Dear Sangha,

We are entering a new decade in 2020. In this world, many changes are happening at exponential speed. As natural process goes, the good comes with the bad. We see both laudable feats in science and technology, at the same time more frequent and unpredictable climate related disasters all over the world which cause much suffering. Political and economic upheavals are appearing in more places. Many things are changing, changing, changing, nonstop. In the future, maybe bigger problems will appear. But a bad situation is a good situation; a good situation is a bad situation. So our growing bad situation can help us find the Great Way.

Buddha taught us more than just how to get a good life. When we see the suffering in and around us, we must raise a big question: What is this? What is life? What am I? Now is the perfect time to reach deep into our heart and mind, and wake up. Wake up to our true nature, to the infinite potential we have inside of us to help others. Nurture the true seed we have inside. Here are words from Zen Master Seung Sahn to encourage us:

“End of this world means beginning of the world. You must understand that, ok? Many people want good taste, good time, good feeling. That’s only desire, no? When a fruits grow, first it has a very good colour, but is not exactly ripe yet. When it ripens, a little colour disappears. Then it is very sweet, very sweet. It has a good taste. But more time, then it becomes rotten. When rotten, then the correct seed appears. Many people want good taste, but this fruit, this world, its taste doesn’t matter, ok? All completely rotten, then the seed goes into the ground, then again comes up, and again becomes fruit. So, don’t only want good taste. Taste doesn’t matter, understand? Your thinking, your situation, your body, everything will soon become rotten. When your situation, your body, and everything is rotten, but inside your center is strong, then your correct seed appears. If you find your seed, you will not die. Your seed has no life, no death. So we must find our true seed, then only help this world.”

May all beings wake up to our Buddha nature and just do it in 2020.

Dae Bong Hapjang
What Is Don’t Know?
Winter Kyol Che Opening Speech November 11, 2019

Zen Master Dae Bong

Hits the table
Loose is tight, tight is loose. This is the opposites world.
Loose changes into tight; tight changes into loose. Everything is always changing, changing, and changing.

Hits the table
No loose, no tight. This is what we call the absolute world.
Originally there is nothing at all. All is emptiness and stillness.

Hits the table
Loose is loose, tight is tight. This is the complete world, the world of truth. Each thing itself is complete.

So, is it loose or is it tight? Which world is the correct world?

KATZ!

Today we begin the 90-day winter retreat and winter kido.

Outside the autumn leaves are turning red, orange, gold and brown.

You all came to the temple today. This is wonderful. People came here from nine different countries, and more will come later to join this winter retreat. Also, Geum Gang Sunim came back to Musangsa from Siberia to do the winter kido. To us, the Buddha hall is cold but to him, it is a kind of springtime (Laughter). He has energy, so when you can, please come and join the kido with him.

We are very lucky. Who in this world has the motivation and the opportunity to take the time to look into themselves? What am I? What is this world? What is life? What is the correct way to live? Many people don’t think about these things. They just follow their desires. The same as animals. But all of
us have inyeon (affinity) with Buddha. That’s very special and wonderful. The great Western philosopher Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” But we chose to do that. We can do that. We can examine our lives. So we are very lucky.

Every morning and every evening in the temple we recite the Four Great Vows:

Sentient beings are numberless. We vow to save them all. Delusions are endless. We vow to cut through them all. The teachings are infinite. We vow to learn them all. The Buddha Way is inconceivable. We vow to attain it.

They are beautiful but just sounding beautiful is not enough. How can we use them in our everyday life? To use them effectively, we need to understand their true meaning.

The First Vow. Sentient beings are numberless, we vow to save them all. This means human being’s correct direction. We come to this world to help. Animals sometimes help each other. But most animals don’t understand other animal’s situation. Human beings can understand all beings’ situations. Then our job is to help. Don’t think about, “Oh, sentient beings are numberless, how can we save them all?” Someone once asked Buddha, “Sentient beings are numberless, how can we save them all?” Then Buddha said, “I already saved all beings.” So don’t check your job, just do it. Then our direction already helps all beings. The first vow means, what is human beings’ correct direction?

The Second Vow. Delusions are endless, we vow to cut through them all. If it is endless, how can we cut through all of them? This means originally all is empty. Delusions are made by our thinking. If we cut our attachment to our thinking, we are cutting all delusions. Then we realize our true nature. This brings great happiness and great satisfaction. This vow means originally everything is empty, so try, try, and try. Just do it.

The Third Vow. The teachings are infinite, we vow to learn them all. That doesn’t mean reading every sutra. It doesn’t mean to study all the knowledge human beings have accumulated. It means moment to moment, keep a moment to moment mind. Every moment is a great teaching. Many people think that they finish school at 19 or 23. But this whole life is school. Every moment, learn. How to learn? Pay attention. During this kido, during the winter retreat, all of us have the opportunity to practice paying attention right now, in this moment. You come here sometimes and do kido, you are chanting Kwanseumbosal, Kwanseumbosal, Kwanseumbosal. But you’re also thinking about the shopping you have to do later, or what’s happening with your family, Or during sitting, people are thinking about, “I hope it is a good lunch.” We also think about what we are going to do when we get out of the retreat. That is called, “Living in delusion.” Living in a dream. Return your attention to just now, this moment. If you attain this moment, it’s always interesting. Zen master Seung Sahn used to say, “If you practice hard, everything is interesting.” I remember one day, I was thinking that he didn’t say that everything is wonderful. But if we practice hard, if we pay attention moment to moment, everything becomes interesting. Happiness, suffering, hunger, good feelings, bad feelings, good situation, bad situation, it doesn’t matter. All become clear. And become a great teaching. And that gives us control over our lives. The third vow means moment - pay attention moment to moment, then you learn everything.

The Fourth Vow. The Buddha Way is inconceivable, We vow to attain it. It has this very interesting word, “inconceivable.” In English the word ‘conceive’ has two meanings. One meaning is when a woman becomes pregnant, she conceives a baby. The other meaning is to conceive an idea, to create a thought. The fourth vow says, “The Buddha way is inconceivable,” which means it is before thinking. When you look at the world, everybody runs their life based on
some idea: political idea, economic idea, body desire idea, religious idea. But our teaching says, “The Buddha way is inconceivable,” which is before thinking, before any idea. That means, “Don’t know is the Buddha way.” Zen master Seung Sahn’s favorite teaching phrase is “Only go straight don’t know.”

When I was a new student, I was still working outside of the Zen center. I had done two three-day sitting retreats with Zen master Seung Sahn in America. I went to New York City for a three-day chanting retreat. We chanted Kwanseum-bosal for 12 hours a day together. He controlled the speed of the chanting. Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. On the last day of the retreat, a student gave a talk and he answered questions. Many people asked interesting questions. What is enlightenment? What does it mean, everything is empty? How do I chant correctly? At that time, I was working as a welder in a shipyard making submarines. I didn’t feel so good because I was making a weapon. It was springtime. I wanted to do something 100%. I lived next to the ocean. My friends in the shipyard, some of them had boats. I was thinking, maybe I’ll buy a boat and go out during summertime on the water and drink beer. Another part of me wanted to leave my job and live in the Zen center. During the Dharma talk, I wanted to ask Zen master Seung Sahn, “Should I move into the Zen center or buy a boat?” I was very embarrassed. Everybody was asking these great questions but I just wanted to ask, “Should I buy a boat? Or move into the Zen center?” I didn’t say anything. But I was sitting there crying.

After the Dharma talk, my job was to wash the dishes. I was in the kitchen washing the dishes. Zen master Seung Sahn walked into the kitchen. He must have seen me crying during the talk. He came up to me and I turned to look at him. He poked me in the belly. Then he just said, “What is this?” And I just stood there, nothing. Then he poked me in the belly again and walked away. Then I continued washing dishes but I was like a zombie. I think there was no thinking, urr... When I finished I walked over to the room where he was sitting. I went to open the door, took my hand away, put it out, took my hand away, and finally opened the door. I just stood there in the doorway. Zen master Seung Sahn was sitting in a chair and said, “Come.” So I went in and stood in front of him. Then he said, “Talk.” I said, “Teach me more.” He looked at me and said, “Only go straight don’t know, OK?” “OK.” “OK?” “OK.” Then he said, “Go.” So I left. As I shut the door I thought, “What the hell does that mean?” Then I went again and reach for the door knob, no, reach for the door knob, no, reach for the door knob, then I opened the door. He looked at me and I shut the door. What is don’t know? Then what popped into my head was Kwanseum-bosal, Kwanseum-bosal, Kwanseum-bosal. I just kept chanting inside my mind. Going home, even going to work the next day still chanting, chanting, and chanting. The next day I quit work and moved into the Zen center. I never bought a boat. But this Buddha hall is kind of a boat upside down. So I did both at the same time; I got a boat and moved into the Zen center.

What is “don’t know?” Buddha went “don’t know” for six years and Bodhidharma went “don’t know” for nine years. Zen master Seung Sahn always said, “Only go straight don’t know.” This is not, “I know how to go to Home Plus, or I don’t know how to go to Home Plus.” Not that don’t know. This means don’t know “I”. What am I? Don’t know. In school if you don’t know, you fail. But in Buddhism if you go straight don’t know, you get Enlightenment, and attain your true self. If we learn these Four Great Vows and learn how to use them in our daily life, then we can find the true direction. The true human way. Inside or outside, peace, happiness and satisfaction are not dependent on circumstances. We just use what appears moment to moment to help. No unemployment. Moment to moment, we have a wonderful job! This is true human life. Let’s just do it! Practicing this winter helps us to just do it.

In the morning bell chant, one of the poems says:

Vowing openly with all world beings
Entering together Amita’s ocean of great vows,
Continuing forever to save sentient beings,
You and I simultaneously attain the Way of Buddha,
Become one: Infinite Time, Infinite Space Buddha.

Won gong bop-ke jae jung-saeng
Dong-im-mi-ta dae won-hae
Jin mi-rae-je do-jung-saeng
Ja-ta il-she song bul-do
Nu Mu A-mi-ta Bul
100 Days Solo Retreat

Just Do it for All Beings!

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS

Wild blueberries, nettle, dead mouse, stars at midnight, lentil soup...
these are conjured up when I look back at my 100 day solo retreat in the Wisła
mountains in Poland this past summer.
I’m compelled to write a few words,
hoping it to be useful for the next person
who aspires to do a solo retreat.

Why did I decide to do a 100 day solo retreat? If I ask myself again, initially the reason was not so clear. I’m already in my
late forties and have been living a monk’s life for twenty-three years. I gained some weight and got a belly, but more than
that, I felt my mind also became overweight. When I had to teach, sometimes I had to face some part of myself that lacked
a power of conviction, and that was most uncomfortable. However, even up to the day before I started my retreat, my
reason for doing it was not entirely clear. That day, I wrote an email to Zen master Dae Bong saying, “Sunim, I start my
retreat tomorrow and will end on August 27. I cannot be reached until then.” Within five minutes, Dae Bong Sunim replied
with just one line all the way from Korea, “Just do it for all beings!” My mind opened up with a bang. We have heard this
teaching from Zen master Seung Sahn and in the Kwan Um School of Zen countless times over and over, and I myself have
repeated it endlessly to students, but how come in that moment, it rang with such clarity, liberating me as if hearing it for
the very first time. In fact, there is actually no other reason than that, for me to do a 100 day solo retreat. During those
100 days there were many hindrances but whenever I would say to myself, “Just do it for all beings!” everything was fine.
I decided to do daily 1,000 bows in five sets of 200. At the beginning of each set, I would start by saying, “Just do it for
all beings!” and my body would move by itself. During midnight practice, or when I woke up in the morning, dazed and
confused, I’d ask myself, “What am I doing right now?” and then immediately cry, “Just do it for all beings!” and it was as if
I was immediately jolted with a double espresso shot. It was a deeply powerful reminder that whether it’s a solo retreat,
any kind of practice, or whatever it is we do in life, one’s direction has to be clear.

After about two or three weeks, I thought a lot about death and the cycle of rebirth. Suddenly, I became very curious. I thought I had crushed this one countless times during dharma talks and kong-an interviews, but there was definitely something deeply unresolved inside. Then I’d reach the same conclusion...damn! The one that drags this question around – don’t know – almost lost it again! When I started to see my ribs showing and my steps getting wobbly, the fear of ‘death’ started following me. Then I remembered, “You already gave your life!” and could feel the power of ‘no life, no death’. Coming into this life in a human body, we really have to live without regrets. Not live by squeezing, forcing ourselves incessantly to some unknown end, but to live a life of truly no regrets. Practicing utterly all alone, I was grateful to the Polish sangha – to the Unsu Foundation, Krakow Zen Center, Katowice Zen Center; to all our dharma family back in Musangsa in Korea, who assured me to go and practice and not to worry about anything; and to my parents who gave me this body so I can practice. There’s not enough space to write how truly grateful I am. Ironically, people I disliked appeared very often in my mind. I really don’t like having this dislike mind, and it appeared very often. So every time they would appear, I would say to myself, “Stop hating” almost like a mantra. After some time, when those dislike thoughts would appear, they became laughable. Happy mind, unhappy mind, loving mind, hating mind – which one is the true mind? In our kong-an book, there are many questions like this. We are truly fortunate to be able to practice with this as our foundation!

I did a couple of short solo retreats previously and remember that what was most difficult was the sense of loneliness. So this time, I made a very tight and meticulous schedule, posted it on the wall and used it like a robot. Based on our Kwan Um School of Zen Kyol Che practice schedule, I added 1,000 bows, chanting the Great Dharani and midnight practice. I just followed the schedule until I could do it automatically. Just do it, just do it, keep going, then even the most difficult or tight schedule, we ‘just do it’, and we get the power to believe in ourselves. Believe in our true selves. Originally there is no such thing as true self.

Only, the sky is blue; bowing time, only sweat; cooking rice, then just “bubble, bubble, bubble…”, that’s all. Even if we gather all the powers of the universe and try to destroy one of those things, not possible. It is also what Zen master Man Gong said: “The place beyond life and death includes both the sentient and the non-sentient. Therefore, all the weapons of the universe cannot destroy the true nature of even a single blade of grass.” It’s the same for our everyday life. When we just do it, just do it and only go straight, we can believe in ourselves. Then every moment is the truth, and everything we do is a bodhisattva action.

Everyday, I read from the kong-an book. There is a commentary from Dae Soen Sa Nim:
“If you want something then you lose everything. If you don’t want anything then you already have everything. But you must hear the stone lion roaring. Then the whole world is in your hand. You can be free and can do anything.”

This was very refreshing. Do you hear the stone lion’s roar?
At the end of the dharma talk, teachers usually say, “Make your center stronger!” I wonder, how can we make our center strong? Only by doing practice, does our center naturally become stronger? Or is there anything else we can do?

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

Decide something, then do it. Or decide something not to do, and don’t do it. What percentage of what you decide, do you follow through? 10 percent? Then your center is 10% strong. 50%? then your enter is 50% strong. Over 50% means you can manage your life. That’s the average person. Average is okay, then you can survive and work in society. Your center is strong 50% of the time that you decide something, then you are able to manage your emotions, some of your thinking, and you can function. But beyond that, over average, any time you decide something and you do it 100%, then you are a free person. You decide not to check, so you don’t check anything 100%. If you decide to ignore anything that appears in your mind 100% and you do it, you are Buddha.

In everyday life, it’s okay to deal with things sometimes as they arise without too much concern. But some emergency appears, then I cannot control the situation and my center is not that strong. What can I do?

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

No matter how you plan your life, there is always a surprise. Always keep don’t know. If you abide in don’t know most of the time, your center is strong so nothing will surprise you. There is only surprise because we have some idea of how things will turn out, but we don’t really know anything! (Laughter) Everybody here assumes that we will go to bed and wake up the next morning, right? Are you planning to die tonight? I don’t think so. Maybe someday, but not tonight. So you make an appointment for tomorrow, you have a plan. Do you really know that you will wake up tomorrow morning? Don’t know. It’s a fact, we don’t know. We always think, and we always try to know and assume that things will work out. I had many plans in my life, almost 60 years of planning, and no plan ever worked out! I stopped planning. Only don’t know. Then why bother? That means you can make a plan but don’t be attached to your plan. Expect the unexpected to happen. We can only be in right now. We have to train to keep don’t know – to keep a clear mind moment to moment to moment.

In the universe, there’s no accident, no surprise. Everything is very meticulous in natural process, in cause and effect. However, because we are thinking, we don’t see that and we are surprised. Sometimes good surprise, sometimes bad surprise. Emergency appears, then how can I fix that? Where is my center? When we are surprised or in a panic, we lose our center. We have to train our center before we get surprised. Everyday do some practice to repeat, repeat, repeat. That’s why people move to a Zen center and practice together, wake up together and do the same daily routine, to make their center stronger. Same thing in the army. By repeating something. They decide, then they follow through. There are many difficult situations that appear, and they go through them together. Also, no situation will last forever. A strong center means keeping a not moving mind. Stop reacting. Stop moving.

When we practice, one thing that happens is that we can find our center in our body. We can put our mind into our belly. First
thing, slowly breathe in, breathe out. If you exhale longer than you inhale, you will relax. Relax means you are not so easily moved around, your mind is not moving. But if you breathe in longer then you breathe energy will go up. In Japan, there is a Bodhidharma doll. You bow to him and then (Boom!) hit him. When hit, this doll moves like this (moving hand left to right) and comes back. Always comes back. That’s because they put some weight in the belly of this doll. You can hit him, but he’s always coming back. If they put the weight in the heart or the head, when you punch it, it will not come back but fall down. Same for us; your root has to become strong. Be like a piece of bamboo; you can bend it, but cannot break it. In our body, that center is in our belly. What you can do is train to breathe in and out with your danjeon all day long. Slow down your breath and as I said, exhale twice longer than your inhalation. Try to breathe in and out through your nostrils and not your mouth. If you breathe through the mouth, it’s a signal to your brain that you’re in danger. Whenever we open our mouth – what I’m doing right now to talk – we lose our center. Don’t talk. Open mouth for talking, then energy goes out. You go to norae-bang (singing room) and sing, then energy goes up. Often, people who are opera singers or public speakers, they get panic attacks. That’s because they breathe in and out often with the mouth. If we talk less, we will have more energy. Our center get stronger.

Ultimately, if we want to have a completely strong center, we have to attain who we really are. Then we will not take anything, including your life too seriously. I always remember Zen master Am Du. Am Du only taught one line: “Don’t make anything important.” And I mean, “anything.” What is important in your life? Everyone has something important and because of that, we suffer, we have hindrance, right? Yeah, everybody has something. Why are you so angry about it? Oh, because it’s important for me. Why are you so afraid? Oh, because this is important for me. Another person says, “My thing is more important.” Just like for the child, to get a piece of candy is very important. This candy controls the child. We can look at that and say, “What’s the big fuss? That’s not so important. There are many different candies, why does he want this exact one?” Whenever human beings make something important, this thing will control us. If we don’t make anything important, our mind is not moving. If going to hell is not important for you, going to hell is no problem! If money is not important for you, even if you go bankrupt, your mind is not moving. Your family is not important for you, they kick you out from the house, okay! No problem. Life and death, also not important. Getting enlightenment, not important. Saving all beings from suffering, not important. Then what? If nothing is important, then what? What is left? You have to find out. Important or not important, that’s all thinking. Have mind, then thinking, so karma controls us. Have no mind, then you are free. Not making things important means our center is strong and automatically, you will understand your direction. Moment to moment, you do your job.

Zen master Seung Sahn was helping people to figure out what is important for them by asking this simple question: if you really knew 100% that you will die tomorrow morning at 4 am, what would you do tonight? Ask yourself this question. Then practice, practice, then ask again! Things may appear as important or not. If they keep coming back, perhaps that’s important for you. If they disappear, not important after all. Then you have a choice. If you can put it down, then you are free. If you cannot put it down, you have to do it 100%. If you do it 100%, one day it will no longer control you.
Courage

This intensive week we are in right now is a no way out situation. We use the word in English ‘intensive’. The part of this word that resonates with me is ‘tense’ - tension. The tension is from sleeping less, or we are compelled to enter into a tension between our aspirations, why did we come here? Why are you doing this? And the reality. The moment we sit down and realize we only have three hours of sleep a day, and in four days, we will have all day no sleep, maybe it’s a bit scary, fearful, and you’re looking for a way out. It could be a cookie, a piece of bread, maybe it’s thinking like oh, she’s so so, or he’s so so, etc. ways we want to habitually escape. What I would call ‘blame mind’. Actually, if we really look at our thinking, most of it is a kind of blame, checking. That’s what really takes our energy. When we do intensive week, it means all those usual holes through which you want to get out through, they just got narrower, and the tension is a bit more amped up. But it’s also a great opportunity that we choose for ourselves, to experience don’t know. It takes courage. All of us took some courage to come here from each of our life’s situation. What is courage? We have a Buddha hall, and it is called the Hall of Great Heroes, Dae Woong Jeon. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, great teachers and practitioners are called heroes. Why? Because it takes courage to be here. It takes courage to sit and not move. It takes courage to sit, not move and look at your own mind, and it takes courage to see that you may not really like what you see that’s going on in your mind, And it takes even more courage to then have love. To then have compassion. To not blame. To not blame others or myself, or the situation. That’s not easy. So we do this together.

I have a story about courage. It’s about a little deer. In Native American folklore, the deer has a special symbol. One day there was a baby deer, a fawn, in the forest. She’s very small, dainty, and they don’t eat other animals. They forage on ginseng flowers and herbs. She was in the forest sauntering along. From far away, she hears a sound. She hears Great Spirit. Great Spirit for us is Buddha. Great Spirit calls out to the little fawn, “Please come to Sacred Mountain, I need your help. You have to open the way so many beings can come up and get enlightenment.” So of course, fawn has a mission. She is on her way up and at the foot of the mountain, there’s an ugly, big, fiery demon guarding Sacred Mountain. Fawn comes up to the ugly demon and the demon roars and spews out strange smells, fumes, and shouts at fawn, “What are you doing here? Go away!” But fawn is not moved. She has kindness, and loving eyes. She just says, “Hi demon, please let me pass. Great Spirit needs me, I have to help.” But the demon refuses, “You can’t enter here!” If any other creature was there at that moment, it would be so frightened and would die on the spot or run away immediately. That’s how scary and ugly he was. He was the worst of all demons you could possibly imagine existed. But fawn wasn’t moved. She had a gentleness, and she was so little but she had kindness. Demon was shouting and spewing more black smoke, and roaring loud, scary sounds. Then he got a bit confused. Why is she not moving? Why is she not scared? The reason demon is always doing this is because a demon is what they call wounded beings in Native American Indian belief. Any kind of demon is a wounded being. What is a demon? It’s our own thinking; desire, anger and ignorance. Fawn still didn’t move, and finally, much to the demon’s dismay, his big ugly figure started to melt. Melting, melting and melting, and he was freaking out. He was freaking out because his demon-ness was melting away! It was melting away because the little fawn had a gentle and kind face, and because she was sorry for demon, she saw his suffering. Finally, he melted and melted to the size of a walnut. He became very small. Then he just gave up. He climbed onto the deer’s lovely back of dappled coat with white spots, hopped on her neck, and said, “Ok, let’s go.” and led the way up to Spirit Mountain. And behind them, the road opened for all beings to enter the path. This path which we call the Dharma Way.

What is courage for us? Only three hours of sleep, some people here are even trying seven days no sleep. What is it that we are trying to do actually? Last night as I was sitting, it was the second to last sitting before midnight. When I stood up, my legs were a bit wobbly, I was a bit in and out of consciousness. During walking meditation, if I don’t keep my mantra, or if my eyes looked to the door, or lost focus of the

(Continued on page 16)
Interview with Bop Yo Sunim

Could you please talk about why you decided to become a nun?

BYSN
When I was living in Mexico, a Korean friend of mine introduced me to the Kwan Um School’s Zen center in Mexico City. I started to practice with them. Actually, I had been meditating by myself before joining the Zen center. When I was in Japan, I wasn’t a Buddhist. Suddenly one day, I had a strong call to just breathe. I didn’t know how, so I just sat down and breathed in and out. Since then, I repeated this breathing every day for 1 hour for 10 years. After I moved to Mexico, I got curious as to why I had to do this every day. I didn’t know the reason why, but felt good when I did it and uncomfortable when didn’t. Later I found I needed a direction for my practice.

The same friend told me to read a book, which was the Compass of Zen by Zen master Seung Sahn. When I read the book, I immediately knew it was what I had been looking for. The next day I went to join the Zen center, I worked and saved money to go to practice at the Providence Zen Center, or to come to Musangsa from time to time. But after some years, I started to feel my practice was just a part time job. I just wanted to make it a full time job. That’s why I decided to become a monastic.

You graduated from the Unmunsa Sutra College. What can you share from that experience that is helping your life in Musangsa?

BYSN
When I was at Unmunsa, I just worked all the time. Working and studying sutra. It’s wonderful to be able to sit in meditation in Musangsa after not doing it for a long time. When I first went to Unmunsa, I really wanted to come back to Musangsa. The reason why I became a monastic was to follow Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching, but the teaching style at Unmunsa was very different. The first two years were quite a struggle.

It was helpful that I had some practice experience before going there. This experience helped me a lot. Some of the questions I had during previous practice periods became clear while I was studying the sutras. Also after coming back to Musangsa and to practice, sometimes I found, “Oh, this is what was said in that book!”

Now I serve as the housemaster at Musangsa, What I have learned in Unmunsa helps a great deal to do this job. At Unmunsa, they hold Buddhist events quite often and I spent 4 years there. Without knowing, I had learned a lot while preparing for those events. I observed and got trained by doing things. All those experiences became great help. Learning something only from a book doesn’t help. We have to have a direct experience. I learned a lot from my classmates in our daily life. I had 30 nuns in my group. Each one of them came from a different temple and had different styles. Still, we could put our ideas together and do things together. This was the most important point I learned there.

Bop Yo Sunim is from Japan. She began practicing Zen at the Mexico City Zen Center in 2007 and in 2013 began her monastic novice training at Musangsa. In 2015 she entered Unmunsa Sutra College, and graduated in 2019 and became a bhikkuni. She is currently the Housemaster at Musangsa.
You are very busy doing your job. Is it a burden for your practice?

BYSN
Just doing it! It’s just really doing it. If I start to think, “This is not my job,” then everything becomes heavy and difficult. As a housemaster, I have not much time to go for sitting even during kyo*l che. To be honest, sometimes I felt a bit of bitterness. But in Dae Bong Sunim’s teaching book he says, “If you can just do what you have to do without resentment, you give other people a tremendous gift: you relieve their suffering automatically. That’s the heart of our practice”. These words really hit me.

Also my monastic teacher Zen Master Dae Kwan said, “Buddha means being responsible for all beings. There is nothing which is not your job”. If I take responsibility, I have to do it to the end. That is what I’m learning now and taking it as a practice. So this is what I meant by just doing. My tendency is to try doing things right. In the sutra school, also we tried hard to do things well. The senior nuns there often compared me with other nuns saying, “You have to make extra effort. Look at Bop Yo Sunim. She is trying hard even if she is a foreigner”. I couldn’t really ignore their expectations, so made constant effort to do things well. But at Musangs, I’m told rather not to try too hard. People tell me to relax. I heard an interesting story of Won Hyo Sunim. After somebody swept the temple garden and cleaned perfectly, he purposely put a handful dead leaves to make a mess. Imperfection is perfect. In a community, we need people who can take care of others with compassion rather than with perfection.

At Musangs, there are many foreign sunims, but you are the only Japanese person. Is there any difficulty to practice in Korea being Japanese?

BYSN
When I decided to go to Unmunsa, actually many people were worried for me. If I face any difficulties living in a temple, it won’t be because of my being Japanese. It’ll be because of my own karma. Unmunsa was rather simple because there were only Korean nuns, Musangs has a big cultural diversity. Each one of us has different practice experience and age. Also we have difference in gender and nationalities, I realized I shouldn’t compare with the training I had as a haengja or novice when I talk to new haengjas at Musangs. They won’t understand what I experienced. Instead of getting frustrated about not having them understand, it’s better to take it as a practice to be aware of my own fixed ideas.

Of course sitting on the cushion helps me a lot. But the real test comes after I get up from my cushion. Sometimes as soon as I get up from the cushion and go to the dining room, everything becomes messy then I say to myself, “What was the all morning practice for?”

What is your future plan?

BYSN
I have nothing in my mind. I don’t even have a plan for next year. For right now I have a commitment to stay and work for Musangs for 2 years. Surprisingly, when the time comes, I get to know naturally what I have to do next. Rather than thinking with my head, I just let inyeon(affinity) takes care of it by itself. When I was about to graduate Unmunsa, I knew for sure I had to come to Musangs. After 2 years, I will know what is the next thing to be done.

It was our pleasure to see your bright face. Thank you very much.
Finding Your Own Way

Won Il Sunim

I began practicing when I was still a teenager. I did yoga at first, until I realized that it was preparing my body for meditation. For me, meditation was the important part, and Zen was the method that really stood out, the path that I wanted to follow. I lived in Zen communities from my early 20’s onwards, for 10 years. I moved to Korea and trained as a monk for two years. Then my father became very sick and I was called home. He had a bad case of diabetes and his insurance payments were crushing the family. They were just trying to survive. This was a turning point in my life. I started working as a carpenter in L.A. It was the first time that I had to work in the world and just be a normal person. It was a great education, it gave me things that were missing. The first years were brutal. I didn’t practice at all for six years. I just worked and got through it, and buried my father.

One day, the Zen monk Hyon Mun Sunim came to visit. He needed help. There had been a big fire at Taegosa, a Zen monastery in the Mojave Desert. They’d almost lost everything. We had to cut down all the dead trees and wash the soot out of the buildings, and recover everything that we could. He was like a brother to me. I was glad to go. It was nearly winter before we finished, time for the winter retreat. He asked me to join. I had no intention of returning to a practicing situation. It wasn’t on my mind at all. I was only there to support them. For some reason I stayed.

The first thing I noticed when I sat down was that I couldn’t remember all the teachings of the Kwan Um School of Zen. The program that I was running before wasn’t working. I quickly developed my own way, naturally, which abruptly, unexpectedly threw open the doors of my mind. Suddenly the practice became very deep and very beautiful. A secret door was opened, one that I hadn’t known was there. From this I realized that, though it’s necessary to have a strong foundation of practice, you have to find your own way. It has to be yours. This was another turning point in my life, when the practice of meditation finally opened up. Gradually, I realized that all the teachings were metaphors, abstract descriptions. All the beautiful teachings that you know by heart will only make sense when you’ve had a direct experience. You can’t get there through words. Words will hinder you.

A basic teaching that I recently received from the Jogye Order is so fundamental that there’s little danger of being caught in it: the three practices. The first is the precepts. For me, this means to put your life in order, not waste energy, not follow after the things that aren’t necessary, to find harmony with the universe, to follow the situation, to make your life correct. When you do this, your practice will deepen, and you begin to experience samadhi, the second practice. Your mind resonates, it opens on its own. You begin to act intuitively, to sense the behind meaning. You become the observer, and bliss enters into your life. It becomes your mind state, all the time. You transfer from the state of suffering into one of bliss and deep peace and joy. This is finding your true self. The practice that follows, the next stage, is wisdom. When you have a deep practice, a deep concentration, then everything becomes your teacher. Naturally in harmony with things, your interactions with the world provide teaching for you and for others.

What’s important is that you put it all down, really, you have to let go of yourself. It took me a long time to discover this because I was bound by dogma. If you hold onto the teachings too tightly, or anything, then it will be difficult to experience your true self. We work very hard all of our lives to become adults, the process of forming an identity. It becomes a prison. First you have to mature into a fully functioning human, then you have to step outside of this identity, to release it. This is the hardest thing that a person can do, but that is our practice, and the way to freedom. One thing you don’t hear so much is that if you’re able to just do it, and your mind opens, it’s a very wonderful state, a wonderful life unfolds from it, a beautiful life. I hope that you continue and find your own way to enlightenment and help all other beings find their way.

Won Il Sunim is from the U.S. and began practicing with the Kwan Um School of Zen in 1990. He lived and trained in various Zen centers on the East and West Coasts of America before receiving monk ordination at Musangsa in Korea, in 2013.
Together Action
SPORTS DAY, KAIST TEMPLESTAY, ORGANIC GARDEN & PRECEPTS CEREMONY AT MUSANGSA, 2019.

Climate Crisis Workshop at Musangsa

A workshop was conducted at Musangsa for us to investigate how we can as a community, act to help our planet. A large proportion of plastic waste in the world derives from disposable packaging for products and foods. Korea is a country that thrives on instant packages and delivered goods, and is one of the largest producers of such waste. It was concluded that in order to better understand and share resources and solutions as a community of practitioners on the climate crisis issue, such workshops will continue.

<Suggestions from the group for a call to action, as personal small steps>
- Reduce purchasing goods that have wasteful packaging
- Reduce or eliminate delivery meals (they come with styrofoam, plastic & seran wrap packaging)
- Switch dishwashing detergent into ecological detergents
- Plant vegetables or fruit trees with mixed plants so that they can grow more healthily
- Eat a plant-based diet
- Reduce flying, fossil-fuel transportation

As Zen students, retaining our human nature is very important. Seeing the value of all life, not just human life, but recognizing that we can understand other humans, animals and all creatures, we have a responsibility to care for all of them and this planet. That is our vow. That is Kwanseumbosal, our true nature’s job, our light of love and compassion. - II Hwa JDPSN

The next Climate Crisis Workshop will take place on March 1, 2020 (Sun).
Happy New Year!
Thank you to all who love and support Musangsa!

Mind Mirror
Practitioners sharing their experiences from the Monday Zen Meditation Class, Fall/Winter, 2019-2020

The temperature is fine
Last night’s darkness is gone
Sitting, saliva flows like a waterfall in my mouth
Still unable to see the crescent moon
How many kalpas before I can see the full moon?

"Searching for spring everywhere,
I came back home to find
spring has already settled in my yard."

When I lose my way
Without a beat, great teachers guide me back.
Dharma friends, along the same path
Share warm hearts back and forth.
Right here on this dharma ground
Warm spring has already arrived.

- Hyon Rim
- Beop Un ji
back of the person in front of me, I would feel my leg wobbling. It would wake me up like a lightning bolt. Ah, that’s it, that’s why the Zen master says, pay attention! Every moment was like that. Every ten or fifteen seconds, I would have this feeling of being in space. Then wake up! Coming back to right here, right now. That’s the tension we are all experiencing in each of our own way. Being clear. Even clear enough that you are aware if someone next to you is in pain or suffers, and even if you don’t say anything, still have a kind heart. That’s why practicing together is such a powerful tool in Zen tradition. By being here together in one situation, we become very aware of all the interconnectedness, nonstop.

Let’s keep trying only go straight, don’t know. Don’t know is very precious. Why? Because don’t know is courage. Courage is don’t know. Then everything appears in front of us as a teaching. In keeping don’t know, one of the benefits that Buddha said we get is a kind of bliss. He called it the bliss of blamelessness. If we can wake up even when we feel like falling asleep, or it’s so difficult but we make an effort - what am I? Don’t know, and just do it, then we no longer check or blame anything. Just doing it is don’t know. Fear or desire is most effectively changed my making a physical effort. Connect to our breathing, and how our body is functioning. And in that awareness, we stop checking and clarity simply opens. Then true joy and some sense of wholeness can be experienced no matter how tired you feel. That’s wonderful.