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**Q. You are an American Zen master from Korea but are now based in Germany. That seems a little unusual. Tell me a little about yourself......**

**HYON GAK SUNIM** I was born in the USA, to a typical middle-class family. Very Catholic and yet with a scientific background. When a precious family member died at an early age, my religious upbringing was severely tested. “Why are we born? Why must we die?” After university, deep readings in Emerson, Schopenhauer sent me to the silence of Zen.

I met the teachings of the great Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1989, and attended my first 90-day retreat in the mountains of Korea in 1990. Ordained in China secretly by my Teacher in 1992 I proceeded to do many intensive retreats in the Zen temples of Korea. An intensive solo retreat in 1992 enabled an earth-shattering spiritual opening. I knew then I had to devote every cell of my Being to transmitting this experience to others.

Some books I wrote in Korea became the first Buddhist bestsellers in Korean history and unfortunately I became a well known public figure. This was not helpful to my life as a simple monk so I decided to return to the West after my Teacher entered Nirvana.

I founded the Zen Centre Regensburg center directly over the spot where the Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote sections of “The Meditations”, by the banks of the Danube. This is my residence when I am not travelling or teaching.

**Q. I understand you are releasing an album of Zen inspired pop songs. How did that come about and who is this music for?**

**ARMAN RAY** I havebeen interested in Zen for many years and hear the word Zen used in ways that have little relation to the practice itself - "I am feeling very Zen today" for example. So a truer understanding of Zen has largely been lost in the popular culture. This album is an attempt to inject genuine teaching into a form understood by all - music. This is why the words are so important here. We have avoided the abstraction of bells, flutes and chants more usually heard in the new age/ambient genre.

This journey began in 2020 when I came across Hyon Gak Sunim via his "What is Zen" Youtube video and asked him if I could turn it into a music video. This led to his permission to sample his talks to make into an album. I spent six months transcribing those talks from which I could craft the lyrics and a further two years producing the music itself. Every track has a theme and a story.

**SUNIM** These songs are for anyone who is seeking the nature of mind, which is the very nature of reality itself. I think of a person somewhere, lingering in their confusion, who might hear one word from this and be inspired to look deeper into their own mind.

I am reminded of the story of Layman No. Before he became the Sixth Patriarch, and therefore one of the great masters of Zen, Layman No was a young man selling firewood in the marketplace of ancient China. One day, while carrying a stack of wood he had gathered in the mountains, by chance he heard a monk chanting “The Diamond Sutra”. When he heard the words, “Simply do not attach to any empty thought arising in the mind,” his mind suddenly opened — he attained the nature of reality.

If this recording is in any way successful, it will function as that monk in the marketplace of old China, chanting out words of Dharma that stick in a young man or woman’s mind somewhere and hopefully help them to find the Dharma. This is the way of Zen.

**Q. So where can people hear this music?**

**ARMAN RAY** The album is available on all the usual music purchase sites plus this website has all the links anyone might need and a great deal of content to explore.

https://www.theformlesstrack.armanraymusic.co.uk/home

**Q. Sunim. Where can we find out about your teaching and work?**

**SUNIM** There are many links to my teaching on the above website.

Importantly my students have recently produced this **Online Course in Zen**, for those who wish to learn Zen meditation, step by step, in clear and uncomplicated language.

The first course (“Zen Meditation: The Basics”) instructs on the basics of building a Zen practice: posture, breath, working with thoughts/emotions, and using “the Great Question”. The second course (“The Novice”) is a six-week set of guided meditations, dealing with obstacles and hindrances in the practice, leading to a silent, non-guided meditation practice: the path of Zen.

Both courses can be accessed here:

<https://www.mirrorofzen.com>

I have recorded several chants that can be used for peoples’ daily practice — both as chants, and as mantras. They are available for free on **SoundCloud**:

<https://soundcloud.com/mirrorofzen>

**Arman Ray + Hyon Gak Sunim** We sincerely hope that people find this music of merit. We have created it to move both body and mind. We hope it may do both for as many with ears to hear and eyes to see.

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