

Outside it is Raining

BY ZEN MASTER DAE BONG

Zen Master Seung Sahn Visits the 6th Patriarch's Temple

In 1985, Zen Master Seung Sahn and twenty-one students traveled through China, visiting Buddhist temples and engaging in Zen dialogues and conversations with Chinese Masters and abbots.

In 1992, the Venerable Fou Yuen, abbot of Nam Hwa Sah, the sixth patriarch's temple in northern Guangdong Province, invited Zen Master Seung Sahn to lead a three day retreat for Chinese and Western students. Organized by the Hong Kong Zen Center, the retreat took place September 5-7, 1992. Fifty Chinese monks from Nam Hwa Sah, thirty-five Zen students from Hong Kong and fifteen monks, nuns and lay people from America, Canada, Poland and Germany participated.

Nam Hwa Sah was built over thirteen hundred years ago. It is most famous because it is the temple of the sixth patriarch, located on Chogye Mountain (Ts'ao Chi). It is one of the few Buddhist temples in China not destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The temple has three hundred and twenty rooms. There are six big halls and nine small ones. The temple is built in three long rectangles. In the center of the main rectangle, going up the mountain are first, the main Buddha Hall; next, the library where sutras and Buddhist statues and relics are stored; next, an ancient pagoda of stone; and next, the hall in which the sixth patriarch's body is enshrined. To the right is a rectangle of buildings containing the kitchen and guest quarters. To the left, a rectangle of buildings containing the Zen hall and monks' quarters. All the buildings and halls are connected by covered walkways, between which are gardens. The temple gives one a feeling of strength, serenity and openness.

There are one hundred and twenty monks and nine lay people living at the temple. The government is more open regarding religion now. There are three to five hundred visitors to the temple every day. Most are tourists from Taiwan, and local people. The government regulates money at the temple but otherwise seldom interferes with temple affairs. The government does want to register the people who regularly practice religion, however.

Teaching at the temple comes mostly from reading the sutras and from the abbot's life experience. The practice is chanting, every morning and evening. Some monks sit Zen for the length of one incense stick four times a day. The rest of their time is spent maintaining the temple for tourists.

The Yong Maeng Jong Jin (Zen meditation retreat) led by Zen Master Seung Sahn included bowing, chanting and much sitting. Zen kong-an style interviews were given to everyone each day by Do An Sunim, JDPSN, abbot of

the Providence Zen Center (now Zen Master Dae Kwang and School abbot). For the Chinese monks, it was the first time actually working with kong-ans and a Zen teacher. Zen Master Seung Sahn gave a dharma speech and answered questions each day. Many monks in addition to those sitting the retreat attended the dharma speeches. Before, they only understood sutra and Pure Land teaching. They were both very surprised and excited by Zen-style teaching. The question and answer times were particularly lively, with both younger and older monks engaged in asking the Zen Master many questions. Lively conversations ensued.

One monk said, "Zen is for very high class people to study and I am very low class. There is no way for me to understand."

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Don't make high class or low class." Picking up a fan, he asked, "What is this? You don't know?"

"A fan."

"If you say 'fan,' you are attached to name and form. If you say 'not fan,' you are attached to emptiness. Is this a fan or not?"

The monk couldn't answer.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "You ask me."

The monk asked, "Is this a fan or not?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn fanned himself. Everyone applauded. Then he said, "Name and form are not important. Name and form are made by thinking. How everything correctly functions is very important. Everybody uses this fan. Chinese people use a fan. Korean people. Japanese people. American people also use this. Moment-to-moment, just do it. That's Zen mind. That's the Sixth Patriarch's teaching."

Another monk asked, "In the Pure Consciousness school they say that when you reach the eighth level you can take away ignorance. But the Tiendai school says you can't get rid of ignorance until you become Buddha."

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "In the Heart Sutra it says the five skandas are empty. Do you understand that? What is the eighth consciousness?"

"Buddha said when the eighth level is reached that is the Bodhisattva level..."

"Buddha speech is all lies. The sixth patriarch said, 'Originally nothing.' Do you have something? Please show me."

"Two different schools pointing at two different things. How should I apply this teaching to my practice?"

"So, I say to you, when Buddha died he said, 'My whole life I never spoke one word.' That is a very important point. All sutra teaching is like children's cookies and toys. Do you like cookies? Then reading sutras is no problem."

"There is a monk from Singapore who came here and preached about two schools. This monk said we must use Buddha's speech to be our guideline."

"I don't like Buddha's speech. I like your true speech." (laughter)

The monk started to speak, then became confused, turned red and then smiled.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "That's OK. Enough. More questions?"

A monk asked, "Does the Pure Land exist or not?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Outside, it is raining."

Everyone was very surprised, then the monk smiled and said, "Thank you very much."

After the retreat there was a precepts ceremony presided over by Zen Master Seung Sahn and Do An Sunim, JDPSN, held in the sixth patriarch's hall. Twenty Chinese monks took precepts with Zen Master Seung Sahn. Also, three lay people from Guangzhou and three lay people from Hong Kong took five precepts and one American took novice monk precepts. Everyone was very happy with the retreat and precepts ceremony and pledged to continue efforts to practice together and share our teaching and experiences. Many Chinese monks expressed interest in coming to Korea to sit Winter Kyol Che (the traditional three month retreat).

On September 8th, a big ceremony was held at Un Mun Sah for the opening of the Un Mun Sah Buddhist Sutra School. Zen Master Seung Sahn and his students from Hong Kong and the West were invited, along with the Minister of Religion of the Province and other local officials and senior monks.

Un Mun Sah, also in Guangdong Province, was founded over a thousand years ago by the great Zen Master Un Mun. It has been rebuilt during the last eight years after being destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The abbot of Nam Hwa Sah has also been abbot of Un Mun Sah for fourteen years.

After chanting in the main Buddha Hall, many speeches were given in honor of the sutra school's opening. Zen Master Seung Sahn was also asked to speak.

Hitting the table with his stick, he said, "Opening is closed. Closed is opening."

Hitting the table with his stick again, he said, "Originally nothing. So, no opening, no closing."

Hitting the table a third time with his stick, he said, "Everything complete, so, opening is opening, closing is closing."

"Three statements. Which one is correct? If you find correct, this stick will hit you thirty times. If you cannot find correct, this stick will still hit you thirty times. Why?"

"KATZ!"

"Open the door, many Buddhas and bodhisattvas appear."

"Today, the Un Mun Sah Buddhism School is opening. That is very wonderful. The government helps us a lot. Everyone is helping us a lot. Also, the abbot is helping us all a lot. That is very, very wonderful."

"This world is changing, changing, changing, changing. So, everybody said, this is end of this world. But Buddha said, not end of this world. This world is always complete. Already Buddha taught us, first: this world is impermanent. Next, this world is complete. So, today this school opening means save all beings."

"Before, Chinese Buddhism was the best in this world, but it almost died. But now the government is helping Buddhism, helping many temples appear, and helping many monks receive education. That is very, very wonderful. That means, in the midnight, bright light appears."

"So, everybody come here, read sutras, practice strongly, attain Buddha's way and save all beings."

"Long time ago Un Mun Zen Master said 'What is Buddha? Dry shit on a stick.' If you do strong practicing, attain that point, then you attain your true self and everything is no problem. If your center is not strong then the sutras read you. You must read the sutras. That's very important."

I hope everyone does strong practicing, practicing, gets enlightenment and saves all beings from suffering."

"Thank you very much."

Everyone was very happy with Zen Master Seung Sahn's speech. The abbot said it was a very high class Zen speech. The Minister of Religion said that now that relations between China and South Korea are open, more connections, and exchange of Buddhism, and coming and going will be possible. He was very happy."

After the Western monks and nuns and the Hong Kong Zen students had bowed good-bye and thank you to the abbot, the abbot gave us a good-bye speech. He said, "Zen Master Seung Sahn got enlightenment at age twenty-two. I have not yet got enlightenment, so I cannot give a dharma speech. Only I have this robe, eat and work each day. Please take care of your teacher"

because he has the sixth patriarch's mind. He has the same transmission as the sixth patriarch. So Buddhism in Korea and China has the same root. Buddhism in Korea and China is the same. That's all."

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