Forgotten Victim ✤ Buddhism in Mexico ✤ Seung Sahn Sunim ✤ Constant Practice

Spring Wind

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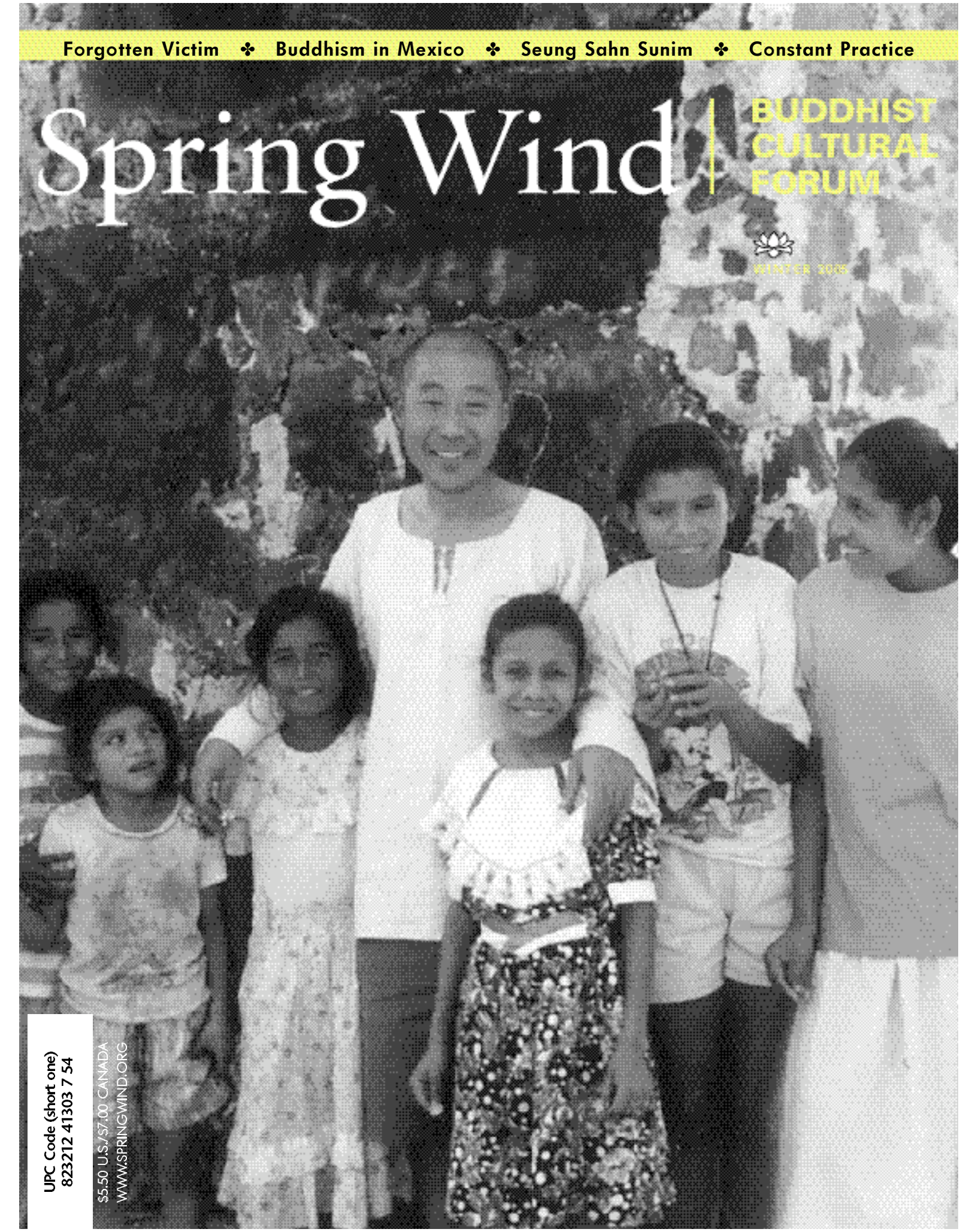

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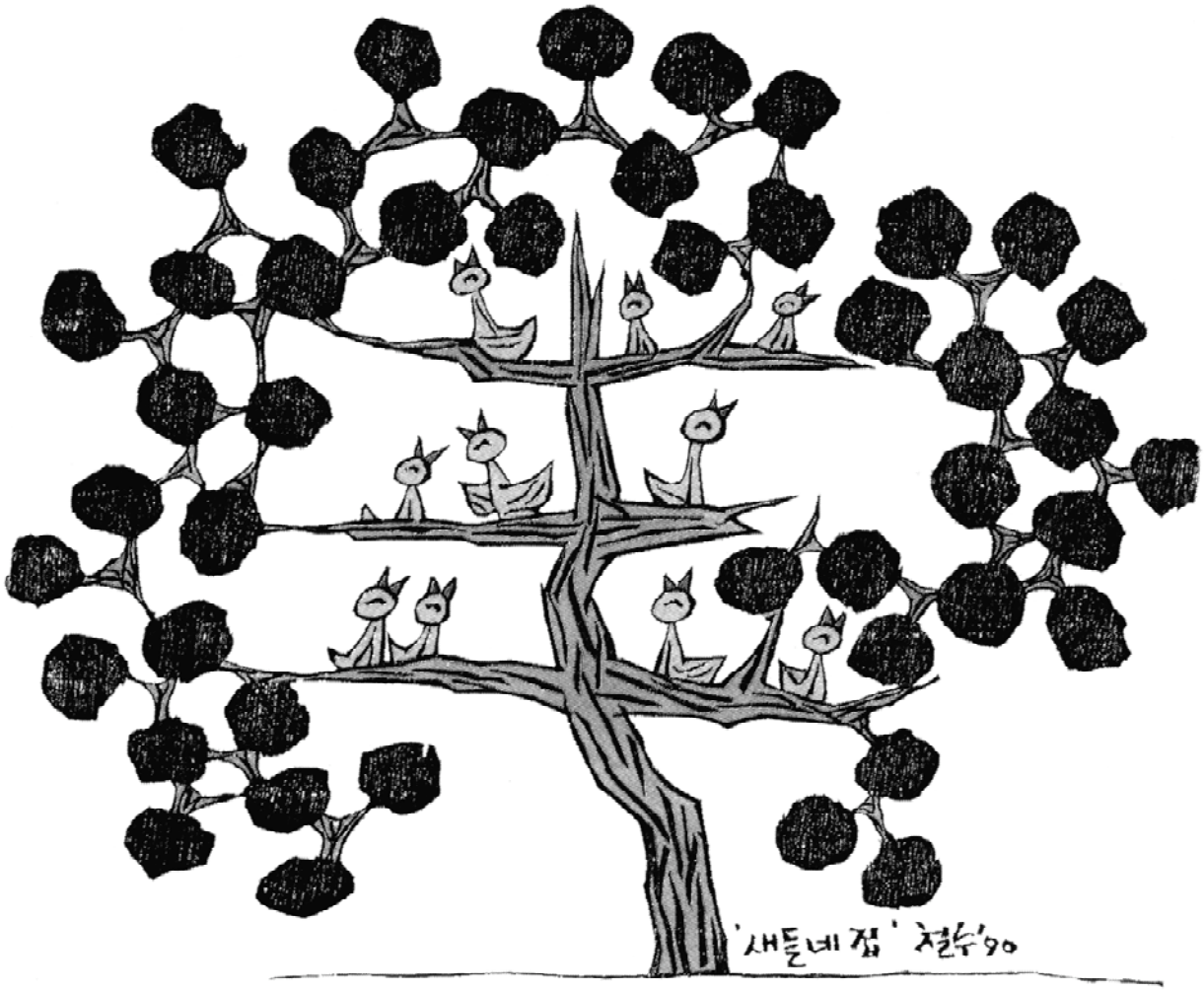

Lee Chulsoo

Spring Wind | BUDDHIST CULTURAL FORUM

WWW.SPRINGWIND.ORG WINTER 2005

4 **Forgotten Victim: Comfort Woman Soon-Duk**
Venerable Samu Sunim

Buddhism in Mexico

16 **Lotus Transplanted in Mexico:**
A History of the Mexico City Zen Buddhist Temple 1984–2004
Rev. Toan Sunim

28 **Buddhism in Mexico Factsheet**

30 **Constant Practice**
Rev. Muhan José Manuel Palma

34 **A Medicine to Cure All Illness**
Bopkong Juanita Ochoa Chi

In Memory of Seung Sahn Sunim (1927–2004)

37 **Don't Know and Don't Worry**
Venerable Samu Sunim

Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom

42 **Zen Buddhist Temple, Ann Arbor**

44 **Joyful Mind Seeking the Way**
Yosim Ken Norman

Everyday Buddhism

50 **Newsdesk**

51 **Homemade**
Tongsan Catherine Brown

52 **Untitled Journal**
Ken Eatherly

56 **Death Beside Me**
William Ace Remas

60 **Depression as Practice**
Kongsa Adam Lowis

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You are buddhas and bodhisattvas. Your everyday stories of awakenings and struggles will help each of us find wisdom and compassion and build an enlightened society. Please submit articles, artwork, and letters to *Spring Wind*.

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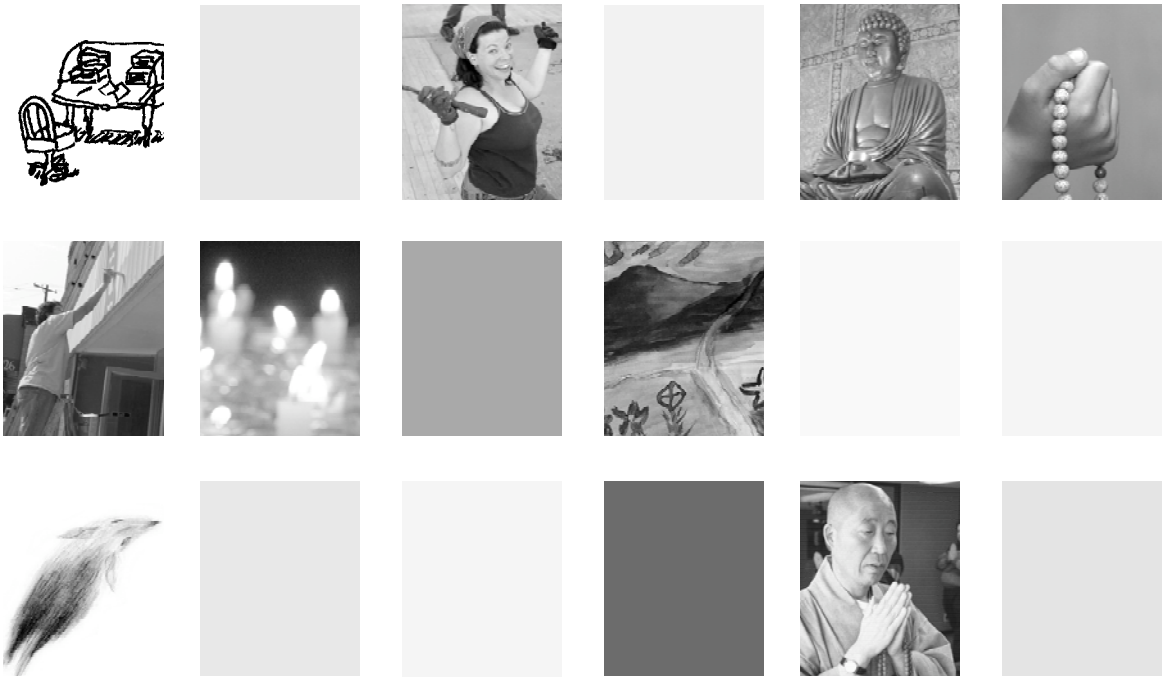
on the cover

A lotus was transplanted and is taking root in Mexico. The year 2004 marks the 20th anniversary of Ven. Samu Sunim's dharma activities in Mexico. Sunim is on his 16th teaching trip to Mexico this winter. The cover photo is Ven. Samu Sunim and children from the village of San Blas, Nayorit, Mexico in January 1997. Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom archives.



May the merit from this issue be transferred to all beings throughout the universe!

Forgotten Victim Comfort Woman Soon-Duk

Editor's Note: Soon-Duk was born in 1921 in Korea. As we learned in the fall 2004 issue of Spring Wind, *she was left fatherless as a small girl when the Japanese occupation forces beat her father to death. When she was sixteen, she signed up to work in imperial Japan, but instead found herself a sexual slave for Japanese soldiers in China. But when she was assigned to serve a high-ranking officer named Izumi, they fell in love. As World War II approached, Izumi sent Soon-Duk home to Korea.*

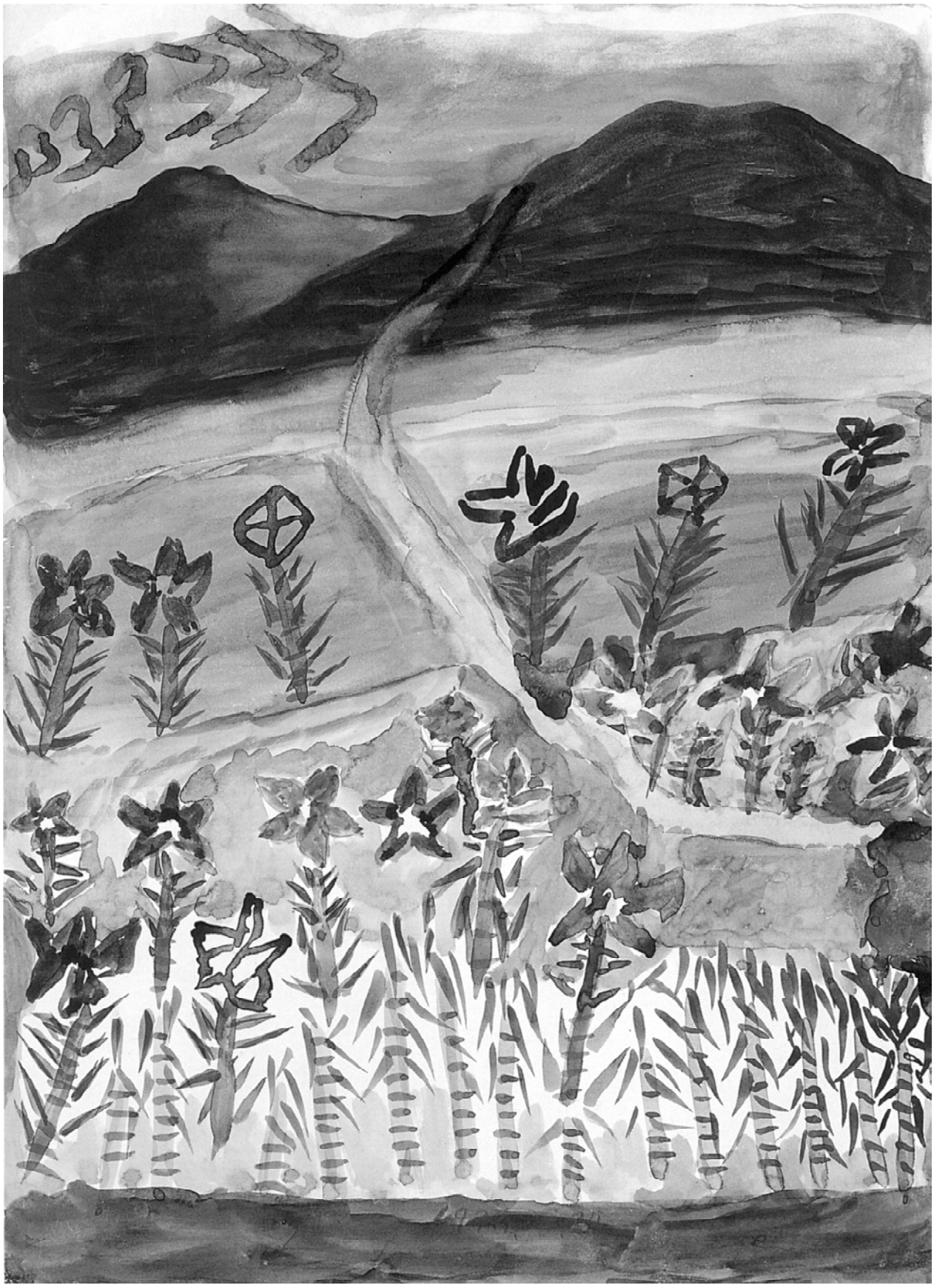
Ven. Samu Sunim

The five ex-military comfort women[1] carried with them repatriation permits signed by Commander Izumi with instructions that all military facilities at relay stations on their travel route provide them with necessary accommodations. They traveled overland to Korea via northern China. The Japanese military was present everywhere. The military machine was well organized and the soldiers disciplined. Soon-Duk and her friends were impressed with the service they received on their journey. However, things became different when they crossed the Korean border. Japanese police became suspicious of them and asked about their relation to Commander Izumi. Soon-Duk pointed out the "Due to disease" designation on their papers as their reason for returning home, and they made it past the police without further questioning. The universal military presence and unlimited power of the police created fear and terror for the Koreans. Still it was beyond the ken of Soon-Duk and the four girls to grasp the extent of the crimes against humanity being contemplated by Japanese imperialism and militarism.

Return Home

It was in April 1940 when Soon-Duk finally arrived back home in Korea after three years of misery. She was happy to be reunited with her family, but the country was bleeding under

[1]In the fall 2004 issue of *Spring Wind* the number of military comfort girls who returned to Korea with the help of Izumi was erroneously listed as six. The correct number is five, including Soon-Duk.



Soon-Duk Kim, *Bellflowers,* acrylic on paper, 1994.

oppression. The situation had gone from bad to worse while Soon-Duk was away. Under the order for war labor mobilization, the country was turning into a military supply base for the Chinese invasion. Peasants left their land to work in the factories. Under colonial rule, the country was deeply subjugated and Koreans were silenced, doing their work at the bidding of the Japanese. This domination extended even into the schools, with public school teachers carrying their swords into the classroom along with their textbooks. In June 1941, Koreans lost their names, being forced to adopt Japanese names. Colonial policy against the conquered was always forced and divisive. The Japanese succeeded in fracturing the spirit of the colonized Koreans and pitted collaborationists and non-collaborationists against each other.

Soon-Duk soon recovered from her poor health, but the joy of her homecoming did not last very long. The villagers were curious about her activities during her three-year absence, and they began to suspect the truth of the rumors spreading in the face of her silence. It was painful, but even more painful was her struggle with a misguided sense of shame and the fear of facing more shame and derision from others. In traditional Confucian Korea, female chastity was so important that the loss of it before marriage brought disgrace to a girl's family and a lifetime of stigma, often so great as to force the girl to commit suicide. Soon-Duk was irate at having been, first, a victim of the enslavement of women by imperial Japan and, second, subject at home to contempt and derision by Korean male chauvinist Confucian beliefs that had disparaged women for centuries.

Soon-Duk received letters from Izumi after returning home. She was touched and moved by his concern, but she was also deeply ashamed of her own illiteracy. Whatever she knew of reading and writing, she learned from him. So she composed a letter as best she could and sent it off with a package of roasted sweet rice and hot pepper powder. She recalled fondly and with sadness that it was the first love letter she ever wrote. In his reply, Izumi thanked her and jokingly mentioned that the hot pepper powder almost killed him. Along with his letter he sent a corrected version of Soon-Duk's letter with comments on her misspelled words and a light-hearted pun. They exchanged letters for a couple of years. Soon-Duk confessed with remorse that it was Izumi who wrote her regularly from Nanjing, China. She was not always faithful in responding to his letters. She said ruefully that she was always busy earning her living and had difficulty writing letters.

In truth, Soon-Duk was in deep despair. Rumors had been circulating that she had been a military prostitute serving the Japanese army. Her mother wept and cried, and her family pressured her to tell the truth. Soon-Duk was not afraid of telling the truth, but dreaded having to inform the villagers about the sordid details of her former "comfort station" life. She contemplated committing suicide several times, but felt strongly she had done no wrong. Realizing that her presence was a constant source of pain for her family, however, she decided to leave home. One moonless mid-summer night, Soon-Duk slipped out of her home and village, tears blinding her view. It broke her heart, thinking that she would never see her mother and home village again. She had departed with the sole purpose of helping her family. Quite the contrary, she brought her family not only disappointment but also disgrace.

Leaving Home

Before long, new realities began to set in. With a bundle of clothes in hand, Soon-Duk faced a new world, one that was bleak and wasted. She had no skills, and her only resources were her sincerity and willingness to work hard.

She went to Seoul and offered herself to any odd and trifling job without pay. She did laundry, cooked meals, and took care of babies. She always did extra work. She was thankful just not to be

starving. She felt genuinely grateful for being alive, being among the living, and working for herself. Winter came and odd jobs dwindled. She learned of handywomen's jobs available in the marketplace. She visited marketplaces, immediately liking the assortment of people, the food and groceries, the hustle and bustle! And there was all kinds of work to do indeed! She helped out at a food stand, then attended a vegetable stall, and scurried around all day. She soon became indispensable to those looking for good temporary help. She finally had plenty to eat and earned some money! More importantly, she was happy and enjoyed herself working with so many people in the market.

More than a year passed. It was January 1942 when Soon-Duk heard the news of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and the invasion of Hong Kong. With the expansion of the war, the Japanese introduced military education into schools and began to draft Korean youth into the army. They sent youth to China, Southeast Asia, and faraway islands in the South Seas to fight the English and the Americans. They shipped men in their forties and fifties to Japan to work in coal mines and munitions factories. People were mobilized to attend prayer meetings for the "holy war" and asked to contribute to the war fund. Great sacrifice was demanded of Koreans to collaborate with the Japanese war effort.

Soon-Duk remained undisturbed while the world around her tumbled and rattled along. She had a simple and clear belief: no matter what happens, one can always help oneself as long as one is intact in body and mind. So she worked hard to help herself and always did so with a helping hand for others. Eventually she was successful and opened her own vegetable stand in the market. Not only did she thrive on her own strength, but she was also much appreciated by all with whom she worked.

Soon-Duk almost forgot her three years in the Japanese military brothel as a sex slave. But she did not wish to forget Izumi, the man who loved her and helped her escape the comfort station. However, it was a cruel irony that her memories of Izumi and the military brothel could not be separated from each other. For now, she felt it was good enough to have memories of Izumi. That she was once loved warmed her heart. She worried about him and hoped he would stay alive, and visited a Buddhist temple and Shinto shrine to pray for his safety.

Time flew and events unfolded one after another. After half a century of the frenzy and madness of military aggression and expansionism, imperial Japan lost her holy war when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and World War II ended in August 1945. Korea was liberated from Japan and then occupied by American forces. Three years of U.S. military government followed in South Korea, while Soviet Russia set up its communist regime in North Korea. In June 1950, the Korean War broke out, in which United Nations forces under U.S. command fought against North Korean and Chinese communists.

Soon-Duk lost everything in the violence and destruction of the Korean War, but her body and mind survived intact. After the war, she started again. She was not alone. After the great destruction, everyone was starting out again. Things were tough and difficult. However, she felt good starting out again, working with others toward a common future. The necessities of life were scarce and there were people exposed to the elements without protection. People vied fiercely for scant supplies. Then they realized that they all had to survive and learned to share things, particularly with the sick and with children. They even learned that poor people could be more generous than rich misers, both in heart and deed.

Meeting with Mr. Pak

With the end of the war in 1953, Koreans regained their spirits. Slowly but steadily, they picked up their lives, surviving with limited means. During

She had long ago promised herself not to fall victim to her past, but it was haunting her again!

these poor but happy days, Soon-Duk met a man named Mr. Pak who occasionally dropped by the fruit stall where she was helping out. Soon-Duk was always helpful and welcomed him. Then she noticed that he came more to talk with her than to buy fruit. One day when he came he went directly to the owner inside after greeting her. They talked for a while in whispers. After he left, the owner said to Soon-Duk, "Mr. Pak works for the railroad office." Then after a pause she said, "He wants to have a meeting with you in private." She added, "He appears to be a good person." It was clear from how the owner spoke that she was encouraging Soon-Duk to attend the meeting.

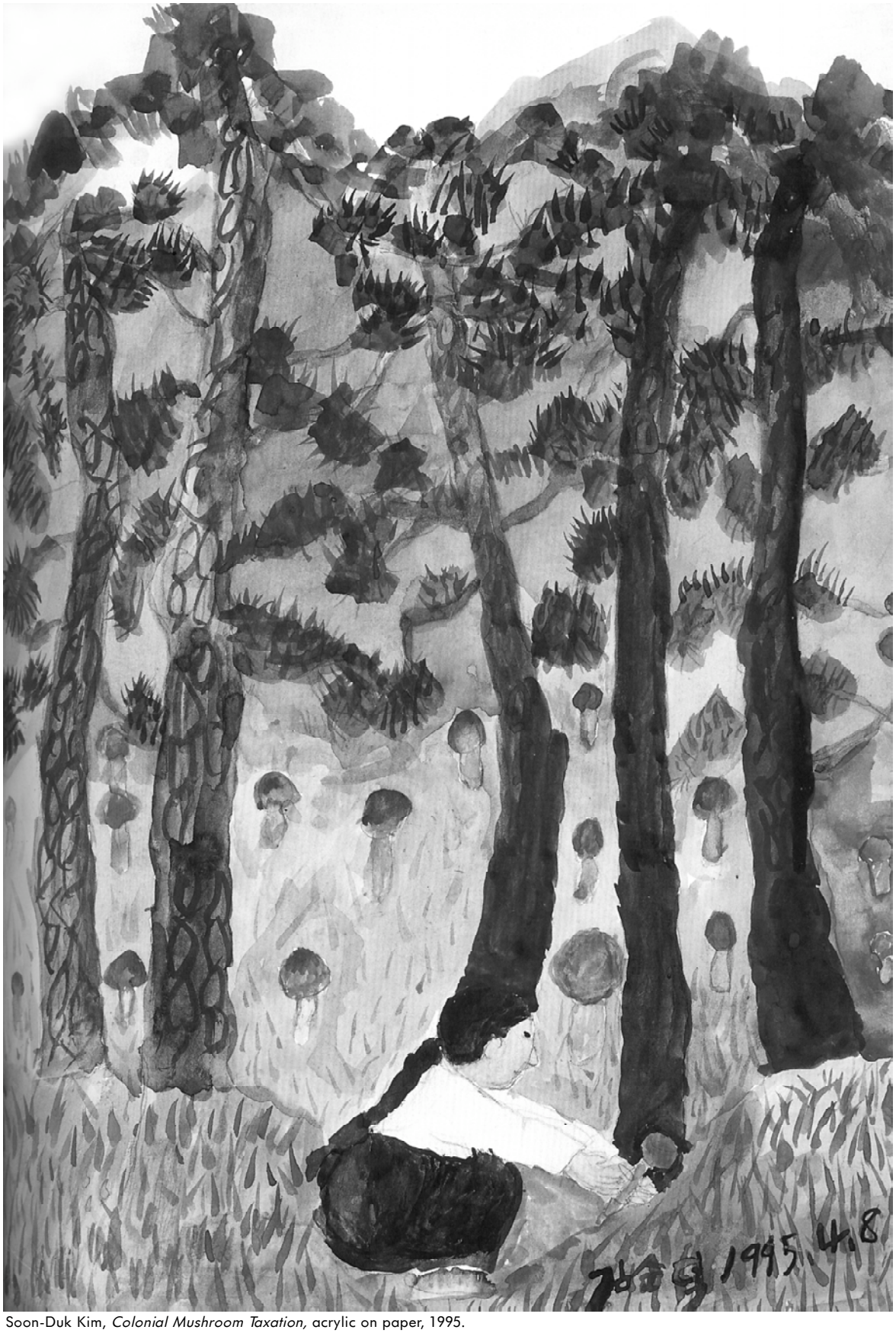
On the appointed date, Soon-Duk put on her best dress and followed Mr. Pak to a tea salon. She had never been to such a place before. She felt like a country girl in a poor dress entering a high society clubroom by mistake, recalling the first time she had entered Izumi's office. Mr. Pak asked a few questions but Soon-Duk remained quiet, staring into her teacup and out the window. After her life at the comfort station and with Izumi, she had given up on men. Therefore, it never occurred to her that she would be sitting seriouslywith a man. Although no words were exchanged, she felt warm being with him. They parted after drinking tea.

On their second date, Mr. Pak explained his situation to Soon-Duk. Pak was fifty years old and married. He said he was attracted to Soon-Duk, and would like to invite her to come and live with him as his second wife. Soon-Duk was listening with growing surprise. They looked at each other without displaying any emotion. Then, Mr. Pak gently held her hand and said, "I promise I will do my best to make you happy." Soon-Duk instantly felt an electric surge of happiness and could barely contain herself from bursting into tears. It was not until their third date, however, that she was able to give her heart to him and accept his invitation.

As a defiled woman, Soon-Duk knew that she would never be able to marry someone formally and become a legitimate wife. In order to raise her own family, becoming a man's second wife was her best option. Previously, she had never even dreamt of marrying someone, let alone raising a family. She was thrilled and excited at the possibility. However, she still carried the invisible blot of being an ex-comfort woman like a dark cloud threatening the sky. Should she inform Pak of her past life? She had long ago promised herself not to fall victim to her past, but it was haunting her again! However, she did not succumb to despair. She felt strongly that she should not be judged by her past, only for what she is today. She decided not to inform Pak of her life as a comfort girl. Her conclusion was that it would help no one but would rather create unnecessary pain.

Marriage

There was no formal wedding ceremony for the second wife. After paying her respects to her mother-in-law and father-in-law, Soon-Duk and Pak married each other in a simple ceremony. Then she moved into his house and began her married life. At the time, Pak's first wife was away in North Korea, just across the 38th Parallel. So Soon-Duk took charge of household affairs right away, caring for her parents-in-lawand Pak's two children until his first wife returned. She went from being a homeless helper to a housewife overnight.



Soon-Duk Kim, *Colonial Mushroom Taxation,* acrylic on paper, 1995.

While as a young girl Soon-Duk had dreamt of marrying a man and making a sweet home, she thought her dream was crushed in the military brothel. Happily, even broken dreams can sometimes come true. Soon-Duk embraced her new homemaker's life wholeheartedly and did her utmost to help and serve her extended family with care and tact. When Pak's first wife returned, she and her children moved to her parents-in-law's house. Soon-Duk honored her and the two learned to get along. Over the years she had her own children, three sons and one daughter. She felt that she had fulfilled her duties as a woman. She spent happy days raising children and taking care of her husband. In 1980, Pak died of a heart attack. After that, she spent her days quietly visiting her eldest son's family and playing with her grandchildren.

Truth and the Way of Reconciliation

It was early fall 1991 when Soon-Duk heard the news that a former comfort woman publicly identified herself and testified against the Japanese government, which was denying the charges. Her name was Hak-Soon Kim (1924–1997). In her testimony she said, "I have lots of unspeakable grudges against Japan and my life has been full of misery because of what Japan did to me. I had to tell someone about this. I decided to reveal that I was a comfort woman." As the Japanese government continued to deny the truth of the military comfort women, it was vitally important to collect as many testimonies as possible from ex-comfort women. Therefore, support groups were organized to redress the war crimes committed against young Korean girls and women. *Chongdaehyup,* or the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, was headed by Professor Jung-Ok Yun. The Council spearheaded the movement, making a nationwide appeal to ex-comfort women to come forward and testify and receive medical and financial assistance.

The difficulty was that many of the ex-comfort women had died of disease or abuse during the course of their service. Many more were slain by fleeing troops seeking to erase any trace of their war crimes. Some were simply left to starve in the jungle, where the Allies found them. Those who made it home bore the scars of battle. With their bodies crippled by sexually-transmitted disease and physical abuse, they suffered from a deep sense of shame and stayed away from their own families, not even considering public acknowledgement of their past.

Hak-Soon Kim's testimony was followed by that of Ok-Ju Moon, who testified in December 1991. As Soon-Duk watched the news programs about the comfort women and their testimonies on the television, her three years as a comfort girl came back in a flash. Soon-Duk was completely at a loss and could not sleep at night. She had always thought of herself as an ex-comfort girl who had returned home mentally unscathed, thanks to Izumi's love and help, and had successfully adjusted herself to society. Therefore, her initial reaction was, why scratch and reopen old wounds, especially since she had much to lose by going public? Then again, she thought she would be the right person to testify against the Japanese government, someone who could speak with calm and dignity about the Japanese war crimes and the Korean collaborationists for their dirty subordinate role.[2]

Still, Soon-Duk could not make up her mind. So she sought advice from her nephew, the son of her elder brother, a high school teacher, whom

[2]The Japanese government admitted the Japanese military's involvement with comfort stations in January 1992, after years of denial, but flatly denied the drafting of comfort women. The Japanese government has consistently refused to make reparations for the war victims. In April 1996, the UN Human Rights Commission announced the Coomaraswamy's "Report on Violence Against Women" and acknowledged the crimes of the Japanese government. Many Koreans and Asians of the countries occupied by the Japanese are resentful for the lack of a formal Japanese apology and forgiveness-seeking. "No [Japanese politician] has done what Willy Brandt (of Germany) did: got down on his knees in the Warsaw ghetto and asked forgiveness" (*New York Times,* November 12, 2004). Particularly in light of a war crime "so sickening…that even Nazis…were horrified" (ibid) and hundreds of Canadians "in Japanese POW camps…faced torture, starvation, atrocities, and use as slave labour….The death rate in the camps was something like 10 times higher than if you were captured by the Germans…" ("Lest We Forget—Hong Kong Vets Recall Sacrifice," *Toronto Star,* November 11, 2004).

she helped financially to finish college. He was very negative. He pointed out that in the past, many war victims and forced laborers tried to get reparations from the Japanese government but in vain. "You have nothing to gain but everything to lose. You will hurt your children deeply. Please do not do it," he pleaded. Soon-Duk went to see another nephew living in Taejon. Upon learning the purpose of her visit, he begged her to stay quiet and not disturb the peace and harmony of her family.

Back home her mind went blank. Unlike other ex-comfort women, Soon-Duk did not have bitterness or resentment against the Japanese. She had returned home with her body-mind relatively intact and had not suffered any depression or mental derangement. But there was something inside her that troubled her deeply for being silent. This kept her awake for many nights. Half a century ago she suppressed her truth, and let silence speak to the people when rumors circulated in her home village. However, this time her silence bothered her. If she remained silent, she would not only betray the war victims and the movement, but also herself.

More and more it seemed clear to her that truths should be told and not silenced. She visited a police station for help. With their help she went to the office of Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery in order to tell her own truth. She felt very relieved after giving her testimony, returning home and falling into deep sleep for two days. When she woke, she went to see her eldest son and confessed. "How could you keep such a painful past all to yourself for so long?" he asked. "You are just marvelous!" So saying, he cried bitterly. However, her second son and daughter-in-law fell despondent. Surely it saddened Soon-Duk's heart to see their reactions, but she felt relieved having unburdened herself.

With a newly found light-heartedness, Soon-Duk attended the weekly Wednesday protest meetings in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul that started in January 1992. While at the protest meeting, Soon-Duk suddenly thought of Izumi for the first time. She asked herself what Izumi would say if he saw her protesting against the Japanese government for its war crimes. Then she asked herself whether Izumi was a war criminal or a war victim. She was sure that his hands were stained with blood. However, he may have been a victim of blind patriotism and mass war hysteria. Can one be a criminal and victim at the same time? Yes, if you fall under a chain of command. Moreover, people also fall victim to their own ignorance and delusion and can wake up. Both offenders and victims can wake up. Seeking justice is important but salvation for all is even more important for lasting peace and happiness. Soon-Duk would never know how Izumi would respond to these thoughts, nor even if he was alive. But she believed he would side with justice and salvation.

The more involved Soon-Duk became in the work of the Korean Council for Women, the more she saw the need for her help. The youngest surviving ex-comfort women were in their late sixties, and the majority were in their late seventies. They all came from poor peasant families and never went to school, being lured into the comfort women's life by trickery and deception. Their body-minds were visibly worn and empty of joy and happiness. They had survived years of abuse and sexual slavery as well as the war, but most lived their lives in fear and shame, emotionally unstable, full of hatred and resentment against the Japanese. Soon-Duk shared the poor country background of the others, but did not harbor grudges against the Japanese. More and more she realized that her lack of resentment against the Japanese was due to her good experience with Izumi.

Soon-Duk began to have scruples about her own life. She realized that she had turned a blind eye to the cause of comfort women because she enjoyed her own good fortunes. Now the plight of the ex-comfort women anguished her and the unrepentant attitude of the Japanese government

disturbed her. She had a strong feeling that nothing mattered in her own life, that she only wanted to help these women regain dignity, honor, and happiness. Thereupon, she decided to devote the rest of her life to the cause of war victims and women.

Duk-Kyung Kang (1929–1997)

It was around this time when the Buddhist monk Hyejin Sunim[3] established the House of Sharing, a shelter for ex-comfort women in Seoul. Soon-Duk moved into the shelter right away. One of the early residents of the House of Sharing was Duk-Kyung Kang. As an ex-comfort woman, she was unusual in that she was educated, talented, and spoke Japanese fluently. Unfortunately, she suffered from cancer. By virtue of education and calm dignity, Duk-Kyung and Soon-Duk distinguished themselves among the *halmoni*[4] (grandmother) and often represented the community. Duk-Kyung and Soon-Duk became close friends. Duk-Kyung was intelligent and eloquent. Although she was younger than Soon-Duk, Soon-Duk honored her for her intelligence and high principles. However, it was Soon-Duk who often represented the community at meetings due to the unavailability of Duk-Kyung. More frequently than not, her calm and dignified presence, undiminished by the life of a sex slave, spoke louder than her words.

In November 1995, the House of Sharing moved to a countryside location in Kyonggi-do province outside Seoul where they built two dormitory buildings, a dining hall and Buddha hall to accommodate an increasing number of halmoni. Aside from the weekly Wednesday trip to Seoul to attend the protest meeting at the Japanese Embassy, the halmoni received visitors almost daily. They came from across the country, some from Japan and some from abroad. Women's groups, school groups, religious and professional groups, and the media all came to visit, learn and study the modern history of Korea and Japan, extend their sympathy and support, and conduct interviews and picture-taking.

Even in her sick bed, Duk-Kyung impressed her visitors with her demeanor and polite, dispassionate conversation. Many Japanese visitors remembered her long after leaving. To help treat hypochondria and pent-up resentment of the halmoni, art therapy volunteers offered drawing and painting classes so that the halmoni would be able to give free expression to their innermost feelings and emotions. After some persuasion and prodding, the volunteers succeeded in helping the halmoni express their anger and resentment without shame. Generally, their drawings were stark, childish, and sometimes cruel. However, Duk-Kyung and Soon-Duk raised their works to a higher standard. Everyone recognized Duk-Kyung's work as seriously artistic. Soon-Duk lacked Duk-Kyung's talent, but she was a hard worker. She made a constant effort until she acquired the talent and skill. Many halmoni surrendered their paintbrushes and picked up a hoe for gardening after the House of Sharing moved to the countryside. After all, as daughters of peasants, they were at home working outdoors with their hands. Soon-Duk too acquired her own plot for vegetable gardening. Being a diligent person, she kept up with both her artwork and her gardening.

Duk-Kyung was suffering from terminal cancer and had been in and out of the hospital. Her illness became of grave concern to everyone at the House of Sharing and its friends and patrons. As close friends, Soon-Duk and Duk-Kyung supported each other and worked together for the common cause. Soon-Duk stopped painting until Duk-Kyung's health improved. In October 1996, Duk-Kyung came home from the hospital in apparently good health, as if responding to the prayers of well-wishers. She started attending the Wednesday protest meetings again and resumed her painting. However, Duk-Kyung's brief recovery was like the

[3]For Hyejin Sunim and the House of Sharing, see *SpringWind,* Fall 2000, pp.13–15, "Comfort Women".
[4]In South Korea and especially at the House of Sharing, ex-comfort women are known as halmoni, or grandmother, a term of endearment.

This was what Soon-Duk and Hyejin Sunim always wanted to do, to bring the message of the war victims to the perpetrator's home country.

brilliantly reflected light of the setting sun. She passed away on February 3rd of the following year[5] amidst the grief of the halmoni and friends.

Duk-Kyung's loss was felt widely in the movement for war victims and women against violence. It took Soon-Duk a few days before she recovered from her sorrow. At her deathbed, Duk-Kyung whispered to Soon-Duk, "Keep your faith in all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Keep our community together and go forward with your beliefs, so that never again will women suffer from violence. Never again." Soon-Duk quietly repeated this to herself, "Never again. No, never again."

Never Again Bodhisattva

Now more than ever before, the halmoni community was looking to Soon-Duk for leadership. But she knew she was not a leader. She liked to work, her life was work, and she was a bodhisattva worker at that. She liked that. But she was old, seventy-seven years old. The future of the halmoni community was not bright. In 1997, a total of 192 surviving ex-comfort women were reported in South Korea. Eighteen months later, only 153 were alive. So the community was racing against old age and death. Furthermore, the majority of the 153 would receive financial assistance from the Korean government, but avoided public exposure. The culture of misplaced shame still prevailed over their life.

In August 1998, the Historical Museum on Sexual Slavery by the Japanese Military, a human rights museum on comfort women, was dedicated on the premises of the House of Sharing. The opening of the museum solved much of the problem of serving the visitors and relieved the burden from Hyejin Sunim and the halmoni. Soon-Duk and Hyejin Sunim now turned their attention overseas. With the help of their supporters in Japan, they organized a tour of Japan exhibiting the artwork of former comfort women accompanied by Soon-Duk's testimony. This was what Soon-Duk and Hyejin Sunim always wanted to do—to bring the message of the war victims to the perpetrator's home country. The travelling exhibit generated deep soul-searching on the part of the Japanese public and at the same time raised the eyebrows of the many die-hard nationalists. More than anything else, the tour was enthusiastically embraced by progressive women's groups in Japan. At their urging, a second tour was successfully organized the following year.

In January 1997, one week prior to the visit of the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs to South Korea, the Japanese Asian Women's Peace Foundation delivered promissory notes to a few Korean comfort women who agreed to receive a private fund. It was a clever two-dimensional face-saving tactic for the Japanese government to avoid the historical burden on one hand and fulfill nominal obligations on the other.

Hyejin Sunim and Soon-Duk expanded their activities across the Pacific to the U.S. and Canada. In 1997, two U.S. Congressmen introduced resolutions to the House to urge the Japanese government to extend a formal apology and offer reparations for the war victims. In 1999, Soon-Duk and members of her support group visited the U.S. and went on a speaking tour at the invitation of local human rights and women's

[5]In *Spring Wind*, Fall 2002, p.15, Duk-Kyung's death year was erroneously printed as 1992.

She rose above her sense of shame and resentment, refusing to stay mired in the patriarchal politics of nationalism.

groups in the U.S. In the same year, California State Assemblyman Michael Honda, of Japanese descent, introduced a resolution into the state legislature calling upon the U.S. Congress to appeal to the Japanese government to issue a formal apology and pay reparations to the victims of its war crimes.

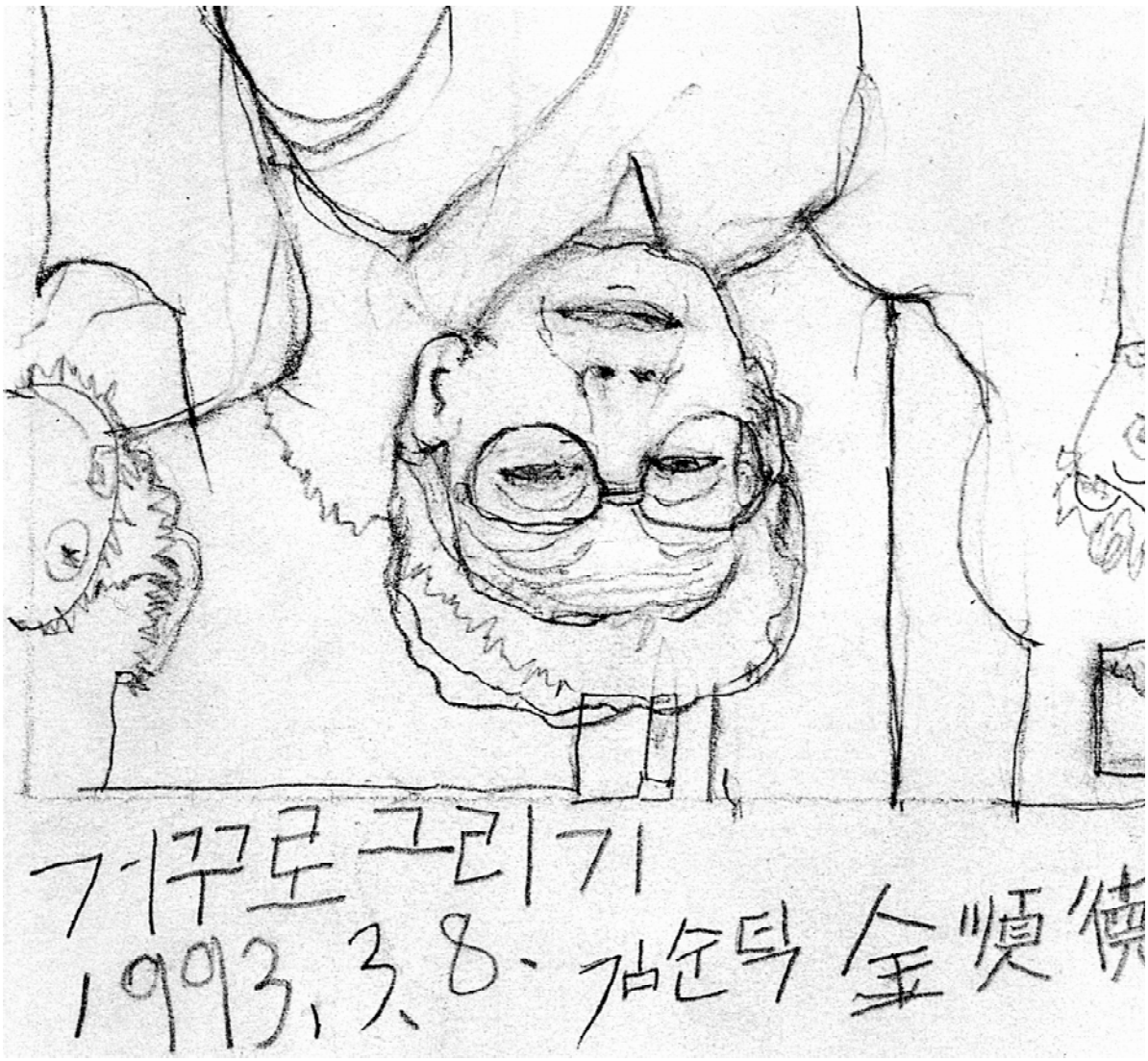
The year 2000 was designated as "Year 2000 Remembrance: Women and Honor" by the International Human Rights Law Group and Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues (WCCW). It commemorated all girls and women who died in Japanese rape camps and in sexual slavery. This brought a measure of healing and honor to the surviving military rape victims. On September 18, 2000, WCCW, which was formed in 1992 to "further research and education concerning crimes against the comfort women of WWII," organized a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. for ten surviving comfort women from Asia (seven from Korea, including Soon-Duk, two from the Philippines, and one from Taiwan). The press conference was followed by a silent march to the Japanese Embassy. On September 20, WCCW, three co-hosting organizations, and nine co-sponsoring international organizations presented Women of Dignity and Honor plaques to the ten surviving war victims in a Remembrance Ceremony. During the ceremony, two keynote speakers, Congressman Lane Evans of Illinois and Nancy Rubin, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, praised the women for their courage and endurance and urged all to "speak out and stand up for the victims, and fight injustice" so that we would "never forget" and it would never happen again. In conjunction with the event, WCCW published *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony of Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military,* and the House of Sharing released *Moddap'in-kkot* (Unblossomed Flowers), a collection of the art work of Duk-Kyung, Soon-Duk, and other halmoni.

In 2002, Soon-Duk visited the U.S. and Canada for the last time, once again to speak out for public awareness through her testimony and the exhibition of halmoni art work. Although she was a victim of Japanese subjugation as a sex slave and later a victim of anti-colonial Korean nationalism, Soon-Duk refused to remain a victim of the past. She rose above her sense of shame and resentment, refusing to stay mired in the patriarchal politics of nationalism. She sought solidarity with comfort women in other countries and visited them in the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan. As the senior person of the House of Sharing and the oldest surviving comfort woman, her presence provided strength and stability to the community of wounded comfort women and her quiet dignity inspired visitors.

On June 30, 2004, Soon-Duk passed away while still fighting for the cause of war victims and against violence against women. She left behind eleven fellow halmoni of the House of Sharing to carry on the task. She was the tireless Never Again Bodhisattva, saying "never again" to military rape and violence against women.

Epilogue

I met Soon-Duk halmoni five times: twice at the House of Sharing in South Korea, and thrice at the Zen Buddhist Temples in Chicago and Toronto during her and Hyejin Sunim's North American tour in 1999 and 2000. I interviewed her twice, and interpreted for her *Chicago*



Soon-Duk Kim, *Self-Portrait—Upside Down,* pencil on paper, 1993.

Tribune interview in September 2000. Soon-Duk devoted the last twelve years of her life to seeking justice and the restoration of ex-comfort women and war victims' honor.

To me, however, she was more like an exiled bird or deer out of the mountains than a social activist. She was a tall woman, always wearing the traditional Korean white *ch'ima* and *chogori,* looking plain but upright with a twinge of sadness. In some way, she was aloof and detached, even in the midst of her supporters. More than once I thought that she belonged to another dass of beings. I often thought of her as a bird without wings longing for the empty sky. I like to believe she would wish to be reborn as a bird or deer in her next life so that she could live free from harm and violence, enjoying freedom of movement. We mourn her demise until her rebirth.

Lotus Transplanted in Mexico

A History of the Mexico City Zen Buddhist Temple, 1984–2004

Rev. Toan Sunim

Mexico is a land of such strong contrasts in its landscapes, peoples, culture, and history. We could say there are many Mexicos within Mexico, from the diverse cultures of pre-Columbian times, through the tremendous impact of the conquest and colonization with its implantation of a foreign religion, the domination of the people, the racial intermixing, and the plunder of the natural resources; a conquest that in many forms is still taking place. Buddhism in Mexico is too young a movement for one to perceive its impact. However, the history of our own sangha may reflect in some ways the path and struggles that other Buddhist groups are going through in trying to bring the benefits of Buddhism's non-dual teaching of liberation to our diverse and essentially divided country.

The Beginning

In August of 1957, D. T. Suzuki conducted a groundbreaking conference with Erich Fromm on Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis in Cuernavaca, Morelos. The joint seminar was organized by the Psychoanalysis Department of the Faculty of Medicine at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). One of the attendees was a psychoanalyst from Mexico City named Jorge Derbez Muro. In the sixties, Dr. Derbez started meditating with his patients, becoming the first therapist in Mexico to integrate Zen and psychoanalysis. He built a small zendo in his clinic where he sat with his patients several nights a week. His Buddhist name was Jimyo.

Rev. Toan Sunim and Ven. Samu Sunim at the opening ceremony for Templo Budista Zen in December 2003, nearly twenty years after Samu Sunim's first teaching visit to Mexico. Photo by Tom Musselman.

In the early eighties, a student from Toronto named Daniel Chamberlain was living in Mexico City studying Spanish at UNAM. He married a Mexican girl and for some time he and his wife, Mónica, were in therapy with Dr. Derbez, who introduced them to Zen meditation. Daniel became very interested in Zen, so when he and Mónica relocated to Toronto in 1983, he searched for a Zen master under whom they could continue their practice.

Daniel recalled his search:

In the yellow pages I found the entry "Zen Buddhist Temple, under the direction of Ven. Samu Sunim." My idea of a Zen master was that of a tall, fierce-looking figure. When I arrived at the temple, a thin, young, gentle Korean greeted me. I assumed he was the attendant. But during the sitting meditation that evening, I realized, through the powerful way in which this "attendant" was practicing, that this was indeed Samu Sunim. Soon I felt a strong affinity with him. Within days, a precept-taking ceremony was going to be held, so Mónica and I started to do the required 3000 prostrations in order to participate. Through the ceremony we formally became Buddhists, receiving the names Ansim and Mani.

Samu Sunim's First Visit, "Set the Dharma Above All Else"

In the spring 1984, Ansim made arrangements with Dr. Jimyo Derbez to invite Sunim to Mexico to give talks and lead a *Yongmaeng Chongjin* (intensive retreat). A Frenchwoman named Edith

LaBrely and several others who used to sit at Centro Zen, affiliated with Maezumi Roshi, helped to organize the visit.

Ansim described Sunim's first visit to Mexico: *Monday, May 21, Samu Sunim arrived in Mexico City, beginning a dynamic fourteen-day visit. Within hours of his arrival, Sunim was at work in the meditation room of his host Dr. Derbez, straightening backs, showing how to do prostrations, and urging a somewhat amazed sangha to train hard.*

Up at five the next day, then prostrations, meditation, a breakfast of papaya, figs, mango, and melon, and we were off to Atlihuayan in the state of Morelos to look for a facility for the retreat.

We visited the country market and a sixteenth century church at Tepoztlán in the valley of Cuernavaca. The country folk responded warmly to Sunim, who quickly established a rapport of friendly confidence, respect and understanding which was remarkable to see. Later, upon returning to his North American students, Sunim said that the Mexican country people were so spontaneous and natural that they had no need of Zen training.

We then hurried back to Mexico City for the first of two Dharma talks. Amazement, bemused glances, and great enthusiasm characterized the reaction of guests and sangha members as ideas and preconceptions about Zen melted away, replaced with the fresh perspective Sunim provided.

Wednesday, again up at five, prostrations, meditation, breakfast, then off to the pyramids of Teotihuacán. Sunim climbed all 365 steps of the Sun pyramid in his bare feet and paid homage to this ancient place of spiritual practice with hapchang and a deep bow upon arriving at the top.

From the summit of the pyramid we watched a group of school children approaching. Two boys shyly asked if they could have their picture taken next to Sunim. Within seconds twenty-five to thirty children scrambled to be induded, all clamoring to have pictures taken with their own cameras. Yes, they had learned about Buddhism in school, and they all promised Sunim that they would grow up to be peaceful and kind to all beings.

Thursday, Sunim met Ejo Takata Sensei, a Rinzai priest from Japan. He was one of the first people to introduce Zen to Mexico. He was the Zen teacher at the Zen, A.C (Zen Civil Association) which was incubated in his acupuncture clinic.

Sunim gave a second Dharma talk at the Centro Zen de México. Afterwards people lined up to offer flowers and express gratitude to Sunim for the peace and sincere humility he had conveyed. He in turn encouraged everyone, even those who had never sat in meditation, to throw his or her "iceberg" of karma into the boiling cauldron of the upcoming Yongmaeng Chongjin.

A four-day Yongmaeng Chongjin began the following Thursday at Río Frío in the mountains east of the city. For some this was their first experience with sitting meditation. However, for beginners and experienced students alike, this retreat was their first exposure to Samu Sunim's intense training. The vigorous morning rubdowns at four in a cold mountain stream chased away drowsiness and set the tone for the all-out effort that followed.

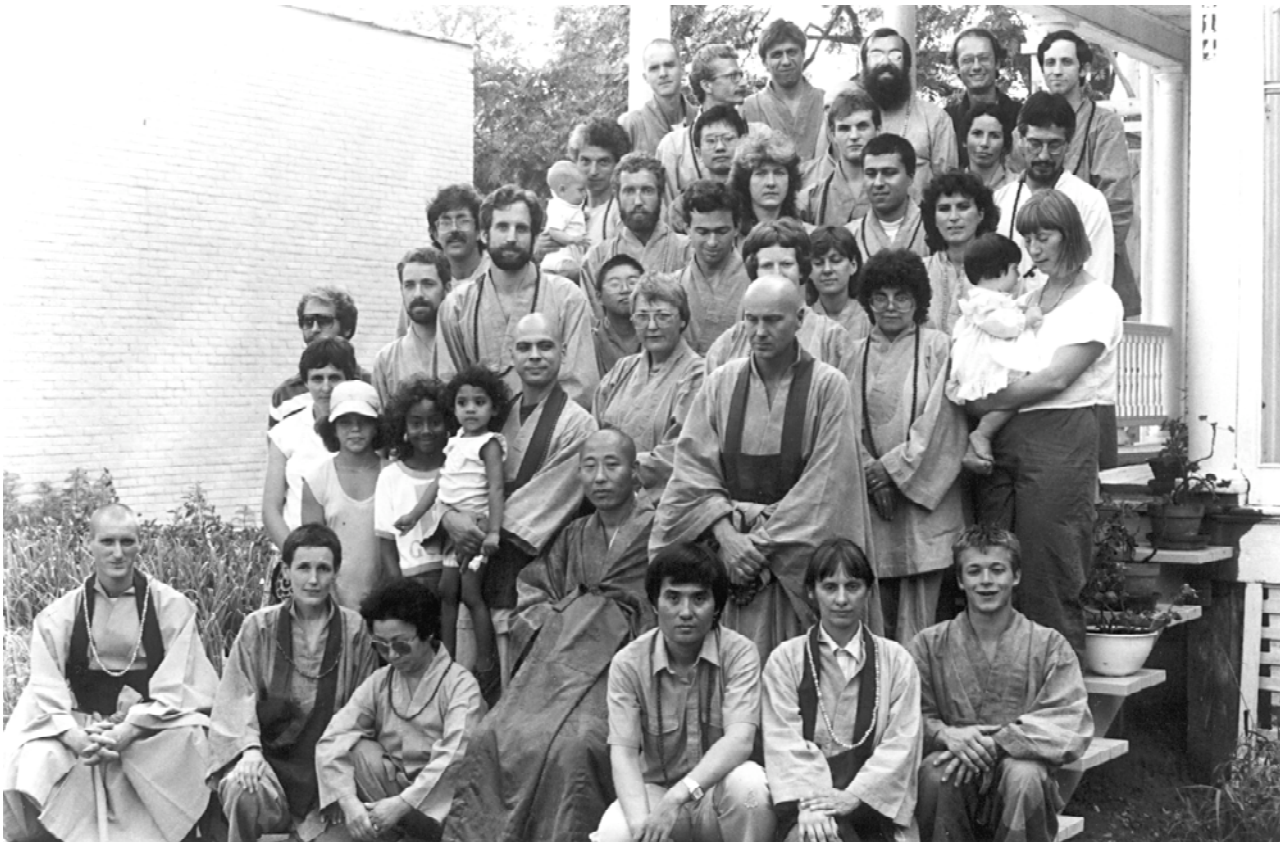
As the retreat was over, Sunim's whirlwind fourteen-day visit was drawing to a close. We raced back to the city for a final meeting at the Centro Zen. "Set Dharma practice above all else on your journey along the Bodhisattva path," Sunim urged by way of farewell.

The next morning, just hours before his departure, Samu Sunim received a final visitor. Juan Manuel Madrigal, a practicing Buddhist from Michoacán, had traveled all night for an interview with Sunim. Juan's wife had participated in the retreat and had called him immediately afterwards to describe what a wonderful experience it had been.

That summer, Edith LaBrely and Marcela Zea traveled to Michigan to participate in the summer Zen training at the Ann Arbor temple.

My Discovery of Zen

I lived near the acupuncture clinic and Zen, A.C. of Takata Sensei. Many times I had passed by Zen,



Precept-taking ceremony on August 17, 1985 at Zen Buddhist Temple, Ann Arbor, MI. Toan José Castelao and Torim Marcela Zea were the first Mexicans to take precepts from Samu Sunim. Photo Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom (BSCW) archives.

A.C., not knowing what Zen was, and not being interested in finding out. For many years I had felt that I needed to deepen my spiritual practice in the Catholic tradition in which I was raised. But as time passed, I sensed the need to open to other spiritual practices. One day I heard someone at the UNAM art school, where I was studying, talk about the Zen, A.C. and decided to try Zen meditation. It was September 1984.

Five days a week, I made my way to the clinic for their 4:30 a.m. sittings. Over the next few months, my interest in Zen grew steadily. Then I learned of another Zen group, the Centro Zen de México, which was affiliated with the Zen Center of Los Angeles under the direction of Maezumi Roshi.

"So, You Become a Monk!"

Members of the Centro Zen—Edith LeBrely, Arturo Pozo and others—along with Dr. Derbez, were collaborating with Ansim and Mani in Toron to to prepare for Samu Sunim's second visit to Mexico in winter 1984.

Ansim arrived first in order to make the necessary preparations for the retreat. Edith LaBrely and I helped and participated in his daily morning practice doing 300 prostrations and chanting. Sunim arrived by plane on December 24 while several members from the Toronto and Ann Arbor sanghas drove all the way to Mexico in an old Chevy van. Sujata Linda Klevnick, the director of the Toronto temple, came with David Steele, Yusim, Yosim, Musim Pat Ikeda and Risim. They dressed and ate so simply, traveling like floating clouds. I was deeply affected.

A five-day Yongmaeng Chongjin took place at the Hacienda de la Manzanilla in the state of Puebla. Sunim gave two interviews daily to each of the approximately sixty-five participants. I recall vividly one of my first interviews with

Sunim where he raised his right hand emphatically and shouted, "Zen is religion in movement!" Juan Manuel from Michoacán, who had been inspired by his eleventh-hour interview with Sunim, also participated in the retreat, along with José Ramírez Guzmán, who would eventually lead a group practice in Morelia.

After the retreat Sunim gave two talks in Mexico City, the first at the Convento del Carmen in San Angel. I vividly remember the image of Sunim sitting in meditation before giving his talk. His cushion was placed before a richly decorated colonial altar glimmering with baroque gilded woodcarving, a strong contrast with his austere, powerful and silent figure. I was impressed with this demonstration of boldness, openness and respect in teaching Zen Buddhism before a Christian shrine.

One night I was walking down a street with Sunim. As we crossed a wide avenue, Sunim lightly took my hand and said, "So you come to Toronto and become a monk." Very naturally, as if responding to something quite obvious, I said yes. Even though I wasn't really thinking about becoming a monk, I wanted to devote more to meditation practice. In March 1985, I took a bus to Toronto for a three-month training, which turned into eight and a half years of temple life.

Birth of El Centro Zen Loto de México

In early 1985, Edith LaBrely arrived in Toronto for three weeks of training. Upon returning to Mexico, she converted the living room of her apartment on Berlin Street into a small *sonbang*. This became El Centro Zen Loto de México (The Zen Lotus Center of Mexico). Edith was charged with the responsibility of maintaining regular practice for the sangha. She organized weekend retreats once a month.

On August 17 at the Ann Arbor temple, there was a precept-taking ceremony for the "To" Dharma family, where Marcela Zea and I were present. I received the Dharma name of Toan (the Way of Peace) and Marcela Zea, Torim.

On August 20, Sunim arrived in Mexico with Kumara, a Dharma teacher from Ann Arbor. A Yongmaeng Chongjin was held at a mansion called Castillo de la Serena in Cuernavaca, Morelos. Every day the twenty-five participants sat through hard rain and thunderstorms late into the night. Then they would be up and sit again in the morning sunlight. They cut weeds, painted the walls, fixed the roof and cleaned the yard. Some participants did prostrations on the stone floor during the rest period. It was a very strong retreat.

Sunim's last day in Mexico was an emotional evening for some of his students. The sangha including Toyun (Edith LaBrely) and Tori (Eligio Ramírez) renewed their commitment to forming a group that would establish a permanent place for Dharma in Mexico.

Earthquake

The morning of September 19, 1985, Toyun, Tori and Leopoldo were sitting in meditation at Toyun's place when a strong earthquake hit Mexico City. They quickly found refuge in the frame of the kitchen door, hugging one another. There, they continued their meditation practice, "hana, tul, set..." while watching the concrete room of the sonbang move like a boat upon water. When the quake briefly subsided, they snatched up the mokt'ak and the Buddha figure on the altar and ran into the stairway. We still have the Buddha statue whose head broke off that day. However, half the building completely collapsed after their escape and all the mats and cushions were lost. It was a great shock for everyone. It took Toyun several months to fully recover. She asked other meditation groups for assistance in arranging another location to practice. Dr. Derbez offered his place.

Starting Again, "Urban Zen"

In January 1986, I returned to Mexico because my mother became increasingly weak. She was diagnosed with cancer a few years before, and it was spreading rapidly. She died in August of that year. I spent those months being close to her, doing artwork and sitting with our group. Early in the morning several days a week I would go to Toyun's apartment, now in Río Elba close to El Angel de la Independencia monument. Toyun came from a strong Catholic tradition in France. One of her cousins became a Catholic nun and was serving in South Korea at the time. But after a close family member committed suicide, she had found it difficult to sustain her beliefs. Through Zen meditation, however, she eventually overcame this and had an even deeper encounter with Christianity. On her home altar, Toyun had two figures, the Buddha and the Christ. She had a non-dual approach to spirituality with a profound respect for each tradition.

Toyun trained in Ann Arbor that summer and when she returned her son moved in with her, so she rented a second apartment for the sangha's regular practice. It was a single midsized room in an office building located on División del Norte at Glorieta Riviera in the south of the city. Being on such a busy avenue, we got a good taste of "urban Zen." About seven of us would sit there twice a week. Although rent was low, people often failed to contribute and Toyun ended up paying most of the rent. She tolerated situations like this for a long time.

I stayed in Mexico for the rest of the year. Sunim returned in December. For the second time, he conducted a retreat at Castillo de la Serena in Cuernavaca from December 26 to 31. About forty people participated in the retreat.

I had a strong flu for several days before the retreat and wondered how it would be possible to do the daily rubdown with cold water. After the second day, the flu was gone! Towards the end, I felt a special joy doing the practice, sitting, running vigorously around the castle in single file. One night during an interview with Sunim, my tears flowed for no apparent reason.

After the retreat, Sunim, Toyun, and I went to Morelia, Michoacán at the invitation of José Ramírez Guzmán and his wife Olivia Mejía, both of whom had participated in earlier retreats with Sunim. They made arrangements for a talk and a three-day retreat in Morelia, the first of several activities that Sunim conducted in the state of Michoacán. From that experience, a group was formed with José Ramírez and a yoga teacher, María Luisa, as its leaders. They began sitting once a week in María Luisa's yoga center in Morelia. This arrangement was short-lived and soon thereafter José continued leading the group regularly at an ecumenical cultural center named Casa José M. Estrada.

Dharma Journeys Down and Up

I returned to the Toronto temple in February 1987 and resumed my residential training. That winter, Pobnyom Sunim, a visiting nun from Korea, Sujata and I, along with five other practitioners from the two temples drove in the Ann Arbor Temple's old Chevy van all the way to Mexico City. Sunim joined us later by plane. Yongmaeng Chongjin was held in a small town called Donato Guerra, near the well-known tourist town Valle de Bravo in the state of Mexico. The site was quite primitive and still under construction. Toyun bought some *petates* (straw mats) to place between the concrete floor and the mats and cushions. The caretaker had several dogs that barked constantly during the day. With the addition of passionate music occasionally blaring from nearby radios, the bells of Donato Guerra's church, and firecrackers announcing the end of the year, there was certainly no chance to get drowsy.

Sunim's visit would always inspire someone to help support the sangha. That year, Julieta de la

Cruz attended a talk Sunim gave at the Centro Médico Naturista Integral and eventually came to lead the regular sittings of our group. José Alvarez, who had been a disciple of Ejo Takata Sensei in the sixties, participated in our retreats and was very supportive. He offered his apartment for monthly one-day retreats and occasional all-night sittings.

Each year Mexicans continued to make the journey up to the Toronto or Ann Arbor temples for training with Sunim and fellow practitioners to deepen and reinvigorate their practice. In summer 1988 Toyun traveled from Mexico for the summer Yongmaeng Chongjin as did Rafael Velasco, a photographer, and Anne Marie Koblizek, who worked in various holistic therapies.

After the Yongmaeng Chongjin in Toronto, Anne Marie spent six months living at the Ann Arbor temple. She returned to Mexico and participated in the 1988 winter retreat with Sunim at Tepoztlán, Morelos. The retreat took place in a large, abandoned house at the base of the Tepozteco Mountain. The house had a chapel, which served as the sonbang. It was a powerful retreat, attended by approximately thirty people. Being very close to the mountain seemed to create a very special energy. In the mornings, Sunim would lead the group up to the mountain. After the retreat was over, someone thanked the mountain spirit for allowing them to do a strong retreat.

This was the last retreat organized by Toyun. The increasing workload, some health problems, the lack of financial support from members and a turning point in her life all contributed to her decision to leave the sangha. We will always be grateful and remember her generosity and good humor. Many times she single-handedly paid Sunim's plane ticket, hosted him, looked for places to have talks and retreats, and led regular sitting sessions. She was a bodhisattva.

Interruption

For the next five years Sunim was unable to visit Mexico. The renovation of the new Toronto temple and the opening of a new temple in Chicago demanded constant attention on Sunim. In addition, without Toyun there was a lack of leadership in Mexico for organizing Sunim's trips. I was training in Toronto during this period.

In 1989, Julieta de la Cruz went to Toronto for Yongmaeng Chongjin and took precepts, receiving the Dharma name, Chija. Sukha (now Haju Sunim), the director of the Ann Arbor temple, Sujata and I were ordained as priests. Upon returning to Mexico after a three-month stay, Chija led the group sittings which were now located at the Centro Médico on Ferrocarril Hidalgo 790. She continued to attend Yongmaeng Chongjin in Toronto for the next two summers and to stay for extra training in the Toronto and Ann Arbor temples. But in 1990, the regular group practice in Mexico City discontinued. In December 1990 and January 1992, I made trips to Mexico to visit family. I contacted members of our sangha, who were at that time practicing on their own or with other groups. I gave several Dharma talks and led workshops and a retreat.

Coming back, 10th Anniversary

Sunim returned to Mexico in March 1994, on the invitation of Anne Marie Koblizek, a long-time supporter and practitioner. She was living in a community formed by teachers and students of UNAM. They lived in a house in Tulyehualco, Mexico City. People in the community were very involved with social justice issues. Andrés Barreda and Jorge Veraza, the founders of the community and economics professors at UNAM, were closely following the conflict in Chiapas that had erupted on January 1st that year.

Yongmaeng Chongjin was held at this community house, which was a one-level building with a garden. With forty participants every square inch was used. Dharma meals were eaten in the middle of the garden. The community followed a macrobiotic diet and supported themselves by selling goods and their delicious bread.

Afterwards we went to Morelia where José Ramírez Guzmán had organized a talk and a retreat. The center used for the retreat was a house that could accommodate about twenty people. It had a small garden and three rooms on the second floor. One of the rooms had a small shrine where the teacher usually stayed. One day somebody asked me to leave the room for an hour so that he could "establish a cosmic contact." This place truly served as a center open to different practices.

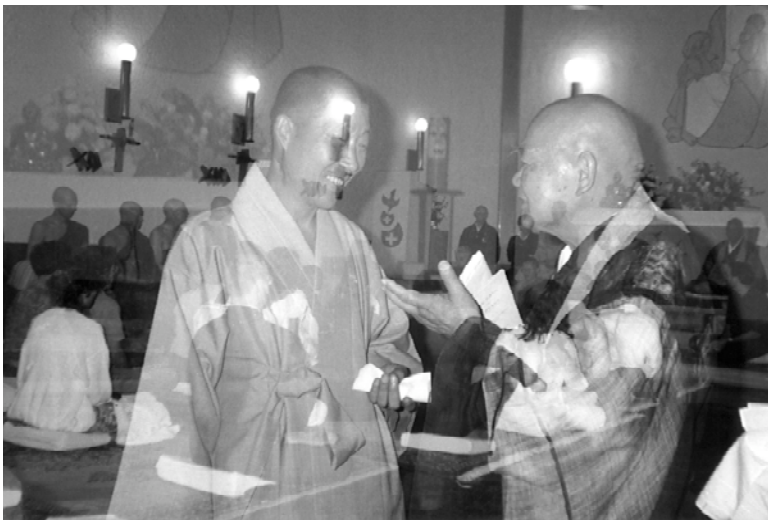
A gathering of Buddhists from different traditions took place in Mexico City shortly before Sunim left. It was held at the SeminarioConciliar de México. Ejo Takata Sensei represented the Buddhist community in Mexico at that time. He, Prasupon ayana Thera, Samu Sunim, and Tesshin Sanderson, a disciple of Maezumi Roshi, chaired the encounter.

When the meeting ended, Guy de Saint Cyr, a disciple of Ejo Takata Sensei in the late sixties and early seventies, approached Sunim interested in practice. Knowing that we didn't have a place to hold our regular sitting practice, Guy kindly offered his own apartment.

Sunim left for the new Chicago temple, and I stayed in Mexico to develop my artwork along with meditation practice.

We sat in Guy's apartment twice a week. For each session we converted the living room into a small sonbang. Upon finishing our practice we moved the furniture, pictures and decorations back into place so that where a Buddha statue had stood, a coat of arms with two swords resumed its rightful location. During walking meditation we had to be very careful not to hit our heads on the hanging lamps. Eventually, inevitable differences regarding practice arose and we split with Guy later that year.

By that time, Victor Rivero, Torim's partner, offered an apartment he owned at Mérida 90, Colonia Roma, for regular sittings. This arrangement lasted until 2003, when we purchased our own temple building.



Samu Sunim and Ejo Takata Sensei during an encounter for Buddhists at the Seminario Conciliar de México in Mexico City, 1994. Photo BSCW archives.

During Yongmaeng Chongjin at the community house of UNAM students in Tulyehualco, Mexico City, 1994. Photo (BSCW) archives.

Celebrating the 10 year anniversary of Sunim's teaching in Mexico. From left to right: Liliana Islas, Ilsu, Ansim, Mani, Sunim, Torim, Toan, Gloria, Irin. Photo (BSCW) archives.

Again in October 1994 Sunim returned to Mexico. He gave several public talks, one of which filled the Science Auditorium at UNAM. Pilar Urreta, a dancer and choreographer who met Sunim at a workshop that year, arranged his first interview in Mexico with Radio Educación.

We held a Yongmaeng Chongjin at the beautiful former Hacienda de Zavaleta, located near Tlalmanalco, Estado de México, and close to the Iztaccáhuatl volcano. It had a central patio full of orange trees and other plants, a large garden at the front entrance, and even a church. In the afternoons we would do some manual work and go for long walks in the nearby mountains. At night it was very cold and we would practice in a long, wide room with a fireplace. After the retreat, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of Sunim's first visit to Mexico in 1984 with cake and some wine.

After the retreat, Sunim and I went to Erongarácuaro, Michoacán to give a workshop at the invitation of a community formed by three families. The community aspired to live close to nature. They settled on three acres, which they cultivated, producing and selling bread.

Afterwards, we went for a three-day vacation to Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo in the state of Guerrero. On our way back, we stopped in Cuernavaca, Morelos to take a break from the long drive and enjoy the famous ice cream downtown. While we were peacefully enjoying ice cream, somebody broke the car window and took Sunim's bag with his passport, plane ticket and a change of dothes. "At least the robber was kind enough to leave me my meditation pants, otherwise I would have had to come to our meeting tonight in bathing gear!" Sunim said that night to our group.

We decided to hold a regular group practice at Mérida 90 on Saturday mornings, and at Torim's apartment in Colonia Xoco on Wednesday evenings. That year four people enrolled in Maitreya Buddhist Seminary. The Mexico sangha's first Dharma students were Illi Lucila Méndez, who was ordained in 2003, Torim Marcela Zea, Irin Rosa María Talavera, Ilsu Luis Felipe Segura and Rowina Morales.

Pilgrimage to Korea

In 1995 several of our sangha members went to the Toronto temple for the summer Yongmaeng Chongjin and the precept-taking ceremony: Illi, Irin and her son Rafael, Ilsu, and Irban Alejandra Ortiz. Afterwards we celebrated the tenth anniversary of Sunim's teaching in Mexico. Ansim and Mani were present. Irban became a Dharma student and stayed a couple of months for training and the rest of us returned to Mexico.

In September, I went to Korea with Sunim and two others for a two-and-a-half-month pilgrimage. That December, Sunim returned to Mexico, gave five talks and two radio interviews, and conducted a retreat .

First Precept-Taking Ceremony,
First Wedding Service

In December 1996, Chang Seung-You, who we had met while on a pilgrimage in Korea, made arrangements with a Korean film crew to document Sunim's teaching in Mexico. Haju Sunim and a few others drove the temple van to Mexico. Sunim arrived later by plane. He gave eleven talks and four workshops, his most active visit to date. Sunim had the first teaching trip in Veracruz, which was organized by Lourdes Fernández, a sangha member who moved to Jalapa, Veracruz. Sunim performed his first wedding service in Mexico for the couple Anita and Enrique Pérez.

Yongmaeng Chongjin took place in Cuautla, Morelos at a yoga center of the G.F.U. (Great Universal Fraternity). It had a huge garden with a stream of crystalline water and a geodesic dome. About forty-five people attended the retreat and some had to sleep in tents, particularly the snorers! The Korean film crew accompanied us everywhere: talks, workshops, the retreat and Sunim's first precept-taking ceremony in Mexico.

Included in the ceremony were Kasan Jorge Valencia, Kalapa María Antonieta Arreola, and Kayu Gioconda Ponzanelli, who all became Dharma students after the retreat.

Casa Tonalli

In December 1997 Sunim returned to Mexico. Yongmaeng Chongjin was held at Casa Tonalli at Tenancingo, Estado de México. Every afternoon we went for long walks either to a nearby mountain or on a long, unpaved road. A stream happily accompanied our walking meditation along with trees, mountains and clouds. Afterwards, Sunim conducted the second precept-taking ceremony, giving birth to the "Mu" Dharma family.

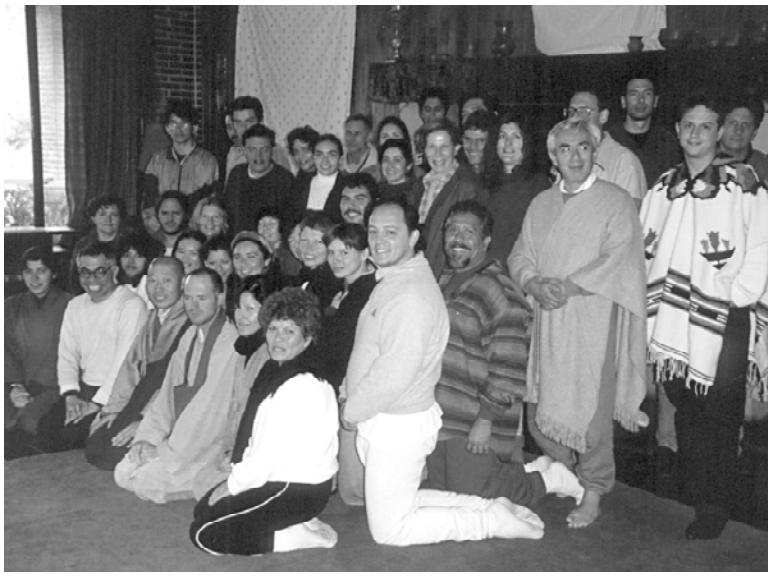
In December 1998, Sunim and Jungsoon Park (now Sanha), who had met a few months ago, came to Mexico. We had a retreat and a precept-taking ceremony for "San" Dharma family again in Tonalli, after talks and workshops.

One of the talks was supposed to take place at the Escuela Superior de Educación Fósica. When we arrived, it was closed. The security guard informed us that the school was closed for vacation, and that he had not been given special instructions to open for any event. In order not to disappoint all the people arriving during this time, Sunim decided to give his talk in the parking lot. We sat on the pavement and listened to Sunim's true urban Dharma talk.

Sanha quickly became very dear to us. Her sincerity, big heart and simple ways delighted everyone. Sunim called her *chiquita* or "little one," but we said, "No! She is *chiquitita*" or "tiny one."

Helping Oneself

Sunim was not able to make his annual winter trip to Mexico in 1999 and 2000. Some of us went to Chicago each summer to participate in a retreat. During this period, we were left alone to maintain practice and to take care of the sangha.



Samu Sunim, Toan Sunim and retreatants after Yongmaeng Chongjin at Hacienda de Zavalet, 1995. Photo (BSCW) archives.

Anita and Enrique Pérez, Samu Sunim, and a Korean film crew after Sunim conducted his first Buddhist wedding ceremony in Mexico. Photo (BSCW) archives.

The first precept-taking ceremony in Mexico on Dec 30, 1996. Photo (BSCW) archives.

However, we suffered from the lack of leadership. Sunim's visit, his powerful presence and teachings would inspire many people to participate in the retreat and practice. But, only a small number would remain constant in our weekly practice. I was frequently absent due to my trips to Sonora doing my artwork. In my absence, Illi and Kasan, both Dharma students, tried to lead the sangha.

Sunim encouraged me to organize and conduct retreats in Mexico. In October 1999 I gave my first Yongmaeng Chongjin in Mexico. The retreat was held at Quinta del Sol, a Christian center in Tlalpan, Mexico City. We did long periods of walking meditation in the afternoon. We would pass by an old man in a wheelchair who was taken outside every afternoon to enjoy the sunlight. The garden flowers, the old weak man under the sun, and our silent meditation procession evoked a powerful sense of impermanence.

In 2000 Torim's apartment, where Wednesday sittings were held, was sold. So, our group practice reduced from twice to once a week: Saturday mornings at Mérida. I conducted two retreats—during Easter and after Christmas.

Growing Up

During Easter 2001, I was invited to conduct a four-day retreat in Pátzcuaro, organized by a group from Michoacán. Several of them had practiced meditation with a group related to Casa Tibet. The place was large with a spacious garden and many avocado trees. Kalapa and Muhan José Manuel Palma participated from our Mexico City sangha. Muhan had been living in Cuidad Juárez, Chihuahua, and traveled a long way to participate. Everyone connected with his eagerness and sincerity. In the fall he went for a two-month training at the Chicago temple, and then started fulltime training at the Toronto temple in February 2002.

In Mexico we celebrate our ancestors on November 2, Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead). We took advantage of the holiday for a retreat to "celebrate" our being among the living with the chance of waking up. We had a second retreat at the same place in Pátzcuaro.

In December we whole-heartedly welcomed Sunim back. Sunim inspired us continuously. Fifty people attended the retreat held in Tonalli. Afterwards we had a precept-taking ceremony for "Bop/Bob" Dharma family. At the sangha meetings, Sunim urged us to learn to take responsibility for the Dharma in Mexico. He was giving me instructions and advice until the moment he passed through the airport gate. Inspired by his strong encouragement and admonition, ten people became Dharma students after this visit.

Oh, Sweet Home

In December 2002, Sunim made his annual visit and conducted various talks, workshops, and a retreat. We made an important decision to buy a house and move to a better location. We envisioned that this would help reach more people in the city and serve the sangha better.

Several months of searching for a future temple building bore fruit when we found a house in Actopan 30, Colonia Roma in October 2003. The house is centrally located and has a silent atmosphere. We were able to purchase this house with generous help from the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom, which shouldered about eighty percent of the total value.

We had the opening ceremony on December 20, 2003. I immediately moved in and became a full-time resident teacher at this new home. The fact that somebody lives at the temple and receives phone calls and visitors seems to create a sense of stability in the sangha. The feeling of owning our own space helps the sangha work together to grow.

Now, in line with the Society's guidelines for temples and affiliated groups, we offer two Sunday meditation services to the public. Each week there are one or two new people who come to our services. We faithfully maintain daily

morning and evening practice for the residents and weekly sittings for members.

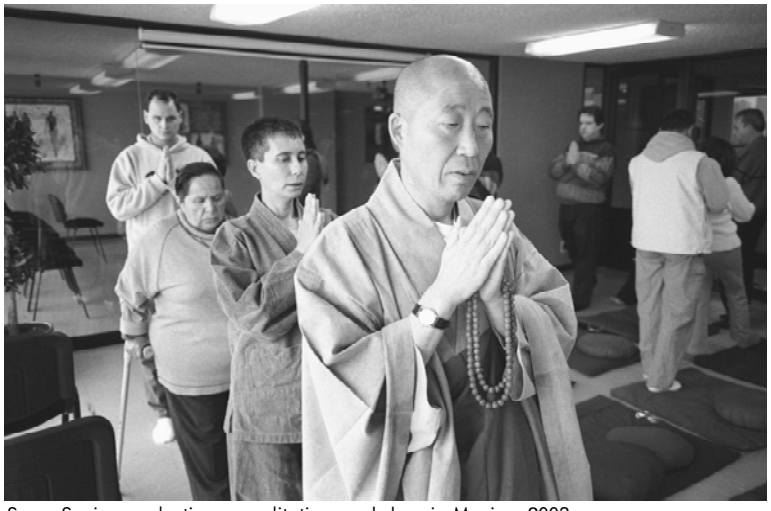
Taking Root

A challenge for Buddhism, not unique to Mexico, is to reach out to more people from more diverse backgrounds and to take real root in the lives of individuals so that Buddhism would become more meaningful and viable to society at large. If Buddhism does not find ways to become more relevant, it may end up being a mere fashion or one of the many shallow practices in the spiritual market of our consumer society. This is a historical task, in which we each take part and fulfill our own share of responsibility. Sunim has brought the Dharma to Mexico by embodying the Dharma. Buddhists in Mexico will follow his example so that we become strong roots of Dharma in the Mexican soil.

Rev. Toan Sunim (José Castelao Camara) is a Dharma successor of Ven. Samu Sunim and an artist.

Haju Sunim, Toan Sunim, Samu Sunim and retreatants after Yongmaeng Chongjin in Cuautla, Morelos, 1996. Photo (BSCW) archives.

Toan Sunim, Samu Sunim and sangha members meeting in the apartment at Mérida 90, Colonia Roma, 1996. Photo (BSCW) archives.



Samu Sunim conducting a meditation workshop in Mexico, 2003.
Photo by Tom Musselman.

Buddhism in Mexico Timeline

1957
Erich Fromm invites D. T. Suzuki to participate in a joint conference on Buddhism and psychoanalysis at Cuernavaca, Morelos. Their book *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* is published in 1960.

1960's
Dr. Jorge Derbez, a follower of Erich Fromm who attended the conference, practices meditation with his patients as part of their therapy.

1967
Ejo Takata Sensei settles in Mexico City. Takata Sensei had trained in Japan at Shofuko-ji under Mumon Yamada Roshi before being invited by American Richard Crowly to teach in the United States and Mexico. In Mexico, he collaborated with Erich Fromm for over a year, and was invited by Dr. Jorge Derbez to work with patients.

1969
Ejo Takata Sensei founds Zen A.C. (Zen Civil Association).

1973
Takata Sensei works with the peasants at Sierra Mixe, teaching them to cultivate soybeans and organizing self-aid programs.

Late 1970's
A group of Mexicans contact Maezumi Roshi of Zen Center of Los Angeles; some go to ZCLA to train.

1979
Maezumi Roshi leads a 7-day sesshin at Cuernavaca, Morelos. Centro Zen de Mexico is founded.

1983
Seung Sahn Sunim visits Mexico.

1983–1984
A crisis at ZCLA suspends visits by Maezumi Roshi. Centro Zen de Mexico splits, and the Centro Zen de la Ciudad de Mexico is founded. Edith LaBrely, originally from Centro Zen de Mexico, and Dr. Derbez invites Samu Sunim of Zen Lotus Society.

1984
Samu Sunim visits Mexico and leads retreats in May and December. Dr. Jorge Derbez contacts Philip Kapleau Roshi, who spent winters in Tepoztlan, Morelos.

1985
El Centro Zen Loto de México (The Zen Lotus Center of Mexico) is founded, led by Toyun Edith LaBrely. Ven. Prasupromayanathera of Thailand visits Mexico and founds the Centro de Meditacion Vipassana, with Chakkaratani Vicky Gurza as director. Mr. Sato comes to Mexico City and founds Dohbo Sangha of the Jodo Shinshu sect.

1986
Tesshin Sanderson, Maezumi Roshi's senior disciple, unsuccessfully tries to unite the two sanghas of Centro Zen de Mexico and Centro Zen de la Ciudad de Mexico.

1987
Tesshin Sanderson stays in Mexico to direct CZM, while Maezumi Roshi directs CZCM from L.A. Philip Kapleau Roshi leads a meditation workshop. Several attendees commit to regular group sittings.

Late 80's
Buddhist groups initiate informal meetings to get to know one another and to share experiences.

1988
Toyun Edith LaBrely discontinues her leadership of El Centro Zen Loto de México; Samu Sunim's teaching visits are suspended.

1989
Philip Kapleau Roshi leads a sesshin in Cuernavaca, Morelos. Casa Zen is founded, led by Gerardo Gally, the director of the publishing company Arbol Editorial. Roshi Kapleau's books are published in Spanish. H.H. the Dalai Lama visits Mexico. Cardinal Norberto Rivera hosts an

interfaith event at Metropolitan Cathedral. The Dalai Lama addresses the need for tolerance and the development of a good heart regardless of one's religious viewpoint. Marco Antonio Karam founds Casa Tibet, the first official representative of the Tibetan people in Latin America.

1992
An ecumenical event is held and the Consejo Interreligioso de Mexico is founded. Ejo Takata Sensei is appointed representative of the Buddhist Community in Mexico. Regular meetings of Buddhist groups are formalized. The Ley de Asociaciones Religiosas y Culto Publico (Law of Religious Organizations and Public Cult) is promulgated to protect rights and freedom of practice. Various religious organizations register, including Centro Zen de Mexico. Chakkaratani Vicky Gurza of Centro de Meditacion Vipassana publishes the ecumenical magazine En Tiempo Presente.

1993
Ajahn Sobin S. Namto of Thailand visits Mexico. Fundacion Vimutti (originally Fundacion Nibbana) is founded in Tequisquiapan, Queretaro with Carola Andujo as director. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso opens Centro Budista Dharmachakra of the New Kadampa Tradition, a group founded in 1975 in Ulverstone, England.

1994
Samu Sunim resumes annual teaching trips to Mexico. Regular weekly practice is reestablished, led by Toan José Castelao. Centro Budista de la Ciudad de Mexico, an affiliate Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, is founded by Dharmachari Upekshamati, a Mexican who traveled to London and became a disciple of Sangharaksita.

1995
Ven. Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche arrives in Mexico.

1997
Wangyal Rinpoche founds Garuda Asociacion Cultural Tibetana A.C. with Amalia Gomez as director. Centro Mexicano de Budismo Theravada, A.C is established in Xalapa, Veracruz with U Silananda and U Nandisena as teachers. Centro Zen Maezumi Kuroda is founded, succeeding Centro Zen de la Ciudad de Mexico. Takata Sensei passes away. Tesshin Sanderson became the representative of the Buddhist community.

1998
Lama Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche visits Mexico.

1999
Lama Lungtok Tenpa'i Nyima visits Mexico. Bon Buddhism centers are established at several cities. Tesshin Sanderson organizes the first annual Encuentro Budista at Jardines de San Mateo, Estado de Mexico. The gathering lasts three days, on the theme "The Four Noble Truths."

2000
Instituto Loseling de Mexico is founded as the official Mexican headquarters of Drepung Loseling Monastery. A second Encuentro-Retiro is held in Zitacuaro, Michoacan.

2001
Ch'an master Ven. Sheng Yen and Rev. Guo Yen Fa Shih visit Mexico. Tambor del Dharma in Mar de Jade is established and led by Laura del Valle.

2002
The third Buddhist Encounter is held in Mexico City amid general concern over the events September 11 and their aftermath.

2003
The fourth Encounter is held with the theme "Buddhism and Daily Life." Chakkaratani Vicky Gurza of Centro de Meditacion Vipassana is appointed representative of the Buddhist Community in Mexico. Samu Sunim's sangha establishes the Templo Budista Zen with Toan Sunim (José Castelao) as resident teacher.

2004
The Dobho Sangha splits, with the Jodo Shinshu adherents forming the Hongwanji-ja Mision de Mexico, A.C. under the leadership of Rev. Masao Ishii and Rev. Michinori Honkawa. The other branch forms a nonsectarian Buddhist Group, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (BDK), or Templo Budista Eko. BDK is directed by Rev. Koichi Jyohsin Todaka.The fifth Encounter is held in Mexico City with the theme "Buddhism Alive." The Buddhist Community initiates meetings with national government authorities.

Toan José Castelao

constant practice

Rev. Muhan José Manuel Palma
Translated from the Spanish by Bopkyong Lisa Galicia

The first time I heard the word "Buddha," the figure of a bald man with a big belly and a smiling face came to mind as did superstition and magic. In Mexico there is a saying "Rub the Buddha's belly for good luck." Many people have a Buddha statue surrounded by charms in their businesses for good fortune. I never imagined that Buddhism was a religion.

After friends and I were in a car accident, I realized how important it was to be alive. I became more responsible for myself and I began searching for a spiritual path. I was twenty years old. I practiced yoga from a book for a while and from there emerged an interest in meditation. A friend taught me Zen meditation. I didn't give it much consideration because meditation seemed like resolving an intellectual problem. My friend used words that I didn't understand like Buddha, bodhisattva, and Bodhidharma. Coming from the Catholic faith, I rejected these words since they seemed esoteric.

At that time, I had a girlfriend who was going through some problems. I wanted to help her and I bought a book to do so. In reading the book, however, I realized that it wasn't for her but for me. The author said that the only way to find happiness is through prayer or Zen meditation. I thought, "I'm already familiar with prayer, but what about Zen meditation?" I began investigating Zen. I was in college and found the book *Three Pillars of Zen* at the university library. I read it and followed the instructions to practice meditation. One day, while walking through the university gardens, I came upon a Zen meditation poster announcing Samu Sunim's visit in December 1996. My life at that time was a disaster. I had broken up with my girlfriend, my grades were bad, and I had no money and no job. My dilemma was whether to continue studying geology or get a full-time job. I had final exams but didn't take them in order to attend all of Sunim's talks and workshops, hoping to find an answer for my life.

A friend and I went to Sunim's meditation workshop. We arrived late. We were in a hurry and entered the room without removing our shoes. Sunim shouted from the front of the room "No shoes!" Toan approached and asked us to remove our shoes. We took them off and bolted in. Toan called to us again and showed us how to accommodate our shoes and socks in an orderly way. He said, "With just a bit of attention, you can save yourselves a lot of suffering in your lives." At the workshop there was an altar with an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This struck me as odd. I figured that the teacher must favor the Virgin of Guadalupe. Years later I learned that the facility had been rented the day before the anniversary of the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance and that there wasn't enough time to dismantle the altar before the workshop.

It was a year later in December 1997 that I attended my first five-day *Yongmaeng Chongjin* retreat. On the second day of the retreat, I was thinking that the practice just wasn't for me, that it was very hard, required much discipline, and that it would be better if I returned to the Catholic Church. But after the retreat, I took precepts and eventually became a Dharma Student in January 1998. Sunim invited me for training at the Chicago temple. I attempted to travel to Chicago in December 1999, but the United States Embassy refused my request for a visa since my economic situation was unstable. At that time, I worked as a restaurant manager. The next year, I started a new job in maintenance at a boxing gym in order to have more time for practice and for attending sangha services. The pay was very poor, but I was glad to have time for my practice.

The following month, a friend got a job in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. He worked for the government and he needed people whom he could trust, so he invited me to work with him. I discussed the offer and my seminary training with Toan. I saw the job as an opportunity to obtain my visa and save money to pay off my debts. Toan advised me not to go. He said it would be challenging to keep up my seminary training without the support of the sangha and with the many distractions of Cuidad Juárez, a city full of violence and drug trafficking. I didn't have an alternative but to accept my friend's offer because I needed a visa and the money. So, in February 2000, I went to live on the border.

I had been working for Customs for almost two years. I had gotten involved in a very active social life full of vices. I was earning a lot of money, thanks to corruption. One could say that I had every comfort, but I was unhappy. I lacked the happiness that I had known in Mexico City where I had menial, poorly paid jobs, but the time to do my practice. In Ciudad Juárez, I lost all connection with the sangha and my practice.

I obtained my visa for the United States, and I promised myself that for my first vacation during Holy Week, I would go to the Chicago temple. When my vacation arrived, I called Chicago. I didn't know how to speak English, but I wanted to tell Sunim that I wanted to come to Chicago

Every one thought that it was better to continue working and accumulating wealth than pursue spiritual training, but nothing had made me happier or more peaceful than Dharma practice.

and that I had my visa. Fortunately, Sunim recognized my voice and the only thing he told me was to speak with Toan. It was impossible to speak with Sunim because I didn't know English. When I spoke with Toan, he advised me to wait for the summer retreat in Chicago. He suggested that I attend the Mexico City retreat during Holy Week instead. My dream of going to Chicago evaporated again. I attended the retreat with Toan in Mexico City. That retreat was one of the most difficult that I've experienced since I had not practiced for a year. My whole life in Ciudad Juárez flooded my mind, but by the end of retreat, I had rediscovered my practice. Yet after a month, I lost my regular practice again and returned to my old habits.

I got drunk one day after a gathering with my colleagues from work and when I woke up, I was at home in a terrible state. I realized that I had driven my car home, but I didn't remember how I got there. I had lost my cell phone and my wallet was empty. I looked in the mirror and I was disgusted. That's when I woke up and decided to change my lifestyle. I thought, "If I continue like this, I will kill myself one day. This lifestyle isn't taking me anywhere. I took this job in order to obtain my visa. Now I have one, so it is time to leave this job."

Summer was coming and I knew there was going to be a retreat, but now I had no vacation time. I had to negotiate with my boss for a week of vacation before I had earned it. There was a special task that consisted of organizing the archive of Customs permits. It was a serious, tedious, and time consuming job that nobody wanted since the building housing the archive was abandoned and out of the operations area—that is, where there were no opportunities to receive bribes. So I made a deal with my boss that I would organize the archive in return for a week of vacation. The job took me months to complete, but it was good practice since I couldn't take pay-offs there.

In summer 2001, I arrived in Chicago with the aim of renewing myself spiritually. Sunim surprised me with the invitation to resume training, and I was accepted as a Dharma student again. Sunim told me: "Don't put off what is good. Always do it even if you're not sure. Since it is good, you won't be harmed. But always postpone what is bad."

Ever since I met Sunim the first time, I had the desire to participate in Zen training at a temple. For me it was a dream to live in a temple with a Zen master. When Sunim invited me the first time, I promised myself that I would do everything necessary to train. After the retreat in Chicago, I realized that I enjoyed Dharma practice more than anything else.

I returned to Mexico to resign from my job even though my colleagues and my family did not accept the decision I was making. At times, people are caught up by appearances. Every one thought that it was better to continue working and accumulating wealth than pursue spiritual training, but nothing had made me happier or more peaceful than Dharma practice. Doing retreats and helping the sangha could help me keep my mind at peace and live a happier life. So I had another opportunity to turn my life toward the Dharma.

When I arrived in Chicago in fall 2001 for ten weeks of residential training, I didn't know what awaited me. Above all, I didn't know English, but

I trusted my practice and I trusted that Zen has no language. So I took refuge in this, nothing to do but practice. The language barrier was, on one hand, a challenge, but on the other, it was an opportunity to practice. I maintained silence most of time and observed what was happening all the time and intuited what needed to be done.

Living at the temple is different than attending a retreat, which is a short but very intensive period. Temple life is a constant practice, not so intense, but constant like a river current that flows yet always seems the same. My challenge was finding the Dharma while doing the most simple and routine things. I tried to keep my mind in the here and now. Chanting practice was the antidote that reduced my distractions—my thoughts about the future and the past. At times I became disillusioned because I made mistakes, but there was nothing for me to do but try again anew. Every day was a new day. Every day there was something I had to learn about myself. I learned the discipline of consistency. The training in Chicago went beyond that ten weeks. I realized that it was just the beginning.

I returned to Mexico and broke up with my girlfriend. It was painful, but I had to do it. "Something" told me I had to leave. I didn't know anything about my future, only that I would be going to the Toronto temple to continue my training. I couldn't imagine what was going to happen and how it was going to transform my life. Before departing from Mexico, I visited some of my best friends who had just had their first child. I was still thinking about my girlfriend. When I was with my friends, I saw the image of a family: husband, wife, son. They were happy with life and their new baby. This image made me think, "I could have had this," but I also thought of a verse from the *Dhammapada*—renounce a small happiness in view of the great happiness. I spent the night with my friends and at dawn the baby began to cry. I awoke and realized the Buddha's first noble truth that life is suffering. The baby was just days old and was suffering. That cry inspired me to reaffirm my decision to follow the Dharma.

In February 2002, I arrived in Toronto with Sunim. Everything was new to me. I was alone with Sunim. I always had to be alert and accommodating. Shortly after arriving, the temple moved to a new location. Since I didn't understand English, I had to guess what was happening. It was a great practice of attention and intuition.

The move was a great experience for me as the new building was transformed to function as a temple. There was much work to be done; above all, cleaning. Each small and simple task completed was an achievement and progress could be seen daily. Every day I had to do my practice. I was the only resident and, at times, it was difficult to get out of bed in the morning. I wanted to continue sleeping and not practice. I thought, "I'm alone, no one is going to know," but such dishonest thinking with myself made me get out of bed. I also said to myself, "I've left too many things behind, I've sacrificed too much to continue being the same and to continue cultivating the same old habits. I might as well return to Mexico. I came here to change, to be better, not to be the same." With this I got up and did my practice, unconcerned with the conditions in which I found myself. One of the greatest satisfactions in my life is to wake, go outside to run, and to see the parking lot and the pines covered with snow in the winter.

Now my life is completely dedicated to the Dharma. My training will never cease for I am always cultivating beginner's mind, each day fresh and new. We are constantly renovating the temple. It is beautiful to see the sangha working together with one goal, leaving behind individual interests for the sake of all beings.

Muhan is now a Zen Buddhist priest, ordained in July 2004 by Ven. Samu Sunim.

a medicine to cure all illness

Bopkong Juanita Ochoa Chi
Translated from the Spanish by Konghwa Elizabeth Enciso

I was born in Mexico City in 1967. As the daughter of two professors, I received a liberal and secular education free of religious pretensions. My father studied law and actively participated in the social and union movements of the time. My mother taught English classes and dedicated herself to raising the family. Although my father's social ideals influenced me throughout my youth, other more immediate concerns predominated in my earlier years.

My health was quite weak. At seventeen, I had the beginnings of asthma and severe sinusitis. I began a cycle of illness. I constantly visited clinics, hospitals, dentists, and traditional healers. It was then that I decided to become a doctor, so I could relieve my own pain and that of others. While I graduated from high school with that intention, a single idea was to change the course of my life. How could I cure others when I myself was so ill? I would first need to be cured in order to help everyone else.

I met many people during college years who helped me regain my health. I began to practice macrobiotics and was able to resolve my main health problems. In addition, I had the opportunity to study Marxism and theories critical of modern capitalism. This widened my perspective and allowed me to see beyond my own experiences. It was a time of great change and I personally was happy with my choices. I had found medicines for both my body and my social conscience. However, these changes were difficult for my family to understand, and our differences finally pushed me to leave my home. It was a difficult decision; yet, I felt the world smiling on me as I moved forward.

Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom archives.

I moved into a commune where I found a wealth of understanding and experiences. Although the people at the commune were kind, communal life was not easy. I was constantly confronted with my own attachments, and my ego often made me suffer. How could I give up all that was familiar and adjust to this new group life? My inexperience led me from one thing to another in search of stability. I read a great deal but found it difficult to reconcile my ideas with my reality. This brought me tremendous anguish and suffering. Throughout the next years I alternated between emotional highs and lows.

One of my favorite activities at the commune was the practice of Sydha yoga meditation. Chanting mantras helped me to enter into a sense of emptiness. This meditation proved to be of immense benefit, but I practiced it only sporadically. Nevertheless, it served as a true refuge whenever I returned to it.

In 1993, I attended an intensive meditation workshop. During the workshop, a sense of peace inundated my existence. For minutes I was nothing, everything was clear and I needed nothing. Grateful, I cried with joy. Many of my certainties dissolved, and I had the opportunity to see myself through new eyes. It was no longer enough to have physical health and a broadened social perspective. I realized I needed to cultivate my spiritual health.

In the spring of 1994, Anne Marie Koblizek, a member of the commune, invited her Zen teacher to conduct a retreat at our house. He was Samu Sunim, a Korean Zen master. He came to stay with us a few days before the start of the retreat. We found him simple, humble, and energetic. I

was taken by his shaved head, wide face, and beautiful almond-shaped eyes through which you could barely see his brilliant pupils. The retreat began and I was in charge of the kitchen. I had to cook for a large number of retreatants. Working with other kitchen staff without words was challenging. I felt nervous. I was more distracted and confused than usual. When I had an interview with Sunim, he asked me about my practice. I told him that I was preoccupied because my life was not going well and I didn't know what to do. Sunim said, "You're here only for five days and you're not going anywhere. So do what I say: meditate intensely. I guarantee that by the end of the retreat you'll know what to do." Suddenly my heart filled with hope. My breathing became peaceful. I gently lowered my gaze, drew my hands together.

My meditation continued like never before, fueled by an inner determination to remain free from distraction. I felt very light and free. Everything shone with the hope of finding resolution. I could be in the darkest corner of the house and it wouldn't matter. I was nearly intoxicated by my meditation and, at moments, I would turn and see everything around me spinning out of control. I would quickly lower my gaze and again take refuge in my breathing, "Hanaaaaa."

At one point of the retreat, I experienced a profound state of stillness and purity. I felt as though I were submerged in crystalline blue waters in which even breathing was unnecessary. By the end of the retreat I was quite satisfied and indeed felt as though something within me knew what I had to do. Expressing my profound gratitude, I parted with Sunim.

For days after retreat, I continued to feel at peace. Those of us who had attended the retreat remained impregnated with Zen. For several months many of us continued a regular practice. My life, in general, improved in many ways. While I still had much to resolve, I was satisfied. However, as the years progressed, the delicate thread of equanimity and tranquility began to fray. Once again my emotions began to rise and fall. The economic and political crisis in Mexico was compounded by my own emotional crisis. My convictions and knowledge were useless in confronting this old suffering.

It was not until six years later that I decided to find Samu Sunim. What a joy it was to see him again! I participated in the Yongmaeng Chongjin retreat in December 2000. The day before the retreat ended, Sunim gave a talk on taking precepts and becoming a Buddhist. I was initially resistant because of my secular upbringing. However, I realized that I had been seeking out the Buddhist values all my life, to protect and help liberate all beings. So, I took the precepts and received the Dharma name, Bopkong (Dharma of Emptiness).

Right after this retreat, I became a Dharma student in the Maitreya Buddhist Seminary. Each subsequent retreat carved a deeper space in my consciousness and my heart. The instructions were simple and precise: pay attention in all that you do; help yourself; right now, right here, just this; just do it. Gradually, the accumulated tensions began to release their hold on me.

A few months ago I moved into the temple so that I could improve meditation practice with a stronger discipline. Right now I work at a holistic clinic and continue my studies in Chinese medicine. I challenge myself to harmonize my daily life with my work and meditation practice. This gives me tremendous satisfaction. My new cheerful and more tolerant attitude has benefited my patients and friends alike which, in return, brings me great joy. In Dharma I have found not only a refuge but a great medicine for the heart.

Don't Know and *Don't Worry*

The life and teachings of Seung Sahn Sunim (1927–2004)

Ven. Samu Sunim

Son (Zen) Master Seung Sahn Haengwon[1] passed away of heart failure on November 30, 2004 at Hwagye-sa, his home temple in Seoul, South Korea. He died peacefully after uttering his last words to his concerned disciples:

Don't worry, don't worry.
Light (of wisdom) prevails ten thousand years.
Mountains are green, rivers flow.

The funeral and cremation services were held on Saturday, December 4 at Sudok-sa, his mother monastery, on Toksung-san mountain in South Ch'ungch'ong province. The funeral ceremony was organized by the Council of Elders of the Korean Buddhist Chogye Order, of which Seung Sahn was a member.

It rained all that day over the mountain. Close to ten thousand people braved the wet day to attend the funeral ceremony and to pray for Seung Sahn's return. Many of his Western disciples—Westerners make up the majority of his ordained disciples—came from abroad. Following the funeral, *tabi* or cremation (*jhapita* in Pali) took place at the cremation site 600 meters away from the main temple complex. It took six hours until the pyre was reduced to ashes and bones. Bones were gathered and carefully placed in the white porcelain.

In America, Seung Sahn's Kwan Um School of Zen hosted a memorial ceremony Saturday, December 4, at its head temple, Providence Zen Center in Cumberland, Rhode Island. Dharma family members from New Haven Zen Center in Connecticut, Cambridge Zen Center in Massachusetts, Chogye International Zen Center in New York City and two Zen groups in Maine—more than two hundred teachers and students in all—attended the ceremony to mourn and remember Son Master Seung Sahn Haengwon.

In this world of impermanence, we offer this ceremony to Zen Master Seung Sahn…The four elements disperse as in a dream. The six dusts, six roots and consciousness are originally emptiness. To

[1] Seung Sahn began to use the name, Seung Sahn, after he came to the U.S. in 1972. Previously he was known by his Dharma name, Haengwon.

understand that, the Buddha and the eminent teachers return to the place of light. The sun is setting over the western mountains; the moon is rising in the east.

In Los Angeles, the Federation of Korean Buddhist Temples of Southern California held another memorial service at Dharma-sa temple on Sunday, December 5.

Students and Dharma friends are advised to chant *Sogamuni-bul* (Shakyamuni Buddha) or *Namu Amita-bul* during the forty-nine day observance.

Seung Sahn Sunim was born Duk-In Lee in 1927 in Sunch'on of P'yongan province, North Korea. In 1945 he graduated from a technical high school in P'yongyang. After a brief involvement in the anti-communist student resistance movement, Seung Sahn fled to the Myohyang-san mountains where he stayed at the Sangwon-am hermitage of Pohyon-sa monastery for the winter. This was his first encounter with Buddhism. In spring the following year, he crossed the 38th Parallel and went to Seoul.

Duk-In left behind in North Korea his parents and younger sister, his only sibling, and his wife and a baby daughter. After the Korean war, he met his sister in South Korea. His daughter has been living in L.A. since 1980's.

In Seoul he earned his living working at a radio repair shop while studying Buddhism at Dongguk University. Student society was deeply embroiled in ideological strife. Seung Sahn was thoroughly disillusioned in March 1947, when he saw the right and left factions fighting against each other. The fights broke out after the factions held separate meetings commemorating the anniversary of the March First non-violent uprising for independence, that had taken place in 1919 during the Japanese colonial rule.

So, he left Seoul, bringing with him ten volumes of the great thinkers. With the help of a friend from the Buddhist classes, he rented a room in one of the sub-temples of Magok-sa monastery near Kongju, Ch'ungch'ong province. It was his intention to read through the great classics East and West. After going through Western philosophy and Confucian classics, he finally came to the Buddhist books, which he had set aside for last. Of all his readings Eastern and Western, it was the *Diamond Sutra* that impressed Seung Sahn most. For the first time he began to take Buddhism seriously.

While Seung Sahn was studying at Magok-sa monastery, a ranger monk Togyun, whose duty was to keep the mountains, came by and asked him, "What are you doing, student?"

"I'm learning Buddhism," Seung Sahn replied.

"What for?" asked the monk.

"So that I would become a worthy person."

"Buddhism is not something you can learn and study!"

"Then, what is Buddhism good for?" asked Seung Sahn.

"Buddhism is to forget. Buddhist study is to unlearn what you've learned."

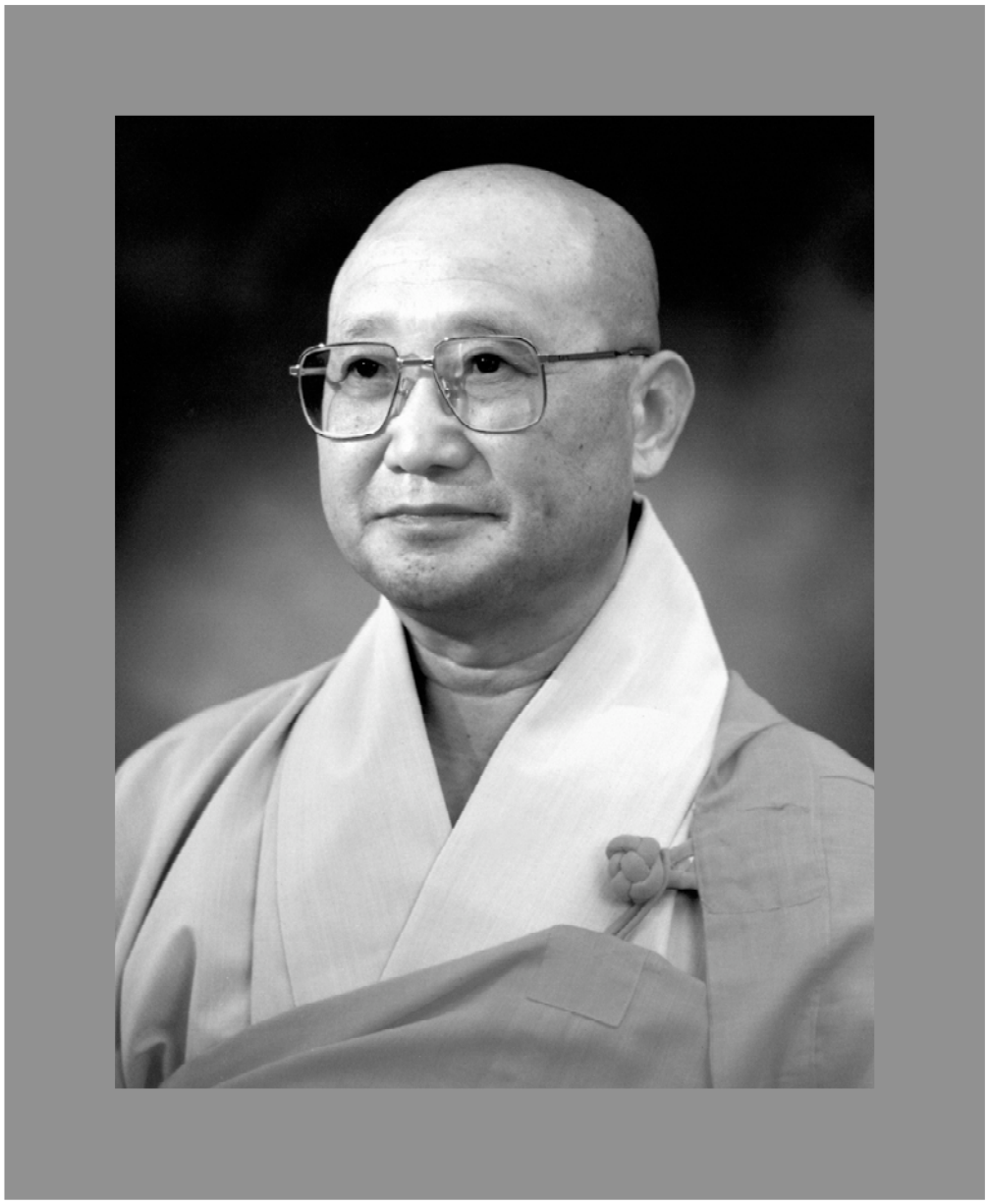
This seeming nonsense made sense to the young Seung Sahn. "From now on I have to learn to unlearn," said he to himself. He figured that he had to learn to recite a mantra. He then thought of becoming a monk. Somehow it appealed to him more than politics and science and technology. So he consulted with his monk adviser Chu Sokch'an. He went to the main temple complex at Magok-sa and shaved his head with Cho Suhae Sunim as his teacher in October 1947. After becoming a junior monk, Seung Sahn asked his advisor:

"What's the most difficult kido? I'll achieve it or die, or go insane, one of the three."

"*Great Compassion Dharani!* If you do the Dharani kido[2] for 100 days, you'll become free, or die, or go mad."

Ten days after his ordination, Seung Sahn set out on a 100-day kido on a diet of raw pine needle powder. The kido was full of struggle and crisis, physical, psychological and spiritual, until the seventieth day. Eight times Seung Sahn packed up to leave, but he changed his mind nine times. On the ninety-ninth day, when he heard a crow singing, his

[2] Purification and wish-fulfilling chanting practice.



Seung Sahn Sunim (1927–2004)

mind opened up and he realized the truth of "True Emptiness, Wondrous Being." So he composed a Dharma poem:

The road down the mountain of Complete Enlightenment is not new,
The traveler carrying a backpack is not an ancient.
The sound of walk ta-ta-ta connects the past with the present.
The crow flew away from the tree singing.

After the 100-day kido, Seung Sahn met his future teacher, Master Kobong (1890–1961) who came to Magok-sa to conduct a retreat for Son practitioners. Seung Sahn was serving the group as *koyangju* (cook).

"How long have you been a monk?" asked Kobong.

"A few months."

"What's your cultivation?"

"I recite the Great Compassion Dharani."

"Reciting the Dharani helps removing your

Irgan Lorne Fromer

"If you don't know, you have to keep inquiring with growing doubt."

karmic obstacles and fulfilling your wishes and prayers, but it does not help awakening your mind. Now, you listen to me. Once, a monk asked Zhaozhou, 'What's the great meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?' And Zhaozhou replied, 'Big Cone Pine Tree!' Do you understand?"

Kobong was telling Seung Sahn a story of the great master Zhaozhou who lived from 778 to 897. Seung Sahn thought to himself, "What's the matter with big pine cone or small pine cone." Since he was not sure, he said, "No, I don't." "If you don't know, you have to keep inquiring with growing doubt." So advising, Kobong gave Seung Sahn a Buddhist name, Haengwon (Practice of Vow) and told him to go to Sudok-sa monastery for *kyolje* retreat.

In the fall of 1948, Seung Sahn arrived in Sudok-sa, the home of the Dharma family of Master Man'gong (1871–1946). Seung Sahn did not yet have monk's clothes, nor did he have a proper robe. So he was wearing a kind of makeshift robe on top of his Western dress. He must have looked a strange and funny fellow. "Who are you?" asked a dumbfounded monk. "I am a student of Master Kobong. He sent me here to stay and train." The monk looked Seung Sahn up and down and then took the new "student" monk inside. This uncommon "student" monk became a spectacle for the community and a subject of scrutiny. However, Seung Sahn received immediate attention and favorable treatment on the reputation of Kobong, who served as chairman of the Dharma Protection Committee of Master Man'gong's Dharma family. This helped him gain easy access to Son adepts and great disciples of Master Man'gong.

Seung Sahn had arrived at Sudok-sa barely two years after the death of Man'gong. In this post-Man'gong period, seasoned old hands, prominent practitioners and Son eccentrics were all in the lineup. The supreme master of the training center was Yongum Sunim (1887–1951). In his absence, Toksan served as his substitute, while Ch'unsong[3] (1891–1977) delivered Dharma talks. *Ipsung* (director of the meditation hall) was Pobjin Sunim (1898–1986). In addition to these, Manho (1906–?), Sinsu, Suman and Taeo all counted as equals in their capacity. All together there were sixteen good-for-nothing *nahans* (arhat) lurking in their adjoining rooms.

It was when the young Seung Sahn inadvertently stepped into one of those adjoining rooms that one of the adepts suddenly challenged him. "Tell me, where is Amitabha Buddha?" And then the adept recited a verse:

Where is Amitabha Buddha?
Keep it in your thoughts and never forget.
Where no thoughts remain, exhausting thought after thought
Your six gates (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) will emit a flood of golden light!

"This is full of dead words! Where is your Amitabha Buddha? Where is it? Show me!" yelled the adept. Seung Sahn muttered, "Well, you know it. Why are you asking me?" Then came an unexpected reaction from the adept. "Oh, this is the young fellow who will stir up a great trouble!" It was a complement.

This article will continue in the next issue.

[3] For the story of Ch'unsong, see "Korean Zen and Humor," *Spring Wind*, Spring 2003, pp. 10–11.












All photos this page by Kongni Ben Ridgway.

Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom

Zen Buddhist Temple, Ann Arbor, MI

On June 10, 2004, the Ann Arbor temple purchased its next door commercial building, 1224 Packard. Perhaps this important event was envisioned in the early 1980's.

Sujata Linda Klevnick, an artist and designer in Zen training at the Toronto temple, stood looking across Packard at the temple—viewing, sketching, and deciding what our new wall at 1214 should be like. Finally the design came and she determined the bricks should go with the neighborhood—like the golden yellow bricks on the bike shop and vacuum shop, our neighbors to the east.

The old hedge was removed, we dug the four-foot-deep by fifty-foot-long trench for the footings, poured concrete and hauled blocks and bricks, and helped John Marhofer build the wall for weeks and weeks. Kumara Dino Wilson carefully built the covered gateway. The new wall and gateway put our temple on the map.

During the next twenty years our sangha has grown steadily. We did a lot of renovation, expanded our grounds, purchased a small house at the back of the property. For several years we investigated enlarging our premises since the *sonbang* (meditation hall) was small and there was no space for big Dharma events inside. One idea was to build in the back yard, another to renovate our big old home, another to move to a new location. Then, last spring the bike shop came up for sale. When we had a good look inside the bike shop, it was obvious we should purchase the building. And great plans came to mind—more windows and light, moving the furnace downstairs so that the room could be bigger, building a side entrance to connect the building with the rest of the temple property through the garden. A land contract was signed on June 10.

We immediately took up the Society's tradition of renovating yet another old building. At the first Sangha Workday on July 17, about thirty members, friends, and children showed up. Smiling faces and a strong, rhythmic energy filled the building. We tore down walls, pulled up old carpeting and the tile underneath, and painted the front of the building. The golden yellow paint applied to the building front matched the golden brown temple wall. Marvelously the two properties looked like they belonged together.

Since this first renovation day, we have been making steady improvements: sanding the tar off the wood floor, repairing and painting the east wall, patching the basement foundation and installing larger gutters to prevent basement flooding, insulating the ceiling, installing a new backdoor, and making a special altar area for children. This new children's altar enshrines the Buddha statue that Sunim originally had at his basement apartment temple on Markham Street in Toronto in the mid seventies.

We are grateful to the many people who have generously offered time to help, and to those who responded to our summer appeal for financial support. Over $15,000 was raised toward the total estimated renovation cost of $160,000. In addition to the renovation cost, we need $3,000 monthly to fulfill our fifteen-year land contract agreement and to cover operating expenses.

This is a Dharma building for the long run—slow and steady and patient. "The kind of patience that is very spacious and serves as a kind of nourishing container and place of creative cultivation for wisdom, generosity, and perseverance," to quote Musim Ikeda-Nash, a former resident, who was thinking of something else but it applies here! Please come and witness our Dharma work and provide your support generously.

Joyful Mind Seeking the Way

Toronto in 1984, part two in a series

Yosim Ken Norman

When I first arrived at the Toronto Zen Buddhist Temple, Samu Sunim allowed me to think of myself as a visitor, providing me a small, private guest room in which I found a framed copy of Contemplation on the Six Paramitas. Sunim quietly suggested that I consider staying for a few more months in Toronto instead of executing my recent plan to abandon training. As I had a delicate, precious feeling about my Buddhist life and practice, it was hard to walk away from my Dharma home and family.

When I decided that I would give my training another try in Toronto, I was promptly evicted from the little guest room. Thereafter, I unrolled my sleeping bag on the dormitory floor with the others. Sujata entrusted some of the temple's office work to me and showed me how to be of help with patience and kindness. Several days later, Sunim no longer thought it all right for me to stay on there, training full-time, while still intending to leave some months down the road. He asked me to decide if I was in or out. I said, "In," and resolved to make this pseudo-monastic life and the way of the Bodhisattva a lifelong enterprise. For the most part, I came to feel it was a good fit. While not perhaps made of the same stuff that great spiritual heroes are, I was sure that this was a worthy path of genuine beauty and integrity. I wanted to be a part of this awesome, new religious movement. I felt that even I could make some important contribution to the flowering of Buddhism in North America, the meeting of East and West.

The Toronto temple was very different from the one in Ann Arbor. Only a few years ago, it had been a run down flophouse in bad need of repair in a not-so-up-and-coming residential neighborhood of Canada's largest city. Now it was beautiful

with a serene ambiance throughout—white walls and high ceilings, wood trim and tasteful Asian accents, a contemplative garden with a teahouse, stone pagoda and the sound of trickling water. The basement had been excavated by hand and was now finished with a polished flagstone floor, washrooms, and sauna. The care, craftsmanship, sacrifice and toil of the Toronto sangha had miraculously turned 46 Gwynne Avenue into a glowing shrine of mindfulness and compassion. Yet the Toronto temple shared much with that of Ann Arbor—the practice schedules, the teachings, the love and support of sangha, the devotion to the Way, and the frisky camaraderie of those of us who had nowhere else to go when services were over and everyone else went home. In Toronto, Sunim was a ubiquitous presence, a force to be reckoned with, and a warp core of surprising vitality and Dharma clarity. Sunim reprimanded me, encouraged me, meditated, ate meals and ran errands with me, teased me and sang songs with me, and did what he could with this innocent and idealistic American youth.

Playing My Part in All of This

Work practice has always been an important part of full-time temple training, and I had always loved to sing. Now I wanted to return constantly to my practice while working by chanting in a singsong voice. I typed up the Great Compassion Dharani in a way that was easier to see and memorize and learned it by heart so I could chant it anytime, anywhere. This inspired Sunim to require all of us to memorize it and to test us on our accuracy of syllable and pitch. For a time, it became my job to do the morning wakeup chant and to perform the awesome morning bell chant in Korean, with ear splitting peels of the large temple bell.

With only minor, finishing touches to make on the renovation, Sunim, Sujata and the rest of us turned our attention to the publication and worldwide distribution of a new journal, *Spring Wind: Buddhist Cultural Forum*. Sunim impressed us with his ability to write in English, and artides solicited from sundry sources appeared. We laid out *Spring Wind* the old fashioned way, did our own photographic work at a nearby print shop, and bought an old, offset printing press. I learned the strange art of running the press—becoming one with the fast moving machine, continually balancing the yin and yang of the flow of ink and water, keeping vigil over the clarity of text and halftone photographs while chanting. Each issue seemed to be twice the size of the one before. Collating it all by hand was a big job, requiring the help of the whole sangha. When I'd finally produce the last pages, we'd spread it all out in the *sonbang* on long, narrow tables and assemble it in sections, hour after hour—a tedious, joyous, communal effort. Then, we'd take them all to the print shop for the stitching and trim, and return them to temple for the final stage of stuffing envelopes and applying address labels. A cottage industry, a grassroots movement, a labor of love, an impossible dream—some things never change.

In those days, there was an active Korean congregation in addition to the membership of North American Zen students. By far, my favorite time of the week was Sunday morning when the Koreans would come for their service. Early in the morning, or even the evening before, the grandmotherly *posalnims* (women devotees) would arrive and begin their culinary devotions. Squatting over their rice cakes, kimchees and other sumptuous side dishes, they'd talk and exclaim and carry on with their selfless work, completely unconscious of themselves. The aromas of toasted sesame oil and soybean paste mingled with the sounds of laughter and Korean gossip amidst the comings and goings of families in their Sunday best, greeting us almost-monks with uncommon respect and offering large bags of rice, flowers and fruit at the altar. Their religious service produced a cacophony of chanting and unstructured prostrations followed by an animated Dharma talk by Sunim in his native

tongue. Once when Sunim was away, it fell to me to play mokt'ak and lead their *kido,* chanting "Kwanseum Posal," and I was sure I had entered an entirely different galaxy. Looking back, it is always the unswerving devotion of the posalnims that impressed me most: giving, working, serving, bowing and chanting without reserve.

Winter, which had given way to spring and the sweltering heat of summer, then passed through autumn, arrived again with its bitter chill. Sunim went on pilgrimage to Korea with Supa and Sanbul, and I split firewood, chipped ice off the sidewalk, and marveled at the poignancy of nature through frosty windows. Our full schedule of meditation and services continued fifty-two weeks per year, and gradually I picked up a modicum of the strength and stability of my Dharma companions. Occasionally, I arrived at an unprecedented sense of dynamic presence and wholeness—a brief, ecstatic experience of profound calm—as though everything, exactly as it is, were supercharged with electricity. In moments of great clarity like those, I was nowhere to be found; there could be no judgment of any sort, except that I suddenly loved and trusted everything without exception, beyond any reason.

Epiphany in Mexico

Our lives were so utterly regular and prescribed that I was surprised when Sunim had announced that we should have part of one Sunday off. We had been given ten dollars and told to go out and do as we pleased for several hours, part of a wise campaign to ward off burnout. But I was truly shocked when I learned that we would all go to Mexico to meet Sunim on his return from Korea, do *Yongmaeng Chongjin* with the Mexican sangha in an old hacienda outside of Mexico City, and afterward have a bit of a Mexican seaside holiday! Fried on relentless work practice and errand running, I couldn't wait to relax on the beach, listening to the sound of breaking waves. As many of us as could piled into the temple van like hippie vagabonds and drove straight through from Toronto to Mexico City.

A couple of days into the retreat, I was experiencing some genuine accord with my practice. My concentration became a steady, willing friend. During work period, I assigned myself the task of picking up tiny pieces of broken glass and rusty nails that littered the sunny courtyard. The sun beat down, I followed my breath, and I removed the tiny bits of trash one by one. But I became overwhelmed by a strange fatigue, working calmly in the afternoon sun. I didn't know it yet, but I was already coming down with Montezuma's Revenge. I only thought, I have got to rest. In a move uncharacteristic of Yongmaeng Chongjin, I simply left my work in search of a quiet place to sit down. I didn't know that in a couple hours' time, several of us would be stretched out on the floor in misery, vomiting continuously. All I wanted was to rest a bit.

Behind the hacienda, I found a low, shady spot beneath a tree, removed from the others, where green things grew around a little pool of water. Gratefully, I sat down among the living things. The dappled shade shifted in the breeze, and I watched the water striders darting about on the surface of the water. I followed my breath. I watched the water bugs. I felt the breeze shift in the shade of the little tree. All of a sudden, I understood the freedom of the water striders. I understood my own, natural freedom—the freedom of all things. And at the same time I knew that I must leave the temple, for I had somehow been coercing myself to stay. I knew I would not abandon my practice but could no longer stay in an artificial environment. Buddhism, it seemed to me, was ridiculous, an artifice, a thing of nothing. I would leave!

Immediately, I got up, found Sunim, and told him. I insisted that I would finish the retreat, return to Toronto as planned, and pass my duties on to others in a responsible way. This was no passionate impulse. I was not desperate—only resolved.

I've often wondered if this wasn't the biggest mistake of my life, a delusion in disguise. Perhaps there was just too much that lay beyond the monastery walls for a restless, twenty-one-year-old, romantic, intellectual type. Anyway I did leave in March 1985. Sunim and Sujata stood in the doorway and watched me go. I walked out into the unknown—and it led me here.

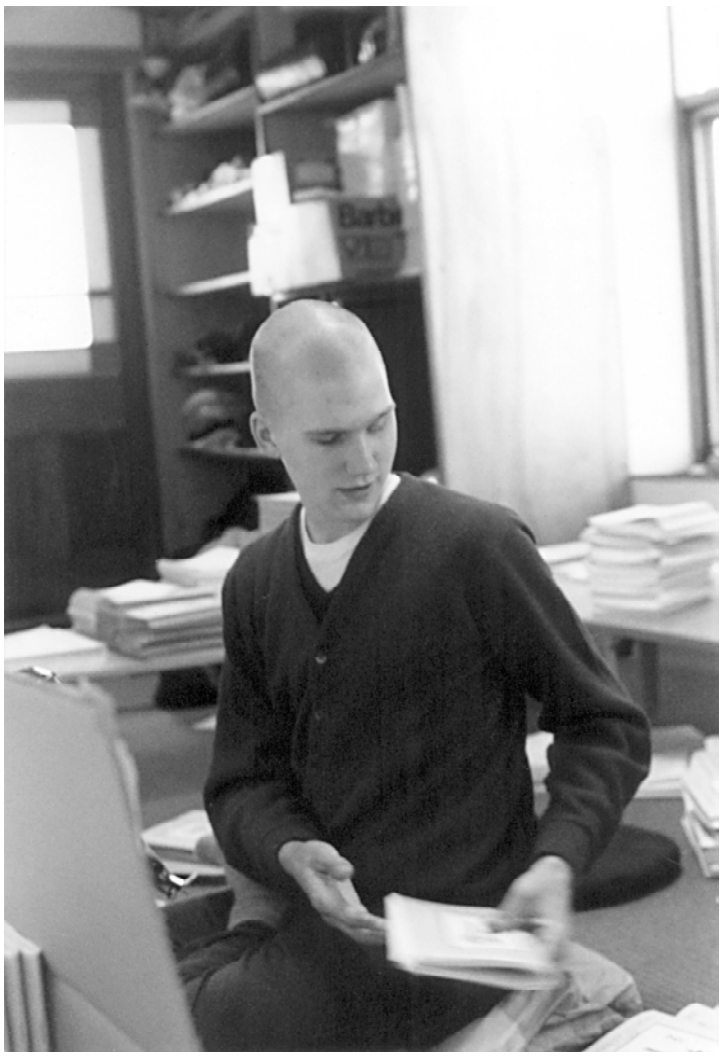
Fast Forward

Without a clue as to what I would actually do with my life, I ventured out to British Columbia. I thought Kasyapa, who had left the temple a few months before and gone back to his hometown of Vancouver, might be the only one on Earth who could understand where I was coming from. I didn't know if I would stay for a weekend, or a decade, or forever—I just went.

I thought perhaps I was losing my mind. I thought perhaps I was a religious fanatic. I practiced as earnestly as I could without structure. Kasyapa and I were delighted to see each other again, and we spent a memorable summer together. I set myself up for the winter in a tiny little cabin on the Olympic Peninsula and tried the career of a hermit, but that failed, too. I was lonely and wanted to help others. I was made of softer stuff. I wandered a bit. I made new friends. My formal practice was marginalized, and I steadily lost my focus on the Dharma.

In February 1986 I met Sara and her two young sons and became the lover and family man I'd always wanted to be. We made our home in the hills of north-coastal California (near Eureka/Arcata), a place of tremendous natural beauty where Redwood Creek cuts its way through steep mountains covered in Douglas fir and assorted hardwoods. In 1992, Julian was born, and my devotion to family and domestic joy went off the charts.

Without a foundation of meditation, study or devotional practice, however, I was vulnerable. I gradually lost the thread of mindfulness and



Yosim collating an issue of *Spring Wind: Buddhist Cultural Forum* in 1984.

Ven. Samu Sunim and retreatants after winter Yongmaeng Chongjin, 1984.

became too busy, ambitious, and poisoned by purpose. By 1997 I knew I had to change and recover the Bodhisattva spirit of meditating in the midst of compassionate action. So I went to hear a female monk from Shasta Abbey give a talk at the yoga center in Arcata. I learned there was a small, local Zen group, and I began to attend some of their sittings.

By the time my dad died unexpectedly in 1998, I'd increased my involvement with the local Zen group to weekly sitting, and I'd cleared out a four-foot-square closet for an early morning meditation space with a tiny, low altar. I did a little Dharma reading and sometimes used my break at work to meditate for a few minutes outside on the parking lot curb. I'd become a closet Buddhist at home and unearthed my formal practice in little, daily ways.

My father's death had a strange effect on me. For several months, I felt elated, full of energy, and in touch with my inner life. Later, I would enter a mild depression and struggle with old demons. I was saddened by the loss of my dad, but initially, instead of grief, there was joie de vivre and overflowing love for others.

One day while driving home from work, I reflected on how my father's death had robbed us of any further development in our relationship. He was gone forever, and the potential that was there between us was lost. I wondered if Sunim was still alive, or if I'd run into an old Dharma friend one day who'd say, "Oh, yeah. Sunim, he died two years ago." I realized that it was inevitable that I would condemn my relationship with Sunim to the past if I maintained this distance and silence between us. I was allowing a great treasure to slip through my fingers.

It had been thirteen years since I had seen Sunim—except in my dreams, where an unsettled mood prevailed. But the minute I got home from work that day, I picked up the phone and called him. I asked him how I could keep this feeling of intensity and connectedness from fading. I invited him to the west coast to give a talk and lead a retreat. He suggested in turn that I come to the temple in Chicago to do Yongmaeng Chongjin, and we'd take it from there. I was noncommittal.

I spoke with Sunim on the phone a couple more times, and in early 1999 he said, "Listen, Yosim. You come do Yongmaeng Chongjin before this year is over, or I'll come out there to California and find you and kill you!" Now, I knew he was joking, but with Sunim, you never really know. Anyway, I took his point and faced my fears that summer by actually going to the Chicago Zen Buddhist Temple. Entering this temple I'd never been to before and seeing Sunim again was a bit like the dreams I'd had so many times before but without the alienating sense of being in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing. It was like a homecoming, and I was relieved to find my people again and to return to the practice and culture that seemed so much a part of me.

A New Beginning

After Yongmaeng Chongjin, I renewed my precepts. That evening I wept and wept—out of gratitude and out of remorse for all I'd done wrong. The next day, Sunim told me that as long as he was alive, there'd always be a place for me in the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom. Before I left to return home, he suggested I consider enrolling in Maitreya Buddhist Seminary, which he insisted I could do even at my great distance if I could come to temple just once a year for retreat and Dharma student training. I said that I'd think about it.

In August, Sara and I had a golden opportunity to make some sweeping changes in our lifestyle through changing jobs and domestic responsibilities that, among other things, would afford me more time at home to do formal practice each day. Rather than enrolling in the seminary as I was inclined to do, I began a year of daily practice morning and afternoon, to see if my heart and resolve were strong enough to start something as

demanding as the seminary and see it through without losing momentum. I didn't want to get in deep with the Society again and not follow through, so I put my enthusiasm to the test.

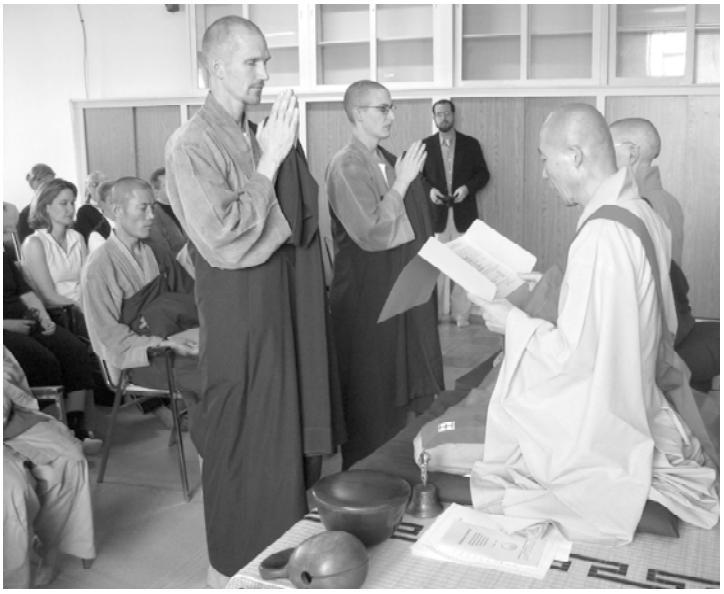
One year later, my feeling for the training hadn't changed. My practice had been steady, and I decided I was up for whatever the seminary program demanded of me. I knew it would be difficult and far more convenient for me to practice instead with one of the groups in Arcata or Eureka. But I thought, if I'm to go more deeply into this, and even become ordained as a lay Buddhist teacher, I should pay attention to my affinity for this teacher, this style of practice, and this lineage and tradition that feels native to me—that I grew up with, in a sense. So, in the eleventh hour, I sent in my application, passport photo and a check and became a first-year student in Maitreya Buddhist Seminary. A prodigal son had come home.

Four years later, this summer, I officially completed my seminary training and was privileged to received ordination within the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom as a Dharma teacher. Words cannot express my joy to have arrived at this new day. I'd like to express my love and gratitude to the Three Jewels, to my Dharma brothers and sisters, to my family and friends, and to Samu Sunim for supporting me in this endeavor.

May we within the temple of our own hearts dwell,
amid the myriad mountains!

Yosim Ken Norman plans to found a temple affiliated with the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom in the near future.

Yosim at Zen Buddhist Temple, 46 Gwynne Ave., Toronto in 1984.


Yosim during ordinantion at Zen Buddhist Temple, 297 College St., Toronto in 2004.

newsdesk

Chiyul Sunim on a hunger strike in front of Blue House, August 2004. Photo courtesy of *Hyundai Bulkyo*.

Korean Bhikkuni on Hunger Strike to Save Colony of Salamanders

Chiyul Sunim, a female monk at Naewon-sa Meditation Center, became an environmentalist when she learned the South Korean government would tunnel through Ch'onsong-san mountain (One Thousand Sages) to build a high-speed railroad without proper investigation of environmental impact. When she and fellow female monks realized the survival of thirty species of animals and plants and twenty-two wetlands were threatened, they filed suit against the government on behalf of salamanders in danger. Further, Chiyul Sunim and supporters organized "Friends of Salamanders," getting 240,000 people to join their suit.

In November 2002, then presidential candidate Roh Moo-Hyun pledged to suspend the tunneling. However, in late June 2004, Chiyul Sunim went on a hunger strike in front of Blue House, the presidential palace, because President Moo-Hyun wasn't fulfilling his campaign pledge. After fifty-seven days, Chiyul Sunim was near collapse and dying. That day, the president persuaded her to stop, promising his government would stop construction of the section on Ch'onsong-san mountain and order reevaluation of the eco-system impact. But on November 29, the High Court of Justice of Pusan dismissed the lawsuit by "friends of salamanders."

In response to the setback, Chiyul Sunim, with the help of Catholic nuns and Won Buddhism sisters, began a project embroidering 1,000 salamanders on a huge piece of yellow cloth, raising hope with each salamander embroidered. Today, encouraged by the court decision and under mounting pressure, the government is ready to resume construction. So, Chiyul Sunim is back to her hunger strike. She believes she and Ch'onsong-san mountain are one and the same, and that tunneling through the mountain is boring through her heart.

Michigan Temple Attacked by Vandals

According to a report in the *Livingston County Daily Press and Argus,* American Buddhist Temple, an ethnic Chinese temple located in Livingston County, Michigan, was vandalized several times in November 2004. It's suspected the crimes were committed by white supremacist hate group the Ku Klux Klan. The County Sheriff's Department and the FBI are seeking information relating to recent temple thefts, including a stolen gold Buddha statue, as well as profane graffiti on the temple building. The temple relocated from Cleveland, Ohio, in 1994 to its present fifty-acre home in Michigan and has been victimized at least twenty-six times in the last eleven years by vandals, according to the *Daily Press.* American Buddhist Temple founder Rev. Cheng Kuan believes that those responsible for the recent attacks are acting out of fear of a religion they do not recognize or understand, and out of hatred and frustration related to the war in Iraq.

Newsdesk art by Matthew Cordell. www.matthewcordell.com

homemade

Spring Wind *invites readers to share the joy of creativity and a non-consumer lifestyle in this special section.*

Tongsan Catherine Brown

Temple tofu. We put it on the table and it disappears, and people say, How do you do it? What's the secret? What's the secret? There really isn't one, or if there is one, it's the open secret of attention. The creamy blocks of tofu, the quick flash of sesame, the heat and sizzle of the pan.

Golden Cube Temple Tofu

You'll need:

- extra-firm tofu
- nutritional yeast flakes
- soy sauce
- toasted sesame oil
- salt

1. Cut your tofu into slices about 1/2" thick. If you have time, it's nice to blot the slices dry on a clean kitchen towel. Then cut into fingers about 3/4" wide, then into squares.
2. Put a heavy frying pan (we use cast iron) on the flame to heat. Pour in vegetable oil to cover the bottom of the pan. Add a splash of sesame oil. Get this nice and hot—but not smoking—and drop in the tofu. Spread it out quickly so that the bottom is evenly covered.
3. Sprinkle with salt and nutritional yeast. Let it cook undisturbed over medium heat for about 3 minutes. Now get out your spatula or stir-fry flipper and loosen the tofu from the bottom of the pan, flipping it around. Sprinkle a little more nutritional yeast and a little more salt. Cook undisturbed for another 3-5 minutes. Flip the tofu around again. Keep doing this until a little nibble makes you want more. Now splash in some soy sauce. A whoosh of steam billows up. Cook until the soy has evaporated, and you're done.

A garnish will give extra joy. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, chopped peanuts, paprika, chopped cilantro, or anything else that you have on hand that looks nice on the golden cubes of temple tofu.

Variations

You can also give your temple tofu a sweet glaze. When it's done, remove it from the pan. Now work quickly. Into the hot pan add a tablespoon or two or three of sugar, depending on how much tofu you have, and let it melt. Watch it like a hawk. Don't stir. (Tilt and shake the pan if you need to help the sugar melt evenly.)

You've just made caramel. If you're not mindful you'll make burnt sugar. When the sugar is all melted and before it burns, add a generous splash of soy sauce. Another huge billow of steam. Stir energetically to dissolve the caramel in the soy. Turn off the heat. Now throw your tofu cubes back in and toss them to cover them with the glaze so that they shine. There should be just enough glaze to cover your tofu. You can throw in some sesame seeds now. They'll stick to the glaze and make your tofu look really pretty.

If there are any leftovers (as if!), they make nice croutons.

I have walked in the garden of the temple of Buddha. Seeds stick to my coat and I carry them away.

Editor's Note: Temples in the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom offer the Visitor's Program in which those interested in temple life can live at a Zen Buddhist Temple for a period of time. Ken Eatherly lived at Zen Buddhist Temple, Ann Arbor on the Visitor's Program for one week.

Ken Eatherly

Sunday, November 14, 2004

After all these years, why now do I need to go on a retreat? Is it the constant weight of the half-a-hundred projects I seem to have little hope of finishing around our large, elderly house? Or is it the fatigue of having volunteered, with my wife, to feed some sixty to seventy Kerry campaign workers every day for most of the month of October, coupled with the disappointment of the final vote?

And why do I, a lukewarm Episcopalian, think a week at a Zen Buddhist temple is the best remedy? Is it that my faith, torn by contradictions, needs a different brand of spiritual glue? Or is it that Ann Arbor, only an hour from Detroit, is just far enough away to make it seem like a real escape but close enough to rush back in case all our pipes decide to burst at the same time? This said, am I doing the right thing by leaving my car, just another tie to my "normal" life, at home and taking the train instead?

How will I, the ex-journalist, get by without my daily dose of newspapers, hourly updates via radio, and nightly barrage of TV reiterating all the crises on the planet, larded with copious commercial breaks to remind me how inadequate and unfulfilled I will be if I refuse to buy enough stuff to fill a warehouse?

Nabi Anita Evans

Putting Buddha-nature aside for a moment, how will an all-vegetarian temple diet set with my carnivore-nature? Will the four tablets a day worth of Beano that I packed be enough to stave off embarrassment? Without any formal training, will I know how to behave? Although I brought a cloth belt for the occasion and left my calfskin wallet at home, will my suede Rockports, even if I leave them outside, be an affront to sentient beings?

At sixty-seven, am I too old to hope for any great changes in my life, or is it, instead, that I am finally old enough? Why does the cab driver at the Amtrak station, when he spies this gray hair

lugging a backpack and sleeping bag, warn I "will never make it all across the University of Michigan campus and up and down all those hills," even though I know it is only two miles to the temple and I proceed to hike it in thirty-five minutes, barely winded? And why does that, more than anything else, make my day?

Monday, November 15, 2004
Free day at the temple: Where did I ever get the notion to take a big plastic bag and pick up all the litter it will hold on my afternoon walk back up Packard Road? Was it the sidewalks I saw on my way through this college town yesterday, awash in drifts of newspaper, battered pop cans, bright red or blue plastic cups, silvery shards of foil, Styrofoam take-out cartons, assorted small vehicle parts, empty cigarette lighters, and all the other castoffs of students too hurried to find a trash barrel? Or was the final straw for me the circle of cigarette butts, the last drag of mortals before seeking greater purity inside, that I noted just outside the temple gate? Does this odd little service to the world at large seem like a crazy act or the most sensible thing I can be doing with my time? Would a Zen master stoop for an empty Marlboro pack? But does it matter what it seems? Can't some paths to enlightenment simply benefit from a little spiffing up?

Tuesday, November 16, 2004
Why does a mokt'ak, waking me from a sound sleep at 6 a.m., sound like something out of prehistoric time? Is it OK to chant "Kwanseum posal" when I don't know what it means? (Come to think of it, didn't I used to chant "Kyrie eleison" in church without knowing what it meant?) How can I be at breakfast only an hour and a half after the morning sitting began when it felt like at least two hours of prostrations followed by two hours of meditating with my legs all twisted up under me?

And is it possible I'm enjoying this?

Wednesday, November 17, 2004
Work detail: How is it that I came here to get away from the burden of caring for a big old house, and I'm finding it strangely satisfying to do exactly the same kind of thing around the temple? Is it really just better to help others before yourself? Or is it because this, too, is only transitory, fleeting...?

Thursday, November 18, 2004
What next? Is "walking meditation" the farthest-out thing I've ever seen or what?

Friday, November 19, 2004
Why does Buddha have such long earlobes, and how come I never noticed this before?

Saturday, November 20, 2004
7:30 p.m. As I gaze out the third-floor, yoga room window on a Saturday night in a big college town, the streets alive with young people out in their cars looking for odd diversions, strange excitements, exotic brews still to be tasted, and new ways to blow their minds through ceaselessly ascending octaves of stimulation, when did I start feeling more sad for them than envious?

Sunday, November 21, 2004
Is it my imagination or, as I walk back to the train station, does it feel as if my load is lighter? Did a week of temple food two times a day agree with me after all? In a week of total immersion in a different culture, did I gain any lasting insights? Will I actually be able to get away from eating meat, affirm the world and all life, clean my plate, and live fully in the moment? With hardly any litter in sight, is it possible other people have started picking up trash along the sidewalk? If I study it for the rest of my life, will I ever understand Zen? Why am I already thinking of coming back here?

Zen: Is it the answer that is important? Or the question?

brown songbirds in the branches
puff up their feathers,
trying to be bigger than the cold

Kelly Shepherd
www.ravingpoets.com

Kongsim Rob Brown

death beside

William Ace Remas

It was so hot and still I left all the windows open. This was unusual. On our desert ranch, windows are normally closed tight to keep out the night.

The night's sounds filled my room. Insects rustled through dry leaves, the flutter of bat and birds' wings hummed now and again, an old truck on the highway a mile away blurred the still air, rabbits and kangaroo mice scratched and burrowed, and a lonely dog on the neighboring ranch barked distantly.

I enjoyed these sounds and fell asleep as if I were listening to a radio tuned to some special primeval channel. My sleep was somnolent, half dozing, half alert, dreaming and not dreaming at the same time, part in the bedroom, part floating like a ghost over the long and lonely desert. When a terrible howl and shrill, desperate screech bolted me from my bed, I at first thought I was dreaming. Soon I recognized the howling as a coyote, a real coyote. In fact I recognized the timbre of his growl as the coyote I heard occasionally on full moon nights. The desperate screech was new, however. Its expression of fear, pain, and utter despair was unmistakable. With nervous horror, no longer somnolent, I realized I had heard the last moments of a rabbit's life just outside my window.

Wild rabbits make a happy home on my ranch. They lounge on the lawn, burrow below fence posts, and generally pass to and fro without regard for my occasional appearances, knowing that I would never harm them. I had made them my friends and family. Each weekend when I returned to the ranch to repair rock walls and weed the driveway, I brought with me bags of baby carrots and red lettuce that I laid out like a sumptuous feast on a big stone by their burrows. In the morning when I checked the banquet area, invariably all of the delicacies were gone. The coyote at last, I understood, had been successful. A member of my rabbit family had succumbed to his patient stealth.

The next afternoon I was performing my weekly ritual of mowing the quarter-acre lawn

Toan José Castelao

that graces our rugged estate. The sun shone intensely. The air was hot in my nostrils. Out of a splendid desire for exercise and a stupid doggedness not to spend money, I mowed the lawn with an old rotary mower. Since the lawn slanted uphill, about half of the time I was pushing the mower up against gravity. This exertion, together with the heat, exhausted me.

As I flopped down carelessly to rest, I discovered I had lain beside the carcass of a small rabbit partially hidden in the long grass. No, not really a carcass, just some shreds of fur, a lone paw, and a small smear of blood. This must have been my friend of last night, the coyote's dinner.

I was too tired to jump away from these small bits of death, so I lay there panting. The sun burned my face, the wind cooled the sweat staining my t-shirt, and the aroma of the freshly mowed grass mixed pleasantly with the dusty dry air. I rested there oddly content with death beside me, though last night in the darkness I had been horrified by the pain I heard in my tiny friend's final screech.

Later I found a small finch on the patio, feet pointing to the heavens from where he had fallen, dead and stiff. With a shovel I moved him unceremoniously to the wild desert beyond the fence line so that his rotting corpse wouldn't attract more varmints to my patio.

That night in bed, though it was cooler, I left the windows open so that I could tune in again to the wild society outside, dealing death or escaping it. I was astounded to hear all of the munching and crunching, screeching, and stealthy advances of one creature trying to eat another or escaping someone's dinner plan.

From my bedroom window, with the night breeze fluttering the curtains slightly, I could look

Toan José Castelao

up at the bright, cold stars, silent and still, so far above this organic turmoil. I realized, as I gazed at Venus in the west, that I had been like the stars, cool and far removed from the business of death and survival. Without heed to the reckless nature of life, I had plunged into my activities with no regard for the inevitable.

The jaws of death are as close to me, and to all of us, as they were to my rabbit friend or the small finch whose grand flight ended in a leaden drop from the skies. So, too, can I drop from my lofty perch, felled by lord death without warning, without recognition of this last and most important event of this life.

So disturbed was I about my ignorance, I rousted myself from the house and sat on the patio not far from where I had found the bird. Alone in the desert darkness, except for the munchers and escapees who scurried in the bushes, I sat and waited for death, not just my death, but the death of all around me and all whom I know.

The most terrible thing about death is not my own but rather that of my family and friends. They will be gone one day, either preceding or following me. Contemplating this, I grew sad; tears welled up in my eyes. I wanted to howl like the coyote and screech with pain like the rabbit. There was no escape from this terrible realization. Death is beside me always. All my life I had ignored its shadow by averting my gaze to the pure heavens of my imagined life rather than watching the dark shadows that follow my feet in the dust.

regret regret?

At my age there is but one word to describe my mental state: regret. I regret having lived the life I have lived. I regret the people I harmed, either intentionally or unintentionally. I regret the debts that I acquired. I regret the focus on material well-being at the cost of my spirit. I regret not keeping my son home the night he never returned.

His absence breaks my heart. Now I realize that, even before that horrible night, my heart was already broken. I had gone too far down a road I didn't want to travel. I have allowed myself to come too close to the day of my death without fulfilling the purposes and promises I had dreamed about as a younger and happier man.

As I sit at a popular bakery and coffee shop downtown, idling away my morning over coffee and a Danish, I see other people, all my age, who exhibit evidence of the same mind of regret. They may cover it over with an air of worldliness, animation, or wisdom, but they are no more settled or happy than I am. Measuring their life with coffee spoons, they too think about a life better lived. Now secure financially, they spend their time planning vacations or investments. This is clever camouflage. They are desperate to assuage regret.

Then there are those times when regret captures us by surprise. Despite our efficient dedication to our distractions, regret for the life that might have been lived arises unbidden, vivid and unrelenting like an old war wound. We are halted

in our tracks, caught in the bright glare of our own clear wisdom. Staring blankly at the newspaper we've been reading or slowly stirring, stirring, stirring our coffee (although the sugar and cream have long ago melded indistinguishably with the black coffee), we muse about a life that didn't happen. A faint word heard over the din of the noisy espresso maker uncovers a dusty shoebox of old aspirations. If I had only the vision to make my son stay home that night, not out of fear, but out of the pure joy of being in his company.

Time is a myth. We have no time. We've never have had time. We have dreamt foolishly that we have time to make adjustments, to defer aspirations, to learn from error, to make amends, to love our family and friends. It is like a dream, isn't it, this life? In one moment we live in a world full of promise and youth, and in the next we're burdened with our recklessness. There is no past, no future, and never has been. Regret is realizing too late there is only now and it has always been that way. Memories are nothing but pain. When your son is gone, he is gone.

Regret is not just sadness, though there is much of that in it. A subtle joy slowly arises also, the joy of knowing that now I know. Events have unfolded. What used to be mystery is now history. The anxiety of uncertainty has dissolved into grim fact. There is no second-guessing, wishing, or daydreaming a person can do, unless crazy, when you know the facts. So it is with my son. I am prohibited from the foolish act of wishing he were still here because it is impossible that he could be.

While it offers only bare comfort, knowing what is certain helps the mind. Maybe that is why there is some grace in growing older. Gradually, as the years pass, we trade our dreams for reality. Where we were once hopeful and ambitious, we are now wise. We know how things are, and we know it was foolish to ever think that they are not what they are or that we could change what is into what I want. This wisdom, earned after so many wrong turns, misconceptions, and pain, is joy.

Can I say that regret is joy? Or perhaps a doorway to joy? Like many doorways, it may appear imposing and solid, but still it functions as a doorway, providing entry to a new place.

I am on slippery ground here. At anytime I can slip from one state to another. Such a balancing act, unfamiliar for most of my life, is difficult. I feel like it is dangerous. I can slip from joy to sadness in an instant. I fear banging my consciousness too hard on either.

Do I regret my regrets? Or can I choose to find joy in them? If I had the power to make a choice, I would choose to have my son back. But I don't have that choice. So I choose joy, the joy of having loved and known him, and keeping him still and always at my heart.

William Ace Remas, aged 60, lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife Marsha and son Eli. His first son Jacob died in a car accident at age 19 the night he returned from college for the holidays six years ago. Ace owns a small data processing company and has been active in his Buddhist community for nearly a decade. Originally from northern Nevada, he manages occasional meditation retreats in his desert home.

depression as when the sickness is the

Kongsa Adam Lowis

There are times when the smile of the Shakyamuni Buddha statue on the altar seems altogether sinister to me—a cosmic trick stringing us all along to the tune of a promise that, for all I know, may never be delivered. The bronze on my altar is an authentic Thai piece that I bought from a dealer in Venice Beach, California. Buddhas from Thailand are most often depicted with flames emanating from the top of the head. This particular style has always appealed to my aesthetic sense. It seems to express how the experience of samadhi is truly an illuminating fire. Shakyamuni sits there so comfortable and at ease in his fire with his impish little smirk while I tumble through time and space burning up in mine.

There are times when I have totally belligerent conversations with the man on the altar. "Hey you! What makes you so special? Why should I believe you?"

He replies by just sitting in pleasant abiding, not moving from the posture as if to say, "Don't believe me. The earth is my witness." And he never leaves that seat, and the right hand forever indicates the earth as witness.

A friend of mine who comes from a Jewish background tells me that there is a long-standing tradition of screaming at God (indeed one need only read the first five books of the Bible to discover that this is the truth). He laughs and seems thoroughly amused at how I seem to be screaming at the Buddha. He tells me there's a saying, "If God lived in a house, all His windows would be broken." I'm amazed that so much stained glass remains intact every time I walk by a church. Of course I know better than to hurl anything at the Buddha, I know it will just fall like flowers. I just wish he would teach me that trick.

Lately I've been moving through a depressed phase. There are times when I just can't get above the fog, and I'm all caught up in the sadness, malaise and anxiety. Just staying above ground and getting from one side of a day to the other seems draining. It's like being a spirit passing through the *Bardo:* You feel dead, everything looks pretty scary, and you don't know what's on the other side.

I've always been the type to grapple with questions of faith. I did so all through my Christian upbringing. Just because I've shifted from Protestant samsara into Buddhist practice does not cause the on-going boxing match with

Kongsim Rob Brown

doubt to diminish. And for this round, my ass is kicked.

I've heard our teacher, Haju Sunim, say, "Your own nature is the Buddha nature." My thought is, "Gee whiz, I didn't know Buddha was such a miserable S.O.B." Haju has also said, "The Buddha's Mahayana path encompasses everything in the known universe." If so, then it must also encompass my melancholy state and crisis of faith. There must then somehow be a truth to my resisting the truth and my relentless questioning of even basic tenants like the Three Jewels.

Still, I choose to remain alive; but why, I don't know. Times like these I keep thinking, Why bother? It repeats in my mind like a new *hwadu*. Sun is shining, birds are singing, and all I want to do is sleep. I can't get past the feelings of failure and worthlessness. All my efforts at creation seem to yield neither profit nor the results that I envision. To date I have not made a living at anything I have found to be meaningful and fulfilling, yet in between I keep living for the moments of applause. I've had the privilege of seeing my material published in places, and my credibility is building. Still, I'm so far from what I want—to be independent and self-supporting doing what I love. I keep thinking there must be something not right with me because I still feel the presence of, and still grapple with, the obstacles.

And Buddha sits smiling from within the fire, and I'm burning up in mine.

I believe I was twenty years old when I first became diagnosed as "bipolar." Most of the time I actually prefer not to think on this. Much of the time I also prefer not to be medicated. I am resistant to dealing with psychiatrists and drug companies. I want to believe that there is a different truth. Perhaps it is I, and ones like myself, who truly, fully embody what it is to be human. Whenever I look at an illustration of the six realms of existence, the human realm shows people both in the throes of torture and the heights of sensuous pleasure. The human realm is where the heavens and hells intersect—where we are actively destroying and actively creating—where one moment yields the heights of pleasure and another the depths of pain. Those of us challenged by this mood disorder certainly travel the extremes of both directions. And I believe there is a particular wisdom and insight that comes from traveling these extremes that we should not blind our eyes to nor medicate out of existence.

I once read somewhere that bodhisattvas travel through all the realms of experience that humans, animals, and gods have in order to arrive at the fullness of wisdom and compassion. So, even though in times like these I feel so off-track, I feel just a thread of hope that perhaps I am on the path to fully discovering compassion.

The second sentence of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* reads, "I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead." There is always something that precipitates these episodes of traveling through the doldrums. For Kerouac it was the break-up of a marriage. For me it was losing my job.

Recently I was fired from a job that was supporting me meagerly but well. I was afforded benefits for the first time in years. I was let go on the day it was all supposed to get better for me. I was to be starting in a better, higher-paying position with the daytime hours I'd been wanting for awhile. So when the boss told me that I was discharged, I refused to sign the document. I stormed angrily out of his office and the building while he ran after me shouting, "Adam! It's not worth it!"

My response to this was, "A white-bread, well-fed, chump-ass like you has no idea what it takes for a person like me to stay above ground!" After this I climbed to the top level of one of the parking structures in town and just stared out over the edge for awhile. I'd already failed at keeping my Buddhist restraint. My emotions were on overload. I didn't know whether to scream, cry, smash something, or jump off the structure. Eventually I was found by the police and rather violently escorted to psychiatric emergency.

After waiting out the days until my release, I returned home to my bewildered housemates who were wondering where the hell I'd been. Days went on, and I had a few moments where I felt clear and very much relieved. I said to myself, Yeah, I can do this. It's all going to be fine. I began practicing as a drummer with my friend, Chris, and a new bassist. We had high hopes for the trio. It all seemed to be going fine.

A short time later, the personality dynamics of our house began to decline. I wasn't going to be able to pay the rent anyway. I knew it was time for me to move on, yet I felt worthless. After all the progress I had made, just when it seemed that I was on the threshold of creating a more stable situation in my life, I was back to homeless, back to unemployed, back to couch surfing among friends and family. I then became ill, which complicated things even further. I decided to accept an offer to stay with an aunt and uncle here in Ann Arbor—which is better than being on the street but is a troublesome situation. This hurts me. I need more than anything to be independent so being back among these evangelical, fundamentalist Christians is somewhat bothersome to me.

All I can think about is how worthless I feel, everything I've done wrong, and everything I can't forgive myself for. All the feelings of worthlessness, sadness, and despondency catch up with me like a whirlwind I can't outrun. Adding insult to injury is the judgmental voice in my head saying, "You're Buddhist. You're better than this."

A Friday night arrives where I'm expected to read poetry to the music of another band I've come to know. I feel exhausted. There's no way I can handle performing. When I finally check back in with my trio, I learn that there's all manner of rumors going around that I've died, been jailed, etc.

I practice a few more times with these guys, but as I head into the week I withdraw completely. I don't leave the house. I don't answer calls: Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. Finally Wednesday evening I decide to venture out to a local blues jam where I sometimes break my chops. It turns out to be a disaster. I choke. On the first two songs I'm clumsy as hell and all over the place. At one point I drop a stick, and there's no spare where I can reach, so I fumble around for the one I drop. The bassist decides to point

Adding insult to injury is the judgmental voice in my head saying, "You're Buddhist. You're better than this."

out the fact that I blew it. I very nearly throw non-violence out the window. I want to throttle the guy. Instead I just walk off before finishing the set.

I remain bitter about this for a couple of days. At one point I was actually convinced I would never play drums again. Soon, however, I'm met with a realization about this whole episode. The bass player who decided to castigate my playing ability is indeed my own reflection. For days on end I've been punishing myself—entertaining my feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing. So it goes that when I venture something with an impure mind, I get impure results. My demons of self-deprecation manifested in flesh and blood on that very stage. This was my creation.

This same weekend I'm invited to read at our Buddha's Birthday poetry event, but I'm in a space where performance anxiety is too much for me. I show up afterwards, expecting a lecture on how disappointed everyone is, but when I arrive, Haju just greets me warmly, bows and says, "Happy Birthday!" I respond by looking at my shoes. She then grabs my arm and gives me just a warm, reassuring look in the eye—saying nothing, yet saying so much. I'm not feeling my Buddha-nature just now, but she reminds me that I've only been born just now and that something is to emerge from behind the cloud. It's a moment of silent transmission that my eyes were opened just enough to receive.

I don't in any way consider myself a good example of what a Buddhist should be. Although I've taken precepts and refuge, I'm not always entirely certain I should have. I may be playing for the team, but I often feel like the one white-knuckling on the bench. I'm quite often fearless to the point of reckless. Restraint is difficult at times, and I have a sensualist bent. I really like everything that feels good. There's this side of me that so much needs to be out loud and unrestrained, yet my wildness keeps bringing me back here—to this hellish place.

I once read an interview with a famous writer/actress who described her bipolar illness by saying she feels as though she is three people: the practical one who builds her house, the flamboyant, fun-loving person who decorates it, and the ornery world-weary crank who has to live in it. This mirrors exactly how I feel.

There are times when the practice for me is just being with the sick, sad feelings, just waiting until I emerge on the other side. If I can't swim, then I try to embrace the drift. These days I'm not smiling so much, but I feel the burn. I find my hope in having faith in impermanence. Right now, I really don't believe in anything else.

And Buddha keeps sitting in the fire smiling his madman smile.

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Amanda Innes, *Dumpster,* acrylic on canvas.
Backcover: Calligraphy by Rev. Toan José Castelao

constantly question your true nature

Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom

We are happy, energetic, helpful Buddhists!

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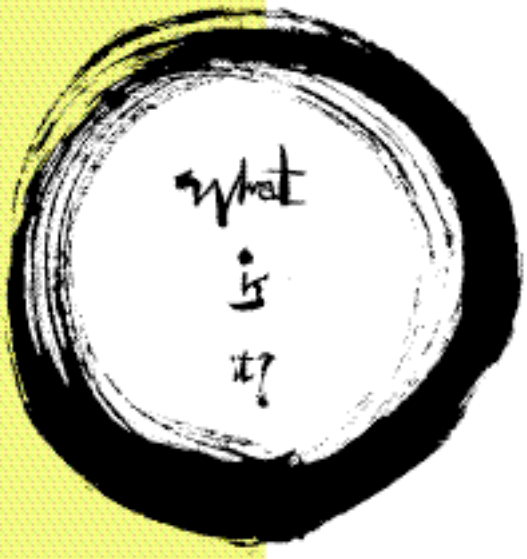

Sunday Public Meditation Services 9:30 a.m. & 4:00 p.m.
Meditation Courses, Retreats, Visitor's Program,
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Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom is a North American Buddhist order founded in 1967 by Venerable Samu Sunim, a Korean Zen master. The Society's Dharma work promotes the non-dual gate of awakening in the everyday life of ordinary people.

ALL WELCOME!