zen Centers</b> .....	28, 29, 30
<b>Membership in the Kwan Um School of Zen—America</b> .....	31

[3



Cover: Photo of Zen Master Seung Sahn in Spain, from Palma Zen Center archives.

# When You Completely Attain Your True Self, Then Everything Is Complete

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Dharma talk given in Katowice, Poland, April 1978

**Editor's Note:** Zen Master Seung Sahn, made his first trip to Europe in spring of 1978. He was then fifty years old, a Korean monk, and the Seventy-Eighth Ancestor in his line of succession. He had been teaching in America since 1972 and was the first Korean Zen Master to teach in the West. And now he wanted to find out about Europe. And so, in the company of six of his students, Dae Soen Sa Nim made the trip. They started in Italy, going first to Rome and then to Venice. Then they continued on to Zurich in Switzerland. Eventually they ended up in Poland, where they went to Warsaw, then Krakow, and finally Katowice. Along the way they visited many Zen centers and groups, and Zen Master Seung Sahn gave talks in many different places. The following dharma talks detailing Zen Master Seung Sahn's European experiences are taken from the daily journal kept by Mu Sang Sunim, who at the time was still a layperson named David B. Gerber. Dae Soen Sa Nim specifically requested that his student keep the journal of the trip, and so most of the talks made during that trip were recorded and later transcribed into a manuscript, and they are reprinted here with Mu Sang Sunim's permission.

The first is a talk Dae Soen Sa Nim gave upon his arrival in Katowice, and the other is a question and answer session. ❀

I feel today as I did when I once went to Kapleau Roshi's Zen center. [In the audience there were about thirty people in brown robes, in the style worn by Kapleau Roshi's students. —Ed.] Two years ago, Kapleau Roshi invited me to the opening of their Buddha House. Today I am visiting your Zen center. The Zen center is small, but the correct Kapleau Roshi mind is always here with you. So I am happy to see your everyday practicing, and I hope your Zen center will grow and grow, you will get enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

People believe in many kinds of Buddhism. Our Zen is a two-time revolution from Buddha's original teaching. Buddha originally taught Hinayana Buddhism. Then there was a revolution: Mahayana Buddhism. Next there was a revolution within Mahayana Buddhism: Zen Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism is only believing in one buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha. Mahayana Buddhism taught that one buddha was not enough. There are many people with different karma, different ideas. So to save them, in Mahayana Buddhism there are 84,000 buddhas, 84,000 bodhisattvas, 84,000 demons. This is too many buddhas, too many bodhisattvas, too many demons. So Zen Buddhism says that too many are not necessary. When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha! When you meet a bodhisattva, you must kill the bodhisattva! When you meet a demon, you must kill the demon! That is Zen. Then you will return to your true self. Zen is not dependent on anything. Not dependent on Buddha, not dependent on bodhisattvas, not dependent on God, not dependent on demons. Dependent on my true self. That is Buddha's original teaching.

Depending on my true self means becoming independent. I heard that formerly there was much suffering in Poland. In Korea also there was much suffering. I read the story of Madame Curie. Russia controlled this country. Curie went underground, teaching the Polish language. The Japanese also controlled Korea. Korean people taught Korean underground. This means being independent from one's country. Very similar karma. But this is outside independence. Zen is inside and outside complete independence. So our Zen means when you completely attain your true self, then everything is complete. If your mind is not complete, everything

4]



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archives

else is not complete. So if you are complete, your friends, your family, your country, the whole world is complete. Buddha said, if one mind is pure, the whole world is pure. That means complete teaching.

So what is complete? Our mind has many kinds of ideas. Also we keep many kinds of conditions, many kinds of situations. If your opinion, your condition, your situation completely disappear, then your mind is clear like space. Then your mind is like a clear mirror. Then you can see the sky—only blue. You can see this wall—only white. Someone is hungry, give them food. Someone is sad, you are sad together. There is no inside, no outside, no subject, no object; inside and outside completely become one. The name for this is great love, great bodhisattva, great compassion.

In this world all beings are suffering greatly. Buddha said that numberless beings are suffering. So our Buddhist students, keeping the great vow, only going straight, helping other people. Just your style. Now you are small, but your mind light is shining everywhere. This mind light has no shadow. It is brighter than the sun, stronger than anything. So I hope you only go straight, keeping bodhisattva mind, great love, and great compassion, soon get enlightenment, finish the great work of life and death, and save all people from suffering.

### Q&A: How Did You Learn Dharma?

A student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “How did you become interested in Zen?”

Dae Soen Sa Nim replied, “I didn’t understand my true self. First I wanted to understand my true self. I studied at the university. This was before I became a monk. Understanding is like a tape recorder. Understanding could not help me. I took all my understanding and threw it away. Then my true self appeared. So Zen is very interesting.”

The student continued, “How did you find Zen Master Ko Bong?”

Dae Soen Sa Nim said, “First I entered a monastery. At that time, after the Second World War, Korean society was very confusing. So I went to the mountain. At that time I also liked Western philosophy, but one day I decided that Eastern philosophy was better than Western philosophy. At that time I was not Buddhist; I was Christian. So I studied Taoism and Confucianism. But I didn’t understand the truth. I liked what Socrates said: ‘You must understand your true self.’ Confucianism and Taoism could not make me understand my true self. One day a monk came to my place and said I must read a book. It was the Diamond Sutra. So I read in the Diamond Sutra, ‘All formations are transient. If you view all appearance as nonappearance, then you can find your true self.’ This helped me. Then I studied many sutras, reading and reading. Later, a monk came and asked me what I was do-

ing. I said I wanted to understand Buddhism. The monk replied, ‘If you want to understand Buddhism, this is already a mistake. If you throw away all your understanding, then you will attain correct Buddhism.’ I thought that was correct, so I threw away all the sutras. I wanted to go to a Zen center. Just at that time, Zen Master Ko Bong visited our Zen center, Magaksa Temple. So I met Ko Bong and studied Zen from him. After one year I became his student and he gave me transmission.”

Another student asked, “How do you like Poland—Warsaw, Krakow, Katowice?”

Dae Soen Sa Nim replied, “Before I came to Poland I heard that your country is like our North Korea. I was born in North Korea, and later I moved to South Korea. I want to return to my country, but I cannot. So I thought, maybe Poland will not give me a visa. I worried about this. But your country gave me a visa, so I say, ‘Thank you very much.’ I understood my country, very strong. I came here to your country, it is very warm, also there is freedom. It’s like Europe. All young people’s minds here are like the minds of young people in America and Europe, not different. So I am very happy. Already young people become one. Then this mind in the future will mean world peace.

“Politics is only politics. But if young people’s minds come together, politics will only follow young people’s idea. So if young people’s mind becomes one, this is the best thing. Before, I said this mind is great love, great compassion, the great bodhisattva way. Only help other people: my family, my friends, my village, my country, the whole world. This mind. So I feel very good.”

A student asked, “How did you come to learn the dharma, become a monk, and become a great teacher?”

Zen Master Seung Sahn answered, “I didn’t know the dharma, so I became a monk. I studied dharma—but no dharma. I wanted to find the dharma, but I could not find dharma. So I don’t want dharma, only this. What do you understand?”

The student said, “I don’t understand anything.”

Dae Soen Sa Nim replied, “So I hit you. Then maybe if you find the meaning of my hit you will understand dharma. But this is only what we call dharma. If you want original dharma, you ask me: what is dharma?”

The student asked, “What is dharma?”

Dae Soen Sa Nim said, “When I’m hungry I eat; when I’m tired I sleep. Do you understand?”

“I think so, but I’m not sure this is understanding.”

“Then ask me again,” said Dae Soen Sa Nim.

“What is dharma?”

“Today I left Krakow at 8:40 and arrived here after half an hour. Is that enough? Dharma is not dharma. The sun, the moon, the stars do not say, ‘I am the sun, I am the moon, I am the stars.’ Buddha did not say, ‘I am Buddha.’ God does not say, ‘I am God.’ The true God and the true Buddha have no name. Also the true sun, the true moon,

*(Continued on page 19)*

# *You Can Change Your Karma. Your Mind Can Do Anything.*

## Recollections of Zen Master Seung Sahn

*Zen Master Bon Shim (Aleksandra Porter)*

Meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn was a life-changing experience for me and for many people. When you meet such a person, your life becomes so determined that it leaves you with no other choice but to spread his teaching eventually.

We meet many people in our life. Some are charismatic, interesting, or warm, maybe even bright, but Zen Master Seung Sahn was something else. He was like a clear mirror, and in the reflection of it you could see your mind vividly. This wasn't always pleasant, yet at the same time, there was neither judgment nor discrimination from his side, only an open-minded person whose only wish was to wake you up.

I had the privilege to live with him in one apartment every time he came to Warsaw Zen Center. We shared the same space, and he was a part of our family, coming to the kitchen, always with some comment or advice. He was curious about what we were cooking and would hang around for a while. We were living our daily lives, and one time, a large kitchen table we had ordered arrived and we couldn't get it through the door.

Zen Master Seung Sahn heard some movement and people pushing the table and immediately had an idea. He shouted, "Bring it through the window" and added, "Good table." These were the special moments of living together, simple but at the same time remarkable to see this alert mind in everyday life situations.

But there were also unusual moments. Zen Master Seung Sahn had this strong dharma energy or dharma light, and it was hard to stop my little kids, who absolutely wanted to go into his room and just be with him as much as possible.

Another story from a significant moment for the Polish school occurred when we celebrated our twenty-year anniversary. Zen Master Seung Sahn was already very ill, but he came anyway. We built a new dharma room just before the event. Zen Master Seung Sahn was very happy when he arrived and saw a beautiful new big hall for practice and so many students inside. He didn't talk much during the ceremony, and when he returned to his room, he just collapsed on the big chair, exhausted. So I leaned close to him and whispered if he needed anything, maybe I should call a doctor. He just shook his head in denial and said, "You have many people here—think about other people."

Zen Master Seung Sahn touched the hearts of so many people. I hear stories all the time from his students. Some of them are still in our school, and some came back after many

years of absence. He spread enlightenment seeds all over the world, and they are still growing in many different places.

What is fascinating is that he didn't have to explain much. As we know, his verbal communication wasn't the most important factor. His books and his teachings constantly inspire and attract many students, but the essential part was that his presence helped us to connect to something bigger than us, our original mind.

I had the honor to translate hundreds of interviews and exchanges he had with many people. He had such a strong impact and could change a person's view or attitude in a short time, or help them to let go of their anger or strong opinion or strong suffering, giving them direction and encouragement for practice.

One time a man arrived in a very poor state of mind. He was in pain and crying, Zen Master Seung Sahn sat with him in silence for a while, and then he said to him, "You can change your karma, your mind can do anything. You must do strong training." And that's exactly what he did, and he is doing so much better.

Zen Master Seung Sahn could reach each person deeply, and people seemed relieved after talking to him, a truly remarkable and great bodhisattva.

I remember a big dharma talk at the Warsaw University of Technology, where about five or six hundred people attended. It's hard to describe the moments of complete silence after he asked questions like "Where are you coming from?" or "When you die, where do you go?" or "Who are you?" Everyone got hit, and even after he finished his talk, people were just sitting there and still couldn't leave the lecture hall for a little while.

The last story comes from an important event on my path, a kind of recognition from Zen Master Seung Sahn. I received inka from him and I was very happy. For a moment, I had this idea that now I can relax a bit with my daily practice and focus more on my new job, but I wanted to hear what Zen Master Seung Sahn had to say about that. So I asked him, and he looked at me with his piercing eyes and repeated, "Relax, *haha!* Now you should practice more, because you have more responsibility. If you loosen your practice, your karma will control you, and you cannot be completely clear."

Deep gratitude for Zen Master Seung Sahn's unshakable direction, incredibly clear and powerful teaching that continues to inspire and save many people from suffering. ♦

# The Berlin “Crash Visit”

Zen Master Hyon Ja (Jo-Alma Potter)

In 1997, the Berlin sangha was working steadily to finish the new Zen center. After a long search, a member had found a huge space in a factory building, which after a major transformation would become our dharma place. But then we suddenly were informed that Zen Master Seung Sahn, along with several other monks and a nun, intended to visit the new Berlin Zen Center.

At that time, I was the abbot of the emerging new Zen center. We went into overdrive to be ready for their visit. We aimed for perfection, but a perfectly finished Zen center is an illusion, because everyone’s idea of perfection is just that: an idea. It wasn’t quite finished when they arrived.

Finally, the time for the visit was quite close. We were so nervous. We rented a huge van to pick up our honored visitors. I would be the chauffeur. Hah! If only I had known how to drive such a van. But try mind is a powerful mind. The following memories remain from that first visit.

When Zen Master Seung Sahn entered our barely ready dharma room, he went straight to the altar and bowed. A German artist had carved a new Buddha statue for us from a solid piece of oak. This new Buddha statue had replaced the previous small golden Korean Buddha statue. Our sangha members typically did not agree on most things, which provided great like-dislike teaching. But one thing we did agree on was how much we loved that Buddha.

In front of the altar, Zen Master Seung Sahn suddenly asked me, “Abbot, everyone like this Buddha?” I enthusiastically replied “Yes”—and breathed a sigh of relief as he nodded and moved on to inspect the rooms and the kitchen. We settled him in the interview room, which also had a small altar upon which the small, golden Korean Buddha sat. Softly but clearly, he said, “This nice Buddha. Put on big altar.” It was a defining Zen moment for me and a great teaching in serious attachment. I took a deep breath and simply nodded.

I shared what he had said with the other members of the sangha and asked them if they agreed to swap the Buddha statues that day. It was a defining Zen moment for the members. We all grumbled a little bit, but we swapped the Buddhas. We understood that it was not about “our way” but rather about attachment mind.

Later, Zen Master Ji Kwang (Roland Wöhrle-Chon) and I built a tall altar for the new wooden oak Buddha, and we placed this altar directly at the entrance door to the Zen center. Since then, this oak Buddha has greeted the thousands of Zen students attending practice in the Berlin Zen Center. Not long after that, we received a beautiful, wooden Korean Buddha statue, which now sits on the dharma room altar. This wood Buddha and that wood Buddha: same or different?

Once, while waiting in a restaurant for lunch, the beautiful nun, now Zen Master Dae Kwan, stood up, took her sweater off, and placed it over Zen Master Seung Sahn’s shoulders. She said, “Little bit cold here.” This very simple action brought sudden tears to my eyes. I had seldom seen that quality of directed attention and kindness and have never forgotten it.

That same visit remains indelibly imprinted in my mind as the Crash Visit. Zen Master Seung Sahn had described the big van in two words: “Big Horse!” After our restaurant visit, we were all in the Big Horse when I cut a corner too sharply and crashed into a brand-

new BMW. No one was hurt, but I experienced agony mind. Zen Master Seung Sahn only said to me, “Hard training!” and smiled. The first thought in my mind was to find a taxi, which then appeared out of nowhere, and when everyone was safely in the taxi and gone, I sat down on the curb and cried in front of the shocked owner of the BMW.

I remember those two words—*hard training*—at those times when my life has indeed been hard, but I also remember his gentle smile. ♦



Photo: Courtesy of Berlin Zen Center

# *In This Life, Getting a Little Bit of Happiness Is Important*

## **Anecdotes about Zen Master Seung Sahn**

*Tolo Cantarellas JDPSN*

Being in Palma de Mallorca for a retreat followed by a public talk, Zen Master Seung Sahn came along with Do Mun Sunim (now Zen Master Dae Bong), Zen Master Dae Kwang, Zen Master Su Bong, Mu Sang Sunim, Jane McLaughlin (now Zen Master Bon Yeon), and Diana Clark. At one point, Zen Master Seung Sahn felt unwell and had to be admitted to a clinic.

He was there for a few days until it was time to give the public talk. Then he told me to talk to the cardiologist and tell him that he had to go out and give this talk. The doctor told me that this was impossible, that he could not assume such responsibility, and that he had to stay in the

electrocardiograms and told me that with those medical tests and given his history of two previous heart attacks, he could not let him leave, but that in any case, if he wanted to leave, he would do so voluntarily and at his own risk.

I went again to transmit the information to Zen Master Seung Sahn, and he told me, "OK, give me the paper, and I'll sign it." The doctor signed the voluntary discharge and gave it to me so that Dae Soen Sa Nim could sign it, telling me, "If this man wants to commit suicide, I cannot prevent it."

That same day, Zen Master Seung Sahn left the clinic to give the talk at the conference, which was a success in terms of attendance, without any problem.



The first retreat in Palma in 1982 was attended by many diverse people of all ages and from many places. Only a few of the more senior students were familiar with the formal meals served on such retreats.

At lunchtime, instructions were given on how to proceed. When it came time to clean the bowls, as it was the first time, and with so much new information, there was a misunderstanding, and many retreatants had not realized that they should not leave food in the bowls. When collecting the water at the end, they put food scraps into the water. When the collected water was presented to the head dharma teacher, it was a soup with leftover vegetables, bread, etc.

Seeing this, Dae Soen Sa Nim got quite angry and ordered that "that" be distributed among all and be drunk: "Drink necessary." Hearing that, about twenty people got up and left. Zen Master Seung Sahn reconsidered his attitude, took back the order, and explained the reason for the whole

procedure in the formal style so that things calmed down, and the retreat could continue without further incident.



While living at the Paris Zen Center, we were visited by Zen Master Seung Sahn, along with Do Mun Sunim, making a stopover on the way to Poland. Every morning Dae Soen Sa Nim went to the embassy to get the visa to enter Poland and returned without success. The situation



*Photo: Courtesy of Palma Zen Center*

hospital following the treatment and continue doing tests. I explained what the doctor said to Dae Soen Sa Nim. He patiently listened to the story, and when I finished he told me, "Go back to the doctor and explain that it is unavoidable that I have to go to give this conference that many people will attend. Therefore, I have to leave the clinic today."

Again I went back to meet with the cardiologist, as smoothly as I could, expecting an angry reaction. When he found out that I was a nurse, the doctor showed me the





Photo: Courtesy of Palma Zen Center

lasted for several weeks.

The Zen center followed the rhythm of practice, work, meals, and so on. But from time to time, Dae Soen Sa Nim invited us to the movies and then to ice cream before returning for practice. After lunch each day, we made sure to have all our jobs finished so we would be prepared in case there was an “afternoon session.”

Once we went to see an action movie—Zen Master Seung Sahn’s favorite genre. I used to sit behind him and translate from French to English (sometimes without much success), so that he could follow the plot.

After endless scenes of violence and innumerable deaths, there came the final scene, in which the protagonist (Arnold Schwarzenegger) said goodbye to the girl on the steps of the plane (as in the movie *Casablanca*) and also decided to stay on the ground, to finish the work.

After dinner at the Zen center, we used to have tea and discuss the movies we had seen. Dae Soen Sa Nim said, “You know, he (Schwarzenegger) should have left with the girl because, in this life, getting a little bit of happiness is important.”



While visiting Seoul with my wife, Gabriela, we stayed in a *yogwan* (a Korean-style hotel) near Hwagyesa Temple, where Dae Soen Sa Nim lived. We participated in the practice and some temple activities.

One day, Zen Master Seung Sahn invited us to accompany him on a trip with some monks from the monastery

to Pusan, in South Korea, where there was a ceremony and he had to give a dharma talk. We traveled there by car, and when we arrived, there was a theater full of people; there were traditional dances, which were very colorful, with exquisite harmony; and then Zen Master Su Bong gave a talk in Korean. Finally, Dae Soen Sa Nim concluded the event with his dharma talk. We had been asked to go on stage to greet the audience with a bow, and we were asked for our names and professions: Gabriela, journalist; Tolo, nurse.

When we went on stage, there was a great ovation for us, as Western students of Dae Soen Sa Nim visiting Korea. However, they mixed up our professions—perhaps due to gender-role assumptions—calling Gabriela Tous the nurse and Bartolomé Cantarellas the journalist.



While Dae Soen Sa Nim was admitted to a clinic on the outskirts of Palma (located near a forest) due to cardiac risk, we went to visit him: Do Mun Sunim, Mu Sang Sunim, Jane McLaughlin, and me. When we entered the room, we saw him, relaxed and smiling, looking up. On top of the IV support that was connected to his arm, there was a small insect with antennae perched, and Dae Soen Sa Nim was talking to it affectionately. Once all of us had joined him next to the bed, he introduced it to us and continued talking to both it and us. The scene was charming and tender. He made us smile and, at the same time, relieved us of our concern for his health. ♦

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Photo: Courtesy of Palma Zen Center

# Becoming a Monk Is Not Special— It Is a Kind of Technique

Zen Master Dae Kwang

From a dharma talk Q&A given at the Vienna Zen Center, July 15, 2022

## Great Harmony between the Dharma and Life

**Question:** I've heard that you are a monk, and I would like to ask what moved you to this decision? Why did you decide to become a monk? What kind of feeling or thought or experience did you have?

**Zen Master Dae Kwang:** When you think about what's going on in your life, then there are always these three things we're talking about all day: old age, sickness, and death. What do you actually want and why? And what's the result of that? If you want to stay young, how's that going? Well, it goes OK for a while. But Zen is all about finding your true self and helping the world. Meditation doesn't actually do anything for you, but it does expose to you what's actually going on. So what do you want?

There's nothing special about my life and why I became a monk. It's the same old stupid stuff that's happening to everybody. It's just what do you do about it. Becoming a monk is not special. It's a kind of technique. So he [*pointing to the person who gave the introductory talk*] talked about divers and their breathing techniques. Breathing is a technique that we use in Buddhism a lot. The Buddha did that kind of technique because he didn't know what else to do. When you look at old age, sickness, and death—what the hell are you going to do? Even if you're healthy, you'll die, and everybody around you will die, and everything that you want will be gone. We always summarize all that crap by saying old age, sickness, and death.

So the Buddha, before he becomes the Buddha, sees an old person, a sick person, and then he sees a dead person lying by the road. It's interesting, because in the West, when you see dead people, they're usually dressed up really well. They have good makeup. The box is nice. When I went to my mother's funeral, I looked at her, and she hadn't looked that good in about fifteen years. That really hit me. So, that's life. You're always thinking that way, that I want something. But if you look at this "I want something," you'll notice it's not going to result in anything. Except, the Buddha noticed it resulted in suffering.

If you watch your mind closely, you want something, and then it will work out, but then it goes away, or it doesn't work out. Zen Master Seung Sahn always said,

"A good situation is a bad situation." Well, that doesn't make any sense! Everybody wants a good situation. But if you just hang around for a few minutes, suddenly, that good situation would turn bad for sure. You don't have to worry. That will happen. So that scared the hell out of him so much that he left home. Scared me, too. Probably scares everybody here. That's why you're here. You're not here accidentally.

## Simple Technique

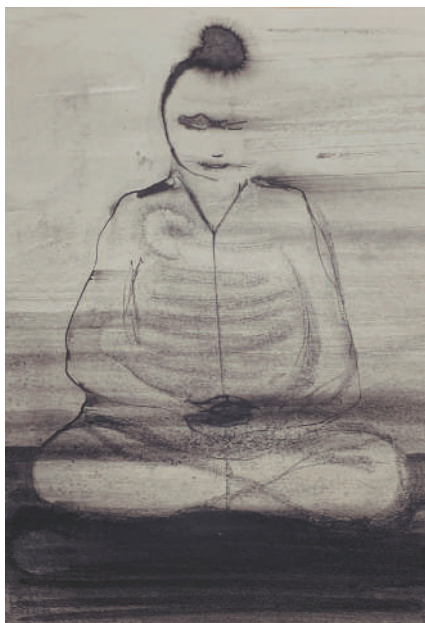
Why do you do something? So we use these techniques. Buddha used that very simple technique: "Just breathe in and breathe out and pay attention." It's simple. I can teach you that in just about less time than it takes me to say it in a sentence. Because you already know what it is. You don't do it, but you know what it is. But that's true of everybody else. So that's some kind of technique.

And then there's Soto Zen, which has an even simpler technique. You don't pay attention to the breathing; you're just aware. That's the Chinese style of meditation. So simple that nobody would come to the Zen center if we taught that, because it's too simple. As Zen Master Seung Sahn was asked, "Why is Zen so difficult? You know, people will give up on it almost immediately. Why is that?" Well, that's because it's so boring. In fact, what we're teaching people is to be bored. If you sit this retreat

this weekend, you'll notice, boy, this is really boring. We'll be sitting here and looking at the floor for half an hour.

So the Buddha leaves home, his real high-class life. He's a prince, his dad's the king, everything is going well, and then he sees these three things—old age, sickness, and death. "Wow, wait a minute, this isn't going to last. What the heck is going on?" He doesn't understand, and this not-understanding is interesting because it pulls you away from your desire mind for a second. It may last only a second. Usually, with me, it's about half a second. Then you just let go because there's no solution, right? Does anybody have a solution to old age, sickness, and death?

10]



Art: Sven Mahr

Religions talk about it. Like the solution of death is we'll all go to heaven and what? For how long? We'll be up there in heaven with this solution tucked away under our shirt, waiting for somebody to autograph it. That's always going on. All the time. But the Buddha wouldn't fall for that. That's why we've remembered him for 2,600 years. So he couldn't figure it out. In fact, not figuring it out is natural and correct. In fact, if you look at his life closely, he didn't figure it out either. Therefore, he's talking about meditation techniques.

Our techniques in the Kwan Um School of Zen are a little more complicated. We do keep breathing. That's a good idea. So we'll teach a breathing technique to you. And then also we'll have you pay attention. Usually, we'll even stick in a phrase to repeat inside your mind. So we might have you do a mantra, which is just repeating something. It's either something you understand or something you don't understand, because you're just repeating this inside your mind while you are breathing. Zen Master Seung Sahn did this chant called the Great Dharani. So it's just a technique to keep one thing, to keep what we call a just-now mind.

### Really Good Croissants

Usually, we're off somewhere. So you're in Paris buying some really good croissants. Not like those fake croissants that they sell in Austria or New York City or San Francisco, where I'm from. You know, like the *real* ones. You're always thinking like this. Your mind will just shoot off somewhere, and then the simple thing is to just come back to just now. That's too simple. But there's something interesting about just now. And the interesting thing about just now, even me telling you this is going to shock me:

Give me one second of the past. Just one. And then give me one second of the future. Same story, right? In the future, I'm going to become a famous Zen master and move to Texas. OK, that's a good idea. So that's like one second of the future. But you don't have that. Then what do you have? You have just now, right? That's the third option. Give it to me right now. You can't do that either, right? So it always is: "Oh, Zen is so negative. It's always talking about how everything is empty and there isn't anything." Well, that's just an attempt to describe to you what you actually are, which is this [*clapping his hands*] moment-thing, which is not something that you can give me, obviously. But then why do that?

So the Buddha has this big question: "What am I?" And he sits for six years, practices for six years. He gets so frustrated by the teachers he's met and that he hasn't figured it out, so he goes and sits underneath a tree. Then toward the end of that six years, one morning he looks up, sees the morning star, and then—*boom!*—he realizes: "This is it! That's cool!" Then he keeps sitting there: "Man, this is great! There's nothing like just now, you know?"

### Help People!

There's a good story about a Hindu god called Brahma living up in Hindu heaven somewhere, and he looks down, and he sees the Buddha—the idiot, sitting underneath this tree, grooving on the moment. Brahma flows down to earth, stands in front of the Buddha, and says: "You have to get up and help people!" Buddha doesn't say anything, but Buddha does hear what the god said. The god realizes that and floats back up to heaven. Then the Buddha gets up and spends the rest of his life helping people.

### Take Away the "I Want Something"

Usually in Buddhism, the religion, we celebrate the birth of the Buddha. We celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha, and strangely enough, we celebrate the death of the Buddha. But we don't celebrate the most important thing, which is him getting up and helping people. So I proposed to the Singapore government that we need a new holiday. It's called *Get Up Day*, and it's the most important holiday of the year, actually. A lot of people don't realize it yet, but they will. That's what you do with this moment to help the world.

So, Buddhism means finding your true self. That's Buddha, seeing the star and realizing that, "Oh, this is what I really am, this moment," and then getting up to help. That's all of Buddhism. It's very simple. Actually, it doesn't make any difference what techniques you use. Arguing about techniques doesn't lead anywhere. After all, modern Zen comes from the Sixth Ancestor. He didn't practice any technique. He was just walking by a monk who was standing in the corner reading a sutra. He listened to one line of it, then—*boom!* That's where all of Zen comes from.

So the problem is not with practicing. The problem is, why do it? We come here to practice. It's not meant to be completely unpleasant. It's also not meant to be pleasant. This is called the middle path. It's not too hard; it's not too easy. Most times as you go through life, it can be easy, or it can be hard, but it revolves around that I *want* something. So if you take away the "I want something," and then you just do it, like the Nike shoes ad says, "Just do it!" then you get this big result and use that to help the world.

### Just Do It!

So that's the point of the whole thing. With all these techniques that he's talking about, the idea is to help people. Why do it? That's the important question. That is Buddhism. That is why it is called Mahayana Buddhism, which is great love, great compassion, and bodhisattva action.

So that's a technique question. But very important is, why do you do the technique? Actually, the technique is not important at all. Helping people is what is important. ♦

[11

## INKA CEREMONY FOR

# Jan Sendzimir

*On September 3, 2022, Jan Sendzimir received inka at Shinjomsa Temple, Slovakia.*

### DHARMA COMBAT

**Knud Rosenmayr JDPSN:** Jan, I have a question. You are a professor, so you deal a lot with understanding, right? Zen Master Seung Sahn always told us that understanding cannot help us, so my question to you is, When can understanding actually help us?

**Sendzimir PSN:** You already understand.

**Rosenmayr PSN:** No. *[Shaking head.]*

**Sendzimir PSN:** What color is my robe?

**Rosenmayr PSN:** Gray!

**Sendzimir PSN:** Understanding has appeared.

**Rosenmayr PSN:** Ah, thanks for your understanding.



**Question:** Hi, Jan. Nice to meet you. I made some interesting investigation. *[Shows a forty-five-year-old photo of Jan doing Sim Gum Do (Korean sword practice) with Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel), Mu Bul Sunim (Roger Nobel), and Paul Chance at Hwagyesa Temple.]* I was surprised that you have been practicing so long in the Kwan Um School. I was wondering what kind of teaching you were learning that it would take that long to become a teacher.

**Sendzimir PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** I'm asking you.

**Sendzimir PSN:** I'm glad we both arrived on time for this interview.



**Zen Master Bon Shim:** Our teaching is wonderful, and it says that good and bad have no self-nature. There's a great variety—for example, this ceremony is wonderful, but we have terrifying things. So my question is, Do good and bad ever end?

**ZMBS:** You already understand.

**Sendzimir PSN:** *[Points to his robe.]* What color is my robe?

**ZMBS:** No, no, this won't help. I can see well so far . . .

**Sendzimir PSN:** Is this a good color or a bad color?

**ZMBS:** That's a good color, yes. *[Bows and leaves.]*

### INKA SPEECH

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

Home is not home. Not home is home!

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

No home. No not home!

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

Home is home. Not home is not home. Which one of these statements is correct?

KATZ!

Bright faces shine in the morning light.

### Where Is Home?

Where is home? Maybe it's right here in Kosice—so near to where my father was born and spent his summer holidays long ago. He loved this land, but never could show it to me because of the war. Perhaps this is finally near home?

Where is home? What am I? What is life? These are fundamental questions that urge all of us to really look at this life, at this world. But often we do so with so much drama, as these questions arise every time and we get knocked off balance.

I often ask, Am I European or American? No one here can spell or pronounce my name. My father was Polish,



and my mother was French. They told me, “Don’t make anything special. Americans gave us safety in the most dangerous time. Just be an American.” I said, “OK,” but it felt so strange. I started to look at this country, back in the 1960s, everything was new—new highways, new airports, new cars. I thought, “Maybe this big, shiny new country is home. Maybe this is part of who I am?”

### Tylko kapusta i masło

But when the Iron Curtain opened, and I finally reached Poland ten years later in 1970, I found that home is more than names or words can capture. I had just arrived from shining and glamorous Manhattan, New York, to Warsaw. I found a world with no color. No paint on the buildings, no bright lights. Yet life in some ways was full and vibrant—made by people with hardly anything—no cars, no telephones, no fancy anything, and in the supermarkets there was almost no food at all—*tylko kapusta i masło*. Only cabbage and butter. No bread, no meat, no vegetables. Nothing! And this was Warszawa, the capital of Poland. I was frightened. How do these people live? Yet I found these people were wonderful. Even though they had nothing, these people had bright, sharp minds. They asked penetrating questions, wisely observing life, and loving and helping one another in ways that were inspiring. With nothing, they were making a good life.

Am I Polish? They can actually spell my name. So, am I home? The friends I’d made in Poland laughed and said, “Jan, you’re a nice guy, but you don’t look Polish.”

*Don’t know.* This question arose even more deeply for me when I lived the next year in West Africa and found the same story from people who had less than the people in Poland. Wonderful, insightful people.

### Home or Not Home

Maybe I can find the answer in books? Perhaps literature or religion can answer it? I read and read, and I found no real satisfaction or relief. Philosophy was too dry, with none of the juice of life. Religions involved carrying around mountains of beliefs. Then a book on Zen hit me: “As soon as you think you’ve found the answer, you have gone to sleep.” This can never grow old. It will always be fresh. But, how to follow this Zen path? Japan and Korea are on the other side of the world.

Maybe drugs are the shortcut? It was the hippie times, and I had hair down to my shoulders. We tried everything. And when I say “everything,” I mean *everything!* And so, we tried all kinds of magic mushrooms and LSD, and had fantastic experiences. It was a world beyond words. For a lot of these experiences, why open your mouth when words make no sense? And so one had a feeling in one’s bones, that something beyond words was out there.

But what is it? Every time, we woke up from these drugs to find ourselves in the same place, frustrated as all the glow faded away, and it became clear. You can’t depend

on outside help, because it melts away. Drugs may show you *not home*, but eventually you’re back in the same place, and you still don’t know. You must climb this mountain on your own and leave “inside” and “outside” behind.

All my efforts to find *home* or *not home* ended in the same place: Don’t know.

### So, What Is My Direction?

I decided to check out all the Zen masters and find a sangha: a grand tour from California to New York, and maybe even Asia. As luck would have it, I was living in Providence, Rhode Island. I called Providence Zen Center, and they said, “Yes, we have a Zen master here.” So I went there for my first encounter with an actual Zen master. I remember waiting in the dharma room for evening practice, everyone seated in silence. I hear the footsteps coming down the stairs, and there appears Zen Master Seung Sahn, the first Zen master I saw who did not live in the pages of a book.

All through chanting and sitting, I was sneaking glances over at him, looking, listening, trying to get a sense, and again it became clear. Check him out? Are you kidding?

I had no idea how. *Don’t know.*

So, in twenty minutes, my grand tour evaporated. Why bounce from flower to flower when you can’t even taste the nectar? Stay right here until things become clear.

Maybe PZC is home. Zen Master Seung Sahn said that we lost our way to our original home because we forgot our true self. So I moved in and started to build my new Zen identity: new robes and kasa, new practice, new language, a dharma name. But before I could settle in to a comfortable home, Zen Master Seung Sahn challenged us: “Why are you practicing? You want enlightenment? Enlightenment, not enlightenment—not important. What is your direction? That’s important: only for all beings!”

But which direction? A doctor asked Dae Soen Sa Nim, “Should I become a monk?” He replied, “No, just be a doctor 100 percent and help everybody.” This was a big relief to hear, because after ninety days of Kyol Che at Sudoksa Temple in Korea, I knew I would have been a really bad monk. Do you want proof? Just look at my two beautiful daughters and my wonderful partner. So, what is my direction? Where can I help the most?

### Earth, Climate Crisis, Science: Home . . . Not Home . . . Don’t Know

Already there was much suffering, because the world was changing so fast—so fast that it was becoming hard to recognize. Especially now, when more than 30 million people are environmental refugees. They have been chased from their homes by drought, flood, fire, and storm, by climate change. They live somewhere else, not because they want to, but because they have to.

[13

In California, there are canyons where the fire moves so quickly that sometimes the only warning you get is your neighbor yelling to you: “Run!” Don’t think of your passport or try to grab anything; just start running. That’s how fast the fire moves. Now we hear this from Australia up to Siberia and around to Europe: “I no longer recognize my world.”

Fire, flood, drought, pandemics. *Home becomes not home becomes our new home . . . don’t know.* This is where help is needed.

Maybe I could just be a scientist 100 percent and save all beings with knowledge. Forty years’ work in science revealed that knowledge is not enough. It’s even dangerous for the small minds that grab it as their identity. They use their knowledge to protect their identity. These are the ones that say, “I know.” But, in the world of science, there are great minds that have moved far beyond knowledge to a frontier driven only by curiosity where nobody knows—a wave of *don’t know* that never stops. I was profoundly moved by how humble and open the greatest of them were, like children who would listen to and talk to anyone, eyebrow-to-eyebrow, with complete honesty and humility.

### We Need This *Don’t Know* Now More Than Ever

14]

Every path I tried—names, possessions, philosophy, religion, drugs, knowledge—all ended in the same place: don’t know. But how to use this don’t know in a world changing so fast that no one recognizes or trusts anyone or anything? We need this don’t know now more than ever. Never in my seventy-two years has the world been so divided. So many people are frightened, and in their fear they are trying to gain control by knowing more than others. *My* scientist said this, *my* journalist said that. So I know! Because of this anger and certainty, we are not learning. I am a climate scientist, and I can tell you that no one has the answer. We have to learn. We have to take risks and learn our way into the future.

Would you like to see the power of this don’t know? Let’s go back 108 years to *not home*—the no-man’s-land between the British and German trenches in the First World War on Christmas Eve, 1914. One million men already dead in five months. The world had never seen such destruction and carnage. There was shock and incredible anger as well as fear holding everyone apart.

A British soldier is shocked to see a Christmas tree and lanterns in the German trenches and hear singing “*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*” from the German side. The Brits countered with “The First Noel,” and the Germans answered with “*O Tannenbaum*.” Something was opening. What is this? Yesterday we faced machine guns. Today there is singing. What is this?

The bravest on both sides used this opening to go out into the no-man’s-land between the trenches. They were brave enough to say, “I don’t know.” They shared tobac-

co, schnapps, sausage; took photographs, played soccer. These men were brave enough to put down the hatred and any idea of *enemy*, and a miracle occurred. They simply recognized each other as human beings, where “you” and “I” are not different. Two-thirds of the front ceased fighting that Christmas. A hundred thousand men laid down their arms for two days.

*Don’t know* made possible what no one could have imagined. The same responsibility lies before us right now. Beyond techniques or words or ideas. What can we do now? Some may think of Zen as some romantic escape from the world into meditation. It’s not romantic. It’s practical. Practicing don’t know is the most responsible step in this changing world. So where is home? When we follow our direction, practicing a deep don’t know, then home appears as we build together. And when we lose our direction, then home disappears.

I am so grateful for these many years of practice with all of you. You have all taught me. No journey happens alone. My profound gratitude to all my friends and family who have supported me over these many years, and especially to my teachers, Zen Master Ji Kwang, Knud Poep Sa Nim, Barry Poep Sa Nim, my wonderful partner, Alma [Zen Master Hyon Ja], and ultimately, Dae Soen Sa Nim, Zen Master Seung Sahn, who helped me to start down this road. Hand in hand, we all share this work, and I hope it will continue so for many years to come.

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

If you search for home, you will miss it.

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

If you don’t search for home, you will never find it.

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

Take away searching and missing—then what is this?

KATZ!

It’s a beautiful mountain morning. Let’s open the door and help our friends in, out of the rising heat! ♦

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*Jan Sendzimir JDPSN has practiced Zen since he met Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1974 and moved into the Providence Zen Center. He did Kyol Che at Sudoksa Temple in South Korea in 1976. He continued to practice in the United States over the next twenty years, while completing a doctorate in ecology and raising two daughters in Florida and Austria. In 2010, he returned to intense practice in Europe, South Korea, and North America. Since 2013 he has lived and practiced with his life partner, Zen Master Hyon Ja, as abbot of the Vienna Zen Center.*

## INKA CEREMONY FOR

# Dušan Silváši

*On September 3, 2022, Dušan Silváši received inka at Shinjomsa Temple, Slovakia.*

### DHARMA COMBAT

**Question:** Hello my friend.

**Silváši PSN:** Hello . . . “old” friend. *[Laughing from the audience.]*

**Q:** Thank you.

**Silváši PSN:** You’re welcome. Is that all? *[Louder laughing.]*

**Q:** *[Hesitating a little]* What to say . . .

**Silváši PSN:** *[Speaking to the audience]* So the next question please! *[Even louder laughing and applause, and another questioner starts to approach.]*

**Q:** I got it!

**Silváši PSN:** Congratulations!

**Q:** Now seriously.

**Silváši PSN:** OK.

**Q:** This is an important situation, an important event not only for global Kwan Um School of Zen but especially for the Slovak sangha, because as we call [the late] Oleg JDPSN our national treasure, he will be followed by the next teacher. That is absolutely wonderful! So Oleg’s style of teaching was to make jokes—we called it “Wow Zen.” What will be your style then?

**Silváši PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** Please teach me.

**Silváši PSN:** I’m sitting here answering you, and I’ll tell you a joke afterward. *[Loud laughing and applause from the*

*audience.]* You know, it’s an adult one. *[More laughing and applause.]*



**Igor Piniński JDPSN:** The master of ceremonies said you are a karate master. That means you know a lot about combat, and this is a dharma combat. Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say that in dharma combat first you have to kill your opponents and then resurrect them. So kill me now, please.

**Silváši PSN:** Kiai!

**Piniński PSN:** How can you resurrect me?

**Silváši PSN:** *[Hugs Igor. The audience applauds.]*



**Briggs PSN:** I have a question. In Africa, I have heard that there is a traditional saying: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” How do you like to go?

**Silváši PSN:** You already understand.

**Briggs PSN:** No, I don’t know.

**Silváši PSN:** After the ceremony all of us will go together to have some refreshment.

**Briggs PSN:** What about me?

**Silváši PSN:** Go eat pizza. *[Loud laughing from the audience.]*

**Briggs PSN:** Thank you very much.

**Silváši PSN:** Not at all.

[15



*Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Europe*



KOREA 2023

The Whole World  
Is a Single Flower

The Whole World Is a Single Flower Conference

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October 8-18, 2023

Musangsa Temple, South Korea

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# Zen Traditions in an Ever-Changing World

\* Participants can travel to Hong Kong on 19 October for the 30th Anniversary Events of Su Bong Zen Monastery (October 21-23, 2023), extend his/her stay in Korea or plan to travel home.

<https://kwanumzen.org/wwsf-2023>







秀峰禪院  
Su Bong Zen Monastery

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# You're Cordially Invited!

Join us in Hong Kong for our 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of Su Bong Zen Monastery from October 21 to 25, 2023 ( after WWSF at Musangsa ).

## Here is our schedule:

- \* Sat, Oct 21 – Fun Fair at Gak Su Temple and Hae Su Zen Center on Lantau Island
- \* Sun, Oct 22 – Half-day retreat and Dharma talks from KUSZ teachers
- \* Mon, Oct 23 – Half-day sightseeing and high table 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary dinner
- \* Oct 24-25 – More sightseeing for our visiting friends

After our celebrations, stay behind for our Winter Kyol Che on Lantau Island from Oct 28, 2023 to Jan 28, 2024. You're most welcome to apply!



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PRIMARY POINT Spring 2023

Illustration: Kennis Lo / Ellen G.



## INKA SPEECH

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

Someone said: “For stupid, everyone is stupid.” And one ancient Zen master said, “Buddha sees buddhas everywhere, and a pig sees just pigs.” So normal is not normal; not normal is normal. But look! Can you see it?

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

Can you hear that? This very sound cuts off all your thoughts, and without thoughts there is nothing normal, nothing not normal.

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

But there was a woodcutter who was so busy with cutting that he had no time to sharpen his axe. So when your axe is flat, sharpen it, and don't cut. When you are tired, it's normal to go to sleep. Don't watch social media, OK? So normal is normal, not normal is not normal. Which one do you like? Which one sounds normal to you?

KATZ!

I am so happy to see this wonderful big sangha here—more than sixty people—in this small retreat center in Slanske Nove Mesto on this wonderful, normal September day. This event is also kind of an opening ceremony of this new retreat center. We wanted to do this ceremony with Oleg PSN *[pointing to the urn with Oleg's remains on the altar]* maybe two years ago, but COVID-19 and Oleg's passing away have changed everything. So please, let me use this rare opportunity to, at least, thank everybody who helped to build this center, especially Peter Klen, Martin Svarc, Denisa Nagyova-Matuszakova, Oleg Šuk PSN, a couple of my karate friends, and of course my wonderful wife, Olinka. OK, the commercial is over.

About twelve years ago, when our first daughter, Dorotea, *[pointing to her in the audience]* was born, my wife and I thought that it is totally normal to have such an intelligent and clever girl like she is—until our second daughter, Alicia, was born. She was born with special, not normal conditions. She is a special needs child. Then we realized that to have Dorotea is not so ordinary, but rather it's great luck! In spite of her special conditions, Alicia is a very cute baby. Yes, we still call her a baby even though she is five and a half years old, because she still acts like a baby. And she doesn't differentiate—she can touch me, she can touch Dorotea or our cat, and—as some of you already experienced—she can touch any of you. But also she can stroke a refrigerator or anything else. And strangers in a restaurant too. And not just touching but also kissing or pinching—very hard—she is really good at it! And she sometimes takes your phone, so if you cannot find yours, please ask her. But after a couple of years visiting many doctors and therapists, we have realized that having our Alicia is normal, because this happens all the time in many families around the globe. So we realized that not normal is normal and normal is not normal.

Another example: I work for an IT company, and I also lead short morning meditations there. About six to eight people used to come. That's about a third of the company—we are



Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Europe

not a big company. And you know, for programmers, it is not easy to sit—there are too many problems to solve, algorithms, deadlines, some of them very close. But one hot summer morning during sitting with all the windows wide open, an old communist-era truck outside began to start the engine: *ddddddd, ddddddd, ddddd, dd, dddddddddddd!* Fifteen minutes, which was the whole meditation time! After sitting, we always have a short sharing, and one of my colleagues said, “You know, normally I cannot keep meditation mind but today, thanks to this truck, I could keep the moment mind for whole time—it was wonderful!” This sound was so distracting but could be used as a wonderful meditation technique. So maybe the next time when you sit and hear some annoying sound or have some unpleasant feelings or pain, you can try to use them as your meditation technique. Or just stand up from sitting meditation and continue practicing like that.

Now we can really see that normal is not normal and not normal is normal. But! All those judgments—normal/special, nice/ugly, this/that—they depend just on our dualistic point of view, on dualistic thinking. But originally nothing is labelled *normal, ordinary, special*. Just our thinking makes those tags. And without thinking, everything is already complete. So nothing is normal or not normal. But still! When somebody near stumbles, your normal reaction is to catch them. It is a normal instinctive reaction to help, to protect somebody else or ourselves. This means it is actually our true nature. Without thinking, our reaction is to help, to protect. But there are many points of views about helping. You can see one example not so far from here, just about fifty kilometers to the east in Ukraine borders. The Russians say they came there to help, to “denazify” and “demilitarize.” And about two weeks ago we had an anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. That time, they also came to help—to “save” democracy here. There are many views, so how can we see what help is needed and what is correct and what is not? To see it, you need just two things—no, Facebook

is not one of them! You just need a clear mind and compassion!

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

Originally, everything has the same substance, so originally everything that happens is already complete.

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

But look around and you will see how many not normal, “special” operations (president Putin called his war on Ukraine just a mere “special operation”) not only here *[pointing eastward toward Ukraine]* but all over the world, are making a lot of suffering for many people and other beings. So what can we do?

KATZ!

After the ceremony, our sangha will serve some refreshment and gifts to you, so you can be happy and relaxed. That’s the normal compassionate practice of all Kwan Um Zen centers around the world. Thank you very much for your attention, and Kwan Seum Bosal to all beings in need. *[Bows.]* ◆

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*Dušan Silváši JDPSN received inka from Zen Master Gu Ja in September 2022. He was born in Košice, Slovakia. During his studies after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, he started to seek a way that would make sense to him. In 1992, he encountered Kwan Um Zen teaching and started to practice intensively, first with Zen Master Wu Bong and Zen Master Dae Kwang, and later with Oleg Šuk JDPSN. Dušan works as an IT specialist and has also been a karate teacher for many years. He has been the abbot of Košice Zen Center for many years. He has two children with his wife Olga—also a longtime Zen practitioner—and together they have been working on spreading the teaching of Zen to a much wider audience through yoga and karate, and recently also with IT professionals.*

[19

*(Continued from page 5)*

the true stars have no name. All names are made by thinking. Dharma, karma, Buddha nature are also all names. So the only true dharma is no dharma. True truth is no truth. True karma is also no karma. If you make dharma, you have dharma. If you make karma, you have karma. If you cut off all thinking, everything and you become one. But if you have something, you only have something, you lose everything. If you throw away everything of your own, then you will get everything. This means, throw away dharma, Buddha, God, throw away your understanding. Then you will get true dharma, true Buddha, true nature,

true substance—you will get everything. Then everything you can see, you can hear, you can smell—everything is dharma, everything is Buddha, everything is truth. If your mind is correct dharma, then everything is correct dharma. If your mind is truth, everything is truth. If your way is correct, then everything is the correct way. That is Buddha’s teaching. Everything is made by thinking. So how, just now, moment to moment, do you keep your correct situation? That point. So if you make your idea completely disappear, then everything you see, you hear, you do, all is dharma. ◆

# Zen in the Cloud: A Meditation Group for Beginners in Poland

Agata Hae In

## An Old Question, an Old Controversy: How to Teach the Dharma

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 locked us up in our small homes. A large number of people, however, had access to the internet, an infinite digital window to the world. It turned out that it's possible to practice in giant virtual dharma rooms spreading from one continent to another. In the course of two years, the mahasangha developed various ways of spreading the dharma on the internet.

The question of how to transmit the legitimate teaching was an important concern from the very first Buddhist council, after Buddha's death. There, Ananda recited the 84,000 authentic discourses of what would later become the Pali Canon. Nonetheless, since nobody had asked the Buddha which of the offenses of monastic code were less important, some accused Ananda of distorting the true dharma.

20] Controversies such as this are not limited to ancient Buddhism. When the Latin version of the Tridentine Mass was translated into national languages, Christian conservatives also worried that this would destroy the sacred essence. How fragile this sacred essence was considered to be! How common that changes such as these cause controversy.

When I went to Korea in 2010, it was the first year when haeng-jas, candidates to monastic life, had to memorize the Korean version of the Heart Sutra along with the Sino-Korean one. Since fewer and fewer young Koreans can read and understand Chinese characters, this decision was a matter of making the Buddha's message more widely accessible. This is how we adapt and survive. During the pandemic, we had to adapt to the internet. This has again raised the question of how best to engage with and instruct new students. It's also provided an opportunity to inquire into our connection with all students, and with the sangha.

## A New Inquiry, a New Approach

This inquiry had several components. It began prior to the pandemic and prior to the European sangha engaging with these questions in an intentional, structured way. In 2016, the North American sangha looked at the needs of millennials and whether the current approach to practice and teaching was meeting these needs. This culminated in a millennial dharma report, published in 2016. Among other things, it noted, "Technology permeates nearly every facet of millennial existence. As a school, we must understand this and meet millennials where they are." Inspired by this document in 2018, the European sangha organized its first convention, which focused on adapting Zen Master Seung Sahn's message to the twenty-first century. A survey from over a hundred students delineated four areas to work on:

- New forms of together action for community building
- Zen practice for beginners
- More education
- Empowerment of students

As we were formulating how to put these recommendations into practice, the pandemic hit. This also forced us to consider how the student–teacher relationship, the sangha, and beginners might be engaged with online, rather than in person. With this in mind, at the Warsaw Zen Center in Falenica, we began to consider how we had been engaging beginners, and whether there would be a different way that strengthened the connection.

## Revisiting How to Engage Beginners: A Tenfold Increase in Membership

For about ten years at the Warsaw Zen Center in Falenica, we had well over a hundred people per year visiting us



for the first time, with only three to four new people becoming regular members. This means that only 4 percent of newcomers stayed with us. During the pandemic, we worked with Zen Master Joeng Hye (Andrzej Piotrowski) to develop an approach that we ended up calling “Zen in the Cloud.” We formed two long-term meditation groups for beginners, one in 2021 and one in 2022. We based the structure on the four priorities listed above. Each group had about fifteen people, and eight participants from each group are still members today.

This means that what we feared—that online practice would result in a watered-down version of “stay-at-home, pain-free” dharma—led to 50 percent of newcomers practicing with us live, both daily and during retreats. This is more than ten times the participation we had before. What follows is a description of the design we came up with and the rationale for it.

### Horizontal Structure and Circle Style

The Zen in the Cloud groups, as mentioned, were formed according to the four criteria outlined by the European convention. We designed these groups for beginners after long discussions with Zen Master Joeng Hye about the most effective methods. The younger generation is used to a certain bottom-up approach to education, in which they personally engage in emotionally stimulating projects. They value peer learning more than lectures, and they value sharing their mistakes and group wisdom among themselves. This is why we decided on a Zen circle format—or rather a Zen square, since it was taking place on Zoom. We opened up a Facebook group as well for daily exchanges, motivating each other, and sharing Zen memes. Each group was led by a senior dharma teacher or a monastic. We met with our Zen masters once every month. In 2021 we met for ninety minutes once a week for six months, and in 2022 we did that for three months with similar results. Each meeting consisted of

- thirty minutes of practice reports;
- thirty minutes of meditation;
- thirty minutes of discussing meditation methods or Zen Master Seung Sahn’s key teaching phrases; and
- establishing homework, including daily practice and weekly study texts.

### Laying the Foundation for a Practice That Can Mature Well

Obviously, the nature of the Zen practice is based on the student–teacher relationship, which can foster a true, nondual encounter beyond thinking. Teaching online how to manage the psychophysiological energy of such a meeting didn’t seem possible. However, a beginners’ class is not yet a mature form of training but, rather, an introduction to the fundamentals.

We designed the introduction to keep in mind the

barriers that beginners commonly face. It’s simplified in order to help beginners overcome these barriers, many of which are either psychological or practical in nature: shyness, introversion, or lack of motivation, or lack of time or transportation. Three months seemed enough for the small sangha to develop and form a group of peers—the class of 2021 and 2022. Among their written feedback one person said, “Without this group, I wouldn’t have courage to visit the temple.” Another remarked, “Before, I felt alienated, and the sangha of old friends seemed very hermetic and only for the advanced ones.”

### Starting from Correct View and Don’t Know—Teaching the Fundamentals

Most formats of modern skill-learning courses, from stress reduction to skydiving, consist of theory and practice. In our case it meant that we decided to offer more structured and planned education rather than relying on individual, random readings and intuitive experiments with meditation methods.

When I told this to two experienced Zen masters, they said, “We never knew with Zen Master Seung Sahn what the structure of our training would be like. We always just started from don’t know! And you start from thinking!” And indeed, we started from thinking—clear Buddhist thinking, called correct view. Participants learned about the four noble truths, the eightfold path, and the chain of dependent origination. They are then systematically, one by one, introduced to basic phenomena Zen Master Seung Sahn distinguished in practice. He spoke of various kinds of minds operating on different levels of practice:

- Lost mind
- Wandering/holding/loose mind
- Checking mind
- Thinking mind
- Try mind
- One-pointed mind
- Not moving mind
- One mind
- Mind clear like space
- Mirror mind
- Before thinking mind
- Stillness and bliss mind
- Shining mind
- No mind
- Freedom mind
- Clear mind of truth
- Clear mind of function

### Choosing a Suitable Method for Your Stage of Practice

The practice part of the course was based on the meditation techniques in the *Dharma Mirror*. We practiced for two to three weeks with each of them. In the end, most

practitioners knew which technique suited them best. One person commented, “Counting the breaths is like counting the trees during a forest walk!” Another said, “Why would I think about numbers when my mind is silent?” A third person remarked, “Only counting the breaths to the very, very end of the out-breath helped me to silence my internal noise.”

Following Zen Master Joeng Hye’s teaching direction, we put a lot of emphasis on distinguishing between samadhi and prajna, to build both the calming and clear-seeing aspects of meditation. In this way we could avoid teaching people only to relax and accept the thought-stream while sitting, or to focus in too narrow a manner and suppress thoughts and emotions.

I extracted the meditation instructions from Zen Master Seung Sahn’s books and got about two pages of text all together about the breath, posture, tantien (or center), energy going up to the chest or head, plus the description of three elements of Zen method. Zen Master Seung Sahn stresses all the time that “don’t know” is the heart of the Linji (Rinzai), Caodong (Soto), and Chogye schools. However, after many discussions, we realized that it’s important to divide his techniques into those suited for beginners and those suited for mature practitioners, like our *Dharma Mirror* does.

### **Building a More Precise Map of Steps and Right Effort**

We resolved that for beginners, the more suitable methods are the ones associated with more effort and one-pointed attention on a concrete meditation object. The *Dharma Mirror* calls these methods breath meditation (paying attention to the breath) and mantra meditation (inwardly reciting “clear mind—don’t know” or “Kwan Seum Bosal”). The remaining techniques—keeping a great question on the one hand and maintaining a clear and open mind of just seeing and hearing on the other—seemed too advanced for an introductory course like this one because at the beginning, students need guidance on what to do while sitting.

Recently, during our dharma teachers’ training, Zen Master Bon Shim spoke about students misunderstanding the instruction to “put it all down” and “not make anything.” Without right effort, it can change into “doing-nothing” practice, without any direction or growth of wisdom. She said that we tend to forget about the gradual, initial practices of seven factors of awakening: mindfulness, inquiry, effort, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Everyone can say “the grass is already green” and “samsara is already nirvana.” But in order to experience this not as an intellectual view but as experienced reality, we need an enlightenment map to help students gradually experience these seven factors.

### **Meditation Training Can Be Precise Like a Needle**

Our surveys showed that over 70 percent of participants saw “the possibility to practice online” as one of the three most important features of the course, along with “the possibility to start with people at the same beginning stage of practice” or the “systematic step-by-step introduction to meditation technique and Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching.”

No wonder, then, that 40 percent of participants still asked for more precise instructions or even for guided meditations in the follow-up survey. Only two participants out of twenty-four agreed with the statement “I would rather meditate intuitively instead of applying gradual instructions about the methods and types of mind that appear in meditation.”

### **Some Feedback**

One student commented: “It would be cool if teachers had a system of checking the student’s mind and guiding them from initial meditation techniques to more advanced ones. Intuitive guidance with too much space for practitioners can lead to a threat of not systematic enough teaching and discourage the students.”

Another remarked: “I’m giving the course an A+ because in the end, despite some breaks, I still practice and hope that it will become my lifestyle. Our classes became my internal foundation on which I can understand the texts better and mobilize myself to practice in the Zen center and on the cushion. Additionally, I am well-equipped with the tools to meditate correctly.”

And Zen Master Joeng Hye said, “Buddhism has survived twenty-five hundred years thanks to wisdom, which has expressed itself as flexibility, the ability to integrate with cultural circumstances and the spirit of the times. Flexibility allows us to seek new forms without ever losing the essence of the teachings. This essence can be properly explored only through clearly and precisely mastered meditation training and understanding of the mind. I believe that the presented approach will help our school continue to flourish and serve people in the best way possible in the spirit of the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn.” ♦

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*Agata Hae In has been practicing Zen since 2000. For fourteen years she’s been a resident in Zen centers and temples in Poland, the United States, and Korea, where she pursued monastic training. She spent over four years on intensive meditation retreats. Currently she serves as a lay senior dharma teacher in the Kwan Um School of Zen, works as a psychologist, and hosts the podcast “Clear Mind—Buddhism, Science, Culture.”*

# Let's Do It! Perspectives from the Lviv Zen Center

Won Hak Sunim

February 24, 2022: I was having tea with Zen Master Dae Bong in Hwagyesa Temple in Seoul, when somebody sent him a message. He read to me: "Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine." It felt like a huge, sickening blow to the guts. I finished the bowl of tea—it didn't stop the war.

## Keeping a Regular Schedule to Counter the Chaos

It was hard to get my parents on the phone, and finally when we got connected, they said they were trapped. The Russian military was bombing their town and shooting down people who tried to escape. Helplessness is one of the main factors contributing to stress, so I tried hard to keep a regular schedule of bowing, sitting, chanting, and exercising, but reality seemed shaky and blurry.

I joined a couple of demonstrations in front of the Russian embassy in Seoul, which helped to connect with others, but it felt like it wasn't enough. So when a friend suggested that I become supply manager for a humanitarian storehouse on the Polish-Ukrainian border, I bought a ticket, and on March 1, I got down to work.

## Managing Supplies "Fast and Clear"

During that first month we worked 24-7, getting supplies, sorting them out, and getting them across the border. In that hectic and intense time, I really appreciated my Korean bhikkhu (monk) training, where the main motto is "fast and clear." Even in nonmonastic conditions, I felt confident and useful—so much so that in my free hours I started an eight-week online meditation course for Ukrainians. Around fifty people signed up, and almost daily we had a sitting and dharma talk. The course was so well received that I decided to leave the storehouse and go to Ukraine to do it in person.

## Talking about Refuge in a Shelter

In April, I crossed the border. There were hundreds of people on the border passage to Poland, but almost none on the passage to Ukraine—no men are allowed to leave the country. In Ukraine, I started to give dharma talks in an art gallery that also served as a shelter, and I started with the notion of refuge. Soon, a regular group formed. After eight weeks of daily sittings

in the park, I decided to organize a retreat.

One day, news came that Chon Mun Sunim JDPS was visiting Poland. When I asked him (without much expectation) to lead that retreat, with the conditions that he would get no pay and could be killed by a Russian missile, he said, "Let's do it!"

## Help from the Kwan Um School

Another help that came from the Kwan Um School of Zen was Kathy Park JDPSN and the online sangha, who wired enough money so that we didn't have to worry about food. Also, thanks to Chon Mun Sunim's connections, the Chogye Order learned about our activities and contributed money to rent an apartment for a Zen center.

Now we have a three-room apartment, four residents, morning and evening daily practice, and occasional retreats without teachers.

## Zen Center near Lviv City Hall

At the moment, the electricity grid often fails due to the Russian bombings, but because of the proximity of the Zen center to city hall, it's better connected, so now people come not only for practice, but also to get a warm meal, take a hot shower, and charge their devices. All of this naturally inclines people toward together action.

At first, people were coming to meditation with the mentality of a yoga class—everyone does forty minutes of practice and goes away. Then, as time passed, they started to stay for tea and a chat. After we got an apartment for the Zen center, I offered them a chance to try residency. Soon

people found it valuable to have a clear daily structure and discovered the joy of group meals and regular practice. Because we have only two rooms for residents, we offer only short-term residency—people commit only to one, two, or three months, and then another resident moves in. It helps to keep practice determination clearer.

While some people come and some go, a strong core of practitioners has formed. Usually we have around ten people at evening practice every day, and some of them practice in both morning and evening. Also, three women (as men aren't al-



Photo: Courtesy of Lviv Zen Center

lowed to leave the country) will attend winter Kyol Che in Spain.

War brought more clarity about myself and the direction of practice. For example, until this year I imagined myself to be a thoroughly introverted person; instructing others was the last thing I planned to do in this lifetime. Now for months I talk daily about meditation to many strangers, and surprisingly I don't feel tired or irritated. Maybe my introversion was an imaginary trait, but helping others is a real one?

One little girl who survived the bombings of Mariupol—a big city erased by the Russian military during the siege—lost her family to wounds and thirst. We asked her how she made it by herself. She said that taking care of her turtle helped her.

Taking care of others helps us in two ways.

First, it counters the feeling of outer helplessness. When the world seems out of control, we tend to give up; psychologists call it “learned helplessness,” Buddhists call it lack of *virya*paramita, the “perfection of diligence.” When we meet suffering with helplessness, it becomes stress. If we do something about stress, it becomes just a challenge.

Second, helping others rids us of inner helplessness. If in the worst situation we can give something even to a turtle, it proves that we are not so weak, not so resourceless as we imagined. Then, believing in oneself is possible.

With the outbreak of full-scale war in February, many women fled abroad, but some stayed in Ukraine. Those abroad, although in safety, usually felt worse than those in the country. Tasks such as housing refugees, weaving camouflage netting, and volunteering in hospitals gave people a lot of relief. Although few of these people have heard of bodhisattva vows, they are already doing it 100 percent.

One month before the assault, I was talking with Korean friends about how good I felt in Asia, and how much

I didn't want to return to Europe, especially Ukraine. I enjoyed going to the local university and working on the construction of a Zen hostel in the heart of Seoul. When news of the first bombings reached me and anguish settled in, those likes and dislikes just disappeared. Sitting on a plane to Poland, it dawned on me that the bodhisattva vow means that to help ourselves, we need to help others. The Romans put it aptly as “one hand washes the other, and both are clean.” It's not some heroic extra obligation, but a basic necessity, like a daily meal. A picky baby can throw a tantrum over broccoli; a heroic baby can make a vow to eat broccoli for Mom or Dad, or even for all sentient beings; but a destitute baby gulps it down, just like this!

Zen Master Seung Sahn once said he was attached—attached to saving others. Attachment as a negative state of clinging is a translation of the Sanskrit and Pali word *upadana*. Upa means down, and dana means something given—originally it stood for fuel. Pleasures, views, rituals, and self-doctrine are the four fuels for the chain of suffering, according to early Buddhism. But later, an eminent teacher said, “More suffering is necessary.” When our direction is clear, suffering wakes us up and becomes fuel for our true nature. ♦

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*Won Hak Sunim was born 1986 in Ukraine. He had been practicing Japanese Zen for a couple of years, but after meeting Zen Master Wu Bong, he switched to the Kwan Um School of Zen in 2012. In 2013 he became a haeng-ja at Musangsa Temple. After undergoing bhikkhu training in Korea, he took full precepts in 2016. Until the Russian attack on Ukraine, he had been staying in different Korean monasteries. To contact Sunim, email him at [wonhak.sunim@gmail.com](mailto:wonhak.sunim@gmail.com). Donations can be sent through the WISE app to: [wonhak.sunim@gmail.com](mailto:wonhak.sunim@gmail.com).*

24]

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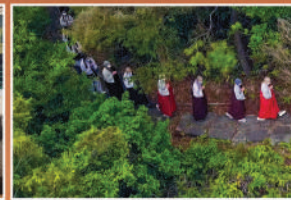
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Florida Women's Reception Center,  
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The heart of the Kwan Um School of Zen is our practice. Zen Master Seung Sahn very simply taught "Don't Know". This

means in each moment we open unconditionally to all that presents itself to us. By doing this, our innate wisdom and compassion will naturally breathe and flow into our lives.

The Zen centers of the Kwan Um School of Zen around the world offer training in Zen meditation through instruction, daily morning and evening meditation practice, public talks, teaching interviews, retreats, workshops, and community living. Our programs are open to anyone regardless of previous experience.

The School's purpose is to make this practice of Zen as accessible as possible. It is our wish to help human beings find their true direction and we vow and to save all beings from suffering.

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Your membership in a participating center or group makes you a part of the Kwan Um School of Zen sangha (Buddhist Community). Your dues help support teaching activities on local, national, and international levels. Membership benefits include discounted rates at all retreats and workshops at KUSZ member Zen centers and a subscription to Primary Point Magazine. *(In other parts of the world, contact your local affiliated Zen center or regional head temple.)*

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