

# NEW CHAN FORUM

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## Paths To Enlightenment?

Do our retreats make any difference? Do they lead to an insight into enlightenment? Or are they merely spiritual hobbies in an age lacking in true wisdom? Although the Western Chan Fellowship is increasing in size and we offer a uniquely wide range of retreats of several types led by accomplished teachers, do our practitioners and local leaders truly understand the implications of the paths we attempt to follow? In this edition of our journal we provide deeply reflective texts in order that we can refocus where necessary on the demands that Chan makes on us as individuals – whether in groups, on committees, on retreat, in solitary reflection, trekking in the mountains or in the hassle of everyday life. Whether an institution is large or small, in Chan it is only individual motivation and personally self-aware criticism that makes any real difference. Consider your personal case!

Chuan-Deng Jing-di

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## Meditation and Personal Disclosure:

### The Western Zen Retreat

John Crook

*Supreme accomplishment is to realize immanence without hope. (Tilopa <sup>1</sup>)*

*In the last couple of years several people have asked me to contribute something on the Western Zen Retreat to the NCF. This was indeed the founding retreat practised at the Maenllwyd before Shi fu came there and the WCF was founded. We prefer all practitioners to begin by attending one of them before proceeding to other Chan retreats, Silent illumination and Koan etc. This is because in the WZR it is impossible to avoid an essential self-confrontation that can easily be avoided in a practice focussed solely on meditative sitting. A study of the manner in which Chan Masters have taught shows that self-confrontation is the way to opening a door to Dharma understanding based in a process that negates self-importance entirely. This is not a path that makes sense to many in our present individualistic age – yet it is the foundation of spiritual wisdom.*

*It is time therefore to take a further look at the WZR. I find the article I wrote for the book “Space in Mind” in 1990<sup>2</sup> still rings with an original freshness that does well as an introduction. I have simply updated it for our consideration today. Furthermore, it leads on effectively into Ron Henshall’s scholarly critique of experiences in these and similar retreats. Hopefully, it will stimulate contemporary retreatants to reflect carefully on the nature of what they are attempting.*

The Vietnamese Buddhist writer Thich Nhat Hanh (1974) has had this to say about Zen in the West:

*Zen does not yet exist in the West as a living tradition. Many monks are teaching the practice of Zen there, but this practice remains oriental; foreign to western culture. The fact is that Zen has not yet been able to find roots in this soil. Cultural, economic and psychological conditions are different. One cannot become a practitioner of Zen by imitating the way of eating, sitting or dressing of the Chinese or Japanese practitioners. Zen is life; Zen does not imitate. If Zen one day becomes a reality in the West, it will acquire a Western form, considerably different from Oriental Zen.*

The creation of a Western Zen also poses the problem of lay Zen because, although there are Zen monasteries in America and Europe following ancient traditions, the majority of those attempting to practise Zen (Chan) remain lay men and women. For these practitioners, instead of the protection given by the walls of the convent and the mutual endeavours of fellow trainees, there is the constant encounter with the many forms of egotistic energy with which most people relate to their everyday worlds. Tough as the monastic environment may also be, the often overwhelming effect of engagement in worldly relationships is commonly the one difficulty that can be reduced there. While strict training in the monastery can and perhaps should lead to a return to the market-place, those who try to train without the walls are often especially heroic in their endeavours. But many fall aside in confusion.

Several authors have already addressed this and related questions; some from an intellectual and academic viewpoint (Merrell Wolf, 1973; Humphries, 1949; Pirsig, 1974; Suzuki, 1953; Watts, 1957, Kasulis, 1981 and the more recent scholarly works of Faure, 1996; Heine and Wright, 2000; McRae, 2003; and others), some with personal accounts of their own struggles (Kennett, 1977/78; van Wetering, 1972, 1984; Amphoux, 1986) and some with a close examination of Zen in the context of attempting to teach and practise it in the modern world

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<sup>1</sup> Chang, G.C.C., Six Yogas of Naropa, New York, Snow Lion, 1963

<sup>2</sup> Crook, J.H and D. Fontana (Eds) 1990. Space in Mind: East-West Psychology & Contemporary Buddhism. Element. Shaftesbury. ( Vega, 2002. Out of print).

(Brandon, 1976; Kapleau, 1965, 1980; Kennett, 1978, Sheng Yen with Stevenson 2001, Sheng yen 2006). In most cases, however, it is with the transmission of oriental modes of practice that these writings are concerned. Little attempt has been made to see what happens if the Western mind, using its own energies and contradictions, can realise Zen practically with minimum direction but accurate facilitation based on a clear comprehension of the goal of training. One particular effort in this direction has revealed startling insights and possibilities (Harding, 1974) and there have been important discussions in our journal, the New Chan Forum (NCF)<sup>3</sup>.

For over thirty years now I have been running several specially constructed five-day Zen sesshins (retreats) yearly for lay people at a remote farmhouse in mid-Wales (The Maenllwyd). This article puts together some key ideas about the nature of the process of change I have observed in participants during the retreat, and which some participants have described to me in letters weeks, months or years after their participation in a sesshin.

### **The Participants**

The retreat is designed for lay people who may or may not have prior experience of meditation or Buddhist teachings, or even consider themselves Buddhists. People come often because they hear of the retreat from friends who are former participants but nowadays increasingly from reading about our programme in the NCF. Although in the early days retreat numbers were sometimes as low as 6-8 persons, I cannot recall having had to cancel a retreat for lack of interest. We often accommodate around 17-18 people even under harsh winter conditions, and have occasionally had up to 25 people, some under canvas, in summer. Participants are usually 'middle-class' but with an increasing variety of class origins and social affiliations, and a wide range of incomes. Originally many were university-educated and a considerable proportion were in the helping professions. The proportion of counsellors, doctors, psychotherapists and psychiatrists rose annually over several years - some individuals being prominent in their fields. Nowadays however due to the internet there is a very wide range of applicants some basically ignorant of Buddhism but intrigued by what they have read. The age-range is great, from about 19 to 80, and individuals may profess inclinations loosely discernible as atheist, agnostic, Humanist, Christian, Marxist or Buddhist. Many have received some training in the sciences, and originally professional scientists and university teachers are often in evidence - perhaps influenced by my own academic qualifications (which, however, have little to do with the process in hand!). There are usually rather more men than women and the reasons for this remain unclear. Possibly they may have something to do with the rather deliberately primitive physical conditions in near wilderness. Comfortably warm hotel rooms and bathrooms are not in evidence here.

People come primarily not because of an interest in Buddhism or Zen, but out of a feeling that the retreat may be helpful in relation to a personal problem. Basically participants are seeking to alleviate their suffering. Some participants have had strong counter-cultural or feminist orientations, or may have embarked on a vigorous search for new or different ways of living. In summary, participants are not:

1. necessarily committed to a particular path;
2. especially convinced that Zen (Chan) offers a solution to their problems;
3. experienced in religious retreats;
4. monks or nuns; or

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<sup>3</sup> Our journal New Chan Forum is a potent source of discussions of practice in Western Zen and Chan. For examples: John Crook, *NCF 11, Supplement*; *NCF 13, 15-30*; *NCF 22, 14-31*; *NCF 27, 8-19*; *NCF 28, 20-25*; *NCF 30, p 10*; *NCF 35, 2-8, 12-18*; David Loy; *NCF 36, 6-34*; Simon Child *NCF 9, 16-20*; *NCF 13, 9-13*; *NCF 34, 4-7*; Stephen Batchelor *NCF 14, 3-8*; Stuart Lachs *NCF 10, 12-19*; Susan Blackmore *NCF 12, 9-15*.

5. practitioners of any sustained training schedule.

These facts are important in trying to understand the process. In particular the retreats can only be compared with caution to actual monastic Zen sesshins of the Chan, Soto or Rinzai traditions, conducted by monks either for other monks in training or for especially committed Asian Buddhists who may have been in training already for some years. It follows that descriptions of experiences by Western Zen Retreat participants cannot therefore automatically be equated with experiences reported by monks in the classical literature. I shall not therefore be assuming that reported experiences during retreat are necessarily kensho, satori or enlightenments. It can be said, however, that reports by WZR participants, and events occurring in interviews (dokusan) during the retreats, are sometimes very close in form and content to those described, for example, in Kapleau's 1965 transcripts of trainee interviews with a Japanese master and the retreat reports in Master Sheng-yen's book 'Getting the Buddha Mind' (1982). Furthermore, there have been one or two enlightenment experiences that have followed closely in time participation in a retreat. It thus follows that some of the underlying psychological processes may be the same. Furthermore, my personal experiences in a variety of forms of Buddhist training point to an underlying unity.

### **The Practice**

The retreat is built out of a considered blending of three elements: zazen practice, the communication exercise (CE) invented by Charles Berner (see Love, 1976), and physical activity. These are combined into a daily schedule which changes slightly as the days progress. On the first day emphasis is on sustained zazen, on the second, third and fourth days on questioning in the communication exercise. On the last day zazen is emphasised once more. Interludes of physical exercise may include exercises or a run up the hill behind the house before dawn, manual work, and a one-hour hill-walk. Sessions of physical exercise are derived from Dharma Drum exercise schedules, Hatha yoga, Tai chi or Mahamudra training, and often there is an evening session of one of the action yogas of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. These can be especially powerful in helping participants break through emotional blocks.

### **Zazen**

The traditional sitting posture is adopted (see for example the Zazen Rules in Kennett, 1972) and a meditation method employed. There is a range of methods available: counting the breath; watching the breath; observing thoughts on an inhalation, letting them go on the exhalation and observing what is there when they have gone; repeating the Buddha's name; repeating a name of the Buddha, suddenly stopping it and looking into the gap so caused; searching the heart (see below); examining a hua-tou or mental device that evokes a witnessing of the mind before it is stirred by a thought (that is, an ante-thought-see Lu, 1964, p. 47); or seeking a response to a paradoxical question based upon a case history from old Zen records (koan).

In the WZR it is 'Searching the heart' or shik-an-taza which is the main method employed in zazen. Here the practitioner endeavours to discover what 'just sitting' is; every thought that arises is allowed to do so until it is recognised as what it is (a worry over a child, a loss, a social blunder, a moment of sexual bliss, a theoretical inspiration) and then it is released, let go of entirely. The mind returns to the state before thought. The practice is summarised as 'let through - let be - let go' - there is to be no encouragement of thoughts, but rather a repeated letting go of all states that arise. Searching the heart can be a long, exhausting process; with low energy states it is painful indeed, with high energy there is the occurrence of scattering. Eventually after many hours the mind seems to quieten down, the hassle reduces of its own accord. This is samatha, or stillness meditation. With persistence, the method leads towards deep inward trance. In zazen one is encouraged to look directly into this quietening mind to

perceive its very nature. Penetrative insight can reveal a mind that is empty of thought and notional content - there is simply a reflecting process, like that of a mirror.

In the WZR, Zazen is used at first primarily to allow the participant to `arrive'; to let the diffuse energies which he has brought with him settle, and moments of tranquillity appear before the communication exercises begin.



### **The Communication Exercise**

The onset of the communication exercise breaks up all this gentling, and sets the mind going again in vigorous pursuit of a question. But the initial practice of zazen has begun to clarify the enquiring mind so that penetration may now go deep. Zazen may also have loosened emotional feelings usually repressed or hidden behind layers of rationalisation or social pretence, and which are now clamouring for release. In Charles Berner's system, two participants sit opposite one another, each taking turns of five minutes to respond to a question from the partner who remains open and alert, receiving whatever comes with acceptance but absolutely no comment. This alternation continues for 30-40 minutes, after which there is a break before the process is resumed - each participant now, however, paired with a different member of the group but persisting with his/her original question. The questions are in fact root koans shorn of all traditional background. In the WZR the following questions are given and usually in the following order:

1. 'Who am I?' (= Tell me who you are);
2. 'What am I?' (= Tell me what you are);
3. 'What is life?' (= Tell me what life is) and
4. 'What is another?' (= Tell me what another is).

A useful question that is commonly used after `Who am I?' is `How is life fulfilled?', for which (3) may or may not be a helpful preliminary depending on the depth of the earlier answers. Other questions used in the WZR include `What is love?' From where does love (truth, life,-it, etc.) come? `What am I like if completely alone?' `What is meaning?' `What is Death?' or the more advanced. `Tell me what the Cross is?' or `What is working with karma?' These supplementary koans are given within contexts which arise in the interviews between practitioner and facilitator. The skill of the facilitator is needed to select a koan which has direct relevance at a heartfelt level for the practitioner - for example `From where does love come?' given to someone recently deserted by a spouse or love or proposing to desert.

As Berner saw, the value of these misleadingly simple questions, lacking entirely the trappings and verbal paradoxes of traditional koans (`What is the sound of one-hand-

clapping?'), lies in their direct pointing to the state of the practitioner here and now. 'Who am I?' or 'How is life fulfilled?' have no enticing frills - they point straight to the basic dilemma. Like the Kamakura warrior koans (Leggett, 1985), they can arise on the spot in the relationship between practitioner and facilitator, and their choice is a matter of 'skilful means'.

In traditional Rinzai Zen, the practitioner sits and meditates on his koan seeking to break through the barrier it represents. In the Enlightenment Intensive (as Berner called his system) and in the WZR the communication between two persons allows direct personal disclosure in which participants face the fear of risking to share their guilty, shameful or agonising thoughts and feelings with another. It may take several hours before a participant can trust partners sufficiently to disclose an emotional barrier which must be stated and released before further work on 'Who am I?' can continue. Such issues of disclosure, fear, risk and trust are present in traditional settings when the monk faces the master. In the WZR they are constantly present as the participants work with one another in the communication exercises.

The communication exercise arouses strong emotions. Once a participant has shared emotion it is rare for the partner not to be deeply affected. The sharing can move to a very profound level of mutual understanding and compassion. Very deep suffering, undisclosed for years, can be released in this way with powerful effects. Sometimes states of great intensity and confusion are aroused and the facilitator's experience of humanistic therapies such as neo-Reichian bioenergetics, gestalt or psychosynthesis is needed in the interview room where body-work as well as heart-to-heart confrontation may occasionally be used.

### **Action Yoga**

The use of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's action yoga involves the whole group in vigorous exercises which help literally to shake out (the 'Kundalini' exercise) or blow out (the 'Dynamic') energies suppressed, cathected to unshareable ideas or simply too far below the surface to appear in verbal presentation. The permission to shout (wordlessly), rage, scream, dance, roll about and laugh is a shared act of trust with the facilitator, whose role as an authority-figure is thereby softened, allowing his care for the group to be more easily perceived. In addition, for some, it constitutes a previously inconceivable performance of fantasy themes involving experiences of regression to childhood. The personal meaning of these emotional events is subsequently explored when the communication exercises are resumed.

### **The Schedule**

These main practices are combined in a timetable that begins at between 5 am and 6.30 am (depending on the season) and ends around 10.30 pm. The day opens with chanting, using orthodox texts from the various Buddhist traditions as well as hymns written specially for the purpose. The day divides into either Zazen sessions (2 x 30 minutes with a cycle of slow or fast walking between) or Communication Exercises (usually 2 x 30 - 50 minutes, with a five-minute break between) with walks, meals, work periods, and action yoga cropping up as appropriate.

### **Discipline and leadership**

The retreat is strictly disciplined in the manner of a traditional Zen sesshin. A set of vows - of silence, gratitude, compassion and diligent practice - is taken at the start of the retreat, and to break any of these persistently is taken to indicate an unwillingness to work and is followed by a request to leave (this has occurred only very few times). The prime rule is that of silence - which means a total absence of conversation rather than a prohibition of all remarks such as simple requests for information. Conviviality when it develops is not suppressed, but rather contained and reflected upon as a result of the silence rule and reminders to 'Hold your Questions!'

Of necessity, the facilitator tends to have a high profile role, especially at the start of the retreat. This is in order to generate an outer discipline vital for the success of the inner work. Furthermore, an assertive expression of the role may be important in helping participants to feel secure. The facilitator must have confidence in the process, and complete openness towards anything a participant may produce. Once the pattern of the retreat is well established and the koans have taken hold, the facilitator can increasingly allow the group process to unfold naturally. He (or she) will be spending more time in giving interviews, and will ask assistants or senior participants to organise the time-keeping and other administrative tasks.



The two permanent figures around which the retreat unfolds are the facilitator (Retreat Master) and the cook. The role of maintaining discipline, and a willingness to exert authority in the interests of the group as a whole, may fall from time to time on either or both of them, and needs to melt naturally into a nurturing role as time goes along. Both facilitator and cook may in some ways be seen as occupying parental roles to the family of participants, and indeed oedipal expressions of feeling may sometimes make themselves felt. The facilitator needs to be able to use such responses creatively in the interests of the participant, and not to react with an authoritarian or overly 'parental' stance.

Anyone attempting to facilitate a process such as this will need to have completed periods of intensive Zen training including orthodox sesshins with a skilled master, training in counselling or therapeutic work with clients and some personal work on themselves in psychotherapy. Facilitators need also to be familiar with Berner's manual of leadership instructions available in the Maenllwyd library. He or she will also require a 'supervisor' with whom to share the events and experiences of running a retreat. Untrained individuals should not attempt work with the degree of interpersonal involvement that characterises the WZR.

Nowadays, most WZR's are facilitated by Dr Simon Child as 'Retreat Master' who trained at length with me in this process and who is a Dharma heir of Master Sheng-yen. We have worked together in training a further two facilitators who will soon be 'flying solo' under supervision. Training new facilitators revealed a number of unexpected difficulties. Leading a WZR differs considerably from leading a meditation retreat such as Silent Illumination wherein the change in participants' responses comes gradually and the teaching follows a consistent course. In the WZR the facilitator needs to be able to respond to surprising responses from participants right from the beginning. Furthermore, as the participants begin to work through their emotional origins at differing paces, the facilitator needs to keep pace with both the differing speed of shifts in individual reactions and the general movement within the group as a whole. This means that talks and teaching interventions cannot be fixed in advance but must move in accordance with the varying rates of changes that individuals and the whole

group may show. This is no easy task and requires considerably more experience in training than either Simon or I had at first realised.

Another difficult task for the facilitator is to ensure that in interviews the participant is moved forwards in their personal enquiry. To return a person to the meditation hall without a renewed impetus from interview is a potentially serious mistake. If several people lose momentum they will inevitably share this with others during the CE and the risk of generating a 'group in flight' (i.e. losing trust in procedure and leader alike) increases. I am glad to say this has never happened yet but the potential danger is always present.

### **The Retreat Process**

The evening on which people arrive is spent in organising bed spaces, getting to know the layout of the building and meeting fellow participants. Around 7.30 pm an assembly is held, and people asked why they have come and what their hopes and fears may be. This plenary sharing helps the facilitator to get a preliminary impression of individuals' attitudes - especially important where newcomers are concerned and to make sure that no one has come with severely aberrant or misinformed expectations. It also allows individuals to get to know one another a little socially before the discipline of the retreat is imposed, and to experience each other's seriousness in the endeavour. The sesshin begins with a short opening ceremony before lights out, after which silence begins.

On the first day Zazen is difficult, the mind chatters incessantly, the early start and a poor night's rest rapidly induce sleepiness and the struggle to resist leads to low energy states. During the day interviews to settle which koan people will wish to work with are given. This establishes contact between the facilitator and participant, helping to renew energy. Originally Communication Exercises began on the second day, but nowadays they commence on the first afternoon.

On Day 2 most participants experience an improvement in zazen, and some individuals may make rapid progress towards engagement with the koan. By the evening, however, the toughness of confronting the koan hour after hour, and the onset of difficult disclosure frequently bring about a return of low energy states. Again these may be alleviated by physical exercise and chant. People become deeply involved with their questions. Most answers to 'Who am I?' begin by references to roles and experiences, but gradually move to the sort of statement 'I am the kind of person who...' with verbal descriptions of feelings. Personal problems and situational dilemmas begin to be shared.

Day 3 calls for great personal application. Considerable emotional expression may occur, so that the sounds of weeping, rage, grief and distress often ring through the building. But these are helpful signs as individuals are freeing themselves to express their life dilemmas as they are actually felt in here/now experiencing. It is more difficult for those who cannot feel free to express emotion, cannot find emotions to express, or who feel imposed upon by the emotions of others. Rationalisers may get very angry, and this anger may be aimed directly or indirectly at the facilitator, who may sometimes feel he is riding a bucking horse. The expression of great emotion is, however, not always a necessary or even desirable activity. Those who have a clear perception of themselves, and those who get emotional blocks out of the way early, begin to look very directly at their moment-to-moment experience and try to see its form and source. Whether by reason of a highly focused intentionality or because of catharsis, some individuals may have breakthroughs into moments of serenity or joy - which, however, dissolve again into other hassling mental diversions as new thoughts come up for attention.

During Day 4 a subtle change comes over the group. Participants now tend to come forward for interviews (dokusan) either because of persistent perplexity, pain or distress or because insights seem to be arising. For those caught in circular or spiralling systems of thought, which like repeated traverses of a cul-de-sac seem to iterate endlessly without release, these



interviews are often of great importance. The facilitator endeavours to mirror the individual process of the meditator, and by precise questions and other skilled responses, to bring the individual to insight into his own mental attachments and personal myths and the need for their acceptance.

Individuals now have the appearance of emptying themselves of self-expression. To an outsider they might appear drained or exhausted, but in fact they are entering a highly concentrated state with an increasing level of a type of energy that allows high attentiveness. Such a state may last for hours while the individual 'crosses the desert'. The level of focused energy in the room may seem almost palpable - the atmosphere is intense but no longer tense - highly creative and insightful communication exercises occur. It is now possible for some individuals in their quest for themselves in 'Who am I?' to go beyond words and experience the living moment non-discursively with a clarity of apprehensive immediacy in which the subject - object dichotomy may dissolve. Such experiences may be accompanied by moments of profound inner stillness, a rising sense of physical and mental bliss, and an awareness seemingly unlimited by previous imputations of self-regarding thought. This extraordinarily acute awareness may be associated with feelings of profound gratitude, openness to others and compassion. Only a few experience this state in depth, but many discover a radically quietened mind in which self-acceptance leads to a loss of personal anguish, together with the emergence of a new view of life in which openness and optimism are characteristic. There is in particular a remarkable feeling of having shed a burden, and a consequent feeling of freed energy.

Day 5 sees a reduction in questioning, with the koan now used more as a simple focusing device than as a question to be answered. Many have realised that in any case there is no answer - rather the paradox inherent in the koan may be resolved through a change in perception. This is like observing those illusory figures in psychology textbooks - seen from one mental stance an old woman stands upon the page - a second later there is a beautiful girl. The cognitive reorganisation now has an opportunity for stabilisation into a changed attitude, but whether this can be maintained following the retreat depends upon many factors in an individual's life. Usually the experience fades quite quickly and much now depends on how an individual's philosophy of life and attitude to living have been affected.

A koan is 'dropped' when an individual experiences a certainty that he or she is quite clear about 'Who I am' (say). This certainty may be associated with the experiences described above, and usually crystallises into a form of words given to the facilitator in a manner which indicates resolution. The participant is now energetic, clear in mind, peaceful, resolved, self-accepting and certain, and this shows in marked changes in posture, breathing, eye energy and facial expression; so that the form of words used is of relatively less importance. When a koan is 'dropped' in this way, the participant is usually asked to savour the result and to continue sharing it with others. This may go on until the end of the retreat, or occasionally a further koan may be given.

Generally, about a quarter of a group's membership has an experience approaching the above description, another half have reached a degree of self-acceptance that frees them deeply to face life's problems, while most of the remainder have experienced and learnt a great deal about themselves and the human condition. A limited number may be profoundly disappointed or leave as puzzled as they came - but even here very few of this number actually regret attempting the retreat. They rightly feel that to have come through it at all is something which, on a wider scale, is exceptional and which may have hidden benefits.

Are these results an opening to the experience of enlightenment known in Japanese zen as "kensho" (Chinese: kai wu)? Usually this is not so but the work of self emptying on retreat may facilitate such an occurrence - sometimes soon after leaving the event or much later on. The prime initial feature of a successful retreat is simply self acceptance: the retreatant has

discovered that being alive as 'me' is not so dreadful after all, that there can be mysterious joy in forgetting oneself, letting go into simple bare awareness of the present - whatever it is. We call this 'self at ease' and it is an opening to 'clarity'. Deeper levels of this experience give rise to a sense of oneness with the world or cosmos in which the machinations of self are temporarily forgotten. An actual 'kensho' only rarely follows but may do so, sometimes taking the form of a sudden realisation after the retreat is over. In 'kensho' there is a personally surprising absence of all self-reference – an experience clearly distinguishable from the previous ones. (See further Crook (ed) *Illuminating Silence* p94-96 and Ron Henshall's following article). Such insights are again normally of brief duration.

What is the long-term effect of participating in Zen sesshins? This is a difficult question to answer since over a period of years individuals grow in many ways, simply as a result of further life-experience and of joining in social activities. In the late 1970s, I distributed over a hundred questionnaires to past participants from which the above assessment of the actual experience of a sesshin was drawn, but apart from a general authentication of the value of the retreat specific detail was difficult to obtain. Personal letters, sometimes of great length, have, however, indicated the considerable influence of these retreats on the life course of at least some individuals.

Very rarely an individual may be adversely affected by the retreat. There is a condition known to the Japanese as 'stinking of Zen'. After a WZR it is possible for the release of energy to produce excessive exhilaration, amounting to a manic euphoria which the subject projects in wildly ambitious expectations of others. Only two cases have occurred in thirty years, both young women, and a spell in hospital care was required before the condition subsided. It is likely that those subject to schizoid breaks are more at risk than others, but the rarity of these occurrences suggests that the proportion of people at risk at the WZR is no larger than that in the general population.

### **A Psychological View of Changes Experienced during a Retreat**

The solving of a koan in a Western Zen Retreat has a strongly self-affirmative character, but one that appears in a curiously apophatic mode. Instead of assertions about identity and personal history, one finds a frequent use of process words - 'I am peace', 'Life is living', 'Another is an adventure', accompanied by a clarity of awareness which lacks easily attributed boundaries in either time or space. What is being affirmed is the quality of the living moment rather than the personhood of the experiencer - yet there is no self-doubt about who it is that manifests that quality. The conventional attributions of parts and processes to oneself as descriptive categorisations in social discourse are however replaced by expressions springing with direct immediacy from a realm of insight and feeling, which lacks the necessity of being named.

A way to explain this is by means of the concept of disidentification. The human individual is a self-conceiving mammal whose concepts of self function to maintain individual distinctiveness, both introspectively and socially, in a world of interpersonal relations. Infants come to impute to their body-mind experience the properties of agency in interaction with others - especially mother. The discovery of agency is followed by the imputation to the self so realised of properties or qualities which arise in social interaction (Lewis and Brooks, 1977; Horrocks and Jackson, 1972).

A powerful view of the way in which identification with such conceptual realisation occurs has developed in Western thought in the writings of G. H. Mead (1934), Homans (1961) and Tajfel (1978) and have been discussed in Crook (1980, 2009). Social acts are seen as events through which individuals learn the perspectives of others about themselves; and incorporate them into 'identity constructs' which constitute their cognitive being. A person only becomes such through a progressively elaborated process of role-taking in relation to another. People

not only conceive of themselves largely as others see them, but tend to act in accordance with the expectations that others may hold. More recent views, based both on observational evidence and sociobiological theory, affirm that, apart from needs for social approval, infants are from the beginning also strategists. They pursue nutritional, affectional and self-expressive goals that form the eventual basis for autonomous action in the world, the creation of economic well-being and the rearing of a family (Crook, 1980, Chapter 9).



Erikson (1950) and Sullivan (1955) show how the development of identity constructs is severely affected by the emotional content of the child-parent relationship. Whenever a child's need for support and explanation is met in an open, caring manner, its development can proceed in a constructive, positively self-evaluative way that leads to the learning of self-affirmative skills and expression, combined with tolerance for others. Where, however, the child is subject to loss (Bowlby, 1969, 1973), to repeated bad temper and punishment, to denigration or abuse, these threats to the emergence of a positive self-evaluation produce habitual anxiety which, when projected onto other figures, becomes the basis for the complex affect-laden habits in adulthood by which actual relations with others are distorted by fantasy. Furthermore, the contrasting, genetically based strategies of the male and female genders lead to contrasts in the fathering and mothering of children in a family. These are often sources of conflict and an important 'root origin' of suffering (Crook 2009, Chapter 19)

Masking operations, suppression, schizoid denial and excessive egotism are devices to protect the self from largely imagined threats derived from fears of the parent. Such devices become deeply ingrained in the character of the individual - basically as attempts to support a negatively valued but necessary sense of personal identity. Naturally, interactional styles based on such patterns in adult life tend to evoke similarly distorted patterns in others leading to the whole range of 'games people play' (Berne, 1966).

At the onset of a retreat, some participants are presenting themselves to one another through the screen of such self-protective social attitudes based on their guarded suspicions of others. Their shaky identity constructs, often based upon years of hurt, determine an often highly defensive or over-assertive stance. Other individuals may have varying degrees of self and other understanding based on life experiences or work in therapy or 'growth' groups. In either case, to come to the Zen Retreat has required an act of trust or courage, because participants know that these restricting habits of personal closure are precisely those they will confront in the course of the retreat. In the communication exercise it is precisely these attitudes that are disclosed to another.

Jourard (1971) has described the therapeutic value of self-disclosure of this kind. As trust develops and deeper topics are broached, the individual experiences relief from the tightly

bound defensive positions of self-constriction with which he or she tends to face the world. Self-disclosure is an important aspect of co-counselling, a system of mutual therapy which Charles Berner used as a model for the Enlightenment Intensive process, and which has a close resemblance to the communication exercise. As the disclosure moves from the merely conceptual to the direct expression of hurt through weeping, rage or distress, so the whole body-mind process is activated and the 'armour' (as Reich termed it) can literally relax - muscular, endocrinal, sympathetic nervous and mental tensions all move towards release or relaxation. Every authentic statement or presentation becomes literally a letting go of 'stuff', and a thorough release of a theme allows a dis-identification from it so that, for the time being at least, it does not recur. There is thus a progressive abandonment of restrictive identity constructs, together with the forms of their physical incarnation.

The motivation for self-disclosure seems to lie in an awareness of the need to share. This sharing can, however, only occur with another felt to be positively regarding; a person not necessarily warm but certainly capable of non-judgemental sympathetic listening. There may be also an element of confession present, as thoughts of shame and guilt are spoken often with profound expressions of remorse, longing for clarification or atonement. Participants have to learn that they can trust one another's common humanity.

Dis-identification leads to an abandonment of conceptual constrictions, and the mind is free to look into the emptiness so created - a consciousness increasingly freed from self-regard and even from the dichotomy between subject and object itself. It is the nature of this consciousness that is the focus of Buddhist self-examination and about which Western psychology still has had little to say beyond complex theoretical disputes (see discussion in Blackmore 2003)

### **Conclusions: Perplexity and Preceptual Truth**

Whether one is an Eastern monk or a Western lay person, the root of the motivation for Zen training lies in perplexity. Perplexity arises within the unsatisfactory character of life itself with its inherent difficulties in self-evaluation, in personal goal-satisfaction and its termination in death. Buddhism itself seems to have arisen in response to an increasingly complex life resulting from the emergence of an urban, class-based hierarchical society in ancient India with its consequent problems of identity, self-esteem and meaning for individual lives (Ling, 1973). Contemporary Western life, with its rapidly changing social norms, breakdowns of social and familial structures and secular value system, raises similar issues in florid form.

The Buddhist response may seem a strange one to anyone who has not undertaken training - for the uncovering of a characterless 'unborn' mind 'empty' of itself seems an unlikely basis for life in a highly fragmented and competitive social world. To understand the purport here, it becomes necessary to penetrate to the depth of meaning attributable to such definitions of Zen as 'the self making the self into the self.' Fortunately, there is an ancient Japanese story which helpfully illustrates the meaning and value of Zen training.

*Once upon a time there was a bed of squashes ripening in the corner of a field. One day they began quarrelling. The squashes split up into factions and made a lot of noise shouting at one another. The head priest of a nearby temple, hearing the sound, rushed out to see what was wrong. He scolded the wrangling squashes saying 'What ever are you doing. Fighting among yourselves is useless. Everyone do zazen!'*

*The priest taught them all how to sit properly in zazen and gradually their anger died away. Then the priest said, 'Put your hands on top of your heads.' The squashes did so and discovered a peculiar thing. Each one had a stem growing from its head which connected them all one to another and back to a common root. 'What a mistake we have made!' they said, 'We are all joined to one another, based on the same root and living one*

*life only. In spite of that we quarrel. How foolish our ignorance has been.' After that this reader hopes they all lived happily ever after. (Taken from Kosho Uchiyami Roshi, 1973)*

The story illustrates the experiential fact that as a result of Zen training the habit of discrimination in producing dualistic distinctions between self and others diminishes, and may even disappear altogether for a time. In this freedom from self-concern there is a sense of participation not only in a social but also in a universal process. 'Emptiness' of self-nature means awareness of the interdependence of all the phenomena of experienced life. This is the stem of the vine. Unthreatened by the processes of others in a sense of community, compassion arises, anger dies down, love in its broadest sense appears.

A training such as this recalibrates the meaning attributable to a person's sense of reality. Dualistic functioning remains appropriate in contexts where action is needed and planning done, but action itself is now perceived within the wider context of a pervasive non-dual base. The Zen task is to develop the skilful means to apprehend this wider, psychologically validated, holistic view of reality and then to discover how to move creatively within it. This is the self making the self into the self.

Given the current norms of society - the practitioner of Zen will almost inevitably find himself to be the possessor of an outsider's vision. Faced continuously with the problem of value in contemporary society, life becomes a permanent koan - how to live according to preceptual truth within contemporary society. Since training leads to the Bodhisattva's concern for the welfare of others, it seems inevitable that a Zen trainee, whatever the details of his personal strategy, will adopt values of a generally altruistic nature - focused more on the common good than on personal advancement. Yet, as skilful means to this end, action in pursuit of an appropriate career, economic livelihood and family life are not to be seen as inappropriate. In holding the koan ever in mind the appropriate way becomes plain. In this there is no magic solution - the effects of karma, personal conditioning, are very strong and need endless review, witnessing the failures, the errors and the disappointments. Life is making life into life and there are no short-cuts - only the emergence of an understanding. As Philip Glass the composer has remarked, the meaning of a work of art is always completed by the hearer. In the view of Zen that too is true of the work of life.

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## **Kensho and the Unborn Buddha Mind**

### **Shingaku, Enlightenment Intensive and ‘Big Mind’**

**Ron Henshall**

#### **Introduction**

In 18th century Japan there sprung up a new religious movement named Shingaku Sekimon which is translated as ‘heart learning’. Perhaps one of the most remarkable facts that emerge from the studies of Shingaku is the large number of people that were issued with papers that certified that they ‘had attained enlightenment’. In the hundred years following on from the late 1780’s, over 36,000 people received such certificates (Bellah; 170). This averages out at some 360 people per year that experienced a kensho or breakthrough, which Baigan, the founder of Shingaku called ‘knowing the heart’, or ‘knowing the nature’.

Having been personally involved in Chan/Zen meditation schools for many years, the expectations for a kensho or breakthrough experience appears to be much lower in the schools that I have had dealings with than the Shingaku figures presented above which appear to be radically prolific.

By way of comparison, The Western Chan Fellowship, a UK Chan/Zen Buddhist Sangha that runs regular 5, 7, 14 and 21 day retreats throughout the year, services about 170 retreatants per year at Maenllwyd, its mid-Wales retreat centre. Of those, up until recently, there were very few kenshos. There have been many ‘one-mind’ or unified mind type of experiences, some very deep, but few occurrences of ‘seeing the nature’. However, I am reliably informed that recently there have been some four kenshos within this Sangha. These latter kenshos have been from among long-term meditators that have trained closely with the Teacher for many years and have themselves, maintained a high level of training.

Going to the other extreme, there has been some fuss within the past decade about a USA organisation called ‘Big Mind’. The founder, Roshi Genpo (Dennis Merzel), claims to be able to achieve 100 % kenshos for all attendees to his seminars in as little as one day.

Ken Wilber, in his foreword to Genpo Roshi’s book ‘Big Mind Big Heart’ says,

*In Zen, this realization of one’s True Nature, or Ultimate Reality, is called kensho or satori (“seeing into one’s True Nature,” or discovering Big Mind and Big Heart). It often takes many years of extremely difficult practice (I know, I’ve done it) in order for a profound satori to occur. With the Big Mind process, as in Zen, a kensho or glimpse of your True Nature can occur suddenly..... Once you get it, you can do it virtually any time you wish, and almost instantaneously.”(in Merzel: 15)*

What we may have here are differences of opinion as to what constitutes ‘kensho’ or ‘seeing the nature’. So, before embarking upon a discussion of the methods used by the various groups presented above and details of the results of these methods, there will firstly be an attempt to come to an operational definition of ‘kensho’ or ‘seeing the nature’.

#### **Kensho or ‘Seeing the Nature’**

(This thrust of this Chapter first appeared in Henshall, 2005, ‘Chan and Indian Buddhism’)

This idea of the ‘Original nature’ has become a key component in Mahayana Buddhism, and especially so in Chan/Zen. ‘Original nature’ or ‘Buddha nature’ can be traced back at least as far as to the Indian Mahayana Tathagata-garbha Sutra, composed c. 200-250 AD.

We should also note that in Nibbana Sutta, Ud. p.80-1 the Canonical Buddha spoke of an unborn - unbecome - unfabricated that made possible emancipation from the born.

Whilst Harvey tells us that in Zen, man’s ‘original nature’ is experienced as a state where thought has stopped and there is a clear, tranquil awareness; a state also known as ‘serene

observation'<sup>1</sup>, in the Chan tradition this is not enough. The idea of 'seeing the nature' (Ch. *jianxing*, Jp. *kensho*) which is an initial breakthrough or a 'glimpse into one's true nature' entails a key element or better; there is a key element that is noticeable by its absence, this key is that of the absence of a sense of 'self'. In line with the Buddha's teaching of 'anatta' (Skt *anatman*) or not-self, an insight into Nirvana includes the dropping off of the notion of a separate, permanent self. The state of 'serene observation' that Harvey describes may well be a prelude to 'seeing the nature' but may not necessarily do so. It is possible to have a brightly shining mind (*pabhassara citta*) and still cling to some idea of a permanent self which would not then constitute 'seeing the nature'<sup>2</sup>.

For this reason in Chan/Zen Buddhism the confirmation of *kensho* from a transmitted teacher in a face to face situation is essential in order to avoid inflation and other problems arising from a misunderstanding of what could well be a temporary meditative state.

This brings to mind the story of Dogen's enlightenment experience in Tiantong monastery in China in 1223, the monastery of Hongzhi Zengjue who was also the author of 'The Book of Serenity', (Jp *Shoyo Roku*) a collection of one hundred Zen koans, wherein he is known as Tiantong Hongzhi.

Upon hearing Tendo Nyojyo, the 50th Ancestor in line from Mahakasyapa, telling the assembly, "To practice meditation is indeed to drop off body and mind!" Dogen had a great awakening (*satori*). He arose and then went to the abbot's quarters and made an incense offering to the Buddha<sup>3</sup>. Seeing Dogen offering incense, Nyojyo asked him what the reason for his actions was. Dogen replied "Body and mind have dropped off." Nyojyo confirmed "Body and mind have dropped off the dropping-off of body and mind." Dogen then urged Nyojyo not to be too hasty in confirming this attainment, to which Nyojyo said, "I am not giving you my Seal arbitrarily." Dogen asked, "What is that which does not give the Seal arbitrarily?" Nyojyo replied, "That which drops off mind and body." To which Dogen bowed in respect. Nyojyo then said, "The dropping-off has dropped off."<sup>4</sup>

This account gives us something of the flavour of *dokusan* or interview between a Master and disciple in the Chan/Zen tradition and also how the *kensho* experience is confirmed by face-to-face or mind-to-mind interaction. The acknowledgement may or may not be supported by words, but if so, not in any descriptive or explanatory way, more akin to the way in which two people share an 'in-joke'. It also shows the commitment and dedication of Dogen, not wanting his insight to be mistakenly confirmed as a *kensho*.

Quoting a reported preaching attributed to Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 C.E.) in which the latter says, 'If you want to realize the Buddha-nature, you must first get rid of selfish pride' [in Nishijima and Cross; 12], Dogen stresses that realization is nothing other than getting rid of selfish pride. 'It is not that there is no realization; realization is just getting rid of selfish pride' [p.13]. He urges his audience to look deeply into the kinds of 'selfishness' and the varieties of 'pride'. When this matter is fully clarified, and one is 'without' selfish pride, what is manifest is *Bussho* or Buddha-nature.

So, 'seeing the nature' or *kensho* involves no sense of anyone who sees the nature. If there is anyone who sees the nature, then the nature is not seen. Perhaps 'seeing the nature' could be presented as 'seeing - the nature!' However, there comes a time when words fail, and perhaps this is one of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey, P., 1990, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, p271

<sup>2</sup> see Harvey 1995 *The Selfless Mind*, p166-176 and Ch 11 for a thorough examination of this area

<sup>3</sup> This practice of offering incense and/or making three prostrations to the Buddha is standard procedure in Chan/Zen training when one has experienced *kensho*

<sup>4</sup> Keizan Zenji, 1993, p 278



Furthermore, kensho is arguably directly related to the context of the Buddhist Dharma. Chan Master Sheng-yen in conversations with Dr John Crook, the founder and Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship, has said that ‘an understanding of self as emptiness rather than as an inherently existing subject, provides the kensho experience with its unique insight into the reality of impermanence.’ (Crook J., 2002; 12). It is not that ‘no-mind’ experiences are only limited to Buddhists; Master Sheng-yen acknowledges that these experiences are panhuman [p.86]. John Crook further clarifies that these experiences are “interpreted within the terms of the belief system or ideology in which the experiencer anchors their faith” [p.86]. Arguably, it is the Buddhist context of anatta (not-self) and anicca (impermanence) that separates kensho from other 'no-mind' experiences.

Hopefully now, with this working understanding of kensho, we may be better placed to look into the practices under discussion.

### **Shingaku Sekimon**

The movement called Shingaku began when Ishida Baigan started teach in 1729. It is considered by many Japanese scholars to have been one of the greatest influences on the morality of the common people in the Tokugawa period (1600 - 1868). Starting with an interest in Shinto, Baigan then mastered the Sung Classics and the explanations derived from Sung neo-Confucianism. However it was the Zen Buddhist influence of his teacher Ryouan that arguably formed Baigan’s understanding and approach to enlightenment, which is the primary focus of this study.

The meditation techniques of Shingaku appear to have been long forgotten. Let us attempt something of a resurrection here.

### **Ishida Baigan**

Ishida Baigan (1685-1744) had set out to know the heart/mind that was behind the words of the ancient Sung sages. He reasoned that without this knowledge, he would never truly understand what they were speaking about. By the time he was 35 or 36, Baigan felt that he had a theoretical understanding of ‘the nature’ (Jp sei; Ch hsing). However, he realised that this in itself was insufficient, as doubts about the ‘nature’ continued to arise. It was then that Baigan began to look for a teacher who could correct his viewpoint.

After a long time of being unsuccessful in finding a teacher, Baigan eventually had an interview with an old teacher called Oguri Ryouan who was learned in the Sung nature philosophy (Jp sieri Ch hsing li) but was also a Buddhist adept and was well versed in Taoist teachings. When questioned by this old teacher, Baigan was unable to express himself and evidently saw more clearly the inadequacies of his previous intellectual approach. Impressed with the old Ryouan, Baigan became his follower and began to meditate night and day.

A year and a half later, the 40 year old Baigan, upon opening a door, had a sudden insight and all his old doubts cleared up. He intuited that the ‘way’ was filial piety and brotherliness, and the knowing of one’s place in life; “Fish swim in water and birds fly in the sky” [in Bellah; 136]. Knowing the nature to be ‘the parent of heaven and earth and all things’, Baigan rejoiced and went to present his understanding to his Master.

Having listened to Baigan’s insight, Ryouan likened Baigan’s understanding to that presented in the story of a group of blind men who come across an elephant; one says it is a snake, one a tree etc, only grasping a trunk or a foot, they can’t see the whole. Ryouan then said “The eye with which you saw our nature as the parent of heaven and earth and all things remains. There must be the nature but without the eye. Now you must lose the eye.” [Bellah; 202]

This instruction stimulated Baigan to practice meditation with even greater resolve, even going without food and sleep for days and nights. After more than a year, he was lying down exhausted one night and was unaware of the break of dawn. He heard a sparrow cry in the

woods behind and experienced his body as the serenity of the great sea or a cloudless sky and felt that sparrow's cry as a cormorant diving and entering the water.

It is said that from that time onwards, Baigan abandoned 'the conscious observation of his own nature' [Bellah; 202]. Baigan then set out to help others and began to lecture privately in people's homes. It was not until 1729, the year in which his teacher, Ryouin died, that Baigan began to lecture publicly and 'hung out his shingle'.

Here then we have someone who intuitively that in order to understand what the Sages of old were talking about, he himself needed to realise for himself where they were speaking from, i.e. from the original nature. Having set about an intellectual study of the nature, he had some insights and intuitions but realised that this was still in the realm of ideas. This came home to Baigan on meeting with his teacher Ryouin.

Baigan then adopted a method of investigation that sounds similar to the methods of the Rinzai Zen Buddhist school. This method is that of investigating either the crux of a question (huato) or 'public case' (Jp koan, Ch Gong'an)<sup>5</sup>. The investigation is done formally in seated meditation as well as at all other times of wakefulness. In the Rinzai school the question, huato, or koan, is looked into and a great ball of doubt is generated. For Baigan, the huato would likely have been 'what is the nature without the eye?', or similar.

The difference between Baigan's earlier insight and his later one is vast. The first insight appears to be an intellectual affair, one of understanding. The second insight, we can safely assume, involved the 'losing of the eye', or the self-reflective and self-referential aspects of consciousness and by this we can accept that this insight of Baigan fits the criteria suggested previously concerning our working definition of kensho.

In Baigan's system of teaching there could be distinguished two 'directions of process'. The first was that which leads to kensho and "knowing the nature" and "knowing the heart". The second direction was that of the ethical practice that follows on from that kensho. However, within Baigan's texts, knowledge and action are identical. Paradoxically here, one can see ethical behaviour as being a condition and part of the process leading to enlightenment as well as issuing from it.

### **Teshima Toan**

It was Baigan's disciple, Teshima Toan (1718-1786) and the latter's disciple Nakazawa Doni (1725 -1803) who took the spread of Shingaku to another level; organising it into a nationwide movement. Toan met Baigan when the former was 19 years old and after 2 years spiritual training with Baigan, Toan had an "enlightenment" experience which was officially recognised by his teacher.

Regarding 'knowing the original mind' or 'knowing the nature', Toan viewed this as 'finding a level of consciousness that is free of subjective conceptualizing tendencies and the "self" that they assume' [Sawada 1953; 52]. He further elucidates that 'the original mind is an awareness that is spontaneous and unselfconscious, beyond egocentric ways of thinking and feeling. Particularly the original mind is 'empty and mysterious' or 'mysteriously clear'. That it is said to be 'empty', certainly does not imply that there is nothing there, but means that it cannot be represented by any form nor does he manifest any sound or smell; there is nothing to indicate it [Sawada,1953; 52].

Another point that Toan stressed was that once one knew the true nature of the mind, one had 'no body' (mushin). This body is not simply the physical body but the "egoistic, unilluminated mind-body of an individual in his unenlightened state"[Sawada,1953; 54]. Toan also used the

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<sup>5</sup> For a full discussion and explanation of these methods see, Master Sheng-yen, 2001. *Hoofprints of the Ox*, OUP, Ch 7.

Zen term “no eye”(me nashi) in much the same way as “no mind”, “no self”, and “no body”. This “no eye” can be seen to echo the instruction to ‘lose the eye’ as given to Baigan by his teacher, Ryouun.

Teshima Toan coined his own term by which is characterized the original mind; this was a ‘shian nashi’ which means ‘no calculation’ or ‘no premeditation’. He saw the predilection towards human arranging as obscuring the original mind. When one is not caught up in calculations, then the self-centred focus is not there. Toan conceived that calculation was sluggish when compared with intuitive thinking (omoi). The latter, being the thought of the original mind, and this omoi is itself one step behind and slower than the original mind. Further, “The original mind, spontaneous thinking, and self-centred mental activity constitute a progressive ossification of consciousness.” [Sawada,1953; 58]



Toan warned his followers that even if they felt sure that they were operating without calculation, sure enough this viewpoint of being free of calculations was itself bound up. Calculation is self-conscious and Toan taught that natural thinking is an unself-conscious activity. Self-conscious cogitation appears to be directed to an inner subject or ego, whereas the original mind cannot be experienced within a subject-object framework [Sawada, 1953; 58]. What is needed is a realization of ‘no-self’, or kensho, this in itself provides a sure basis to begin to operate from the original or unborn mind.

According to Toan, the ‘unborn’ of Zen Master Bankei is just another name for the ‘original mind’. ‘Consequently, the realm of no calculation and the unborn Buddha-mind are the same... the original mind with which one is endowed a birth by one's parents is empty and mysteriously clear. Bankei call this emptiness “unborn”. Unborn means not a single thought is born-it is the place where everything is thoroughly understood and judged before thought arises. Therefore he also called it ‘mysteriously clear’ [Sawada,1953; 60].

The techniques used by Teshima Toan to lead his followers towards an experience of the ‘original mind’, included pointing to the senses of his audience. He would bring out a fan and ask what it is and then ask ‘What sees the fan?’ If the answer, ‘the eye’ or ‘the mind’ was given, Toan would go on to point out that this was a conjecture based upon calculated thinking. People were then urged to stay with this question and also similarly with ‘What

hears this sound?’ and ‘What knows it is a certain sound?’ and ‘What is the mind at that moment?’ This was done until it was experienced that it was the fan that was the mind, as the nature of the mind is to reflect whatever comes into its purview.

This method, according to Toan, strips away students’ layers of ‘wisdom’ one by one...When there is only one layer left, when the mind of faith is developed to the utmost, the time comes. Either one hears the sound of a bell, or is startled by the noise of a drum or a dog’s bark, or one looks at a bird, or views blossoms. At that moment, one suddenly forgets that one last layer of skin, and sees and hears directly – this is the emergence of the original mind. [in Sawada 1953; 75].

Similarly, Nakazawa Doni, Toan’s number one disciple, would hit the podium with his fan and ask his audience how many blows were struck. He would then go on to point out to them that whilst they were listening to him strike the blows, nothing except the sounds themselves existed. Sometimes he would raise the lens of a pair of spectacles from up behind the open fan, simulating the rising moon. Again he would point to the spontaneous, un-premeditated occurrence of perception that needs no subjective self.

Having worked with the senses, Toan’s students then worked with consciousness and operated based on spontaneous cognition, rather than selfish calculations. This was termed ‘Making the will sincere’ and implied making right moral decisions based on understanding which itself was based upon investigating sensory experience.

In this way things are known intuitively without calculating or conceptualizing [Sawada 1953; 73]. The intuitions of the original mind, which transcend the intellectualizing tendencies of self-centred consciousness, naturally conform with the moral order of the universe. Shingaku ‘training at the level of consciousness’ meant learning to choose these original intuitions over the calculations. Toan considered this stage to be critical because it had direct implications for action.

Having looked briefly into the reported practices, methods and results of Shingaku Sekimon, I am quite satisfied that the ‘awakening experiences’ cited amongst the members of this movement appear to satisfy the criteria to be bona-fide kenshos. As to explanations of the efficacy of these techniques, the high reported numbers of kenshos to my mind owes no small debt to that of putting the ‘unborn’ first. In other words, making the ‘seeing of the original nature’ paramount and initial, before any rhetoric or philosophical presentations are introduced.

In Shingaku, the backward-step method of much early Chan/Zen Buddhism was apparently employed from the outset and the direction of the optimum approach is evident to the practitioner from day one, and is perhaps similar to certain presentations of Dzogchen. In Shingaku, as in Chan/Zen, ‘losing the eye’, is fundamental and non-negotiable. Indeed, ‘seeing the nature’, is to see without a sense of a separate self.

In Dzogchen too, it is necessary to ‘see’ that the sense of self is a fabrication and ‘empty’ of any permanence. In the latter case, this might be approached through the preliminaries, or directly, depending on the approach of the ‘school’ or teacher. Either way, an intellectual understanding of emptiness is not enough, in my opinion, it needs to be experienced as it is, without an experiencer.

In Shingaku, another most important criteria appears to be the guidance of a teacher who themselves have ‘seen the original nature’. It was no doubt an important point for Baigan and his Shingaku heirs, that all the Shingaku teachers had to be certified with the Shingaku Admonition, which certified the ‘authenticity of the discovery (of the original mind), and was required for public teaching’ [Sawada, 1953; 164]

The apparent syncretism of Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism which had been one of Shingaku's strengths in attracting such widespread interest among Japanese people proved to be a major factor of its demise along with Shingaku having become associated with the ruling bakufu or shogunate as well as becoming superseded as an educational faculty. In the Restoration of 1868, Shingaku's connections with the bakufu became a liability. With the onset of the Meiji period (1869-1911), there was a great move to clearly separate Shinto from Buddhism and any kind of syncretism was rejected. At that time, there began a programme of building government schools to educate the city classes previously overlooked by the bakufu. These factors nailed the coffin lid shut for Shingaku as a movement.

Another factor cited in the demise of Shingaku was the dogmatising of its teaching. As the teaching became more dogmatic and stereotyped it declined in popularity [Encyclopaedia Britannica]. That being said, Shingaku ethical teaching materials were still used by the popular Shinto movements that were established in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods.

### **Enlightenment Intensive**

The Enlightenment Intensive was the brain-child of a Californian named Charles Berner around 1968. He and his wife, Ava, had been experimenting with healing 'growth' groups in Costa Mesa, CA, USA and it was Ava that came up with the idea to utilise the dyad in their work. Here two people would sit facing each other and, being guided in approach by the Berners, would take turns in communicating any problems they were having. After a pre-determined time had elapsed, the roles would be reversed and the listener, who had previously asked "Tell me about..." and then sat and listened, non-judgmentally, would now become the person who was asked their particular question and they would respond as honestly as they were able, without interruption for the timed interval. This dyad approach had proved to be most useful in accelerating the airing of psychological issues.

Charles Berner had been reading Philip Kapleau's 'The Three Pillars of Zen'. In reading the book, Berner came across descriptions of Zen sesshins where zen meditators, especially in the Rinzai traditions, would consider a koan or question like, 'What is the sound of one hand?', 'Who am I?' or 'What am I?' [Kapleau; 103-161].

In the Zen traditions presented, meditators would sit for hours and for years often before a breakthrough would occur. At one point it came to Berner to combine the dyad communication methods that he had developed with the ancient question, "Who am I?" or "What am I?" and so the Enlightenment Intensive was born. Later the questions were extended to include "What is my true nature?", "What is the purpose of life?" "What is another?"

The Enlightenment Intensive (EI) ran initially for 5-days but later was shortened to a 3-day duration. In looking into the manual for EI, re-worked in 2005, we find that Berner's ideas of 'enlightenment' do not fit traditional Buddhist ideas of enlightenment. He is talking about something quite different. Berner defines enlightenment as "conscious, direct knowledge of the self" (p5) and he also talks about "a certain number of non-physical individuals" being the true reality of what we are (p2-3).

This is obviously not in line with the Buddha's teaching of anatta. Indeed, if we consider the Buddha's teaching to Bahiya in Ud 1.10, we see that that in the Buddha's view of enlightenment, a.k.a. 'the end of stress' there is no room for an 'entity' of any kind.

*Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in*

*reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress [Ud 1.10, Thanissaro 1994a,].*

This is not to suggest that the work done in Intensives is without value, but it is argued here that the reported breakthroughs are rarely bona-fide kenshos. In reading Noyes' book, 'The Enlightenment Intensive', we are given that the experiences on the retreats reported in the book are kenshos or satoris. In reading the reports included in the book, of all the reports, perhaps only one is a possible candidate for kensho as we have previously defined it.

The main problem, I believe, lies in the vision and experience of the 'masters' who run the retreats. Berner was a former teacher of Scientology, and from 1973, he became immersed in the practice of yoga adopting the name Yogeshwar Muni. This latter interest he maintained until his death in 2007. From his writings, it is clear that Berner's approach and understanding was non-Buddhist and mainly influenced by Advaita philosophy.

There do appear to be a few participants that have had what could possibly be a kensho somewhat facilitated by work done on an Enlightenment Intensive. That being said, there are also some people that have had a no-mind experience without any such Intensives or formal Buddhist training whatsoever.

Perhaps the best report of an EI that is run by someone who apparently can discern a kensho from other illuminating experiences is presented in "Tell Me Who You Are" By Jake and Eva Chapman 1988. The only draw back with this report is that it is, as Jake states in his introduction, 'fictional'. Also the 'Master', Peter, who apparently has the discernment, is also fictional.

The success or failure of the EI to set up the conditions where a kensho may or may not occur, in my view depends to a great extent on the depth and skills of the Master. It has been my experience that the clarified awareness of a leader can and does support the clarifying awareness of the group whilst they are in close proximity with him/her.

This latter observation lends some support to the notion of 'transmission beyond words' that is somewhat fundamental to Zen Buddhist Schools. The converse of this is also true. If the leader does not have a degree of clarified awareness, then what he or she transmits may only serve to muddy the waters.

The Western Chan Fellowship under the direct guidance of John Crook and Simon Child , both Dharma Heirs of the Venerable Chan Master Sheng-yen of Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan, regularly runs Western Zen Retreats as part of its portfolio of meditation retreats. The format of these retreats is basically as Berner's EI; mastership in which, had been taught Crook by Berner's disciple Jeff Love. However, these retreats are in the main lead by people who have had bona-fide kenshos, confirmed by a Chan Master. Also, during the retreats, there are Zen Dharma talks, frequent personal interviews and Chan Buddhist services in the morning, at meal times and in the evening involving Buddhist chanting. Thus, the context is decidedly Buddhist. Other WCF retreats follow closely the traditional structures provided by Chan Master Sheng-yen and many practitioners have attended several of such retreats. The WZR often yields 'One mind' experiences and a few kenshos have been facilitated by their use, occurring a few days after the retreat or later on. Kenshos are always rare but in this sangha several have appeared after or during the more orthodox Chan retreats led by Crook and Child.

Concerning the evaluation of retreatant experiences, John Crook and Simon Child of the WCF, are well aware of the dangers in wrongly attributing the title "kensho" to an illuminating experience arising for an individual who is simply well into the process of either mind calming or koan evaluation. Most such experiences are of self-world unity - the "One

mind" experience and not "seeing the nature" with no-self present. In his talks with John Crook, Master Sheng-yen has clarified the difference between 'one-mind' experiences and 'no-mind'. 'The unified mind remains of the same structure as the divided one. It is not yet gone beyond. It is not the no-self' [Crook, 2002; 41]. This usually becomes clearly apparent in the manner of a practitioner's self presentation during confidential interviews with the master.



Another subtle danger that Master Sheng-yen and John Crook have pointed out, is that of 'self-forgetting' or as it is put 'self-invisible', being confused with 'self-absence' [p94]. Here a meditator, has forgotten about his or her self, as indeed he/she may do in the intensity of a One-mind experience, and for a time, this sense of self is not in the foreground. They may report this as an 'absence of self' but this experience can be probed and discerned in further questioning by an experienced leader. Only a masterly con-man could get away with this.

Master Sheng-yen has argued that One-mind experiences are very important and valuable on the path. He has this to say about one-mind and its relationship with no-mind: 'It is usually the case that the appearance of no-mind depends on the prior integration of the mind. So long as self and its object are separate, the one regarding the other, there is duality. The split mind of discrimination cannot transcend its own habits. You cannot experience release into no-mind from a divided mind; you can only do it from a unified one. And where there is no-self we may say there is no-mind. For, in this perspective, the ordinary mind is the activity of self' [in Crook, 2002; 41].

John Crook has kindly provided details of some retreatant experiences during kensho which clearly point to a unique sense of absence. For example:

- finding no-one there in zazen and then finding no-one looking at the face in the mirror. (i.e. rational observation may continue even in absence of I)
- suddenly seeing a rare bird and discovering no one doing the seeing.
- walking down a street and suddenly finding oneself "returning" when trying to cross a road in traffic.

- extreme emotional release followed by self-emptiness.
- Finding no-one driving the car after a retreat.

Crook adds that the ultimate test of the occurrence of “kensho” is the effect of the experience on the Dharma understanding and conduct of an individual as life goes on. Master Sheng-yen has added that a genuine ‘seeing the nature’ is often followed at irregular intervals by lesser echoes of the same experience. (John Crook in private communication)

Thus, the EI may well provide great opportunities to integrate the personality perhaps leading to one-mind experiences but only rarely facilitating the onset of kensho. Arguably, it would be the job of the leader to urge the meditator to continue their practices and not to be satisfied with any passing states, as wonderful as they may at first appear.

### **Big Mind**

Big Mind is the process founded by Dennis Merzel in 1999. Merzel, is an American Zen Teacher who received inka from Bernard Glassman in 1996.

With this process, Merzel claims to be able to introduce all that come to his meetings to genuine kensho/satori in one session and even in one hour [cf intro Wilber’s Forward to ‘Big Mind - Big Heart’ p.15 and Merzel’s videos on Youtube].

The technique is based upon the work of Hal and Sidra Stone, which they called ‘Voice Dialogue’. Here, sub-personalities are contacted, with a view to their functions being recognised, appreciated and integrated. It resembles the understanding of Transactional Analysis and the work of US Psychiatrist, Eric Berne which worked with three ego states: Parent, Adult and Child states. In the Voice Dialogue, working with the Psychology of Selves involves a range of sub-egos categorised into ‘primary selves’ and ‘disowned selves’. Merzel has expanded this range to include ‘Big Mind’ and other ‘Non-Dual and Transcendent Voices’.

So, can kensho ever be an awakening to a self? I think not if we maintain a Buddhist perspective. In Merzel’s plan, the participant adopts the role of many of these sub-personalities and eventually ends up in the role of ‘Big Mind’ or ‘The Way’ or ‘no-self’. Arguably, to play the role of ‘no-self’ is just what it is: playing a role. Can one pull oneself up by one’s boot laces? When an actor played ‘The Invisible Man’, was he really there or not? You decide.

Another important point that has been raised by John Crook <sup>6</sup> among others, is that Merzel in his sessions is operating a technique not unlike hypnotic induction using suggestion with his audience to engage with the different sub-personalities. Here, Merzel is in control. This is in stark contrast to established Buddhist meditation techniques and also to the EI techniques of dyad communication where it is the individual that has increasing control of their internal processing.

I’m sure there is much value in Merzel’s process, and a more fluid, integrated personality is possible as a result. That said, to call this kensho or satori reveals a complete misunderstanding, either intentional or not, of what these terms point to.

### **Conclusion**

Having reviewed the three approaches to kensho of Shingaku, Enlightenment Intensive, and Big Mind TM, the only systems that have reported results satisfying our criteria approaching bona fide kensho appear be Shingaku Sekimon and the Western Zen Retreats run by the WCF. Since WZR’s are closely related to traditional Chan intensive retreats one may also

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<sup>6</sup> In email to WCF Leaders March 28th 2008



surmise that these also can produce kenshos as claimed in the literature but that these too may be relatively few.

The key elements of the Shingaku movement appear to be:

- a direct pointing to the root of the senses and of the mind (the unborn).
- Sustained, present observation, (including formal meditation sitting and at all times) coupled with a questioning intent, of ‘what is seeing/ hearing/ smelling/ tasting/ feeling/thinking.
- A dropping of the overuse of calculation or premeditation.
- ‘Making the will sincere’. The practice of intuitive thinking (omoi) and acting on it.

It is possible that the high rate of reported kenshos by the Shingaku movement may indeed be the result of the confusing of one-mind experiences with actual ‘no-mind’ experiences. Without detailed reports, we shall not know. However, it does appear that many safeguards were put in place by Baigan to ensure the validity of such experiences by way of certification by himself and later by his heirs.

The Enlightenment Intensives certainly can accelerate insights into one’s personal make-up. However, the procedure in itself is not fundamentally orientated towards setting up a kensho unless given under the direction of a ‘master’ who themselves have had an authentic awakening. Berner, in his manual, has said that any one who has read the manual is free to run EI whether or not they have had deep experiences themselves. This to my mind is dangerous territory and I recommend any potential participants check the EI leader’s credentials before engaging in the EI process.

Big Mind and its Voice Dialogue again can apparently loosen up one’s view of ‘self’, but to claim 100% kenshos in a day may be no more than a marketing ploy. It should be noted in this context, that on Merzel’s web site, he offers special retreats at \$50,000 per person, 5 persons per retreat. He has 6 such retreats listed that are full or nearly full, grossing some \$1.5 million <sup>7</sup>. Naturally, with such expenditure, participants may well expect and believe that whatever happens is an enlightenment.

As a final thought, John Crook has insightfully pointed out that whilst the Shingaku techniques may point to an empty or unconstructed ‘mind’ prior to perception as the root or base for mental construction, Berner’s and Merzel’s methods “deal with constructed abstractions of identity high up the levels of narrative formation” (private communication).

This attending to that in which perception arises, to my mind, points to the heart of what was Hui Neng’s approach at the very source of the Chinese Zen tradition; start and end with the ‘essence of mind’ and all shall be well.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.genpo.org/Big\\_Mind\\_Big\\_Heart/Big\\_Heart\\_Circle.html](http://www.genpo.org/Big_Mind_Big_Heart/Big_Heart_Circle.html)

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## **The Dressing Room Door**

Peter Hawkins

*My good friend Peter practices in the Sufi tradition. His poem here shows how similar in important respects the Sufi and Zen traditions actually are. JHC*

*The applause is fading into a memoried echo  
Theatre lights are extinguished one by one  
And in the fading twilight of the dressing room  
The actor slowly disclothes his role.  
The greasepaint scraped, the costume removed  
And hung on the hook behind the door.  
And for a timeless moment  
The once actor, stands there all alone  
Naked, empty, between the worlds.  
“Was he Hamlet? Did Hamlet exist there on the stage?  
Where has Hamlet gone?”*

*Naked he goes to take from the hanger his other garb  
The one familiar in his daily world.  
Then for a moment, pauses, wondering about that other role,  
This self he has learnt to play.  
What happens, he wonders, if he leaves this role  
Hanging on its hook?  
And in this moment of freedom  
Neither being Hamlet nor playing self  
Slips free through the crack in time  
Out through the fire exit, previously unnoticed  
Into another world and the free night air.*

*But who was it that left that night?  
And who was left, hanging on the door?*

*To Michaela*

## **Bitter Joy**

**Ken Jones**

Perhaps it is the rare east wind that shuffles the cards and puts a spell on this day. For here it is the westerlies that have shaped everything – even states of mind. There's something unnerving about smoke blowing backwards. And my neighbour's Red Dragon worn to a frazzle with flapping all morning in the wrong direction.

Through loud woods an arthritic climb to the Llew Goch – our two-tongued Red Lion. Smoke down the chimney and the regulars quieter than usual. Lunch at my corner table.

*The cawl's so thick  
my spoon's bolt upright  
the barmaid's mocking smile*

I opt for the steeper and wilder way home. Still up to it. Turned up collar, hands deep in pockets, I take the path along the margin where meadow gives way to marsh. Treading carefully between past and future.

*Yellow gorse  
sweet sickly scent  
of memory*

The bleat of newborn lambs, who think it's always like this. And dying beside the stream a pregnant ewe.

*At my voice  
she turns to me  
two crow black sockets*

I say some kind of blessing. Her Eurotag M578 puts me in mind of my own measured going. The monthly blood tests plotted on graph paper.

*Mortality  
spelt out  
in small blue squares*

Snakes and ladders. Cat and mouse. Both of us playful, but it's the cat who has time on her side. And time, time is the climbing of this path through young larches, livid green with yet another year of life. Higher still the plantation has been shattered by wind-throw -- a consternation of uprooted and dismayed trees. But some stout oldsters with a stronger grip still thresh about.

*Twisted grey larch  
on its veined roots  
I brace myself*

Breaking out on top, a sheep track threads through the bracken to the boundary wall.

*Unlatched mountain gate  
itself alone  
swinging and swaying in the wind*

With beating heart, breasting the head of the pass, all of a sudden my own wooded valley below, with its winding river and scattered farms.

*Blown on a cold wind  
this rain  
of bitter joy*

## **Interview Training!**

### **A Laugh, contributed by Andrew Horwood**

The new priest is nervous about hearing confessions, so he asks an older priest to sit in as observer on his sessions. The new priest hears a couple of confessions, then the old priest asks him to step out of the confessional for a few suggestions.

The old priest suggests, "Cross you arms over your chest, and rub your chin with one hand."

The new priest tries this.

The old priest suggests, "Try saying things like, "I see, yes, go on, and I understand. How did you feel about that?"

The new priest says those things, trying them out.

The old priest says, "Now, don't you think that's a little better than slapping your knee and saying 'Oh wow, no way!'"

## Neither This nor That

### Talk Three on Silent Illumination, May 2005

#### Simon Child

I want today to fill in some of the background to Silent Illumination, so I have brought some texts for us to consider. Yesterday I started with just three lines, enough to describe the whole practice. Here are some more lines. They are from a text called 'The fundamental expedient for calming the mind that contains enlightenment.' which is from the 5<sup>th</sup> Chinese Ancestor, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, five centuries before Hongzhi.

*"Someone who is not disturbed either by chaos or serenity is a person with a know-how of good Chan practice. When one always dwells in tranquillity the mind perishes. But if you are always in a state of discernment then the mind scatters chaotically".<sup>1</sup>*

So, just Silence or just Illumination does not work. What works is bringing those two together. These two correspond to the aspects of Samatha and Vipassana from Indian Buddhism and also to Zhine and Lhatong in Tibetan Buddhism: 'calming' and 'insight' practices. Historically, before the Buddha, the main practices were for calming the mind. The Buddha's discovery was the importance of adding insight practices to the calming. In many traditions these are practised separately, you practice one or the other. But in Chan / Zen, these are united into a single practice. This unified approach goes back to the time of Bodhidharma who integrated the two practices. So when we do Chan practice we are doing Samatha and Vipassana together, at the same time. The very name of this practise, 'Silent Illumination', states explicitly that one does the two practises of calming and insight together.

It's true that many of us do practise Samatha separately to calm the mind, since many of us start off with the mind in a state that is too scattered to approach Silent Illumination directly. So there may be an initial period purely of calming the mind. But even with that we do emphasize an aspect of openness of inquiry. Yes, you are following the breath but you are also encouraged to notice what is getting in the way, what is arising in your mind. Notice the obstacles, do not suppress them.

So going back as far as the time of Bodhidharma these two aspects of the practice were brought together. Since that time the practice has developed in various ways. Master Hongzhi Zhenjue (Jap Wanshi Shogaku) was credited with inventing Silent Illumination but it is perhaps more accurate to say he codified the then current practices under the title 'Silent Illumination'. These aspects were there before him, going back to Bodhidharma. Hongzhi is perhaps best known in the West through the book 'Cultivating the Empty Field'<sup>2</sup>.

Master Hongzhi Zhenjue lived in the 12th Century at Tiantong Monastery in South East China. In the year 2000 John Crook led a trip to South East China and we actually visited this monastery. It's an important monastery in the history of Chan and Zen. It's where Hongzhi wrote these texts and it's where, a few decades later, the famous Japanese Zen Master Dogen went. He had searched all around China trying to find a good teacher and eventually the one who satisfied him he met at Tiantong Monastery. So he trained there and had an Enlightenment experience and received his Transmission there.

So there we were at Tiantong Monastery, steeped in history, with letters of introduction from Master Sheng-yen which helped us gain access. We were greeted by one of the senior monks and taken on a tour of the monastery, and we arrived at the meditation hall but could not enter as there was meditation in progress already. But we were able to sit there 30 minutes later, with

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<sup>1</sup> Ed John Daido Looi, 2004, *The Art of Just Sitting*, p193, Wisdom Publications

<sup>2</sup> Tr Daniel Leighton with Yi Wu. 1991. *Cultivating the Empty Field*. North Point Press.

instruction from the monk. Then they opened the library for us. So perhaps we were in the same meditation hall where Dogen had his enlightenment<sup>3</sup> and the same library where Hongzhi wrote these texts.

The Silent Illumination of Hongzhi's writings is more a state than a practice. He describes what it is like rather than how to get there. People often think of Silent Illumination as a rather passive, relaxed practice. Well yes it is relaxed because you can just let yourself relax and at some point the state may arise. But it can also require effort. Unless you are already there, you need to set yourself up for this state, to make yourself prone to falling into it. And that requires a certain amount of settling and clarifying the mind. It requires a certain determination to see. It is not always a relaxed practice. Here's a quote about Dogen's Master, Juching, who, keen that the monks practised seriously, used the phrase 'single-minded intense sitting'.

*"Juching's attitude to the practise of meditation was marked by rigid severity. When the training monks fell asleep during meditation he made the round striking them with his fist or slipper, shaming them demanding that they wake up. If the monks still could not resist sleeping he went to the illumination hall to strike a bell to summon an attendant to light candles and he would preach to everyone: 'What is the use of gathering in the meditation hall then wasting your time sleeping? Is this what you left your homes and entered the monastery for'?"*<sup>4</sup>

Here's another reading:

*"On another occasion one of Juching's closest attendants told him of his exhaustion because of a lack of sleep. In this way the attendant expressed his opinion that the meditation sessions were too long and should be shortened. Juching was infuriated. 'Absolutely not! Those who do not possess the mind for the way would fall asleep in the meditation hall even if the sitting period was shortened. For those that have the mind for the way and the determination or discipline the longer the sitting period the greater the enjoyment they find in their training. When I was young I went to visit Abbots in all corners of the world. One of them once told me 'If a monk was sleeping I would strike him until my fists nearly broke. I have grown old and weak now and I cannot strike as hard. That is why good monks are hard to come by. Because Abbots in all corners of the world are lenient towards sitting, the Buddhadharma is declining. All the more we must strike them hard.'"*<sup>5</sup>

So yes, we relax into Silent Illumination but we need a certain amount of dedication to practice as well. We can relax too much and lose it. There is a serious risk with Silent Illumination of falling into quietism. For this reason Master Sheng-yen did not used to teach it very often.

Here is another reading from a contemporary of Hongzhi who was an 'opponent', from the Linji lineage. He didn't believe in Silent Illumination, being aware of its pitfalls. He felt that everyone fell for the pitfalls rather than being aware that they were just risks you had to look out for.

*"Some take sitting wordlessly with eyes beneath the black mountain inside the ghost cave and consider it as a scene on the other side of the primordial Buddha, the scene before their parents were born. They also call it 'silent but ever illuminating' and consider it 'Chan'. This lot don't seek subtle wondrous enlightenment, they consider enlightenment as falling into the secondary.*

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<sup>3</sup> I later discovered that this Chan Hall, whilst probably the oldest in China, was in fact rebuilt following the destruction by fire of the hall used by Dogen.

<sup>4</sup> Takashi James Kodera, 1980, *Dogen's Formative Years in China*, p59, Routledge and Kegan Paul

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p60



*They think that enlightenment deceived people, that enlightenment is a fabrication. Since they have not awakened themselves they do not believe that anyone has awakened".<sup>6</sup>*

I don't think he was a fan of Silent Illumination! But, yes, there is real risk with Silent Illumination that you sit there congratulating yourself on your 'Silence', earned through a lot of work and possibly pain, and you want to protect it at all costs. There's a risk that you therefore shut down your senses, because the noises and sights coming in from outside disturb your silence. Then you're falling into quietism. You're falling into the 'black cave'. Be aware of that tendency, of that risk. We also go in the other direction, we fill our mind with ideas, intuitions and fancies and think we've worked things out. That's not it either. So take care to get this balance right between the two aspects. Don't fall into the cave, and don't fall into the realm of ideas with mind scattering again.

So if you are succeeding in avoiding these two perils, if you are in fact in a state of Silent Illumination, what might that be like? Here's a quotation from Hongzhi in a translation by Master Sheng-yen.

*"Silently and serenely one forgets all words.  
Clearly and vividly It appears before you."*<sup>7</sup>

Forget all words. That is what I was hinting at earlier. There is no need to have any ideas about the things that you see and hear. They simply appear before you and they are clear. No need for words, labels, thoughts. It appears before you.

*"When one realizes It, time has no limits.  
When experienced, your surroundings come to life."*<sup>8</sup>

Turn that around, if you are putting in the way words and ideas your surroundings are dead, you don't know what they are doing, you know only your own thoughts. You do not know the world. Forget all words and It appears before you, your surroundings came to life.

Here's another description from Hongzhi in Cultivating the Empty Field, translated by Master Sheng-yen. The 'Field' refers to Buddha Nature, to what is seen when one sees The Nature, all those synonyms. 'Field' is used as a metaphor.

*"The field is vacant and wide open. It is something one has had from the very beginning. You must purify and correct it, clean it off, get rid of all deluded conditioning and illusory habits. You will naturally arrive at a place which is clean and pure, full and bright. Totally empty without any image, solitary and independent it does not rely on anything. Clear and vast, one illumines original reality and relinquishes external objects."*<sup>9</sup>

You are illuminating original reality not your own thoughts and ideas. You are relinquishing external objects, your own secondary thoughts.

These descriptions may be hard to follow because you are not in that state. When you are in that state these passages make sense. So let's retrace our path to getting to this state through practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Tr Christopher Cleary, 1977, *Swampland Flowers: The Letters and Lectures of Zen Master Ta Hui*, p131, Grove Press

<sup>7</sup> Ch'an Master Sheng-yen, 1987, *The Poetry of Enlightenment*, p83, Dharma Drum Publications

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p83

<sup>9</sup> Master Sheng-yen, 2002, *Illuminating Silence: The Practice of Chinese Zen*, p136, Watkins

We start from the state we all know well, the scattered state. And through practice, including maybe some initial calming practice such as following the breath, then Silent Illumination by placing the attention on the whole body as an even experience, we settle the mind in the body so the mind and body take up the same space. They are together, unified, they are not two things. Your experience is your body experience. Your body sensation is your sensation. Be really solidly present. This you can 'do'. What happens beyond that is not something you can 'do'.

If you try to move the practice beyond there you spoil it. There can be no jumping ahead. But by itself, over a period of time, it may change. I will tell you how it can change not so that you can try to cheat by jumping ahead since that does not work. I will tell you so you have some understanding of what is happening when it happens by itself. Because it can seem that you are losing the practise if you do not understand that this is a natural development.



As you settle with the practice, body and mind become one. When this happens that phrase 'body and mind become one' will have some meaning for you, whereas previously it did not. You are present, there, experiencing your own life, your own movements. This is the first stage of settling into Silent Illumination.

And then as you continue with that you may notice that part of your body experience is the external environment. Part of you being there is hearing the birds and the sheep, seeing the flames of the fire. When you are very settled the environment comes in naturally as you notice these things. They are just there. External phenomena come into you but do not disturb you. Or maybe it could be said that you are going out to them, because there becomes a sense in which you lose your boundary. They are not real questions to ask, 'Are the sounds in you, or have you gone out to the sounds? Is the sound of the bird in the tree out there somewhere, or have you gone out to the tree to the bird?' These sound like strange words when you are not in that state, but when you are in that state you cannot answer the question whether the bird is inside or outside of you.

So, as in the first stage, your mind and body are together but there is a sense in which your mind and body are larger. You can look at this as 'is the bird out there in the tree, or is the birdsong in your eardrum as it vibrates?' The place of the hearing has no meaning because it happens within your sense of you which no longer has the same confines. When this happens you may feel you have lost the practice of Silent Illumination because you no longer have the same sense of body awareness that you had previously. But all is OK, you've not lost the practice, it has moved on a stage.

Actually you still know you have a body but now it is of no more significance than the sound of the bird or of the running water in the stream. You still know what the body is doing but it is no longer your prime focus. There is walking of the body but it has no particular importance any more than the sound of the bird or sight of a flower. They are all there clearly and vividly. This is what is meant by saying that inner and outer become one. So in Silent Illumination, in the first stage body and mind fuse together. In the next stage, inner and outer, body and environment become one.



And there are various gradations within this. It's not a sudden big flip, it's just a sense of being a bit bigger to some degree. It comes and goes. When you notice this there is nothing to do. The main thing to check is that you are still aware of everything within that boundary. If you have lost part of the boundary, for instance if you have gone off into the environment and lost the sense of body then that is not Silent Illumination. If you have a sense of the landscape and the body as one then that is it.

Other things arise in this condition. It's not only a matter of inner and outer. Time changes. Master Sheng-yen phrases it as 'present thought and subsequent thought become one.' Just as there isn't a distinct sense of (separately) 'me, bird, stream', there isn't a discrete sense of 'this thought, that thought', or 'now, then'. There is just the flow. You are in the flow. In that sense time has no meaning. This is the origin of the phrase 'One thought for ten thousand years'. There is one thought, there is not a sequence of individual discrete thoughts. There is a flowing thought.

As we go further in the stages they get harder to talk about. It's already hard to talk about 'where is the sound of the bird' with someone who does not know that state. But just as in the shift from the body and mind merging, then to the inner and outer merging where there is a sense in which you lose the body and yet it is still there, there is also a sense of another shift in which you lose this merged mind/body/environment but yet it is still there. Master Sheng-yen sometimes describes this stage as 'contemplation of emptiness'. In the sense that you have lost body, mind and environment, they are empty. Though at the same time there is sense that you know they are still there and you are contemplating them. And then beyond that is the stage of No-mind, when you have truly lost them, they are no longer there to be found even if you looked.

You cannot push yourself through these stages. It is a complete waste of time to try. What you can do is set yourself up in the beginning stage. Work on the body awareness and a little bit of the second stage by allowing the sounds to come in when you are ready. If you allow them to come in too soon they will draw you out and you will lose your focus on the body. But when

you are sure that your merging of body and mind is solid enough, you can allow the sounds to come into that experience. Anymore beyond that you cannot do.

A nice metaphor Master Sheng-yen once used was of a subway train with a huge crowd trying to get in, with masses of people heading for one door. The people in the very centre of the doorway may get squashed but they are more likely to get onto the train. But if you are on the edge of the mass of people you are less squashed but at some point the pressure pushes you off the side. It's pointless saying 'I should be over there where the pressure is highest'. It doesn't work to try to push in, you have to go to the back of the queue again. 'Going back' in Silent Illumination is returning to focus on the body. If you find yourself starting to expand but then you lose it don't think 'Oh I want to start there again'. It doesn't work. If you lose it, go back to your body awareness. Body awareness can be something that you do naturally, or you can use a method such as circle of the arms. Or simply check that you are aware of yourself as you walk around. Doing body self-massage helps bring different parts of the body into awareness.

I'll lead you now through a simple guided relaxation, which is used on Master Sheng-yen's retreats in New York. One simply scans the body checking all parts are relaxed. Sit in meditation posture. You can have eyes open or eyes closed. Normally in meditation we recommend that eyes are open for half or more of the time so that you don't sink into the black cave of quietism, but for this exercise you can have your eyes closed.

Start with the eyes, relax the eyes. Master Sheng-yen says to relax the eyes means 'no thinking'. Relax the eyes and also relax the face. Check the face muscles are not holding a smile or a grimace; just let them relax doing nothing. Let the face relax.

Let the scalp relax, release any tension. Relax eyes, face scalp. The whole head relaxed. Check the head is balanced on the neck so the muscles are not working hard. Chin tucked in, eyes down at 45 degrees.

Check your shoulders are relaxed, is there any tension there? Are holding yourself a little tense; adjust if you need to. Check the arms, are they comfortable, relaxed and supported. Hands touching in meditation posture. Palms on top of each other with thumb tips touching lightly. The image is that you are holding a small insect between your thumb tips. You do not want the insect to escape, and neither do you want to crush it. Relaxed hands touching but not pressing hard.

Now check your back, are you leaning to left or right, backwards or forwards, are you slumping or is your back straight. Check your posture and get a balance point.

Continue down to the legs. Inevitably there will be some tension and pressure because they are bearing your weight. But is there more than necessary? Are you fighting back? Check that your legs are relaxed. The muscles should be relaxed even with the weight and pressure of the body on the legs.

Now in your own time go over the body again, checking all parts to see that they are relaxed and balanced. If your mind wanders off bring it back and check the body again. In this way stay in contact with all parts of the body. Know whether parts of your body are tense or relaxed. Know what is happening, experience your body.

## Retreat Reports

*Retreat reports are an integral aspect of our journal and one much approved of by Shifu. We print them mostly anonymously and are most grateful to our practitioners for sharing themselves so generously with us. In reading these reports we learn much about the experiences of others on retreat and they often provide pointers for our own understanding Eds.*

### His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Nottingham Arena

#### 24th to 28th May 2008 – a Retreat Report

Over 12,000 people attended the teachings given by His Holiness Dalai Lama (HHDL) at Nottingham over a 5 day period in May 2008. I was one of the fortunate ones to be at this assembly, a great Dharma festival, meeting many people and together basking in the blessings of the Bodhisattva Chenrezi.

The first two days of teaching were public talks that explored the meaning of our lives and how best we could help each other. HHDL spoke in English and his translator helped out intermittently. HHDL outlined how everyone shared the desire for happiness and wished to avoid suffering. He then went on to look at how suffering was experienced and how mental suffering was more powerful than physical suffering. Suffering was identified in mistakenly seeing other persons with negative emotions, rather than simply identifying their actions as negative. The person should always be viewed with compassion on the underlying assumption that he/she too wanted happiness and its causes; whereas the negative action should be viewed as negative, and rebuked. Throughout the 5 days of his talks, HHDL made many references to scientific knowledge and he compared the Buddhist understanding of mind and the scientific understanding of mind/consciousness. The latter is explained mainly in terms of activity in the brain and HHDL stressed the importance of scientific methodology, that is observation without prejudice or bias before a proper examination is carried out, because this objective “attitude” could reduce mental suffering by reducing prejudice.

I began to feel that everything conspired to act as a support for my body, speech and mind. We were staying with Dharma friends from the Western Chan Fellowship who converted their home into a temporary retreat for 14 of us. We woke up at 5.30am each morning to meditate and do our jobs before the morning teaching and returned home after the afternoon teaching to have a wonderful vegetarian meal and more meditation. In this way we were able to discuss the day’s teachings, get to know each other, be very comfortable in our luxurious but low cost settings. This environment generated a very positive state of mind in which to receive the teachings.

The next 3 days HHDL gave teachings entitled “Investigating the Nature of Reality”. It was based on two hymns entitled the “Essence of Well Uttered Insights” and “Hymn to the World Transcendent”.

I assume that HHDL spoke in Tibetan when giving the teachings because of the technical nature of the text. HHDL set the backdrop for his commentary on Nagarjuna's text by looking at how Buddhism fitted in with other religions. He did this by posing 3 questions that all other major religions posit. That is: Who am I? Does the I have a beginning? Is there an end to the I?

In his response to these questions I understood clearly how Buddhism was really different from the other major religions that believe in a God (Islam, Christianity) or a soul/ eternal object (Hinduism). Because Buddhism does not have a God at its centre, its focus is the investigation of mind or consciousness rather than an explanation of the relationship between God and man.

HHDL took this opportunity to emphasize the worthiness of other religions and the respect to which they were due. I have heard HHDL expressing great admiration for the work of Mother Teresa and encouraging Buddhists to explore loving kindness in this way rather than merely occupy themselves in ritual. His theme of tolerance and compassion for other world views was also expressed towards the two sets of demonstrators (Chinese students demonstrating “One China” and The New Kadmapa requesting HHDL to give them religious freedom!) who accompanied us during the teachings. In this way HHDL truly demonstrated, among other things, the lack of dogmatism and the emphasis on tolerance that is found in Buddhism.

HHDL's teachings on Dependent Origination showed how Buddhism is not just a rational philosophy or belief system but that it is an active-never ending enquiry. HHDL did this by posing one question after another and showing how the question you begin with transforms into another as the enquiry proceeds. Starting with the question “Who am I?” leads to an understanding that there are two aggregates in which the “I” may exist: the body and the mind. So we then pose the question, 'Does an independent self exist in either of these aggregates?' By examining this question we are led to the questions, is there a beginning to the physical and mental aggregate? Is one aggregate more important than the other? If the mental aggregate is more important, is there a beginning to it? From a Buddhist point of view the answer is no, there is no beginning to mental aggregate or consciousness. HHDL agrees with the big bang theory that the universe began 13.7 billion year ago and this was the beginning of our universe. However, that does not preclude the possibility of parallel or prior universes nor, most significantly the existence of consciousness.

HHDL also discussed the process of enquiry and what constitutes evidence. HHDL mentioned 3 types of facts: evident, obscure and hidden, giving examples of each. For e.g. A hidden fact could be your birth date. You cannot remember when you were born and would have to rely on evidence from a third party such as your parents or birth certificate; whereas evident and obscure facts are known through direct perception and reasoning.

HHDL said that this process of enquiry relies on observable evidence and is a method of probing that has similarities to the approach of scientific enquiry. The importance of scientific knowledge was a theme that HHDL repeated throughout the talks. HHDL said that scientific knowledge of the physical world far exceeded that of Buddhist knowledge of the physical world. HHDL went so far as to say that he rejected the passages that dealt with the cosmology of the universe in the Abbidharma as they could not be supported by the scientific theory about the origins of the cosmos. Furthermore, HHDL has encouraged all the Buddhist monasteries to introduce a syllabus of science teaching to be taught concurrently with Buddhist philosophy.

HHDL gave a very careful, detailed, technical presentation of the law of cause and effect, describing the different ways in which it was understood. Firstly, when cause gives rise to an effect, the cause ceases and the effect arises. This is known as “coming into contact”. Secondly, each and every phenomena conceptualized is in a relationship. That is there is always a relationship between observer and observed. Thirdly, in the Madhyamika school, dependence is understood in the way we use language. Language does not represent the reality of what is expressed, although it does convey meaning: “If a word and its referent are not different, The word fire would burn one’s mouth, but if they are different there will be no comprehension” (Hymn to the World Transcendent).

The way in which HHDL presented this material was like Indra's net where everything is reflected in everything else. The heart of Dependent Origination is about interdependence and ultimately how we as human beings are connected to one another, the other species we co - exist with and the planet on which we live. The teachings are very relevant for me at this time when our species are becoming more aware of our impact on the planet’s resources and the

life of other species and desperately want to understand not only the impact of our actions, but how to resolve the issues we face.

As each day continued I became more familiar with the concepts, the explanations and the style of presentation and how the great Buddhist scholars engaged in endless debates that enabled them to gain this wonderful understanding of the human mind. HHDL exhorted us not to be content with what we knew and to keep questioning/testing our understanding and broadening our knowledge so that we experience the truth or not of the teachings.

HHDL displayed his wit and totally down-to-earth response in his answers to questions taken each day. Here are some of them. In response to a question about what could be done to counteract someone's fear of death, HHDL came up with "avoid extreme sports". Another was in reference to the Heart Sutra. Two monks were reciting the Heart Sutra; one of the monks was not familiar with it. After the recitation the naive monk asked the other "Wouldn't it be easier to say no head instead of no eyes, no ears, no smell, no taste, no touch, etc.....?"

May his life be secure for hundreds of kalpas!

## **Up the Sutlej: Learnings from India**

### **Report on the retreat-journey in Himachal Pradesh, Sept 2008.**

I wanted to go on the planned, silent retreat in the mountains north of Simla to deepen my understanding of who and what I am; what Buddhism is and to learn how to incorporate its principles more into my being, to be more equipped to live its understandings of life according to its principles and precepts on my return to England.

But, instead, I was confronted not with the silence of retreats in a montane forest (except all too briefly) and near Himalayan glaciers but by the disruptions of all expectations by overwhelming emotional and physical interactions on a daily basis, by total uncertainty about how each day would unfold – all offering an exceptionally powerful learning experience.

I am very much a beginner in Buddhism and not very disciplined regarding any "practice" yet I am profoundly drawn to what I see as clear truths in those Buddhist teachings that I have met.

Undoubtedly, I feel that this uncertain, tempestuous journey gave me the opportunity to learn far more than I would have done had all gone according to plan. Firstly, I was given ample time to realise the truth within many of the Aspiration Prayers used at the Maenllwyd – in particular:

*Let me observe my karmic reactivity so that I may insert reflection before I speak or act.*

*May my words and actions reflect consideration and understanding for the waywardness and stupidity of others.*

*Let me perceive the Dharma in the life of my teacher setting aside his/her mundane characteristics.*

*May I train my thinking so that my thought corrects itself before any harm is done.*

*Let all beings be as my mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters or children and let me so care for them.*

*Leaving aside my wish for the future let me realise that life is only now.*

I feel that this journey, so full of unpredicted storms, landslides, falling rocks and lost time as well as human interactions around these, has enabled me to come face to face with some key concepts in Buddhism, enabling me to have a living and direct experience of the following:

1/ How we generate suffering, how this is caused by not living in the NOW.

We need to allow our daily lives to unfold without putting expectations onto them and without forming emotional attachments.

2 I came to understand more clearly the effects of our Karma – of our clinging to and acting out our own habitual ego patterns. Our view of how we wish to be in life and how we may have lived out our Karma has such heavy influence on how we behave and on what we expect of others in a crisis. It seems that the nature of our attachments arises out of our karmic life. We become attached to:

a/ phenomena (things we are used to, our comforts, how we believe others should behave)

b/ abstract ideas and concepts, ways of viewing life arising out of our life at work, at home, socially, and we try to hold on to these even when all around us is changing and such views are no longer appropriate to the situation.

c/ feelings/sensations – a longing to hold onto loved, beautiful feelings or not to let go of angry, resentful ones.

3/ Through experiences on this journey, I feel I had a direct experience of Impermanence, of the ever changing nature of life – the impermanence of phenomena; disintegrating roads, rocks, mountains, - the impermanence of the workings of the everyday mind and thoughts, - ever shifting plans, schedules, hopes, expectations and the ever changing behaviour of human beings. In sum—the ever changing nature of causes, conditions and their effects.

4/ With regard to causes and consequences, I came to realise how important it is to be aware of the ‘gap’ between a cause and its effect, and, where possible, to place observation and silence in that gap by waiting and watching followed by compassion. This could assist the Prayer of Aspiration where it says: “ Let me observe my karmic reactivity so that I may insert reflection before I speak or act”

5/ I realised there is quite an art in having Patience – to wait for the negative energies to shift – sometimes a “Nothing to do” mind is required.

6/ I also had a direct experience of Joy and Affection emanating within myself. We were given a bookmark by the Leader of the trip, Mary Kingsley, that said “The art of adventure was to be bold enough to enjoy life now”. So often have I restricted such good feelings within myself. I allowed myself on this trip to fully experience joy and affection but to be aware of the dangers of attachment, the desire for such good things to last for ever, which can only cause suffering. I need to let go even of happy things when the time comes to do so. In the meantime, live the Joy fully in the Now.

This was indeed a journey full of crises, uncertainties and some dangers and yet - for me - the snow-capped mountains of Kalpa, the mists and waterfalls of Sarahan, and the Joy and Love I felt will long remain within me. This was indeed a trip of a Lifetime.



## **Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution**

**David R Loy**

**Wisdom Publications (Boston), 2008; ISBN 0-86171-558-6 (pbk)**

**Reviewed by Ken Jones**

This book comprises fourteen essays which originally appeared as articles or talks by one of the leading theoreticians and popularisers of socially engaged Buddhism. ‘Liberated Buddhism’ is the focus of the first half. By this Loy means that “Buddhism needs to take advantage of its encounter with modern/postmodern civilisation – offering a greater challenge than Buddhism has ever faced before -- to engage in a self-examination that attempts to distinguish what is vital and still living in its Asian versions from what is unnecessary and perhaps outdated”. Thus “the Dharma must find new modes of expression that speak more directly to us, including those who may not be much interested in Asian cultures.” (p4). Loy demonstrates that the Buddha himself “was more flexible and open minded than the institutions that developed to preserve his teachings” (p.7). The second half of the book focuses on key aspects of an engaged Buddhism, “where the dharma offers us fresh ways to understand the fix we’re in today.”

The first essay, ‘The Suffering of Self’, expounds basic Buddhism around our root sense of lack. This perspective is then deployed, in three further essays, to understand our delusive experience of money, of fame, and of time, and why we never seem to have enough of any of them. Loy then slots in an introduction to the great monk-philosopher Nagarjuna (The Second Buddha’), who argued that “we think we experience the real world, but the world as we understand it is a linguistic construct that deludes us” 9p.47)

The essay on karma deals with three ways in which it has traditionally been misunderstood. Here Loy recalls the Buddha’s advice in the celebrated Kalama Sutta, which would suggest that “accepting karma and rebirth literally, without questioning what they really mean, may actually be unfaithful to the best of the tradition ... Given what is now known about human psychology, including the social construction of the self, how might we today approach these teachings in a way that is consistent with our own sense of how the world works?” (pp55-76).

The essay ‘What’s Wrong with Sex?’ is of interest not least because of its rarity value in Buddhist writing. Here there is a step-by-step exploration of how far received Buddhism is compatible with contemporary attitudes towards sex and gender. The key issue is “what we expect from our relationships ... consciously or unconsciously we hope that romance and sex will fill up our sense of lack, but they don’t and can’t” (p77).

The book next moves on to social engagement with a hard-hitting essay ‘What would the Buddha do?’ “I suspect there is a special place in hell reserved for those who refuse to give up the self-centred indifference that allows them to sit indefinitely on their cushions while the rest of the world goes to hell” (81). Loy trenchantly argues against the belief that I must first attend to my own liberation before I can be of service to others, or that ‘from the highest point of view everything is empty’, - there are no living beings so no need to worry about their fate (p82).

‘The Three Poisons Institutionalised’ examines the social expressions of greed (free market consumerism), ill-will (globalised war and militarism), and delusion institutionalised in the mass media. (There is also a separate essay on “Why we love war”). It is followed by a piece titled “Consciousness commodified: The attention-deficit Society”. “Our awareness is conditioned in new ways: fragmented by new information and communication technologies; commodified by advertising and consumerism; and manipulated by sophisticated propaganda techniques. Who owns our collective attention, and who has the right to decide what happens to it?”

'Healing Ecology' is a well argued study of how our characteristic personal response to our sense of lack is socially expressed in the limitless exploitation of the biosphere leading us to a wilful mass suicide. "Why is our GNP never enough? Why do we never have enough technology?"

In the concluding 'Notes for a Buddhist revolution' Loy maintains that, while we can envision "a more 'dharmic' society whose institutions encourage generosity and compassion,... this doesn't help us very much. Is a reformed capitalism consistent with a dharmic society, or do we need altogether different kinds of economic institutions?" He concludes that "Buddhism is really about awakening and liberating our awareness, rather than prescribing new institutional structures for that awareness" (p141).

"The role of socially engaged Buddhism is not to form a new movement but, along with other forms of engaged spirituality, to add a valuable dimension to existing movements already working for peace, social justice and ecological responsibility. " What Buddhism has to offer these movements is identified and discussed as: The importance of a spiritual practice; Commitment to non-violence; "Awakening together" (which includes various bodhissatva virtues essential for self-less social action, like not being dependent on results); and Impermanence and emptiness (which imply flexibility and non-attachment to fixed ideas).

Finally Loy addresses the question "What should socially engaged Buddhists focus on? There are so many problems that we don't know where to start" (p146). For many engaged Buddhists this is likely to be the most controversial part of the book. While acknowledging global climate change and related ecological issues as the most important of all, "I suspect that Buddhism has little distinctive to offer in the short run ... we are now collectively at the point where everyone knows the direction we need to move in. The question is whether there is the political and economic will to do so" (p148). (And, crucially, this reviewer would add, why there is not the will?). However, instead Loy argues for Buddhists "a distinctive role in emphasising the places where our collective awareness has been trapped, and showing how to liberate that awareness from those traps." This means a root and branch campaign against advertising and other forms of information manipulation. "Severe curbs on advertising would have enormous repercussions for all of society, because consumerism depends on it." This in turn would strike at the heart of our problems: "the influence of major corporations not only on the economy, but also on government and on our ways of thinking ...". Loy concludes that they are the worst expressions of institutionalised lack that has assumed a life of its own. "In reality, the future will be grim unless we can find ways to rein in corporate power" p.150).

In short, this is a book which provides an accessible and wide-ranging introduction not only to engaged Buddhism, but also to ways in which the ancient Asian dharma can be adapted to play a significant part in liberating our world from its awesome crises.

## **Notices**

### **Forthcoming Retreats**

Details and booking form at [www.westernchanfellowship.org/retreats.html](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/retreats.html)

### **Important Notice to Members Regarding Future AGM Arrangements**

As announced at the AGM on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2008, we are reducing the expense and workload of mailing AGM papers by switching over to email notification.

For those of you for whom we already hold an email address, please be sure to advise the membership secretary of any changes in email address.

For those of you for whom we don't hold an email address, please advise the membership secretary, [membership@westernchanfellowship.org](mailto:membership@westernchanfellowship.org) of your email address.

### **Website Update**

The website layout has been updated and will hopefully be easier to navigate. Please take a look: [www.westernchanfellowship.org](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org)

### **Data Protection Act IMPORTANT Please Read**

We keep the NCF mailing list and the WCF membership list on a computer database for administration and mailing purposes. If you do not wish your details to be kept on a computer database then please write to the Membership Secretary. There are sometimes circumstances where it may be helpful to use this database in other ways, and we would like your permission to do so. We would of course do so sensitively. The circumstances that we have in mind are to contact individuals in a geographical area e.g. (i) to attempt to form the nucleus of a new local meditation group or (ii) to respond to enquirers who wish to discuss Chan or WZR or meditation with a contact in their locality.

If you would not wish your details to be released in such circumstances then please write to the Membership Secretary and your wishes will be respected.

### **Submissions to New Chan Forum - Editorial Policy**

We welcome your contributions, whether articles, poetry, artwork, retreat reports, letters, or whatever else. However we do not promise that we shall publish your contribution, or in which issue it will appear if we do so. Owing to the workload involved, our policy is that we do not acknowledge materials received.

Where possible submissions by email to [editorial@WesternChanFellowship.org](mailto:editorial@WesternChanFellowship.org) are preferred for articles, poems, etc, since this obviates the need for retyping or scanning.

For artwork email submissions are also useful, but in addition non-returnable copies or originals by post may be helpful since then if required we can rescan them ourselves at higher resolution than may be appropriate for email attachments. Thank you.

The articles in this journal have been submitted by various authors and the views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the Western Chan Fellowship.

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