

# The Korea Herald

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## Web-surfing Buddhist monks search for truth

Ven. Hyunjin writes of a funny incident that happened recently. He upgraded to the latest model mobile phone equipped to ring with different melodies for family and friends who called. As he gazed contentedly at his brand-new purchase, it suddenly rang with a woman's voice saying, "Darling, answer the phone!" as apprentice monks stared at him suspiciously.

Just another day in the life of Buddhist monks at Haein Temple. The new book "Sanmun, 10 Chiin-ri" shows the current address, as the title indicates, of modern disciples who left home and headed for the mountain to search for truth.

Through amusing stories, the book blurs the boundary between the religious and the secular and reveals the most spiritual moments to be also the most human.

"Most monks today drive cars, own mobile phones and surf the Web," Ven. Hyunjin writes. Practicing Buddhism is not refusing to drive a car but taking the act of driving as a form of practicing Buddhism.

So the monks at Haein Temple seek transcendence through the ordinary: doing the laundry each morning, making kimchi each fall and patrolling the temple each night to protect the Tripitika Koreana.

The monks are crazy about soccer and have their own playing field. Sometimes they enjoy coffee instead of green tea. They seek salvation, but they, too, are human and live in the world around them.

Yet the monks find wisdom now and then in the most unexpected places. Ven. Hyunjin writes of the time when they hiked through the mountain in a downpour. As the waters swelled, they carefully crossed a stream, but one of the apprentice monks lost a rubber shoe in the torrent. At the next stream, he floated the other rubber shoe away too.

"When I'd lost just one shoe, I was so worried. But now that I've gotten rid of both shoes, I feel so peaceful," he said, barefoot and happy.



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헤럴드경제

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Written in the outhouse of the temple are three Chinese characters full of another kind of wisdom: "Jin Il Bo," or "Please step closer."

The book is like the laughing sutra with its sense of humor, but the seriousness of the devotees is never in doubt. The decision to leave home is a personal revolution of sorts that poses fundamental questions about one's identity and purpose.

The diverse stories of how each of the inhabitants of Haein Temple came to the mountain constitute one of the most moving parts of the book. It tells of their backgrounds and difficulties, about having to convince skeptical family members, and the pains and joys of being on the path.

The attitude of the book is always warm. It never insists upon the teachings of a particular religion. It only asks: What is the future of Buddhism in these changing times? We, in the hustle and bustle of the world, can see through the book how these seekers of truth live and why they are precious.

As Ven. Hyunjin writes, "We monks are not stuffy people from a distant past. We are your close neighbors, living in the present age."

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