

PRIMARY POINT

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SOEN SA NIM GOES TO CHINA



Soen Sa Nim and Chinese Zen Master enjoy a round of Dharma combat on Puto Shan Island.

by Diana Lynch

In September Zen Master Seung Sahn became the first Korean Buddhist monk to go into China since the Communist takeover. South Korea has had no diplomatic relations with China since then, and perhaps Soen Sa Nim planted some seeds of reconciliation and trust that the political people have not been able to. Traveling with him on the 3-week trip were 20 people, including monks and laymen, Koreans, Canadians and Americans, old students and new.

We visited temples that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and which were now being rebuilt by the government: an amazing statement about death and re-birth, about change. We met with old monks who not only had been forced out of their temples to work in factories or fields for up to 20 years, but also to give up their identification as monks and any semblance of formal practice. Yet you could see in their calm and smiling faces that they had attained what real practice is about.

The pilgrimage began with long train rides through the south of China, from Hong Kong to Canton, then to Shao Guan where Nan Hwa, the Temple of the Sixth Patriarch is located. We passed rivers, often with water buffalo cooling off in them, and lush green rice paddies interspersed with taro and vegetable. We saw peasants working everywhere, mountains poking straight up exactly as in Chinese paintings. The magnificence of the country transfixed us all.

In this early part of the trip we got acquainted with the excellent guide supplied

by the China Youth Travel Service, Mr. Zhao, who was very open and knowledgeable about his country's good and could-be-improved-upon parts. He was very helpful to us because few of us knew very much about China, except for John Chan, (an American born Chinese from Berkeley who is writing his PhD thesis on the history of China and who worked out much of our itinerary), and Jon Solomon (a young Zen student from Cambridge who had learned fluent Chinese at Brown University and from having lived in Taiwan and visited in

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A GENTLE RAIN: The unremarkable visit of Thich Nhat Hanh

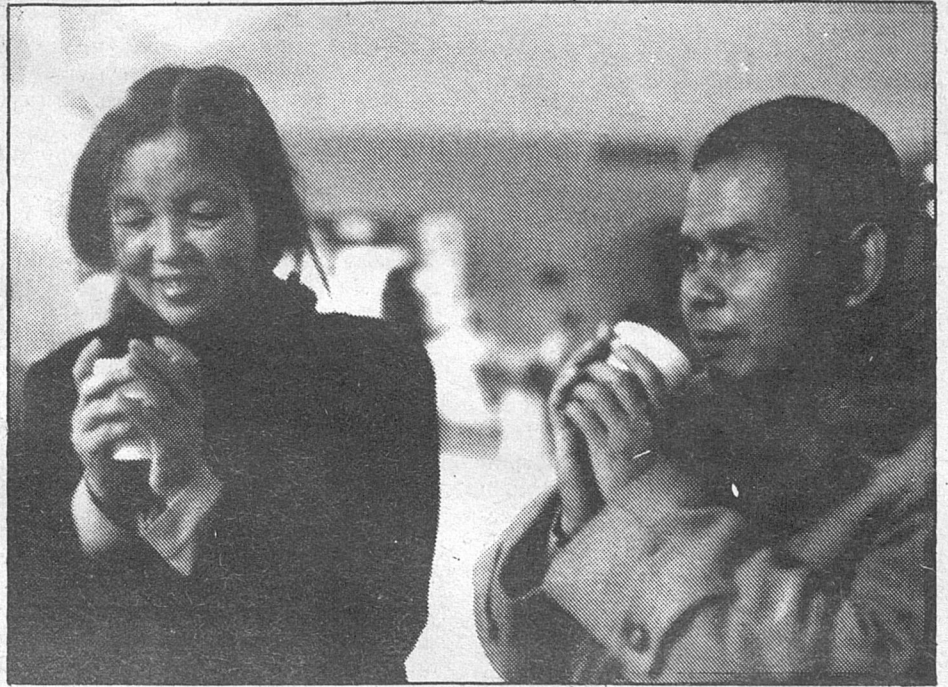
by Ellen Sidor

For seven days in September the hustle-bustle of the Head Temple of the Kwan Um Zen School where some 40 Zen students and their families live and train, was subject to the gentle influence of Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, the renowned poet, scholar and peace activist. Providence Zen Center, his East Coast host for this rare visit to the United States, provided the setting for a 4-day mindfulness workshop and several public talks. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship coordinated his travel schedule.

Living in exile in France since 1966, the slim, collected Zen Master has been an untiring advocate of peace through a change of hearts and minds. He is the leading voice of "Engaged Buddhism" and a founder of the Tiep Hien Order, the Order of Interbeing. About 45 people attended his 4-day workshop, held in the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery on the PZC grounds, in which he taught mindful walking meditation and how to use mindfulness in everyday life. He held tea ceremonies and a precept ceremony to which many children were invited. During his stay, he also gave a scholarly talk on the Heart Sutra.

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Photo by Ruth Klein



THE SWORD THAT KILLS AND THE SWORD THAT GIVES LIFE:

Finding balance in Zen practice

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

The following talk was drawn from a lively question and answer session between Soen Sa Nim and his students at the 3rd Kwan Um Zen School Congress. Master Dharma Teacher George Bowman was the moderator for this session. The School Congress, which takes place every July at the Providence Zen Center, is a major gathering of Soen Sa Nim's students from all over the

world for several days of teaching, School reports, and ceremonies.

GB: Last night we met in small groups to discuss the most important issues of our practice. The major issue was balance: how to find it in the midst of formal practice as Zen students, families, jobs, relationships, etc.

There are two formal aspects to Zen practice: the killing sword and the sword that gives life. The killing sword means how do we give ourselves to the situation? How, without repressing, do we let go of our condition, opinion and situation and really offer ourselves to what's going on in the moment? For most of us that requires a fair

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The next issue of PRIMARY POINT will focus on the "Balancing of American Buddhism" conference held at the Providence Zen Center on September 14 and 15. Included will be talks by Zen Master Prabhava Dharma, Ruth Denison, Ana Pema Chodron, Dr. Joanna Macy and excerpts from the lively Saturday night panel discussion.

THE SWORD THAT KILLS AND THE SWORD THAT GIVES LIFE

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amount of hard work. Sometimes it's painful and difficult. If we try to live that way all the time, only being "good" or only taking certain roles, most of us find that it doesn't work. We become brittle, irritable, out of balance. We do many things with such a charge behind them that we put ourselves in precarious situations.

The other aspect is the sword that gives life: the experience of empowering ourselves, doing things which come naturally, that we love to do and find fulfillment in. When we do too many of these things, most of us get a certain softness or flatness. There's no keen working edge to our practice. It's hard to believe in ourselves if we go too far to that side.

So there's a swing between "putting it all down" in formal practice, life at a Zen Center, the demands of family and job and relationships, and on the other side, empowering ourselves and being happy so that our lives are workable, so that we can be the kind of people in the world that other people would like to be.

These two aspects come up in many different dimensions. On the simplest level, they arise with the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, sitting completely and receiving experience on the cushion, and receiving what comes up in family life and all the other areas. How to balance all this was the major issue that came out of last night's meetings.

In talking with Soen Sa Nim now, it would be nice if we could get into the spirit of heckling him a little. It's hard to do that, because whenever you ask him a question you are taking your life in your hands. I am reminded of the relationship between Ananda and the Buddha. The Buddha would give long Dharma talks and then Ananda would say, "Yes, but what about men and women and what goes on between them?" The Buddha would make some reply, then Ananda would say, "Well, it's all well and good for you to say that, you're the Buddha (or the Zen Master). People fly you around everywhere and everyone bows to you, but we're here, slugging it out in the trenches. How about us?" so a little bit of that spirit would be helpful. Soen Sa Nim, last night many people talked about balance and doing hard training. How do we find balance?

SSN: Many people are confused about what their job is: how much they should practice, how much they should take care of their family. Sometimes this gets unbalanced. So we must talk about our direction. Why are we living in this world? Direction is very important.

If your direction is clear, then your relationships will be clear, your outside job will be clear, your inside practicing job will be clear. If your direction is not clear, it means you are holding some opinion, condition or situation. Then already you have lost what is important. Many people want to drink alcohol and have a good time. If this mind appears, you cannot have a correct relationship to your family or your inside and outside jobs. Your practicing will not be clear. Nothing will be clear.

Everybody has this mind: I like going to movies, I like ice cream, good restaurants, going around everywhere. Single people want a girlfriend or boyfriend to have a good time with. We have a lot of this "wanting a good feeling" mind. And good feeling is sometimes necessary, but first, what is most important? If we understand this, then family, relationships, job, practi-

cing will be no problem. Everything will be correct and balanced.

Q: How can we balance things which help our and other people's spirits grow, like music and art, that are not just having a good time or doing formal practice?

SSN: If you live outside a Zen Center, you decide how often to go. If you go two or three evenings a week and do hard practice, then maybe one evening you want music, one evening of seeing friends, maybe one special evening like yoga or something. If your center is strong, you already have everything. If your center is not strong, then you want many things: music, art, sculpture, tai chi, karate, connecting with other religions. Then your head gets complicated. Is this necessary?

If your center is strong, in one week you can do 10 or 20 different jobs without difficulty. Then coming to a Zen Center once a week would be enough. But if your center is not strong, coming to a Zen Center more often is very important, because you will not be having a correct relationship to your family, your outside job, your music or anything. An eminent teacher once said, "When you drink water, understand whether it is cold or hot." Everyone understands, you understand, whether your own center is strong or not. If it's not, then coming often to a Zen Center is necessary. Having a clear direction is very important.



Soen Sa Nim meeting an Abbot of a temple in China.

Q: Many people have responsibilities outside of a Zen Center which they cannot give up. But if they don't come often, their center will not remain strong.

SSN: Then you must decide about practicing at home and make a schedule of waking up early. Maybe you want to sleep until 6:30, but you must wake up at 4 when everyone else is asleep and do bows. Your center will become strong. Try that. It's difficult, but you can practice at home.

GB: Recently I was at Jakusho Kwong Roshi's center at Sonoma Mountain and he talked about what happens when they have training periods there. Whether it's a week training period or longer, people from the community come to a meeting at the center and work out a practice schedule for themselves at home. Everyone in the sangha together decides that they're going to take this time, whether it's a week or a month, to make more of an effort. They might come to the zendo once a week or not at all, but everyone does it together. The people who can't come at all do a little more than they ordinarily would.

SSN: I like Richard Shrobe, one of our new Master Dharma Teachers, very much because he has great love for his family and is also very responsible to his job. When he would occasionally come to the New York Zen Center, his center was very strong. I would ask him, "Do you have any problems?" He would say, "No problems."

So as an example, his not coming very often to the Zen Center wasn't a problem because his direction is clear. Before he came here, he used to go around to a lot of yoga centers and other meditation groups. Then he came here and found his correct way. He found every day life practicing. Taking care of family and his outside job, that is Zen. Moment to moment, he is practicing Zen. I understand his mind.

Why separate your family, your job, and Zen? Master Dharma Teacher Bobby Rhodes is an old student and she doesn't do

as much formal practice as before, but every day her practice is to take care of her family and go to her job. Even if you are a very good student, if you check your family, your job, your feelings, your condition, you will have a problem. So don't check, just do it, ok?

Zen is every day life. Every day mind is Zen mind. If you keep this mind, no problem. Keep your direction clear and try. Make a mistake, try again. Lots of thinking, try again! Even if you live at a Zen Center for a long time and do many retreats and hard training, but you still check yourself and hold onto things, still your life will be unhappy and unclear.

Moment to moment, just do it: that's our direction. That is Zen. Then your family and your outside job and your practice are never separated. They are the same direction, the same point. Try it. If you cannot do it, then you must do bows many times, a thousand times a day.

Q: Many of the people who run Zen Centers and the School get over-tired from all the responsibility and worry and emergencies, then they feel "I don't like this. I don't want to practice. I don't want to do my job." We call this "burn-out." What can we do about it?

SSN: So you have a baby. It's your baby. This baby has many problems. At night it cries, shits, or crawls around a lot. That's

not so bad if you just take care of it. So the Zen Center is your baby. If it becomes separate from you, this "I don't like it" mind appears. What is your direction, the purpose of your life? You must take responsibility for the whole universe, for all beings. You must find your original job, then this "burn-out" mind will not appear. If you hold onto your situation, your condition, your opinion, then this mind appears.

This isn't a good example, but when I stayed in Korea, I had no problems. I was a Zen Master and everyone took care of me—kept my rooms clean, did my laundry,

Taking care of family and outside job, that is Zen, moment to moment practicing.

brought me food. Many people liked me, came to see me and took me around in good cars. I stayed in beautiful houses, going anywhere was no problem.

When I came to the United States I had no money, so I went to work in a laundry. Nobody understood that I was a Zen Master. I was a laundry-working man, carrying heavy loads of clothes to this store and that, picking up all the dirty clothes, washing them, being sent all around every day. At night I had a lot of pain and fatigue, but I always practiced. My older students understand this!

Some other old monks who have come to the United States to work found it very hard. They wept and were too tired to practice. This means the mind is very important. I never worked this hard with my body in Korea, not just 8 hours a day, but 12 hours a day at the laundry job. But even with the hard work, I always practiced bowing and chanting in the morning and evening. If I didn't work at any outside job, I couldn't get money to pay for my apartment and food. It was difficult. But that was my job.

Q: I understand that. If you have a baby of 1 or 2 years old, it gets up in the middle

of the night. But as it gets older, you don't have to do that anymore. Also, when you came to this country, you had to work to get money, it wasn't for the rest of your life. There are some people (whether or not they are living in a Zen Center) who are pushing themselves very hard, beyond what they can really do. Then they burn out.

SSN: So direction is very important. If your direction is not clear, burnout appears. If your direction is clear, it never appears. Even if you are dying, if your direction is clear, it's no problem. So we practice. If you have energy, no problem. If you have no energy, burnout appears. Every day correct practicing is necessary.

Earlier this summer I was very sick before going to Paris. Breathing was so difficult, I almost died one night. Then I went to Paris on a charter flight and there were many problems: standing in long lines, carrying a lot of baggage, so I got very sick again. My body had no energy. Diabetes means not much pain inside, but having no energy. Everything is uninteresting. "I don't care" mind appears. If you have a lot of energy, helping other people is no problem. So getting energy is very important.

Q: How did you get your energy back?

SSN: I am talking to you now. That is how I get energy. If today or tomorrow, I die, no problem. Worry only means losing energy—"Oh, what shall I do?" Worry is number one bad. If you don't worry about anything, then whenever you die, no problem. Only follow the situation, then slowly it will get better.

Q: All of these questions that people asked you about balance and burn-out and getting a strong center, and having a clear direction, you always answer, "If you have a clear direction." So my question is, how do I get clear direction?

SSN: So I ask you, why do you eat everyday?

Q: I haven't the foggiest idea. (Laughter)

SSN: That's your direction. Why do you eat everyday? For what?

Q: I understand your question, but I don't know the answer.

SSN: You have no answer? Then you don't understand your direction.

Q: Right! (Laughter)

SSN: Then I will make your direction clear. Everyday before bowing we say, "Sentient beings are numberless, we vow..."

Q: "to save them."

SSN: Good! That's your direction. If only your mouth is saying it, you are not doing it. So do it.

Q: But when I say, "to save all beings," it's not true.

SSN: Why isn't it true?

Q: Because I...

SSN: You are checking your mind. Don't check, ok? Just do it! I eat everyday, so only "sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all." So I eat. Then this thinking appears, "That's not true." That's what I mean by checking.

"I vow to save them all" means when you're doing something, just do it, moment to moment. That is all. Moment to moment keep the correct situation, the correct function, the correct relationship. If someone in front of you is very hungry, what can you do? Don't care? Everyone understands correct situation, correct function, only they cannot do it! We understand it only in our speech. If someone in front of you is hungry, give them food. If they are thirsty, give them a drink. Understand?

If you go to New York City to 42nd Street, there are many people begging, but other people just pass them by. If you have money, even if it's only ten cents, give it to them. That is helping. But we cannot do even that.

Doing is very important. Small or big help, it doesn't matter. Just do something. If you understand this, you must try, then your understanding becomes wisdom. If we don't try, then understanding is only understanding and cannot help our true self, our direction, our life, our practice, or save all beings. So only do it. Don't check your mind. That's very important. □