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## Venerable Hyon Gak Sunim

### Ji Do Poep Sa Nim (Guide to the Way)

Venerable Hyon Gak Sunim was born Paul Muenzen in 1964 to a family of devout Catholics in New Jersey, U.S.A. His mother is a PhD in biochemistry, and his father was an executive at a prominent American computer company, and later founded his own company. He has eight brothers and sisters. He is currently the Head Teacher of the Zen hall at 500 year-old Hwa Gye Sah Temple in the Sam Gak Sahn Mountain range, outside [Seoul](#), South Korea. In August 2001, he received *inka*, validating him as a Zen teacher, by Zen Master Seung Sahn, the 78<sup>th</sup> Patriarch in a lineage stretching back to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Educated in philosophy and literature at Yale University (Class of 1987) and comparative religions at Harvard Divinity School ('92), Ven. Hyon Gak Sunim was ordained in 1992 in the temple of the Sixth Patriarch, Nam Hwa Sah Temple on Chogye Mountain, in Guangzhou, People's Republic of China: he was the first Westerner to be ordained in China since the Communist Revolution. (The name he received from Zen Master Seung Sahn, "Hyon Gak," means "endlessly profound enlightenment.") He received Bikkhu precepts at the Diamond Altar of Tong Do Sah Temple in Korea, one of the most sacred sites in the nation, and has been doing training in various remote mountain places, including 3 intensive 100-day solo retreats and some 15 group 3-month intensive meditation retreats.

He has compiled and edited several of Zen Master Seung Sahn's books, including *The Whole World is a Single Flower* (Tuttle, 1992), *The Compass of Zen* (Shambhala Publications, 1997), *Only Don't Know* (Shambhala, revised 1999), and, most recently, *Wanting Enlightenment is a Big Mistake* (Shambhala, 2006).

Most recently, he translated the 500 year-old classic of So Sahn Dae Sa, *The Mirror of Zen* (Shambhala, 2007), into English for the first time.

Ven. Hyon Gak Sunim is also the author of the Korean bestseller, *From Harvard to Hwa Gye Sah Temple*, which has been one of the best-selling books in the Republic of Korea for the last five years. To date, it has sold over 1,000,000 copies, and translations are planned for Chinese and Japanese. It is a very personal, at times very humorous tale of his life in America, his fundamental questions about the nature of human existence haunting him from childhood through years of Catholic school education, through schooling in philosophy and literature at Yale and Harvard, to his becoming a monk under one of the leading Zen teachers of our time. The book is widely credited with leading a revival in interest in Korean Buddhism.

He donated all of the royalties from this bestseller to his teacher, Great Zen Master Seung Sahn, to help build Mu Sang Sah Temple in Kye Ryeong Sahn Mountain.

Ven. Hyon Gak Sunim is also the editor or translator of several best-selling translations into Korean of Zen Master Seung Sahn's English-language books.

Presently, as the Head Teacher of the Seoul International Zen Center at Hwa Gye Sah Temple, he is Zen Master Seung Sahn's official representative at the Head Temple. He leads three-month intensive retreats twice annually, and is much in demand as a public speaker throughout Korea, Asia, and many parts of the West.

The former Buddhist Chaplain at Harvard University, Ven. Hyon Gak Sunim has given public talks at Harvard University, Yale University, Oxford University, Columbia University, New York University, Brown University, Universite de Paris, University of London, among many others, in addition to colleges, divinity schools, and countless temples throughout Korea.