***"The Formless Track is an album of rhythmic Dharma seeds. Like rolling prayer wheels, these 12 techno-songs spin admonitions for practice, for waking up and travelling the Buddha Way." Hyon Gak Sunim***

**Arman Ray** is Chris Taylor a UK fine artist and music producer who has exhibited in the UK and overseas. He has worked mostly in Art & Design education and was involved in the creation of two outstanding Faculties of Design.

He was a researcher in Electronic Design Systems in the 80s and joined the national education team at The Design Council as the Education Officer for the UK Midlands in the 90s. He continued throughout this time to exhibit fine art work before returning to teaching full time.

He has had long involvement in Buddhism since the late 70s and been a longtime sangha member of the OBC which is a western Soto Zen order founded by the late Roshi Jiyu Kennett.

He switched to music production in 2014 when looking for a new challenge and signed to WEATNU Records in 2021. After releasing several EPs he approached Hyon Gak Sunim in 2020 to collaborate in making an album that would bring authentic Zen teaching to a new and different audience.

**Hyon Gak Sunim** is a modern Zen Master who was ordained over 30 years ago by the legendary Zen Master Seung Sahn of the Kwan Um School of Zen. An earth shattering insight of awakening was later confirmed by Zen Master Seung Sahn and in 2001 Hyon Gak Sunim was publicly authorised to bring these teachings to the world.

**"Sunim"** was born Paul J. Muenzen in 1964 to a family of devout Catholics in New Jersey, U.S.A. He was educated in literature, literary theory, and philosophy at Yale University (Class of 1987) and comparative religions at Harvard Divinity School, where he received the degree of Master of Theological Studies in 1992.

Hyon Gak Sunim became a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1989 while studying in Cambridge, Mass., and lived for several years at the Cambridge Zen Center. He was ordained by his Teacher in 1992 in China, at the Temple of the Sixth Patriarch, on Chogye Mountain: he was the first Westerner to be ordained in the People’s Republic of China since the Communist Revolution. He has been doing training in various remote mountain places in Asia, including 3 intensive 100-day solo meditation retreats and some forty 3-month intensive meditation retreats (*ango*).

In August 2001, in a public ceremony at Hwa Gye Sah Temple, in the mountains outside Seoul, Sunim was publicly tested in Dharma combat before an assembly of monks and nuns who had just completed the Summer Kyol Che, and received *inka* (formal approval of enlightenment, and certification of teaching authorization) from Zen Master Seung Sahn. In 1,700 years of Asian tradition, *inka* means one is a *Soen Sa* (Jap.: *Zenji*), or Zen master. (The Kwan Um School of Zen — from which Sunim made himself independent in 2010 — requires seven additional years of organizational service, regional recommendations from appointed bodies, and committee approval for recognition in their 45 year-old organization’s teaching orthodoxy.

At the conferral of his authorization of *inka* on Hyon Gak Sunim, Zen Master Seung Sahn said to the assembly, in Korean, “This is a clear mind. If anyone wants to know how to do this kind of Dharma combat, this is what you just saw.”

In 2002, Zen Master Seung Sahn appointed Hyon Gak Sunim to be the Guiding Teacher of the Zen Hall at Hwa Gye Sah Temple, thereby becoming his official teaching representative at the temple where Zen Master Seung Sahn had been based for 50 years, and where he died in November 2004. During that time, Sunim was also his Teacher’s secretary.

In 2003, Zen Master Seung Sahn informed his most senior Western disciple then in residence at Hwa Gye Sah, Dae Bong Sunim, that he wished to confer full formal Transmission of Dharma on Hyon Gak Sunim. (Though the process for this in the Kwan Um School of Zen requires 7 years of waiting since conferral of *inka*, for the student to begin visiting teachers in other traditions to be tested, Zen Master Seung Sahn acted to bypass this process by a full five years, as he had done for several others before.) He instructed Dae Bong Sunim to arrange for Hyon Gak Sunim to visit teachers in Japan and elsewhere, so that he could confer formal Transmission in the Kwan Um tradition much earlier. Hyon Gak Sunim had “passed” one such test with one of the pre-eminent Zen Masters in Japan, when Zen Master Seung Sahn entered Nirvana in November 2004.

In 2010, perceiving a limiting institutional rigidity which he felt to be incompatible with the edgy, spontaneous heart of Zen’s expedient means, Sunim decided to teach independently of the Kwan Um School of Zen’s hierarchy-structure, while continuing to remain faithful to the extraordinary teaching technologies of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Yet he often sends his students to Kwan Um retreats, and a great many Kwan Um students and teachers often correspond and visit with him to get guidance in their practice. Zen Master Dae Bong — one of the three “regional Zen Masters” at the top of the Kwan Um hierarchy — officiated at the Opening Ceremony for the Zen Center Regensburg e.V in 2016, and returned to officiate at a formal Precepts Ceremony there in 2019.

Sunim is often cited in Korean media with leading a revival of interest in Buddhism in Korean society in the 21st-century, especially among the young and educated. His multi-million bestselling book, *From Harvard to Hwa Gye Sah Temple* (1999), is regarded as the first major Buddhist bestseller in Korean Buddhist history; and his editing, translation, and teaching of several texts by Zen Master Seung Sahn made him one of the most recognized and influential voices in modern Korean Buddhism. The Education Department of the 1,700 year-old Chogye Order was notably quoted in media that “it is believed that over 100 Koreans have left home [become monks or nuns] crediting his bestselling book that was first published at the end of 1999.” Since his ordination in 1992, three temples in Korea were donated to Sunim; he gave all three temples to other monks and nuns. He transferred the royalties for all of his Korean-language books directly back to the sangha.

Due to his renown, Sunim became overwhelmed with demands in Korean society. Over-burdened by the excessive expectations, and weary of the politics of institutionalized Buddhism, but mostly finding great damage to his ability to maintain a strong, consistent practice of meditation, Sunim left Korea for the West in 2009/10, and settled in Germany, where he is based today.