

NEW CH'AN FORUM

禪

No. 22 Autumn 2000

Dharma Adviser

*The Venerable
Ch'an Master
Dr. Sheng-Yen*

Teacher

*Dr. John Crook
(Ch'uan-teng
Chien-ti)*

Editors

*John Crook
Pamela Hopkinson
Simon Child*

Artwork

*Sophie Templemuir
Helen Robinson*

Photographs

*Guo-yuan Fa Shi
Ann Brown*

Price: £2.50

ZEN PERSPECTIVES

In this issue we look at many issues from a diversity of perspectives. Shih-fu sets us going by warning us against taking people at their face value. John Crook makes a new proposal asking — Could a lay monastery actually work? Simon Child launches into Dharma teaching and leading retreats. John examines European Zen and the place of Ch'an within it. Iris Tute has visited an important conference on Women and Buddhism in Germany. Alysun Jones tells us about her experiments in teaching meditation to children. Mick Parkin's philosophical piece has real practical implications for us all. And we have our usual offerings of poems and artwork. Could it be we are gradually coming of age?

CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----|
| Prologue: No going by appearances. | Master Sheng-yen | 2 |
| Editorial from the Ch'an hall. | Chuang Teng Chien Ti | 4 |
| A new proposal: a Lay Zen monastic centre. | John Crook | 5 |
| In the spirit of Ch'an. | Simon Child | 8 |
| poem: Death is Now | Jane Spray | 12 |
| The Place of Ch'an in Post Modern Europe. | John Crook | 14 |
| poem: Multicultural wash | Mark Drew | 32 |
| Women in Buddhism | Iris Tute | 33 |
| Teaching meditation to Children | Alysun Jones | 34 |
| poem: The silence | John Crook | 36 |
| The Best of Both Sides | Mick Parkin | 38 |
| poem: July at Maenllwyd. | John Crook | 41 |
| Retreat report: On trying to say "I'm me!". | | 42 |
| Adverts etc Fellowship information. | | 46 |

Prologue:

NO GOING BY APPEARANCES¹

Master Sheng-yen

*Outwardly like a complete fool,
Inwardly mind is empty and real.*

Often, it is a monk who appears slow and somewhat dumb who is the great practitioner; and the monk who appears to be extremely sharp and knowledgeable is the one who often needs to practice more diligently. Do not concern yourself with or waste time wondering what your experiences may mean, whether you are making progress or not, or how you appear to others. Stay with your method and the rest will take care of itself.

Looks can often be misleading. Some monks who appear to be foolish or dumb may actually be deeply enlightened. There are many stories in Buddhist history that speak of enlightened monks who were often overlooked by others because of their behaviour or appearance. Often, these monks would disregard many of the minor monastery rules, making them appear to be disrespectful, ignorant, or absent-minded.

One such story involves Ming dynasty Master Han-shan (not the poet) and his experiences with a monk while visiting a monastery. This particular monk had contracted a disease that had grotesquely bloated his body and had turned his skin a sickening yellow colour. He was shunned by the rest of the monks in the monastery because they were disgusted by him. He spent most of his time alone because no one would go near him. Still, he was grateful for being in the monastery, and when he asked for a work assignment, he was given the task of cleaning the bathrooms.

Master Han-shan developed an interest in this man because every morning he noticed that the bathrooms were spotlessly clean. Han-shan inquired and was directed to speak to the sick monk. This monk told him that he would clean the bathrooms every night while everyone else slept because he himself had no-where to sleep. After he was finished with this assignment, he would spend the rest of the evening in the Meditation Hall waiting for morning service.

After hearing this, Master Han-shan had great respect for the monk that everyone else avoided. As it turned out, Master Han-shan had a few, long-standing problems with his meditation that he could not resolve. He thought that there might be more to this monk than anyone knew, and so he told him about his problems and asked for guidance. Master Han-shan's intuitions were correct, because the diseased monk regarded the problems as a simple matter and offered perfect advice.

We can gain a few insights from this story. One, this monk felt no need to advertise his experience and attainment; and two, he was neither depressed over nor deterred by the preconceptions of and treatment by his peers. He did not indulge in arrogance or self-pity. How affected do you think you would be in similar circumstances? Would great spiritual experiences fill you with feelings and thoughts of pride and superiority? How would you react if you were the subject of constant ridicule or harassment? Worse, how would you feel if you were ignored and shunned? Would you have the same resolve and equanimity as did the monk in the story?

¹Excerpted from Ch'an Magazine and lightly edited.

Usually, the more deeply enlightened a person is, the less he or she will stand out in a crowd. Once, someone made a long pilgrimage to Master Hsu-yun's residence in order to meet the great, contemporary master. The man spotted a nondescript monk spreading manure in a field and asked if he was going the right way and how long it would be before he arrived at Hsu-yun's monastery. The monk in the field annoyed the traveller because he asked questions about his reasons for wanting to visit Hsu-yun. The traveller did not want to be bothered by this ordinary monk, but as you may have already guessed, the manure-spreading monk was Hsu-yun himself. My master, Lin-yuan, also did not have the appearance of a great, awe-inspiring monk. It was the same for me when I was younger, but now people show me more respect. Some may say it is because of my personality and reputation as a Ch'an teacher, but I suspect it has more to do with looking old and my hair turning white.

These two lines of verse refer to the appearance of one who is already enlightened, but I encourage all of you not to wait for enlightenment to cultivate such an attitude. You will have far fewer vexations if you have the attitude of the diseased monk in the Han-shan story. Pretentiousness is the source of many problems. Whatever you are doing, just do it. Do not concern yourself with the approval or disapproval of others. Do not think about whether you look like a fool or not. People waste so much time and energy trying to impress or take advantage of others.

How many of you would accept a job as a cleaner of bathrooms? Would you consider the job to be below you? How many of you would be willing to let someone else get the better of you in certain situations? If you cannot do even this, then you have not learned much from practice. If in your mind you are clearly aware of what is happening around you or to you, then it does not matter what others perceive or believe. You may appear to be foolish or gullible to others, but in your mind you know you are not. Cultivating such a personality can also be transformative for others, because people will eventually realise that you are not a fool and that, in fact, you are accepting them. Such behaviour gives others permission to be more honest and less pretentious.

One of my students in Taiwan once told me that he is clear and sharp when he listens to my lectures, but when he is working he feels dull and one step behind everyone else. Then he turned to me and said, "You often appear like that yourself, Shih-fu. If I didn't already know you and were to see the way you act sometimes, I would think that you were a stupid idiot."

I did not expect such a comment, and so I responded, "A person with great wisdom is like a fool." But then I added, "Since I'm not a person of great wisdom, you are probably right. Perhaps I am just a fool."

I am relieved that because of my practice, I have grown less sensitive to things other people say and do; otherwise, I probably would have been insulted by this man's comment.

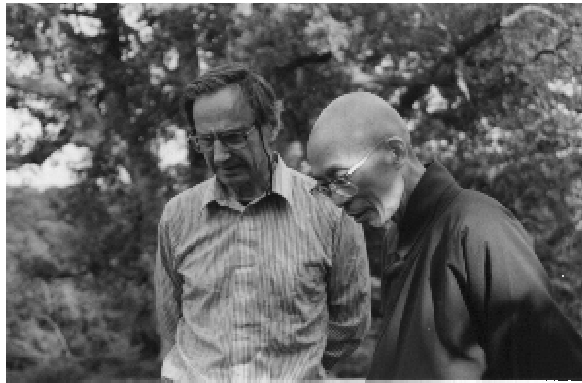
Actually, it is true that I am sometimes slow-acting. I could claim that it is because I am mindful about my every decision and movement; but the truth is that sometimes, I do not know what to do. Once, two of my disciples were arguing and fighting right in front of me. If I had adhered to the rules of the temple, I would have asked them to leave. Instead, I closed my eyes. I sat there, doing nothing, and then left.

The same person who called me a stupid idiot witnessed the entire interaction, and he caught me in the hallway and asked, "You are their Shih-fu. What are you going to do about it?"

I said, "I don't know." Ultimately, I talked to each disciple, but not until they had finished arguing and had calmed down. I did not see any point in trying to reason with them when they were in the middle of a fight. Nothing would have gotten accomplished. By waiting until they were calm and rational, I was able to talk to them without shaming them or antagonising them further. Also, because they were clearer, the problem was quickly and

easily resolved. I still am not sure if my strategy was foolish or wise, but at the time, it seemed to be the expedient thing to do.

In our daily lives, we should train ourselves to be less sensitive to the perceptions of others. Like enlightened beings, we should not be afraid to appear outwardly foolish. Whenever you find that you are filled with vexation because of embarrassment or over-sensitivity, reflect, "Why am I not cultivating outward foolishness and inward clarity?" This is not an easy task for most people, even for Buddhists and Ch'an practitioners. Moreover, we are not enlightened beings, so we cannot expect to act this way all the time. But it is definitely an attitude worth cultivating, and I encourage you to make it an integral part of your daily practice.



Master Sheng-yen with John Crook
Photo: Ven Guo-yuan Fa Shi

EDITORIAL FROM THE CH'AN HALL

A number of important things have been happening in the Fellowship and all of them can be warmly welcomed. Shih-fu's retreat at Gaia House was successful and we are grateful to the management there for their assistance in running this important event. Shih-fu also enjoyed a mutually beneficial visit to Throssel Hole Abbey. We all appreciated the warm hospitality we received from the whole community.

Last year, for the first time ever, I was unable to run the January retreat due to a very severe and unpleasant attack of 'flu. I made it to the Maenllwyd and carried through a number of interviews but I was grateful to Hilary and Ken for running the event in my stead. Retreat reports show they did well and this has increased my confidence in gradually introducing new leaders to our programmes. I was especially grateful to Hilary for her TLC when I was feeling exceptionally low. "Patience!" she said. Under my circumstances of almost total, cough racked, immobility this was a wise reminder.

After this retreat Will Turner donated a Millennium Tree which we planted ceremoniously. Unfortunately it is not doing well and we may have to replace it.

Simon has lead two short retreats solo this year thus embarking on a new Dharma career. Working respectively with Hilary and Sophie as Guestmasters, the two events were warmly received and reports indicate that a positive atmosphere was created by their work. Simon has trained with me as retreat leader for several years and is now fully qualified to help us all at such events.

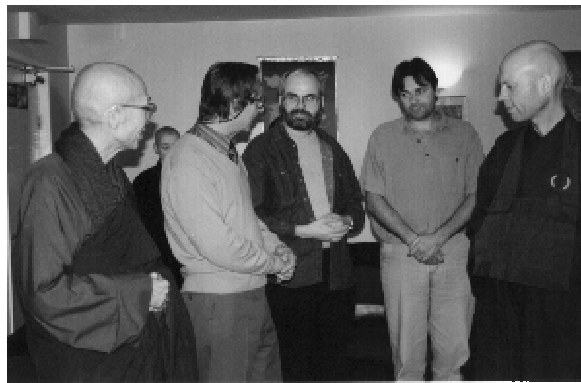
As if on cue but quite independently, Shih-fu also informed me while in New York that Simon was among three Westerners he was going to allow to lead Ch'an retreats. The others are Gilbert Gutierrez in California and Max Kalin in Switzerland. While Shih-fu has

yet to give "Dharma transmissions", he may be considering doing so when the three have had some experience 'under fire' as it were.

In Britain we are thus especially privileged in having two retreat leaders recognised by Shih-fu. Since Simon has had his experience in Ch'an recognised by Shih-fu as having "seen the nature", fellows and other retreatants can feel unusually secure in receiving Simon's help and guidance. Simon's first Dharma talk is given in this issue of our journal. I warmly welcome Simon as my colleague on the Dharma path.

Things move along. This year there will be a full programme of retreats in the UK and I will be visiting Warsaw, Zagreb and Berlin to support the Ch'an Sanghas there. It has also seemed to me that time was ripe to float a further suggestion (see below). Maybe this will prove to be a bridge too far - but let us see.

Ch'uan-teng Chien-ti



Simon Child (centre) with Shih-fu, John Crook and Alec Lawless at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. Photo: Ven Guo-yuan Fa Shi.

A NEW PROPOSAL: A LAY ZEN 'MONASTIC CENTRE'

John Crook

It is several years now since I proposed that the casual retreat arrangements at the Maenllwyd might be of greater value to people if we created a charitable institution. Soon the WCF was in being and is now safely established and supported by small affiliated groups in a number of British cities. We have important European contacts and, thanks to Simon Child, a site on the web appreciated by many world-wide. We conduct retreats that almost always run. May be it is time to consider a further development.

I am making a proposal here for discussion among Fellows and all readers of this journal. What exactly do I mean by a "lay monastic centre" or lay monastery? First of all, it is clear that for the foreseeable future most Ch'an practitioners in the West will be lay people. We do have some models of actual monasteries - for example Throssel Hole Abbey, Tassajara and Green Gulch Farm etc, but even these places are sustained primarily by laity. From such lay practitioners I have received requests or questions about some kind of residential arrangement that would be rather more permanent and enduring than our current system of retreats allows and which would focus on longer term, personal retreats within a community practising silence and mindfulness but without the restrictions of a permanent commitment to training for a religious profession.

Perhaps here we may take Gaia House or the Sharpham Trust experiments as examples of the type of community that may be initial models for consideration. Gaia House runs many

short term retreats but also sustains a system allowing long term private practice within a loose set of communal rules. Sharpham House has experimented with a community, a residential college and now a looser educational system with short-term residence.

I envisage a property with at least five or six rooms for personal occupancy, a meditation hall, a library-cum-office, accommodation for a Director, a sizeable garden or land and set in a suitable environment. Residency would not be permanent. Individuals would contract to stay for perhaps a two to three month minimal residential period open to renewal. The community would thus refresh itself regularly and be less likely to suffer from internal social problems than institutions of more fixed residency. Practitioners would all be lay persons of considerable retreat experience and personal dedication, supported by letters of recommendation and subject to interview. The centre would not be a place for teaching but for practice. Residents should therefore be capable of individual practice. The Director, especially if the first one was myself, would not be permanently in residence. Supervision through dokusan interview would however be more or less regularly provided. Each member would have a personal, agreed upon, practice and daily schedule set within a communal structure involving meals in common, a liturgy, two to three group meditation practices, group discussion and two hours work in the property. Individuals would take turns in certain essential roles such as cooking, obtaining supplies, office work, housework and gardening etc. One member would be a manager for whom some financial benefit may accrue.

Individuals might also be encouraged to do some creative work on their own during residency. This could be study, research or thesis writing, preparing a book or articles, a programme of reading, local field work or service or the continuation of a career through computer or other practicable means such as e-mail. Possibly some relationship with local Buddhists of a mutually beneficial nature may be established in time. While the main orientation would be Ch'an Buddhism as viewed by the WCF, persons of other Buddhist persuasions may, after appropriate discussion, also make use of such facilities.

The key question is who would be interested in such a project? Clearly a sustained occupancy would be essential for financial reasons. Who would like to come? People who have contacted me so far are mostly individuals who wish to deepen their spiritual lives but who do not envisage monkhood as a professional undertaking. They have had some deep experiences on retreat or otherwise in their lives and seek to explore the Buddhist way of being. Other individuals may have just emerged from some trauma in marriage, illness, through accidents or bereavements or war, terrorism etc and seek a period of sustained quiet under some supervision. Others may be approaching retirement and wish to reconsider how their lives may best be fulfilled. The intention to reside permanently at the institution would not be appropriate, although return visits may be encouraged at least in some cases.

The "Director" would be responsible for the Ch'an Buddhist orientation of the view and practice sustained in the "Monastic Centre" and act as spiritual guide to the community. The prime orientation would be that of the WCF as constitutionally established. Master Sheng-yen in conversation has approved the project. The manager would literally 'manage' the day to day arrangements. Various committees, advisory board etc would be established and the exact relationship with the WCF clarified.

Where could this be? Of course, were it possible to secure land and funding it would be good to develop Maenllwyd along these lines. Alternatively other properties might be considered. I may be able to supply some initial finance but any development would be dependent upon considerable fund raising. A major effort to raise sufficient funds would be required and this involves financial management at many levels.

In the short term, a property owned by my sister and I may be a suitable site for an initial one-year experiment. We own a beautiful house set in a large wooded garden in central Southampton. Although obviously urban, the property is secluded, surprisingly peaceful and has a happy atmosphere conducive to reflection and meditation. It is fully equipped and certified by the city council for multiple occupancy and is currently leased to students. While a considerable loss of rental might be sustained by such an experiment, should sufficient enthusiasm be shown this is a matter we are very willing to consider seriously. The advantage of this property is that no additional fund raising is required to set the project going.

The house currently comprises six bed-sitting rooms equipped as student studies, enough to accommodate one director and five "yogins", one large room suitable as a meditation hall, another as a social room or lounge for meetings, a library-cum-office, a kitchen dining room and a large entrance hall way. There are two bathrooms and three toilets. In the approximately one and a half acre wooded garden full of bluebells in spring is a hut which, after renovation, could be used as additional summer accommodation. The driveway could accommodate three to four cars. Southampton is a pleasant city, currently booming, with easy access to the sea, the Isle of Wight and the New Forest.

Preliminary study of the economics suggest that a number of scenarios for residency are possible. A calculated price for residency of say £15 per head per day (i.e. £450 per month), exclusive of catering but inclusive of council tax and insurance as well as basic house maintenance, is only slightly above current student rates and below most holiday rentals. (Prices might be lowered with a full house sustained as such over a period.) This would allow either:

- 3-5 people in residence each for single months throughout the year thus allowing thirty-six "yogins" to experience retreats.
- or 3-5 people in residence for three months each thus allowing twelve different people to experience longer retreats.
- or various combinations of such periods or longer.

The exact relation between this project and the WCF would need careful consideration due to the nature of the financing. It may initially have to be a separate project running in close relationship to the Fellowship.

Turnover times would be on an individual basis so that the community would have a fluctuating membership and hence a number of people would participate in management roles to provide a varying meditative environment. On the whole I believe retreats of this kind would be best when of at least three months duration.

This experiment could be set up quite soon depending upon the interest and enthusiasm shown. Obviously such a project is a dead duck without a committed and positive input from participants. Vague, half-hearted interest would not be sufficient.

So there it is -- I look forward to hearing from Fellows and readers of this journal in order to assess the nature of interest that the proposal arouses -- questions, alternative ideas, offers of financial help, or direct expressions of interest that might lead to an application to participate will all be welcome. Do contact me as soon as possible. None of us is getting any younger and the time is now.

Contact address: Winterhead Hill Farm. Shipham. N. Somerset. BS25 1RS. Expressions of interest by letter, not by phone calls please.

IN THE SPIRIT OF CH'AN

Simon Child

When I was first asked us to lead this short retreat, my first thought was "Why do they need someone to lead a weekend retreat, can't they just gather together and sit together?"

I guessed I would have to provide some sort of teaching. So then I wondered what teaching might be valuable? Perhaps I should regurgitate something remembered from a book or a sutra that I have read but which you may not yet have seen? Perhaps there might be some use in that but somehow that didn't seem right. Probably you all know that Bodhidharma is reputed to have described Ch'an as:

*A direct transmission outside the Scriptures,
Not dependent on words and letters,
Directly pointing to one's own mind
Seeing into one's own nature.*

Perhaps that would be the form of teaching that you hoped for, a special transmission outside the Scriptures? Hmmm.

The problem seems to be that any constructed practice, be it a meditation method or scriptural study, or whatever, does not appear to be a direct pointing. It appears to be at best an indirect pointing, or perhaps simply a background or preparatory activity.

We probably all know that the word Ch'an is derived from the Sanskrit word Dhyana, which refers to meditation. So immediately we can see that meditation seems to be at the core of Ch'an. But we also hear warnings not to become attached to meditation. There is the famous story of the master-to-be Ma-tsu. Ma-tsu, known in Japanese as Baso, was one of the great early Ch'an masters from the 8th century, only two generations after Hui-Neng. Most of you will have already heard this story, but it's worth considering again.

*One day Master Huai-Jang (Jap. Nangaku) visited Ma-tsu's hut. Ma-tsu stood and greeted him.
Huai-jang asked, "What have you been doing recently?"
Ma-tsu replied, "I have done nothing but sit in zazen."
Huai-jang asked, "Why do you continually sit in zazen?"
Ma-tsu answered, "I sit in zazen in order to become Buddha."
Huai-jang picked up a tile and started to polish it using another tile he found by the side of Ma-tsu's hut.
Ma-tsu watched what he was doing and asked, "Master, what are you doing?"
Huai-jang answered, "I am polishing this tile."
Ma-tsu asked, "Why are you polishing the tile?"
Huai-jang answered, "To make a mirror."
Ma-tsu said, "How can you make a mirror by polishing a clay tile?"
Huai-jang replied, "How can you become a Buddha by doing zazen?"*

Ma-tsu became a great master and was the teacher of several well-known masters, particularly of Huai-hai (Jap. Hyakujo), an ancestor of Lin Chi and famous in the story of Hyakujo and the fox, and of Nan-chuan (Jap. Nansen) who was famous for cutting a cat in half, and in turn was the teacher of Chao-chao (Jap. Joshu) from whom the koan Wu (Mu) originates.

The rug has been pulled out from under us twice now, no dependence on words and letters, and no dependence on meditation either. So what is this Ch'an that we are trying to practice, and how is it practised?

Let us take a further look back in time and see how Bodhidharma saw this. Bodhidharma is reputed to be the first carrier of the Zen transmission from India to China. I say reputed to be since although historians seem to agree that he actually existed, they have little hard evidence on how and what he actually taught. The verse earlier about direct transmission is ascribed to him, and also a teaching on the "Two Entrances and the Four Practices". This is quite an important text but you may not have heard of it. Master Sheng-yen has written an introductory booklet on Ch'an practice entitled "In the Spirit of Ch'an" and in it he uses this text as the central document.

Lets look at these Entrances and Practices.

Bodhidharma spoke of there being two entries to realising your own nature. The first is Entry through Principle, in essence it is just to do it, and he describes it like this:

*"Leaving behind the false, return to the true;
make no distinction between self and others.
In contemplation one's mind should be stable and unmoving like a wall."*

This may well be a direct path to Enlightenment but most of us cannot manage it. We cannot manage to set our minds unmoving like a wall, and to stop making distinctions between self and others, and so on.

So he also spoke of Entry through Practice, and he described four methods. Shih-fu makes the point that these four are of progressive difficulty.

The first practice is of "accepting karmic retribution". Karma is a difficult concept for many of us, particularly if it involves discussion of past lives. Let us just look at it in a simple, straightforward way. Actions in the past have consequences in the present. Our actions in the past have effects which may be maturing now. Can we accept what the present delivers to us as being the result of past causes and conditions which are maturing in this present moment, without "picking and choosing" and wishing that it were otherwise? Can we notice our own tendencies not to want to accept the retribution of karma on our present lives?

The second practice is "adapting to conditions". At first glance this sounds as if it contradicts the first one. Firstly we are told to accept karmic retribution, but then we are told to adapt to the conditions that result from it. It seems we are trying to wriggle out of it! But whatever the conditions that we encounter as a result of karmic retribution, whether favourable or otherwise, it is up to us not to reject them but to make the best of them, to use them skilfully. The message of this second method is that as we accept our karmic retribution, whether unpleasant or favourable, there is no point in getting upset or excited. There is no point in getting upset when we receive a painful karmic retribution, it is only our just deserts. Similarly when something good happens there is no need to feel that something special has happened, it is only happening as a result of our past good actions and so it is natural that it should happen. Just as acceptance of karmic retribution requires non-aversion, it also requires non-grasping when the present circumstances are good. For better or for worse that is what is happening, and we need to live our lives skilfully accepting the consequences of past actions, without aversion or attachment, and adapting ourselves to the resultant present circumstances.

The first method seems to emphasise acceptance of our karmic retribution, and the second our adaptation to (but not avoidance of) the circumstances that result from karma.



The third practice is "No-Seeking". This is a higher and more difficult practice. Usually our activities are motivated by thoughts of gain for ourselves. This practice requires that we consistently engage in useful activity, and yet without thought as to our own gain. To truly practice this requires a realisation of no-self. To begin practice we need an attitude of non-seeking, being willing to engage usefully with the world, but without concern as to whether the use is to ourselves or to others.

As we go through these three practices we can see a progression in the attitude required. Firstly we need an attitude of being willing and able to accept the results of our past actions maturing in the present. Secondly we must have an attitude of flexibility, being willing to adapt to and flow with these differing circumstances that arise, making the best of them, not being attached to fixed ideas of the outcome that we seek. Thirdly our attitude of non-seeking means that we do not have any attachment to any outcome at all, whether for ourselves or for others, and yet we do act.

The fourth method is "Union with the Dharma". It is a basic tenet of Buddhism that all phenomena are empty and impermanent. In this method we try to personally experience this impermanence and selflessness through direct contemplation of emptiness. This is the highest practice and allows us to reach the point of entry though principle, the first and rather difficult entrance of which Bodhidharma spoke.

It is interesting that overtly there is no recommendation to sit in meditation in the first three practices, and yet we also hear of Bodhidharma sitting in meditation for nine years facing the wall, and that he taught a new form of meditation which was called wall-gazing. As far as I can establish Bodhidharma's own teaching on this "wall-gazing" has not survived, but seeing how the teaching was hailed by his descendants as a new method it probably referred not just to the physical posture facing the wall, but also to the mental attitude and method, indeed having one's mind "stable and unmoving, like a wall" as mentioned in the first entrance through principle.

So right from the beginning of Ch'an, and of course going back further to the time of the Buddha, we see this balancing of meditation and other practices.

I think that we can consider the first three practices as corresponding to the "Ch'an Attitudes" that John has spoken of in the past. It is important to shift our attitudes. Just sitting on cushions is not enough. In considering Bodhidharma's words we are beginning to get a recipe for Ch'an practice. We may apply fresh attitudes in daily life and in meditation, corresponding to the first three practices of Entry through Practice, and, in addition, we have meditation methods to assist in stabilising and opening up our minds to the essence of our true nature. Although presented as two entries and four practices, with additional meditation methods, all these are to be considered together as one comprehensive approach to practice.

The admonitions not to be attached to zazen now begin to make sense, since true practice requires more than just sitting, and yet nevertheless it's importance is undoubted for those whose minds are not naturally stable, bright and clear - most of us!

It is also worth noting that these attitudes and meditations are complementary and support each other. Having a mind of equanimity, of acceptance, of non-grasping and non-seeking, is very beneficial to meditation. And on the other hand through the practice of meditation we can come to see the workings of karma in our own lives. We can learn to adapt to the results of past actions rather than to grasp them or reject them, and we can cultivate an attitude of no-seeking.

During this weekend, with most of us arriving from busy lives with unsettled minds, it is natural that we emphasise actual sitting meditation practice. Initially we relax and settle into just being here, in our bodies in this place. Then we raise a little alertness to actually notice the quality of that being here, to notice especially our own minds. Perhaps we need to apply calming methods to gain some control over our minds, then we return to watching the mind. When watching the mind, whether when sitting or in daily life, we have the opportunity to apply the Ch'an attitudes, the practices of Bodhidharma. We have an opportunity to accept what happens as karmic retribution and to lead our lives in accordance with the circumstances in which we find ourselves, not to be wishing that they were otherwise, not to be seeking, and to experience our union with the Dharma, to experience ourselves as not separate.

Can we do this? If we can then that is fine and we just do it, we enter through principle. If we cannot then we can use sitting practice to stabilise our minds, and we shall take the opportunity to observe whether or not we do indeed accept our karmic retributions, practise non-seeking, and so on. To the extent that we can do these then we are entering the gate of Ch'an, to the extent that we have difficulty with these we need to continue to practice.

DEATH IS NOW

A poem inspired by the passing of Don Ball. Obituary NCF 14. Spring 1997, 15-17.

*Death is now
Sitting here quietly*

*Death is now
Between each heartbeat*

*Death is now
Between the freezing raindrops*

*Hail Death
Ho!*

*Death in his wellingtons
Stomping across the yard*

Death with his scythe and Harley Davidson

*Death with his scissor-bright smile
Cutting the umbilical*

*Death with his laser-beam eyes
Jump, jump!*

*They're one and the same:
Death, the young tearaway, and*

*Death with his Parkinson's, trembling the tea table
Death with his slippers warming by the fire*

*His 'now where did I put my senile dementia?'
And totter of prescribed pills, for this caused by that.*

*Raindrops hang, reflecting, along the bars of a gate
Brimming with sky and light.*

*Bone-flower,
Glowing orange-pink
Against the grass.*

*Picking it up,
Flesh cushions the bone -
What is this moment's fear?
Of death. Of change.*

*Sitting here
Between the inbreath and the outbreath
Death is now*

*Between the Buddha and the incense
Death is now*

*Between the ringing and the silence
Death is now
Now*

Now

*Can you tell me
What death
is?*

Jane Spray with thanks to Don

THE PLACE OF CH'AN IN POST-MODERN EUROPE¹

John Crook

Shih-fu has encouraged me to assist Ch'an Sanghas in Europe as well as in Britain. Naturally this has caused me to look more closely at continental Buddhism than I might otherwise have done. Some of the results have surprised me. A review of this kind is essential to formulating a Western Ch'an suited to Europeans and this is one of the tasks Shih-fu has asked of us all.

INTRODUCTION.

When Master Sheng-yen got a shoe full of muddy water on alighting from his car in a remote farmyard in Wales in 1989 it was a but a damp prelude to the first presentation of Chinese Zen on intensive retreat in Britain. His subsequent visits have provided us with a fresh and profound discourse on the Chinese view of Zen hitherto dominated by Japanese versions. Few of us at the time also understood that these visits were perhaps unconsciously also a contribution to a considerable reinterpretation of the meaning of Zen for the West, or at least Europe.

When I was first asked to contribute to this volume I was rash enough to consider writing about the face of Zen in the mirror of contemporary "post-modern" Western thought. Reflection quickly revealed the arrogance of this idea. Yet the relation between the ideas about Zen current in the 1950s when I was first interested in the subject (Crook 1998) and the perspectives with which it is regarded today is an important field of enquiry for me personally. In 1994 Master Sheng-yen passed on to me transmission in the Lin-chi lineage of Ch'an to run intensive retreats and teach Dharma not only in Britain but where possible also in Europe (see NCF 9: 2-5). How to do this? I asked him. He replied by remarking that since I was British and he was Chinese it would be my task to find out! This article expresses some aspects of my attempts in this direction.

Since we are all lay practitioners the question of the nature of a lay Zen has much preoccupied us. For me, particularly, there has been the question of what emphasis to stress in the teaching of Dharma. The exciting opportunity apparent in the transmission of the Ch'an Dharma to Europe must necessarily engage the rapid changes in European culture and thought characteristic of our time. This change from a "modern" to a "post-modern" culture calls into question some of the interpretations of Zen and Buddhism that were accepted doctrine in the fifties. Without an examination of this critique there is a risk of failing to connect the profundity of the Dharma to our prevailing ways of life and thought. The skilful means are undoubtedly there but still to be fully uncovered.

SUZUKI ZEN AND THE POST-MODERN TURN

The shift to so called "post-modernity" arose fundamentally from the enormous changes resulting from a growing globalisation as reflected in the growth of transnational corporations and the world wide success of market capitalism. One aspect has been the availability at all times and seasons of food products from anywhere in the globe in the supermarkets of the developed world. In parallel, each and every religious belief and practice is nowadays represented on all our book stalls. One can sign up for virtually anything. The manner in which business, political and cultural transactions have developed has transformed our world to set up a complex, computer led, global interdependence of

¹This text is a re-edited version of an article of the same name published in a *festchrift* volume celebrating Master Sheng-yen's 70th birthday. Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, (2000) 13. 2 549-584. Taipei

economic and political activities so that nation states are becoming largely irrelevant and small minded local fascisms gradually a thing of the past. Philosophically these changes have led to a focus on the interdependence of culture and thought and hence to an emphasis on the contextuality of ideas, of historical interpretation, of taste, and of self-expression.

All Buddhists owe a tremendous debt to Daisetz Suzuki who, almost single handed, brought Japanese Zen to the West making a major impact on major contributors to the intellectual scene and thereby bringing a new found faith to many otherwise alienated from religious experience and thought. Among those touched by Suzuki were Thomas Merton, whose respect for the Japanese savant aided the emergence of a so-called Christian Zen, Christmas Humphreys, the London judge who was later to teach Zen himself, Carl Gustav Jung (in spite of some resistance), Erich Fromm and Aldous Huxley. Arthur Koestler devoted a somewhat intemperate book to a trenchant criticism of Suzuki's approach and, in the post war years of "beat" Zen in California, Kerouac, Ginsberg and Watts based their inspirations upon his writings. Arnold Toynbee is said to have remarked that Suzuki's introduction of Zen to the West would later be compared to the discovery of nuclear energy! The philosopher Heidegger, caught reading one of Suzuki's books is said to have remarked, "If I have understood this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings." (Barrett, 1956). Be that as it may, Suzuki's influence and parallelism with some contemporary trends in Western thought can certainly be said to have been profound. Yet, upon mature reflection resulting largely from a better acquaintance with forms of Zen other than those espoused by Suzuki together with the advent of scholarly, historical study and textual criticism, it emerges that it was his undoubted charisma, open hearted friendship and lovability, as much as his views, that accounted for Suzuki's fame.

Daisetz Suzuki was a great scholar capable of original research in Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese ancient literature and a subtle commentator on such works. His width of knowledge was great but his appreciation of Zen and Buddhism shifted during his long career from a profound antinomianism to a greater appreciation of the range of Zen experience and its historical transmission. It was however his early presentation that made such a great impact in the West. His later reservations have left little mark.

Suzuki's early view of Zen was lop-sided, favouring a presentation of Japanese Rinzai emphasising spontaneity of responses and the sudden and direct apprehension of reality (subitism). As Faure's detailed critique demonstrates (1993: 52-88), Suzuki interpreted Zen experience as the timeless, ahistorical, context free, basis of mystical experience and hence the very root of religion, of which Zen was thus the purest form (Suzuki 1949-53, 1: 73, 265, 270-272, 2: 304). The experience of enlightenment (kensho) was interpreted as a supreme individual achievement attained through heroic efforts but open to all irrespective of race, nationality or creed. "Because Zen is supposedly free from all ties with any specific religious or philosophical tradition, Suzuki argues it can be practised by Christians and Buddhist alike. -- Suzuki's view of Zen's "oceanic nature" reveals the extent of the exorbitant privilege that he confers on his own interpretation." (Faure 1993: 62).

Reading between the lines, his critics see in Suzuki's work a skilled apologia relating an increasingly triumphalist Japan of the post Meiji era to the Western world. In spite of living in the United States and marrying an American, Suzuki, in the end, is considered by some to have been a Japanese chauvinist who tolerated the militarism of his country leading to the Pacific war in WW2, did not condemn the use of Zen in military training and argued that the war itself was a consequence of Western intellectualism and lack of respect for nature (Faure 1993; 70. Victoria 1997; 22-25 etc). His work has been described as "militant comparativism"; comparative study in order to press home one's own case. And

yet it is necessary to place the wartime Suzuki in context. To a degree the Japanese police were suspicious of him due to his prolonged visits to the West and his marriage to an American. He lived in seclusion in his home in Kamakura and recognised that Japan could not possibly win a war against the USA. While his post-war writings accepted a link between Zen and the state, after the war, although he wrote several times on the war responsibility of Japan and accepted that Zen practitioners had been at fault, he mainly blamed Shinto for the disaster (Victoria 1997 147 et seq). As an adopted Westerner, were he alive today, Suzuki would doubtless be greatly surprised by being read in this negative way as indeed are some of his ardent followers.

Suzuki understood very well the spiritual vacuum in the West of the first half of this century, the aridity of scientific materialism and the alienation arising from the general collapse of Christian beliefs before the impact of scientific knowledge. In seeking to go beyond the mere rationalism of the Western 'enlightenment', not only was science itself then an expression of Western romanticism, a seeking for ultimate knowledge outside social and historical experience, but the extreme individualism of Western culture meant that personal cultivation leading to so high a credential as Zen "Enlightenment" based in a heroic, inner adventure was alluringly attractive (Wright 1998).

In reading Suzuki it is not always easy to distinguish between the early antinomian radical and the later more cautious and more orthodox Buddhist writer. Suzuki's tendency is to emphasise the spontaneity and radical nature of Zen. Thus after providing an entirely orthodox account of Zen Buddhist origins in Japan he goes on "Zen undertakes to awaken Prajna found generally slumbering in us under the thick clouds of ignorance and karma. Ignorance and karma come from our unconditioned surrender to the intellect; Zen revolts against this state of affairs..... Zen disdains logic and remains speechless when it is asked to express itself. The worth of the intellect is only appreciated after the essence of things is grasped. This means that Zen wants to reverse the ordinary course of knowledge and resort to its own specific methods of training our minds in the awakening of transcendental wisdom." (Suzuki. 1938. p5).

But what is this 'Zen' to which his use of the word applies - a person, a system, a belief, a form of yoga? Later, in referring to the way in which a master answer questions, he says: " --- the answering mind does not stop anywhere but responds straightaway without giving any thought to the felicity of the answer. This "non-stopping" mind remains immovable as it is never carried away by the things of relativity. It is the substance of things, it is God --- the ultimate secret -". (p80). In these moods Suzuki appears to forget pratitya samutpada, the interconnectedness of things and the identity of opposites completely. While the intimations that arise in meditative practice may be psychologically transcendent, the world within which they happen is far from so - the everyday grind of monastic living. Can one distance 'Zen' from this supporting context? Doing so has become the root of many confusions.

Yet Suzuki did not go unchallenged. In 1953 Dr Hu-shih, a one time President of the National Peking University, tackled him on his views concerning the non-historicity of Zen and its being beyond intellectual understanding. He gives a detailed account of the history of Ch'an and proposed historical reasons for the development of the idiosyncrasies apparent in Zen transmission which in his eyes had a rational, social if obscure basis. Suzuki's rebuttal is trenchant. "Hu-shih does not seem to understand the real significance of the 'sudden awakening or enlightenment' in its historical setting..... All the schools of Buddhism... owe their origin to the Buddha's enlightenment experience... no other than a 'sudden enlightenment'." He goes on to argue that this Zen "way of looking at life may be

judged to be a kind of naturalism, even an animalistic libertinism." Quoting Spinoza, he argues "this kind of intuition is absolutely certain and infallible and, in contrast to ratio, produces the highest peace and virtue of mind." "History deals with time and so does Zen, but with this difference: While history knows nothing of timelessness, perhaps disposing of it as a 'fabrication', Zen takes time along with timelessness - that is to say, time in timelessness and timelessness in time." Zen is thus seen by Suzuki to be apart from its historical setting.

Yet Hu-shih and Suzuki seem to be at cross-purposes. Suzuki is speaking of experience, Hu-shih of context. They do not seem to be able to fit these together. Suzuki always felt that his version of Rinzai Zen provided an ultimate vision beyond history. His indeterminate status between monk and layman, between scholar and popularist, between practitioner and missionary, between Japan and America, led to a view in which all things remotely resembling Zen could be assimilated into one vision; and everything else rejected. The Kyoto School of Philosophy created by Suzuki's friend Nishida has largely followed this line. The result has been a kind of Suzuki monism closed to the usual forms of academic criticism through a direct appeal to an absolutism of the non-historical.



From the same basis Suzuki argued strongly against 'gradualism' which he saw as inherent in the Soto tradition (Tsao-tung) of 'just sitting' or 'Silent Illumination'. He backs Ta-hui in his ancient confrontation with Hung-chih (1091-1157) on this issue and emerges therefore as strongly partisan in his interpretation of practice and its meaning in Ch'an. Leighton and Yi Wu (1991) have however shown that these two great contemporaries were actually friends who co-operated as teaching colleagues sending students to one another. Ta-hui's criticisms were not at Hung-chih personally but at those who used the "just sitting" methods without appropriate mindfulness. He himself also "sat" and was aware that koans too have defects, leading in some cases to intellectually obsessive worrying over old stories. Suzuki also ignores Dogen who warmly approved of both these old antagonists while favouring Hung-chih as the founder of his own practice. Not surprisingly Suzuki's lop sided Zen has produced strange effects creating a certain bias in the transmission of Zen to European shores.

The key European philosophers of post-modernism, Wittgenstein, Austin, Derrida and others have all emphasised the importance of the role of language and culture in

interpreting the significance of history in the understanding of metaphysical views. Analysis of texts and their historicity shows that all propositions are context dependent in often very complex ways; not only on the economic structures underlying culture but also on the interpretations of religion and self within those cultures. There is always a marked interdependence between philosophical statement whether popular or sophisticated, and its cultural frame. Even science is not free from this perspective as Thomas Kuhn (1962) in his analysis of scientific paradigms has shown.

Western romanticism, closely linked to colonialism and the heroic exploration of cultures in far off lands, Jerusalem, Timbuktu or Lhasa, was having its last throw in the fifties when John Blofield translated Huang-po and interpreted him through the 'romantic' vision of the time. We need to assess Ch'an and Zen and what previous Western writers have said of them, anew if we are to discover its relevance to our Western selves in our contemporary scene (Wright 1998). Zen, far from being independent from history, has, in its rich diversity, always been dependent upon it-- as indeed the Buddha, in pronouncing his principle of co-dependent arising, would have suspected and as Suzuki in his later writing also began to understand.

ZEN IN EUROPE

Much as we Westerners owe an initial understanding of Zen to the work of Daisetz Suzuki, we are also indebted to him for considerable confusion. It has not been easy to relate his monolithic vision to the contrasting expression of other Zen/Ch'an schools. Only in recent years, with the advent of outstanding, mostly American, scholarship, are we beginning to see our way through the haze.

One of the prime sources of confusion has been the absence of adequate Dharma teaching in the popular literature. Suzuki's emphasis and that of recent Rinzai tradition on the ahistorical nature of Zen has led to a situation in Europe where contemporary Zen is sometimes taught as if Zen as Buddhadharma was an irrelevance. Zen is seen as something basic to all religions, or at least both Buddhism and Christianity. This has meant that the historical tradition and philosophical underpinning of Sino-Japanese Zen is given little attention, the focus being upon various sorts of practice. Process and meaning have thus become divorced. One Christian Zen teacher even seems to pride herself on a lack of understanding of both Buddhist philosophy and Christian theology (MacInnes, 1996: 95).

This absence of a conceptual basis leads to an unanchored anxiety only too apparent in *Towards a European Zen?* a report based on a conference in Sweden in 1993 (Karlsson 1994). With the exception of Ton Lathouwers interesting examination of Zen parallels in Russian literature, most of the other articles are worried examinations of the problems of adapting Japanese Zen ritual, koans and the authority of a Roshi into a Euro frame. These worries combine with considerable criticism of the social scene in Japanese Zen and doubts about the authenticity of Japanese practice. This anxiety could be greatly relieved by serious Dharma study and by a concerted examination of the deep contrasts between Christianity and Buddhism, in particular problems around the conception of God. None of this is being attempted; serious academic work on Buddhist history and culture being left to the Americans.

In fact several of the Zen schools in Europe are currently in deep trouble. Both the school established by Philip Kapleau and the widely influential Association Zen International (AZI) of Taisen Deshimaru are agitated by issues concerning method and teaching and whether the original transmissions to their founders were reliable. In the case of the Kapleau lineage one key teacher has been dismissed for unethical behaviour. The

meditation offered by the AZI has been described by one critic as "loaded with and embedded into a complex ideological and authoritarian system of belief which is insidiously implanted into participants while being labelled as "true Dharma" (r.halfmann@nikocity.de 1999). Only Thich Nhat Han's centre in Plum Village (France) where Vietnamese Zen is taught, remains immune from such problems. Communication between Eastern teachers unfamiliar with the West and Westerners illiterate in Eastern languages and thought is another common problem. In Britain the Zen situation is more secure; both the Rinzai tradition led by the Austrian nun Myoko-ni (Irmgard Schloegl) and the Soto based tradition of Roshi Jiyu Kennett at Throssel Hole Abbey, being well founded both in practice and teaching, while other new fangled British Buddhisms (The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the New Kadampa Tradition) have been subjected to severe criticism in the press in spite of their considerable wealth and popular following.



Never the less there are interesting explorations in some of the new Zen paths. The FAS society founded some fifty five years ago in Kyoto by Shin'ichi Hisamatsu is based on the Formless (i.e. the True or Formless self), All humanity, and Supra-history, meaning the creation of new history free from the ignorance of the past. Hisamatsu wanted to get away from Japanese formalism by an emphasis on all humanity and work in the world. In FAS there is no Master or any ultimate authority. Instead of the dokusan interview there is "mutual enquiry". Jeff Shore (1993) says "One can encounter a number of outstanding people and continually test and be tested--right now- not just at a special time or place, or with a special person" Instead of traditional koans, FAS uses one fundamental koan: "Right now whatever I do will not do; what do I do?"

The use of this koan is intended to foster a "genuine awakening, rather than the mere insight-experiences which often occur through improper use of the koan." While the koan certainly expresses the ultimate plight of the self and challenges it to solve the inherent paradox in the very wording, it may also be valuable at the level of everyday puzzlement, in relationships of emotional dependency for example (Crook, 1999). Yet, since there is no acknowledged person available to evaluate responses it is difficult to see how such a formless method can be reliable. Mistaken acceptance of koan answers are plausibly a commonplace even in the traditional system where a highly reputed teacher is present, how much more so must this be true in this admirably democratic but basically individualistic

system. There is a confusion here between authoritarian rank and rank based on perceived attainment. When nobody is acknowledged as masterly who can be a judge of insight let alone awakening?

The Sanbo Kyodan school originated from the great Harada Roshi and his disciple Yasutani Roshi who created a practice integrating the methods of Soto and Rinzai. Yasutani has been especially influential in bringing Japanese Zen to the West, in particular as the teacher of Philip Kapleau. Unfortunately for their reputations in the contemporary West, it has been established that both ardently supported Zen training as an aspect of Japanese militarism, a position seemingly incompatible with the teachings of Buddha. Although the Sanbo Kyodan is an orthodox tradition it subscribes to the Suzuki fallacy of treating Zen as the ahistorical root of all religion and therefore offering a methodology applicable within basically any belief system. In Japan this had the consequence that the selfless application of the sword in the decapitation of prisoners could be seen as a Zen attainment. That such a situation could have arisen certainly merits careful historical and cultural analysis such as Brian Victoria has set in motion (1997).

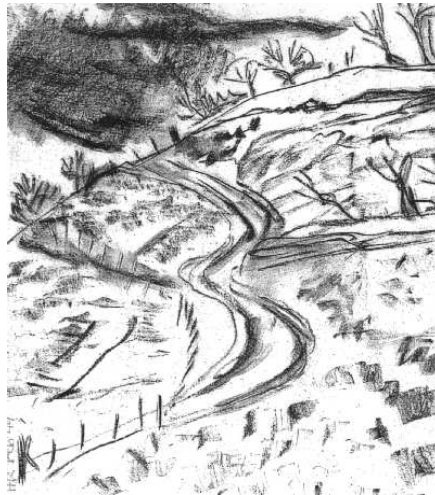
The Sanbo Kyodan also appears to be the prime vehicle through which Christian practitioners have been taught Zen meditation and granted transmission. The resulting work of the Benedictine monk Jager Willigis, the Jesuit William Johnston and Fr Enomiya-Lassalle is admirable and has introduced many people, Christian and otherwise, to Zen practice but it raises many questions. Although the mystical experience common to all religions and probably basic to the shamanic origin of all of them, almost certainly has a psychological root which may be considered a fundamental human condition, this does not mean that the Zen cultural tradition and the practice of meditation can be meaningfully split in twain, adopting the latter while ignoring the former. To simply graft a Zen method of contemplation onto a Christian theological stance looks like thievery.

It is strange that Westerners respond more openly to the Asian model than to the profound practices of the desert fathers in the Neo-Dionysian tradition of apophatic theology. It is stranger still that apologists of Christianity should ignore their own profound methodology to ride the stream of fashion for Oriental mysticism. Undermined by the rationalism of the European "Enlightenment" and the emergence of scientific humanism it seems Christians need to look outside their own culture for spiritual inspiration. This has been a success perhaps only because of Suzuki's insistence on a Zen mysticism independent of history and culture. We do not deny the transmissions of these fathers in Zen nor their understanding of practice but we do need to understand that their realisation is that of a psychological or attitudinal state and not that of an insight into Buddhadharma. Needless to say this can cause profound disquiet in those of their disciples with minds alert to meaning as well as process.

It is likewise strange that basing their approach in the assumed ahistorical, culture free, character of Zen these teachers should still refer to it as a Christian Zen. If either Christian or Buddhist, Zen cannot be said logically to lack context. Only a completely independent Zen could be so. A similar criticism may perhaps be directed at an attempt to describe Zen in terms of agnosticism (Batchelor 1998).

In fact these Christian teachers have no intention of developing a Buddhist Zen understanding. As Batchelor (1994, p 213-220) points out, in spite of a greater tolerance of pluralism in religious belief, inclusivist Zen enthusiasts of the Roman faith are clearly placing sitting meditation in the service of a mission minded Christianity as basically as intolerant of difference as ever it has been. The superiority of Christianity is assumed on the grounds that it consists in 'revealed truth' rather than in 'natural' truth which is as far as

Zen is said to go. For men like Father Lassalle and William Johnston Christian contemplation remains the focus to which they are drawn - a focus paradoxically insistent on the importance of a remarkable if implausible "fact" as having happened in history. If there be any "revealed" truth, might it not be in the teachings of the Buddha and his great interpreters, Nagarjuna, Chandrakurti, Tsong.kha.pa or even Krishnamurti or the Dalai Lama? It seems a comparative analysis of the basis of so called "revelation" is surely needed.



It follows that a major source of confusion in European Zen centres on a question concerning whether Zen is to be considered Buddhist or not. One result has been an institutional eclecticism exemplified by the De Tiltenberg centre in Holland. De Tiltenberg in 1973 was a centre of the International Grail Movement, a Catholic movement for women. Christian Zen was initiated there in retreats offered by William Johnston and Fr Ednomiya-Lassalle. Subsequently retreats were led by Japanese Roshis, a Japanese Carmelite, and Toni Packer a former associate of Philip Kapleau who split away to form her own school. In addition conferences have been attended by major Zen scholars such as Professor Dumoulin and Professor Masao Abe of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. At De Tiltenberg one can sample a cross section of contemporary Zen teachings whether Christian in orientation or Buddhist. While this certainly offers a major educational opportunity, the question as to whether Zen itself is transmitted there remains an open and a confused one. The debate begun at the Swedish conference continues and the questions it posed not yet answered.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND INTERPRETATION

Suzuki's claims are rooted in a Zen discourse in which reading the Sutras is rejected, the teachings treated as irrelevant and even if one were to meet a Buddha on the way it would be advisable to kill him because any interaction would merely throw one off the path. The basic stance is well stated in the ancient characterisation of Ch'an attributed to Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who brought it to China.

*A special transmission outside the scriptures
No dependence upon words or letters
Direct pointing to the human heart
Seeing into one's own nature.*

Furthermore there are numerous stories in which Zen masters illustrate this viewpoint. No gradual approach, even the traditional methods put forward by the Buddha himself, can in this view lead to enlightenment, only the sudden realisation on the solving of a koan can do it.

And yet it takes little reflection to perceive that these very assertions are themselves embodied in texts, writings as voluminous as those on any academic subject. Furthermore the emphases in these texts have a clear history, lines of doctrinal development and preferences for practice are easily located in the traditions of the contrasting Ch'an sects. Even if we were to posit a completely non-cultural component in enlightenment, such an experience is clearly deeply embedded in traditions. John Blofield in his study of Huang-po assumed that the great master would not be interested in history (1985, original 1947). Wright (1998), shows that not only Huang-po but all Ch'an masters up to the present day are much concerned about the purity of the lineage of transmission concerning which disputes may easily arise. Yet, in deference to Suzuki we do have to account for the paradox in the transmission of Ch'an; its obvious embeddedness in historical texts with its roots in transpersonal experience.

Wright points out that any attempt at objective history is itself bound to fail. History is a discourse profoundly determined by prevailing philosophical and political views; witness the rewriting of Indian history after the end of the British Raj. The attempt to create history from legends of transmission is subject to similar processes; as recent studies of the Platform Sutra show. There is a dialectic between past and present and history is simply a discourse interpreting the records and memories of a past time. The purpose of Zen practice is to reach an experiential understanding of the basis of self as the source of mental suffering. Personal experiences of self-transcendence, by their nature beyond the reach of language, are not recordable as normal memories may be. They transcend the person, go beyond the record and yet, being considered exemplary, are transmitted through records. The famous encounter stories of Zen are records of meetings in which the dialectics of transmitting the transcendent are recorded as teaching devices. While the moment of insight goes beyond language and history its expression as teaching is yet dependent upon them. Without a hearing of stories no one would ever know where the signpost was.

If this relation between language, temporality and experience did not exist it would be impossible for the Masters even to speak of enlightenment as the outcome of an event in the past - the time when the Buddha sat down beneath the Bo tree. Wright (1998) says: "A dialectical relationship between the practice of thought and Zen experience is essential to the tradition. Thought pushes experience further, opens up new dimensions for it, and refines what comes to experience. Experience pushes thought further, opens up new dimensions for thinking and sets limits to its excursions. The brilliance of Zen thinking is its tentative and provisional character, the 'non-abiding', 'non-grasping', mind. Knowing through thought that all thought is empty, Zen masters have explored worlds of reflection unavailable to other traditions - playfully 'thinking' what lies beneath common sense". Without such play "memes", as Susan Blackmore remarks, can become forms of oppression (1999).

The Zen objection to Sutra reading and study lies in the perception that idealising theories and models of mind create forms of mental closure as 'beliefs', thereby preventing the exploration of experience that is itself the essence of the quest; an exploration that goes beyond language to where pre-theoretical and pre-discursive understanding operate. Since

the time of the Buddha the nature of the self has been the key problem. A profound psychological analysis in phenomenological form underlies the practice and is treated at length in the Lankavatara Sutra of which Suzuki himself provides the major translation and commentary. It is of course not essential for a practitioner to know this, he may simply practice, but the cultural roots exist for him within the meditation instructions he will be given or the koans he may be set. Yet to abandon understanding for rhetoric alone may quickly become a confusing practice.



Going beyond self-concern necessarily leads to states that cannot be described in language constructed around pronouns, verbs and nouns. In the end the rhetoric of Zen is metaphorical or poetic often making use of actions or signs we can no longer interpret since we are not party to a particular ancient culture. Thus the knock-about that masters seemed to so enjoy and the rough speech carry implicit meanings we can today often barely grasp. Yet the matter is not intrinsically mysterious, the psychology of self-transcendence, the abandonment of self-concern, underlies the path, the view and the result. In Buddhism all this has received detailed philosophical attention much of which has striking resemblance to Western theories of mind in psychotherapy (Crook 1980. Katz 1983. Crook and Fontana 1990).

Momentary insights need to be related to an ongoing manner of life before a practice can be said to be mature. After 'seeing the nature' many ancient masters remained in training often for years. In traditions less subitist than Suzuki's there is nothing strange about this. While insight is characteristically sudden the maturation and digestion of meaning may take a long time. The ignorance of self-concern is not resolved in a moment. It takes time, and time is discourse, time is history. There are many methods for the personal elucidation of Zen and one is not necessarily superior to another. Rather, these differences often relate to individual capacities. Roshi Kennett once remarked how in her Soto monastery in Japan a monk who was not doing well might be referred to a Rinzai master - and vice versa.

It is important always to remember the returning line in the Heart Sutra. "Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form." The early Suzuki and those who followed him tend to forget the second line. All forms and experiences are ultimately 'empty' but the expression of emptiness is through these very forms. The two are indivisible.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CH'AN

Master Sheng-yen teaches in the lineages of both the Lin-chi (Rinzai) and Tsao-tung (Soto) traditions. In particular he has inherited the eclectic approach of the great Master Hsu-yun who, at the turn of the century, revived Buddhism in China after a long period of neglect. As many schools and lineages had disappeared Hsu-yun made use of the surviving traditions of both Pure Land and Ch'an to produce a valuable synthesis that is both deeply rooted and flexible.

On retreat with Master Sheng-yen the practitioner may choose a method of meditation the use of which is negotiated in interview. Watching the breath, Koan and Silent Illumination are all taught. But Sheng-yen does not believe in meditation instruction without a thorough understanding of the concepts that lie behind it. He teaches his followers not only how to sit but why sitting is helpful to realising a Dharma understanding. His talks range widely from the sayings of the Buddha through the Sutras and Zen dialogues to koan texts and philosophical works. He argues that meditation without conceptual understanding is a very limited activity and that attainment of insight requires both. To Master Sheng-yen, Ch'an is a Buddhism of exceptional clarity that seeks to fulfil the Buddha's intentions in opting to teach his realisation to the world. Today most Chinese Buddhists frequently refer to their practice as Ch'an but few concentrate on insight so strongly as Master Sheng-yen. Other groups are more concerned with charitable works and chanting in the style of the Pure Land sect.

While Master Sheng-yen agrees that insightful experiences akin to the transcendence of self in Zen occur in many spiritual traditions, Christianity, Sufism etc, he states that the enlightenment of which the Buddha spoke depends on realisation within an understanding of the Zen view. In particular this means an experiential insight into the emptiness of all phenomena including both self and universe. His teaching is thus based in the Prajnaparamita and Madhyamaka insights of Buddhism and their development in Chinese thought emphasising the Tathagatagarbha as the root of mind. Although I have not discussed the point with him in depth, I doubt whether he would consider an insightful experience of no-self within Christian Zen as "seeing the nature" (kensho) unless the God of the practitioner was perceived as 'empty'. And this of course would be a tall order for most Christian believers although less problematic for those versed in apophatic theology and contemplation.

Master Sheng-yen completed his own training in Japan studying for a doctorate at Rissho University and sitting traditional retreats. On coming to America he brought with him both the Koan tradition and the methods of Silent Illumination. Whereas Suzuki rejected the latter as a useful path, Master Sheng-yen has in recent years taught this approach increasingly, beginning in Wales in 1989. He has presented Silent Illumination retreats in Poland, Russia, Croatia and Sweden and in 1999 in Berlin where his coverage of the subject was exceptionally complete. We may argue therefore that it is through his teaching of Silent Illumination that Master Sheng-yen is making a profound contribution to European Zen.

KEYS TO ILLUMINATION

Rather than a precipitate gallop up the slopes of some koan mountain Sheng-yen lists four modest aims for beginners on retreat. These are: to realise that one is not in control of one's own mind, to discover how to train in awareness, to calm the mind, to provide opportunities for repentance and hence to regain the freedom of immaculacy, and to

practice with an individually suitable method that will yield insight (prajna) (Sheng-yen 1982, Crook 1991). A beginner will usually start with watching the breath. S/he soon discovers the truth of the first aim and seek to develop awareness encountering the barriers of wandering thought and fatigue in the process. In addition, prostration sessions focussing on repentance are a means of facilitating the fourth aim. Only when a mind has achieved at least a relative calm may the method shift through negotiation in interview to the use of either a Koan or to Silent Illumination.

Koan practice does not differ from that taught in Japanese or Chinese monasteries. There is the requirement to develop the "great doubt" from which after intensive effort a resolution may come. Often stress is placed on a life-koan to be realised over many years of focussed effort. In Master Sheng-yen's retreats the emphasis is on working without tension, correct but not strained sitting, relaxed mind and "letting the universe do it". Since different participants may be using contrasting methods, the collective even obsessive focus on koans of a traditional Rinzai retreat with its accumulating mental power is less in evident and koans are unlikely to be solved with the explosive force described in some accounts of these retreats. The realisation under Sheng-yen's guidance seems likely to be gentler.

In teaching Silent Illumination Master Sheng-yen lists several stages of practice (See *New Ch'an Forum* 15, Summer 1997, about to be republished). While these may result in a gradual evolution of insight the stages do not necessarily follow one another. Some practitioners may quickly develop an advanced stage omitting or running quickly through the early ones. Usually however the first practice is to develop 'Total Body Awareness' - unlike the Japanese focus on posture the attention here is directed to the awareness of presence within the sitting body. A successful awareness here depends on focussed attention on the sensation arising within the sitting. Success leads to a calmed mind in which the boundaries between interior and exterior gradually disappear and time before and time after merge into one flow - what Dogen may have called "without thinking." As one practices at this stage various meditation experiences of an encouraging nature appear and a realisation of "one mind" may arise in which the practitioner feels himself in confluence with nature and the universal process. These stages may arise through focussed intentionality. "No-mind" as in the experience of "seeing the nature" (kensho) cannot however be the result of any deliberative practice. When intention is present so also will be desire. Where desire is present so must the self be there. The concern with achievement, with getting a result has to be entirely abandoned but the attempt to do this merely completes a circle, the self still being present in the attempt to go beyond itself. Here is the ultimate 'gateless gate' likewise come upon in the intense focus within the Great Doubt of koan work.

Kensho arises spontaneously when the trained mind simply lets go without any willed intention. It cannot therefore be the object of any desire or wanting. Only the faith in its possibility seems important. One may wait for years but waiting itself is a mistake betraying desire. Yet one cannot forget the possibility nor its significance. "Seeing the nature" means seeing the immediate universal process as right before ones eyes, a boiling egg, a bird flying bird, a dropped tea cup. There is no self present then - simply..... Words are transcended but the experience is never forgotten being often the very pivot upon which a life turns. Here then is the reason for Suzuki's insistence on a context free Zen. Yet, shortly, the self returns and practice continues, practice within a lineage, under guidance, in humility, with deference to history. Even great masters probably have such an experience only occasionally in their lives. It is sufficient.

Silent Illumination and Koan work in Ch'an are thus parallel paths. They seem to suit different people and the practitioner through experiment and experience will come to develop an affinity to one or another of them.

WESTERN PATHS

Master Sheng-yen once told me that the main difference between his Chinese and his American practitioners lay in persistence. A Chinese, once told how to practice, just goes and does it without question. Since the Master said so - it will be right. In the end, and that may only be after a long time, a profound result may arise. A Westerner typically shows a very quick intellectual grasp of what is being demanded. Western education enables quite complex ideas to be handled with relative ease. But Western education also inculcates a perennially questioning mind and an individualism that seeks personal distinction. When results do not come quickly a Westerner rarely persist into the Great Doubt but rather worries within conventional doubts: self criticism, scepticism concerning the master and the method destroys the very focus of attention he or she may have to an extent established. This worrying, based in self concern, sustains an agitated mind which may then quite easily decide to try something else - supposedly quicker and less disturbing.

In response to American needs for speed Charles Berner in the fifties created an interesting form of retreat which he styled the "Enlightenment Intensive". Within this practice individuals sit together in couples. One asks the other a brief 'koan' or 'hua t'ou', typically "Tell me who you are?" The recipient puts this to him/herself as "Who am I?" and has five minutes to make some response that does not necessarily have to be verbal. The questioner remains silent or merely repeats the question. After five minutes a bell sounds and the roles are reversed. Each partner thus has a sequence of five minutes alternating with the other for some thirty to forty minutes. There is then a short break until the participants reassemble to work with another individual in the same manner and with the same question. This process runs throughout the day with only short breaks for food, maybe a walk or a brief sitting session.

Typically, individuals begin by describing aspects of their roles in life. This gradually changes to comments such as "When I hear the news I often want to cry." The responses refer increasingly to emotion until someone expresses that feeling directly by weeping, laughing, being sad or angry. Clearly this is a direct statement of being at that moment. Emotion may or may not be expressed but it is deeply felt and the sharing of life's problems engenders an increasing trust in the group. Sometimes things are shared that have never before seen the light of day. Eventually a silence falls as people run out of anything to add. Some may then realise that everything they have said is who they are. "I'm me" may be a response which, if fully realised, leads to a letting go into an experience of wholeness that may be an entirely fresh opening onto previously unsuspected freedoms. Such moments may amount to the discovery of the 'One mind' in an orthodox retreat. Berner styled such moments as "enlightenment experiences" and their significance for the practitioner is undoubted. Yet they may only rarely amount to "No mind" since the intentionality in this process is so strong.

In exploring ways to present Zen, I trained with Jeff Love in Berner's process and later developed it as the Western Zen Retreat in which the format of the event resembles a Buddhist retreat but the Communication Exercise, as it is called, becomes a prime method of practice. After giving such retreats over some twenty years I can say that on average about 25% of participants have some insight into "One mind", 70% find the experience of common humanity deeply revealing and may undertake profound changes in their life

styles, a few find the practice disturbing but usually manage to complete it with a sense of an achievement and surprise in so doing.

The Western Zen Retreat is now used as an introductory retreat by the Western Ch'an Fellowship. It provides an intensive introduction to the self-confrontation that all Zen training demands and we like beginners to start by participating in this process. The secret of the method lies in the progressive emptying out through sharing of worries, thoughts, concerns until even self concern is confronted. Letting go happens automatically if the process is followed with openness but there are many culs de sac and emotional blockages on the way.

The process has clear links to psychotherapy which is not surprising as Berner based it in a joint consideration of the dokusan and the Western co-counselling method. I have seen intense personal blockage, shyness and neurotic preoccupations dramatically shifted in individuals who have attended several such events. It follows that the relation between the theory underpinning Zen retreat and psychotherapy is a matter of great interest in the post-Freudian West (Crook. 1990, 1997, 1999, Crook and Fontana 1989, Epstein 1996, Pickering 1997) and may become of wider interest as the globalisation of Western values continues to spread.



INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

In bringing Ch'an to Europe Master Sheng-yen offers an ancient, less contentious, thread soundly based in Dharma and meditative experience and with unimpeachable authority. The prime features of his presentation are: complete anchorage in Buddhism while accepting the natural influence of Chinese culture, especially Taoism, on the tradition; a balanced position with respect to the 'subitism' of Koan work and the 'gradualism' of Silent Illumination; a progressive set of meditation practices graded to suit practitioners of all degrees of experience; a strict retreat structure with formal interviews and traditional rituals but with an emphasis on relaxed effort, tolerance of diverse abilities and humour; and last but by no means least, instruction on meditative practice related to and informed by examination of the main themes in the Dharma, anatta, anicca, pratitya samutpada, the Heart Sutra, Madhyamaka, the psychological basis in Tathagatagarbha, the significance of Hui-neng's teaching, and the recorded sayings of great Ch'an masters including both Hung-chi and Ta-hui. His public analyses of texts are often particularly illuminating. In this Ch'an package many of the implicit problems in European Zen are very fully addressed.

Yet there is an important aspect of Ch'an which he has yet to share fully with us. Although he has lectured on this subject to small groups in New York and mentioned it briefly at

Gaia House in July 2000, so far as I am aware he has yet to present it on a seven-day retreat. The Avatamsaka Sutra is a backbone to much of Ch'an thinking but few European practitioners are aware of its profound meaning nor of the Chinese philosophical system of Hua-yen that is derived from it. In the USA some academics, writers on engaged Buddhism, and one or two masters have begun to focus on this system and its potential impact on the relationship between Buddhist and Western thought.

Hua-yen is a way beyond the negativism or nihilism of which outsiders sometimes accuse Buddhism and also a way beyond the problems inherent in the concept of 'emptiness' which Ch'an practitioners inevitably encounter. Hua-yen does a marvellous job in providing a positive image of Buddhism to which the present generation may comfortably relate and does so without contradicting the emptiness perspective that lies at the root of the Buddhist vision. It relates well to many problematical issues concerning the environment and interconnected global problems and it could well become a philosophy underwriting the perspectives of those troubled by the need for an 'engaged Buddhism' (Jones 1989, 1993).

Many who read the Heart Sutra for the first time are puzzled by the key lines "Form is Emptiness. Emptiness is Form", and there has been a tendency to concentrate on the first of these two lines without returning along the second. Hua-yen provides that all-important returning perspective.

The Avatamsaka is a vast compendium of Buddhist teachings originating in India but achieving its main impact in China. Thomas Cleary has completed the mammoth task of translating it into English (1993). Hua-yen abstracts from this multilayered compendium philosophical principles that are the chief focus of my interest here (Chang 1972). We may introduce these briefly by considering a few basic propositions.

1. First we must recall what 'emptiness' is empty of - namely inherent existence. No apparent thing set before our senses has permanent being in the world for everything is transient, subject to impermanence. Attachment to any object must therefore necessarily lead to distress especially if that object is oneself or any attribute of oneself such as good fortune, health, youth, wealth, a Mercedes etc. Yet an absence of inherent existence does not imply a "void" or non-existence as such. All events are mutually co-determining in progressive cycles of complexification and degeneration. This is the principle of the co-dependent arising of phenomena. Emptiness (*sunyata*) is such (*tathata*). One could say that the universe is like a river rather than like a rock. It continually flows and one can never enter the same stream twice.
2. Objects appear to us as images. The mind may be likened to a gigantic mirror in which the properties of the universe are reflected. We only see events as in a mirror. These images are not the things in themselves but rather constitute a virtual reality. This is all we have. While we may impute form and structure, causality and relatedness to images we do actually contact them only as they appear to our senses.
3. Descriptive knowledge is thus necessarily indirect. There is a metaphorical account of this in a description of a monk teaching a pupil. The monk appears in the mirror of the pupil, the pupil appears in the mirror of the monk. The teaching is likewise mirrored and so is the acknowledgement of any understanding. The nature of knowledge is 'such'.
4. Furthermore different properties may be assigned to apparent things by different minds, persons or teachings. For example water may be said to be a liquid, H₂O, melted ice, congealed vapour, molecules or quanta depending upon the perspective offered. Yet all

of these perspectives exhibit simultaneous mutual arising- furthermore they are each participant in the other showing simultaneous mutual "entering", and again each contains all the others. When we are aware of these relationships we have a 'Totalistic' or 'round' picture of how a thing is. Although any thing is empty of inherent existence it never the less may appear under any one of these mutually penetrating guises. Thus "emptiness is precisely form". The wonderful metaphor of Indra's net captures this vision nicely. Above the palace of Indra hangs a great net from which are suspended millions of multifaceted crystals. Each reflects all the others in never ending mutuality.

5. The events that appear to us as things- such as a man falling off a horse or an aircraft crash, has two aspects; the described event itself (with all the mutual penetration of potential descriptions) and the underlying causality that may be invisible - the principles that govern the happening. In Hua-yen the first is called the realm (dharmadhatu) of Shi, the second the realm of Li. There is no obstruction of Shi by Li as they are mutually interpenetrable. This leads to a number of contemplations: the principle that Li embraces Shi, the principle that Shi embraces Li, the principles that production of Shi must depend on Li, that Shi illustrates Li, that Shi may be annulled by Li, that Shi may render Li invisible, that while Li is Shi and all things/events are Li yet Li is not itself Shi nor are Shi Li.

The practical application of this is clear. Consider the life of a wood, the insects depend on the foliage, the birds depend on the insects, falcons depend on the small birds, the trees depend on humus which comes from the remains of living creatures. There is here a complex system well-researched in ecology through the application of systems analysis and cybernetics to structures such as woods, organisms, digestive processes etc. Yet we may still affirm quite logically that all these events are "empty". Systems analysis was foreshadowed centuries ago in the thought of these Chinese sages.

Here then is a powerful vision as to how emptiness expresses itself in forms. In meditation one may take up many aspects of the same phenomenon and through seeing their interdependence and lack of inherent existence allow them to merge into one understanding or experience. When the self also participates totally in that experience that one thing becomes uncharacterisable. Experience thus becomes empty, yet as soon as thought reappears the categories re-establish themselves. The understanding of emptiness must therefore necessarily also invoke form. The two are co-dependent. Meditation implies action and vice versa.

Master Tung-shan in T'ang dynasty China formulated a similar teaching known as the Five Ranks that depict the integration of opposed dualities as may occur in the practice of meditation. The first rank places the relative within the universal; the second places the universal within the relative; the third is the principle of emerging from the universal (i.e. the appearance of the ten thousand things from a unified sense of emptiness); the fourth is an integration of the particulate and the universal in one vision in which however their separation is still apparent; the final rank is unity itself without divisions. Each rank is never the less present in all the others.

Europeans appear to have had little to do with such an inclusive picture of Dharma. Perhaps our civilisation is somewhat tired after all the strains of this century and inclined to opt for the better known or apparently safer routes. In the USA a more exploratory attitude predominates which, although it may sometimes seem a little naive to European eyes, is also often highly creative showing a way forward that is not in contradiction with a full understanding of tradition. John Daido Lorie, Abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York State has written a wonderful little book (1999) in which the above principles of

'holographic' interdependence are shown to be basic to an understanding of wilderness and hence to all environmental study. Quoting Thoreau and Snyder he reveals an American vision of the wild that echoes in striking ways the Avatamsaka inspired Mountains and Rivers Sutra of Dogen and Tung-shan's realisation on seeing his reflection in the water of a stream. "I am not it yet it is all of me." - a profound metaphor for the relations between sentience and the universal.

Loorie emphasises that the key to this understanding is no mere philosophy but rather an intimacy with insentient things, a feeling of closeness between oneself and the flowering of daffodils in spring or the falling leaves of autumn, between oneself and the mountains that are always moving, rocks, stones and trees. To develop such intimacy requires stepping beyond our dualistic, romantic aspiration and its culture of individualism. A certain sort of empathic imagination is needed for such an act, an imagination stimulated by meditation on the diversity in unity that Ch'an Dharma can inspire. Here we have an outreach from Zen to the problems of the environment that face us all and which need urgent attention.

CH'AN AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN ZEN

Zen in Europe is currently a patchwork quilt of somewhat competitive perspectives with much invested in contrasting metaphysical positions and ancient loyalties to church or humanistic faiths. While good Zen practice is cultivated in many centres the Dharma upon which Ch'an relies and its Buddhist history is poorly understood and in some cases ignored largely as a consequence of accepting Daisetz Suzuki's pan-religious mysticism.

Ch'an as presented by Master Sheng-yen can provide an important corrective through an emphasis on the anchoring of Zen practice in Zen Dharma and the proper investigation through intellect and experience of what that actually may be.

It remains of course unclear how attractive such a position may become in Europe. Tolerance of diversity between contrasting perspectives as well as between Buddhist and Christian exponents must be nurtured and sustained. Yet there is a real danger that forms of "inclusivism" that align meditation practices with Christian or Humanist mainstreamings may vitiate the entire Enlightenment project as understood by the Masters. Helen Tworikov's (1994) warnings from the USA apply to Europe too. Yet, even if it is at first only a minority who pursue the Ch'an way with its inherent difficulties as well as depth, the distinctive value of Ch'an as an open, well argued, perspective on the place of sentience in the universe, may well begin to win debates to create a much more sure footed unity of understanding and practice than at present obtains.

REFERENCES

- Barrett, W. 1956. Zen for the West. In: *Zen Buddhism, selected writings of D. T Suzuki*. Doubleday. New York. vii-xx.
- Blackmore, S. 1999. Waking from the Meme Dream. In: Watson. G, Batchelor. S and G. Claxton. (eds) *The Psychology of Awakening. Buddhism, science and our day to day lives*. Rider. London. 112-122
- Batchelor, M 1998. *Principles of Zen*. Thorsons. London.
- Batchelor, S. 1994. *The Awakening of the West: the encounter between Buddhism and Western Culture*. Parallax. Berkeley.
- Batchelor, S. 1998. *Buddhism without Beliefs*. London
- Blofield, J 1947. *The Zen teaching of Huang-po on the transmission of Mind*. Buddhist Society. London.

- Chang, G. C. C 1972. *The Buddhist teaching of totality: the philosophy of Hua yen Buddhism*. Allen and Unwin. London.
- Cleary, T 1990. *Book of Serenity: one hundred Zen dialogues*. Lindisfarne. New York.
- Cleary, T. 1993. *The Flower Ornament Scripture: Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Shambhala. Boston and London.
- Crook, J. H. 1980. *The Evolution of Human Consciousness*. Oxford.
- Crook, J. H. 1990. *Catching a feather on a fan. A Zen retreat with Master Sheng-yen*. Element. Shaftesbury.
- Crook, J. H., 1997 Authenticity and the Practice of Zen. In: Pickering, J. (ed) *The Authority of Experience. Essays on Buddhism and Psychology*. Curzon. Richmond.
- Crook, J. H. 1998. *Hilltops of the Hong Kong Moon*. Minerva. London.
- Crook, J. H. 1999. Zen: the challenge to dependency. In: Watson, G, Batchelor. S and G. Claxton. (Eds) *The Psychology of Awakening*. Rider. London. 197-214.
- Crook, J. H. and D. Fontana. (eds) 1990. *Space in Mind: East-West Psychology and contemporary Buddhism*. Element. Shaftesbury.
- Epstein, M. 1996. *Thoughts without a Thinker*. Duckworth. London.
- Faure, B. 1993. *Ch'an Insights and Oversights: an epistemological Critique of the Ch'an tradition*. Princeton University Press. NJ.
- Jones, K. *The Social face of Buddhism: An approach to political and social activism*. Wisdom. London.
- Jones, K 1993. *Beyond optimism: a Buddhist political ecology*. Carpenter. Oxford.
- Karlsson. H (Ed) *Towards a European Zen*. Zenvagen. Stockholm.
- Katz, N. (Ed) 1983. *Buddhist and Western Psychology*. Prajna Press. Boulder.
- Kuhn, T. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago.
- Leighton, T. D. and Yi Wu. 1991. *Cultivating the Empty Field: the Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hong Zhi*. North Point. San Francisco.
- Loorie, J. D. 1999. *Teachings of the Insentient: Zen and the environment*. Dharma Communications Press. Mt Tremper. NY.
- MacInnes, E. 1996 *Light sitting in Light: A Christian's experience with Zen*. Harper Collins. London.
- Pickering, J. (Ed) 1997 *The Authority of Experience: Essays on Buddhism and Psychology*. Curzon. Richmond.
- Sheng-yen. Master, 1982 *Getting the Buddha Mind*. Dharma Drum. New York
- Sheng-yen. Master, 1987. *Faith in Mind: a Guide to Ch'an practice*. Dharma Drum. New York.
- Suzuki, D. T. 1938. *Buddhism and its influence on Japanese culture*. Eastern Buddhist Society. Kyoto.
- Suzuki, D. T. 1949-1953 *Essays on Zen Buddhism*. (Three volumes.) Rider. London.
- Suzuki, D. T. 1955. Zen: a reply to Hu-shih. In: Suzuki, D. T. *Studies in Zen*. Rider. London.
- Tworokov, H. 1994. Zen in the balance: Can it survive America? *Tricycle*. Spring Issue.
- Victoria, B. 1997. *Zen at War*. Weatherhill. New York/Tokyo.
- Wright, D. S. 1998. *Philosophical meditations on Zen Buddhism*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Multicultural wash

*Sitting - in my Caribbean friend's
laundrette
reading - the Dhammapada.
Standing - my white dhoti
collected from the dryer
folded.
Listening - seeing - a Chinese
couple wash fashionable clothes
- arguing.
Walking - breathing -
Leaving -
only the mind - now.*

Mark Drew

WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

A CONFERENCE IN COLOGNE 30th March till 2nd April 2000.

Iris Tute

This conference was run by women for women, and was visited by 1220 women of whom 700 took part in the whole conference. It originated from several previous meetings concerned with similar themes

In 1983 women from North America ran the first conference whose main theme was about women in Buddhism. In 1987 the first international conference concerning Buddhist nuns was held and, on that occasion, the International Association of Buddhist Women, Sakyadhita was founded. The aim of Sakyadhita is to sponsor nuns in the East and in the West, to train women to become Buddhist teachers and to look at the role and function and the place of women within the Buddhist tradition. International conferences take place approximately every two years, up to now mainly in Asian countries. In 1997 A small international symposia took place in Frankfurt a. M. at the Johann-Wolfgang-von-Goethe-University on "Women in Buddhism. What is cool about Buddha?"

Now in 2000 this was the first big conference on Women and Buddhism in Europe. The prime intention was to make the engagement of women in Buddhism visible and to offer them the opportunity to meet with practising and teaching women and to network for support. The conference was run by women for women.

The inspiration and organisation came from Sylvia Kolk and Sylvia Wetzel. The idea was to contribute to Buddhism from the life and consciousness of women. Buddhism is experienced as a freeing practice which fascinates many women. This practice originating 2500 years ago has been interpreted and taught primarily by men, the experience of women being largely ignored. The conference was trying to question the teachings and practices from a feminist perspective, to ask questions and to investigate. The conference was seen as a place where this could take place.

Every day there was early meditation, lead by a Theravada, Zen and Tibetan teacher respectively. Then followed a main lecture: Joan Halifax, teacher of the Order of Interbeing (Thich Nhat Hanh) on engaged Buddhism. Tsultrim Allione who had been a Tibetan Nun on 'strong emotions'. Then there were offers of 3 workshops per day which participants chose at registration out of a dozen or so offers. The choice was dazzling.

There was also a most impressive selection of truly world-wide entertainments, all great fun.

The whole conference was framed by an interesting art exhibit by European women showing their feminine symbols of understanding and awakening to the Buddhist path with paintings, sculpture film and constructions.

I had first left Germany 40 years ago when hardly any one had heard about Buddhism. Returning now for this event, it was a moving and strange experience for me. Having in the meantime found 'a home in Buddhism' here in England, to find myself amongst all these Buddhist women, mostly German, some Austrian, Swiss, Spanish and very few English, was at some level very encouraging and I felt in touch at a deep level. It was a privilege to have been there.

There was no sense of different factions, it was about Buddhist women who belonged to different schools, yes, but this felt more of interest rather than of unbridgeable gaps. What was far more important was how we integrated Buddhist practice into our daily lives,

where and how we found teachings. The conference offered a good platform to share about these aspects and to hear about interesting individual stories.

Perhaps it was also of specific significance, that this first women's conference took place in Cologne, one of the German cities most destroyed during the last war. There was a significant consciousness of the importance of peace work, and this first of all has to start within each one of us, and Buddhism feels a strong tool with a message of hope.

Initially the conference was run with a very considerable financial deficit, at the end of the four days enough money had been donated to cover it all and that too shows how deeply moved and committed many felt to the cause. There was much sharing of awareness of the exciting situation we found ourselves in; at some level creating new ways of Buddhism for Western women now being in a very different place from those before us. How can this revolution find a meaningful expression now, and how can women help each other?

At a deep level, there should be no necessity to create social divisions by gender, but clearly there has a long tradition during which this issue has not been addressed and the thought of which constitutes a burden for many women. Gender issues have never been a specific problem for me in our Ch'an group. On the other hand this conference has heightened my awareness of many problems facing women for which I am grateful.

TEACHING MEDITATION TO CHILDREN

Alysun Jones

Those of us who have young children and some time to spare may wonder what kind of contribution to make in the schools they attend. Having made the same pizza at least thirty times with excitable eight-year-olds, I found my desire to help with Arts and Crafts quickly satiated. There was always more flour on the floor than in the pizza, and clearing up was never one of the kids stronger interests. Inspiration came quickly at this point. Buddhism! At least there's no mess to clear up, in a tangible way, at least.

Some weeks later, having received much supportive guidance from Throssel Hole, I had my package ready to roll. The school was moderately interested, in a polite way. But somehow the session got repeatedly cancelled. "We don't want to give a religious message too strongly", the Headmistress pointed out. Dismayed, I almost gave up.

The OFSTED report provided new enthusiasm - the school was criticised for it's poor religious education, and self-development activities. I decided to approach the subject differently..., and spoke to the Headmistress about some "self-awareness" training. Interest appeared to be quite high. I got a new package together. Briefly it involved beginning the session with some listening activities-Tibetan bells, the sounds around them, and then moving on to listening to "inside"..., their feelings and sensations. We then turned to a discussion of why self-awareness might be important, and ended with a brief meditation instruction, a meditation exercise, and a discussion of the children's' (10-year-olds) preliminary impressions.

This was my first attempt at such an endeavour - I'd done quite a lot of things with children, planting plants, and even singing to them - but this was new and I had no idea how they were going to react. My first group of six were hand picked by the teacher for

being keen and enthusiastic students. I had an easy start. However, even as the time wore on, and I began to receive the more difficult children ("You sit there and you sit there, and if there's any trouble at all Ms Jones will call me!")

"So why do you think I've come to talk to you about self-awareness, why is it important?" I asked, thinking the answer must be obvious by now. "Because you're bored, Miss?" one pupil offered. "Because we need to listen to the teacher more?" "So we can tell when the Police are around?" one boy from a slightly rougher background added.

I was surprised that meditation was not a completely new idea to most of the children. Some mothers had already begun to teach their children how to do it. The saddest story came from one boy whose mother had taught him meditation as a gift before she died of cancer. "When I meditate, I talk to her", he explained. Another mother had bought a meditation pack and was using that with her children. But those whose parents did not practise, still had popular culture to rely on - some spoke of the martial arts - and others of videos they had seen - Ace Ventura Pet Detective, being one rather well known one. In one group I decided to go with it when they all put their hands up in the air and began to hum, as Ace Ventura himself had. OK, so why did Ace Ventura meditate? I asked. "To find the bat?" "No, no it was because he lost his pet racoon." another child added. Realising my mistake I quickly suggested another line of enquiry. (You'll have to see the vid now!).

So what were their impressions?

I have to say that the length of the meditation was extremely short - just a minute. And this I think was appropriate. Children needed to feel that they were doing a task that would be over soon if it was hard for them - there would be opportunities to extend the period, I hoped, if they enjoyed it.

And enjoy it I think they did. Many times they asked to continue the session "Can we do it for a whole hour?" "Can we do it all day please?" No one wanted to leave the session at the end. Some described feeling "Peaceful," "Calm". One boy described his experience as follows "I felt that all my bad feelings packed their suitcases and went out of my ears." I have to say there was considerable interest in the incense stick and candle, especially getting a chance to light it or blow it out. And some times this felt quite out of control!

On the whole though, I felt very positive about the response and a certain pleasure when a mother approached in the playground to thank me for helping her daughter through her exams; "She was so nervous.... but after she saw you she sat in her room every morning burning incense, and I think it calmed her down."

Where next? I am hoping that I might pluck up the courage to suggest a workshop for teachers on teaching meditation to children. They might also try it out themselves and see the benefits. Perhaps a subtle Change in the whole school culture might come about.

If you are interested I can recommend an excellent book, "Teaching Meditation to Children" by David Fontana and Ingrid Slack (Element Press). Throssel Hole also provide a 'Teachers pack' on Buddhism which provides many helpful ideas. Good Luck.

THE SILENCE

*Silence in my head
sweet sunshine and the jackdaws calling,
dew on the autumnal grass
muddy puddles and fallen leaves
scarlet on the lawn.
Silence in my head
nothing doing there,
the morning hour, mists dissolve
in grey-green hills, the rocks
show through the soil.
Silence in my head
clock ticking somewhere
in this empty house,
solitary today the open view,
moving shadows beneath the trees.
In the silence of the world -
nothing ever moves
the wind-drift stillnesses
the circling birds.*

JHC



BEST OF BOTH SIDES

Mick Parkin

The purpose of this article is to suggest that we all too often understand Buddhism in terms of One-Sided Solutions which don't actually solve anything, and that we would do better if, instead, we worked with the Complementary relationship between life's various two-sided polarities.

From the ridiculous to the sublime. A good example of a One-Sided Solution would be 'detachment', which is frequently taken to mean that we should "not get involved" with our emotions, or even that we should completely avoid discriminating between different ways of interpreting events - e.g. "I do/don't like the way he's acting."

This strategy may be one way of getting a bit of peace - although it would probably be a lot easier to just go and have a lobotomy - but if 'detachment' then gets extended to include 'non-discrimination' in terms of moral/political choices it can end up being very dodgy indeed.

In fact, most principles behind the idea of 'detachment' are so wide of the mark that it's not even a One-Sided Solution but would be better described as a Ridiculously One-Sided Solution. Personally, I reckon that we should just stop using the word and instead refer to the genuinely useful possibilities which presently go under the heading of 'detachment' by using a different word, for example - 'non-grasping'.

Yet, 'non-grasping', taken in isolation, would also be a One-Sided Solution - so what we need to do is to combine it with its Complementary Opposite, which in this case would be something like 'engagement' - a willingness to engage with and appreciate life's suchness.

Making it happen. Having arrived at an understanding of our experience in terms of Complementary Opposites, there is a further and final stage in the approach which I'm suggesting as an alternative to One-Sided Solutions - we need to ask ourselves what Essential Quality would allow us to go beyond dealing with these ideas as just an abstract exercise and instead actually integrate them into our everyday lives.

In the case of 'non-grasping' and 'engagement' I reckon that the Essential Quality which we require is 'fluidity' - in the sense that, if we imagine life as a river, then detachment is about sitting on the bank and staying dry, whereas fluidity is about moving in time with the suchness of that river, a perfect combination of engagement and non-grasping.

No, really, I don't mind. To take another example of a Ridiculously One-Sided Solution, consider the tendency amongst Buddhists towards self-deprecation - or as someone once put it, "becoming a doormat for all sentient beings". As with 'detachment' there is a valid truth behind this idea, but as before this is better expressed by using a slightly clumsy negative, i.e. 'non-selfishness'. Equally, non-selfishness is still a One-Sided Solution so it therefore has a Complementary Opposite, which turns out to be 'authenticity' (following the OED definition or authentic as "possessing inherent authority", i.e. being self-justified).

The Essential Quality which would allow us to combine non-selfishness and authenticity would perhaps be 'empathy', by which I mean an insight into the fact that all sentient beings are, by definition, sentient - i.e. that they have feelings. In terms of how we relate to other people, this insight automatically stops us wanting to treat them as objects which we can manipulate to fit in with our self-centred schemes. It can also be turned inward to cultivate self-respect and an ability to understand what our own feelings mean - or in other words, authenticity.

'Empathy' would also be a good word to use instead of 'compassion' - a sentiment which is fine in the abstract, but quickly reveals itself to be essentially patronising once you try it out on actual flesh-and-blood people.

How it works at work. The only reason for trying to understand life in terms of Complementary Opposites is so that we can change how we relate to the real world. In this spirit, I'll take an example now from my own life, i.e. from my work as a free-lance English teacher in the state sector - a significant part of which involves telephoning schools to suggest that they might like to pay me to come in and do a session with their students.

One of the reasons why I've been reasonably successful in this work is that I'm able to remain fairly relaxed about the financial insecurities which are inevitable in any kind of free-lance work, but at the same time I can apply a determined attitude to the various obstacles which are thrown up by having to deal with any large scale bureaucracy. In short; remaining relaxed prevents me from cracking up, and so allows me to apply the necessary determination; being determined prevents me from losing so much work that my relaxed attitude would be stretched beyond breaking point by the financial destitution which would follow. Neither quality would be viable on its own, but applied in unison they actually enhance each other - and this is the essence of what I am proposing as an alternative to the usual One Sided Solutions.

What I'm not saying. At this point, I'd like to clarify what I'm not proposing - for example, the strategy of replacing one quality by another. This can be a very useful strategy, and I do use it myself - for example, whenever I have a phone conversation with someone about working at their school, I always make a point of being very relaxed so as to let them know that I'm not going to get pushy with them. This usually has the effect of making them feel relaxed as well, and as a result we get to have the extended conversation which some people would try to engineer by being pushy and domineering. However, if used in isolation, this strategy would just be another One-Sided Solution as all it really does is replace a forceful (yang) approach with a yielding (yin) one.

There is, however, a way of using the strategy outlined above which would overcome its one-side limitations, namely by combining it with its mirror opposite, - a strategy that substitutes a yang approach for a yin one. For example, if I'm on the phone to someone and the conversation is starting to drift, then I might decide to move things on a bit by making a very definite (yang) intervention - such as, "So, is there any particular day of the week which would suit you best?"

Also, it is important to distinguish what I'm suggesting here from a strategy which involves bringing opposite qualities into harmony by fixing them into a static and bland equilibrium. Instead, we should use a dynamic approach which allows each quality to be brought into play as appropriate - with, say, a comment at the yang end of the scale being thrown in every now and then as a way to maintain an overall balance of yin and yang in the full course of the conversation. Equally, we would never get to make these yang interventions unless we used a relaxed, more yin, approach at first to help get things off the ground.

Some more examples. As well as the example given above, where relaxation and determination were seen as Complementary Opposites, I'll now briefly consider some other situations where the same principles could apply.

- To start off by sticking with my work - when teaching students how to do rhyming poetry I always explain it as involving a combination of imagination and analysis, because if your imagination gives up when you are trying to write a certain line, you can get round this by noting what word the end of that line is meant to rhyme with and listing all the possible words which could fit that rhyme. This analytical process usually provides you with dozens of possible words, each of which could provide a spark for your imagination to come up with a way to continue the poem. Equally, by regularly returning to the more imaginative side of your brain you avoid this 'word-search' exercise becoming abstract and boring.
- When things go badly - for example, if you're stuck waiting for a bus - you can avoid getting too frustrated by realising that if it wasn't for these negative experiences you would never get to experience the joy which wells up within you when you do eventually see that bus come round the corner. Equally, when things go well, you can avoid going into a

deluded, slightly manic state by realising that such experiences are part of an overall deal which will also at some point involve things not going the way you want them to.

- Moving on to the subject of relationships - you can appreciate a person more by being aware that one day you will lose them, and equally that loss will be easier to come to terms with if you feel that you did fully appreciate them while they were still around.
- You can become more independent by being willing to ask another person for their support, but equally you'll find it easier to ask for their support if you realise that by doing so you will gain in strength and eventually become more independent.
- An obvious failing in the psyche of the typical man from Yorkshire - which is where I grew up - is that he tends to avoid emotional involvement by keeping up a bluff and potentially superficial front. On the other hand, this attitude can have its uses if you need to balance things up by making a yang intervention - for example, if you find yourself in a situation where everyone feels obliged to be nice or is getting too sentimental, you can break out of this by saying something jokey but confrontational.
- You can develop your own perspective by orientating yourself within a certain tradition, and equally develop a deeper understanding of that tradition by trying it out for yourself, in your own way.
- You can accept the need to struggle and equally struggle to develop the ability to accept things.
- One of the most essential splits in many people's lives - that between emotional and rational - can also be seen in terms of Complementary Opposites. Any insight which can be explained in purely rational terms will also have an emotional significance for the person who has had that insight. If this emotional side is expressed alongside the rational explanation then the whole thing acquires a greater depth and it also means that you are communicating on more than just one level. Equally, if you feel strongly about something, then being able to analyse rationally what is going on inside of you can only make you more emotionally articulate, or in other words, better able to communicate what you are feeling.
- Another obvious pair of Complementary Opposites would be innovation and consolidation.
- By way of expanding the scope of this brief list, it occurred to me recently that if the Scottish migrants who moved to America had remembered their own experiences during the Highland Clearances - i.e. if they'd remained focused on their past, as well as their future - then they might have avoided getting drawn into the general oppression of America's native population.
- Having said all this, it might perhaps have been easier to make my point by just repeating a quote which I once saw on a postcard: "Washing-up makes cooking possible, Cooking makes washing-up possible."
- Finally, if for any pair of Complementary Opposites there is also an Essential Quality, then it might also be worth asking, "What would be the relevant Essential Quality for each of these Complementary Opposites?"

Mick Parkin, mickmcparkin@aol.com, is the convenor of a Zen group in the city and would welcome enquiries. He would enjoy correspondence about any issue raised by this article.

July at Maenllwyd

*Evening falls in the silent valley
shirtless in the Ch'an hall
doors open*

*Sunbeams flood the floor
buzzing flies
dirty the panes*

*Bamboo wind bells
talk in the sycamore tree
tak, tok, tik, a good kip*

*Woodpecker shouting
ginger cat
visiting again*

*No water in the brook
no sound
looking up-somebody coming?*

*Haymaking humming in the distant air
binoculars to distant fields -
Where?*

*Dawn breeze through the open door
sweet sheep shit
flavouring honeysuckle*

*Wales, the green aquarium.
Birds swim along
singing.*

RETREAT REPORT

We are grateful to retreat participants for writing so honestly about their experiences on retreat. This gives us valuable help in understanding the retreat process. Such reports provide some insight into the difficulties and benefits of attending a retreat. We continue to publish these reports anonymously. We regret we are unable to publish everything that we receive.

ON TRYING TO SAY "I'M ME!"

Maenllwyd April 2000

*In the yard, after the rain,
every step makes mud.
Why do I hate the squelching?*

Mixed-up youth, far-out experiences. I first read about Zen, as a 15-year-old in 1966, in Alan Watts' "The Way of Zen". I was immediately attracted by the sense of the Zen masters knowing something that was wonderful yet ordinary in that it was always present. From that time, for perhaps 7 years, I read much about Zen and Buddhism, and began trying to meditate. During this time I left school and went to university, from which I graduated with a degree in philosophy and social sciences. Thereafter I entered a very "mixed up" period of my life. However, during this time I had a whole series of experiences of something that felt transcendent. I would typically be walking outside in wide-open spaces and suddenly, for a second or two, would have an acute sense of something that contained everything within its being. This "something" was experienced as being extraordinarily real.

Most of these experiences I've forgotten. One of the last I do remember though: walking home down a quiet road from my part-time job as a waiter in a busy cafe. Without doing anything special, my mind was relatively quiet - suddenly I felt a little audibly fizzing ball of mental activity and energy almost physically zipping out of my head and disappearing into the distance. As it went I realised that it was the immense amount of mental chattering and activity that had always been going on all the time... and a moment later I found myself looking over at some trees and a large hotel in the distance and knowing that it was God who was looking out through my eyes. (I wasn't a Christian, although I'd thought much about "God" and was acquainted with how some Christian mystics expressed themselves. In particular, the central technique recommended by the author of the "Cloud of Unknowing" struck me as being an exact functional equivalent of working on a koan.) These experiences made me realise there was a way of experiencing that carried with it the conviction that this was how things really were.

From about 1975 to 1982 I meditated with a fair degree of regularity, i.e., for about an hour most days. However, my mind in those days was a seething mass of mental activity, and these attempts at meditation were mainly not very effective, although I seem to remember that I eventually discovered how to use the physical act of breathing and sitting as a sort of handrail along which I could pull myself towards silence. But a change in my external life circumstance was taking place, and in the early 80s I abandoned zazen.

Money, lovely money! I had been interested in Japan and various aspects of Japanese culture from an early age, and as early as 1972 had decided to go to Japan to practise Zen. To this end I began teaching myself spoken Japanese. In my "mixed-up" period I stopped this, but in 1976 took it up again and was making good progress when Japanese friends encouraged me to start studying the written language. This I did, avidly, and an enquiry about a dictionary led to my going to Sheffield University, where I studied on an intensive 7-week course in reading scientific and technical Japanese. On returning home, I practised assiduously every day and began trying to get work from translation agencies. After years of being very poor, my new-found career as a technical Japanese-English translator began to take off.

Annual earnings started to rise, and by the late 80s my increased professional confidence coincided with high inflation, and I raised my rates substantially year by year. I became enchanted with the whole process of getting increasingly proficient at what I did, building up my freelance translation business, learning more and more about interesting and cutting-edge technical fields (I had been an excellent maths and science student at school), and getting the large amounts of money I was beginning to earn. Zen and certainly zazen receded into the background of my concerns as I immersed myself in the world of work and upward mobility. However, I think that some sort of concern with the nature and quality of my moment-by-moment experience never completely disappeared.

Coming full circle. At the back of my mind was always the knowledge that I should take up the practice of zazen again, but for many years I put it off. Eventually, a few years after the break-up of a 17 year long marriage, I moved to Edinburgh with a new partner and learned of a Ch'an meditation group led by Frank Tait, who had participated in Maenllwyd retreats. I sat with this group several times, and thus got started again. However, my commitment was not yet mature, and any time that translation deadlines were pressing, zazen go omitted.

Another decisive experience, however, seems to have been a little insight that arose on a visit to Amsterdam. Sitting beside a canal after a few puffs on a joint I found myself acutely aware of a single thought as an almost solid object moving slowly through the space of my mind. And, looking at the canal and a barge and a man on the barge, I saw clearly that the world of my ordinary consciousness was simply the space in which everything occurred, thoughts as much as barges, and was somehow fundamental and absolute. On returning to Edinburgh, a few days later, I was walking down the many stairs from our top-floor flat when I realised that the mental silence I was aiming at in zazen was not something to be cultivated - it is actually always there.

Anyway, whatever the acuteness or accuracy of these little insights, they did have the effect of encouraging me to start sitting more regularly than for many years.

Anticipating my first sesshin. Having read so much about Zen in my earlier life, I now found myself with little desire to read about it. However, a book my sister had given me a few years ago ("Meetings with Remarkable Women") contained a chapter on Charlotte Joko Beck, and Beck's way of talking about Zen experience had impressed me. I bought her two books and appreciated her approach. I noted her repeated encouragement to combine daily practice with as many sesshins as possible, and on this basis I determined to take up Frank Tait's suggestion of trying a Western Zen Retreat.¹ I visited the Western Ch'an Fellowship web pages now and then and was appalled by the amount of talk about Zen. However, I was encouraged by the first-hand accounts of retreats submitted by retreatants. I purchased "Space in Mind", a compilation of papers that includes one by John Crook outlining and analysing the WZR retreat. I felt that I had some preliminary idea of what this retreat would involve.

I was looking forward to lots of zazen, confident of having cracked the problem of sitting pain. My stool has a removable central leg, and I can interchange legs of different lengths. I experimented with these, and decided I preferred the shortest, since then I'm sitting nearest the ground and feel more grounded. However, I was slightly worried about the "communication exercise", since I knew that any answer had to go beyond describing facts about myself, and I was uncertain how I would deal with this question more directly.

The retreat process. I'm a bit late, but the retreat proper hasn't quite begun. People are still chatting and drinking tea. Everyone seems friendly, though there is an air of intentness. John Crook makes his introductory remarks and we all briefly say who we are and why we have come. Then the retreat begins.

¹I had participated in a weekend of meditation at Throssel Hole way back in about 1982, but now the thought of returning there did not occur to me for some reason. Perhaps I was attracted to the apparently less formal approach that Frank was communicating.)

I quickly discover that my anticipation of relatively pain-free sitting won't be realised. I've miscalculated badly! The short leg that had been great for one daily 30-minute sit at home is now useless in preventing excruciating pain in repeated sessions of zazen, despite each 30-minute session having a break of 5 to 10 minutes in between for walking meditation or just strolling outside for a breath of fresh air and a pee in a field. I ask the very approachable guestmaster about leg pain, and he suggests I try to view the experience as a pure sensation and observe how it changes with time. He also says there is no harm in changing my posture halfway through a sit, and notes that after a few days I may find the pain simply disappears. I have a little success with these measures, but on the whole the pain does not disappear, although by the last day there are periods when I can concentrate on just sitting rather than on the pain! And yes, when I do make myself just experience the pain in my knees rather than react to it, inexplicably - even when quite severe - it sometimes temporarily vanishes! Strange... unfortunately, it never goes away for long!

As a first-time WZR participant, I have to look into the question of who I am. My various partners in the exercise sit facing me and say: "Mike, tell me who you are..." At first, I just try to get a sense of who I am in the present moment. I'm uncomfortable with this!

I have a first interview with John Crook, our Zen teacher. For me, John communicates a sense of "no hesitation". What he does seems to flow very naturally. He blends seriousness, intelligence and humour. In the interview, his manner is not heavy - he makes me feel that what is going on and what we are discussing is very natural, and this somehow defuses the situation of most of the "Oh, I've got to be good for the Zen master" type of projection.

John tells me it's better not to short-circuit the communication exercise (CE) process by immediately trying to leave words behind. He advises me to start with some brief verbal outlining of who I am.

This I do in subsequent CE sessions, and now I find myself progressing. After a day and a half I find myself back trying to feel my way into who I am in the present, but this time it feels as if some sort of process of enquiry had been set in action.

By day 2 of the CE, I feel more focused in the present. I'm telling my questioners that I realise that I'm all that I'm aware of moment by moment... that I'm like a river of experience... When I'm asked the question, I feel some sort of emotional block arising in me. Emotional, since it has a thought component (something like "I should be able to say who I am. I'm bad because I can't...") and a body sensation component (which I variously describe as being like a solid, hard, opaque rock in my head). I say that this block is like a rock in the river, impeding the flow. Subsequently, I realise that this block is part of me, too, and this seems to take me a little step further.

Later, while on one of the daily afternoon periods when everyone is free to walk over the very beautiful surrounding fields, paths and hills for 45 minutes, I find myself walking up the steep track away from the house, angry with myself for being so pathetic that I can't say who I am. For of course I sense that I'm just myself... but for some reason lack confidence in saying this. This keenly felt anger helps, and for a short while I have a vivid sense of just being myself! Here's what I jotted down quickly later that afternoon:

Sunday: walking up the hillside, angry at not being able to respond to 'Who are you?' Get serious, Mike! So later, in pairs, I realised that, although I had hesitation, there should be no problem, since I am always in the right place to answer it: I am where I am. My perceptions are there. The environment is there. Even my hesitation is there... It's all me. John said, not what you have, but what you are. Not having (an experience), but being one.

Later, back at the CE, I'm still fighting to be able to say "I'm me!"... my mind comes up with another image: I'm a large railway station. The station is happy to let anything pass through it. That is what it does. The block sensation that arises when I'm confronted with the question is just one more thing passing through the station. I wonder if I find it hard to deal with because it is so static.

Finally, on the last morning of the retreat, I manage some more concentrated zazen, and press on with my question, which increasingly I've found easier to keep "holding" in a very direct, felt way... and at some point, the words from one of the texts we chant every morning come to mind: "Look directly behind your face." These words become very meaningful, and then I experience a sort of stillness that somehow always lies behind my present moment. I seem to be this stillness. In my final interview, I describe this to John and he acknowledges the experience and gives me some tips on future practice.

A couple of retreat moments

*Against the blue grey sky of dawn
the black tree sings.
Little bird, filling space
in your invisibility.*

One afternoon. I find myself musing on interconnectedness. John has mentioned that the weather at Maenlywd is under the influence of the Atlantic. Where does the Atlantic end? Water molecules from "the ocean" are now scudding overhead as I walk over the hills above the house. The substance of the Atlantic is now here. And later, standing in the darkish hallway between the library and the Ch'an hall, I find myself looking at a small patch of intense sunlight striking the brown wooden wall. Seeing the shape of the illuminated patch change as the wind outside blows a tree branch, I realise that at the atomic level, the surface of objects must be continually interacting with photons in incredibly complex patterns. I have a keen sense of the unimaginable complexity of the interactions of this universe.

Post-retreat experiences. The day after returning home, walking to the local shops, I am getting that shifted perspective: everything I see is within me. I do not have to do anything: just let everything appear as it does. At one point I have this little degree of insight into who I am and simultaneously experience a particular desire. This is striking - for I experience the desire with a clarity and objectivity that is usually absent... what a fascinating physiological occurrence desire truly is!

When the shifted perspective disappears, I concentrate on letting my breathing breathe relaxedly just as it wants, and maintain a vivid sense of being centred, being me. After a while, I notice the expanded perspective again. I'm reminded of something Chogyam Trungpa wrote: he was saying that first you must practise being centred, and then gradually expand and realise there is no centre. I feel I understand this statement more directly now than before.

Retreat + 1 week. As the insight fades, familiar thoughts and feelings reappear. For example, the "My life is a succession of mistakes" roundabout, with the "Wasted time" and "All in the wrong order" phrases making their usual appearance. I'm amazed at how readily the non-insightful mind can get tangled up in itself... can spin a lace-work that by a complex interconnection and interaction of sets of thoughts and feelings actually manages to conjure up an "I". If enough interconnected thoughts point to a fiction labelled "I", eventually the fiction gains a ghost life that believes the thoughts and experiences them as truths about "its" "reality".

The small degree of insight that was present has more or less gone. I find myself trying to wriggle my way back into it, but I know that "whoever tries to re-create an experience is in the Devil's kitchen". Such efforts simply disturb the mind. The way forward is to continue practising letting the mind be. Zazen. Sit there, breathing naturally. Only now I seem to have this question as a viable additional technique.

It seems to me that insight is a natural faculty that will tend to arise when the mind is quiet enough. The quieter the mind/body, the more self-obvious its nature.

Already thinking of a next WZR.

ADVERTISEMENT

BHUTAN: A fantastic tour of this amazing Himalayan land

With **John Crook**

BHUTAN is an independent Buddhist country in the Eastern Himalayas full of temples, monasteries, medieval towns, great fortresses, wonderful mountains and forests and above all a people predominantly of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

This tour, already long in the planning, will cross the entire country from West to East in our own vehicles visiting all the main cities and many important temples and fortresses of unique architecture. A three day trek, sleeping under canvas in the forests, to a high pass to view the high Himalayan range and village culture is included together with local visits to personalities, festivals, meetings with lamas and meditation in monasteries whenever possible.

The tour will be organised by our old Ladakhi friends from Highland Adventures, Delhi, and we will probably have Tanu Rigdzin once more as our trusty caravan leader. Those who have travelled with John and Tanu before know the sort of time they are likely to have: amazing locations, wonderful people and perhaps a safely scary adventure or two.

Unfortunately, in order to control tourism and ensure its quality, the government of Bhutan imposes high costs and taxes on tourism. This means the price of this adventure is higher than most we have sponsored before.

Probable cost £3400 for approx 16 days London-Delhi-Bhutan-Delhi-London. Projected dates: April 2001

If seriously interested please write for our detailed Brochure. Please notify John Crook immediately of your interests: Winterhead Hill Farm, Shipham, BS25 1RS. Fax 01934 842231. johcro@compuserve.com

Contacts for the 'New Ch'an Forum' and 'Western Ch'an Fellowship'

NCF Editor: to whom you can send any material for possible publication is: Pamela Hopkinson, 2 The Hall, Middleton, Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 4LX. Telephone: 01629 822170, Fax: 01629 825435. pamela@phopkins.demon.co.uk.

WCF Secretary: (and also **NCF picture editor** to whom you can submit photographs, artwork etc for publication) is: Simon Child, 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, LANCs, BL9 7RU. Telephone: 0161 761 1945, Fax: 0161 763 3221 (work). secretary@w-c-f.org.uk

WCF Treasurer and Membership Secretary, NCF Subscriptions (£7.50 per three) and Back Issues (£4 each) Tim Blanc, 29 Gwilliam Street, Windmill Hill, Bristol, BS3 4LT. treasurer@w-c-f.org.uk

Chair of the WCF: Hilary Richards, 8 Park Terrace, The Park, Nottingham, NG1 5DN, Telephone: 0115 9242075, chair@w-c-f.org.uk

Teacher of the WCF: Dr John Crook, Winterhead Hill Farm, Shipham, N. Somerset, BS25 1RS. teacher@w-c-f.org.uk

Local Groups Contacts

Affiliated Groups:

Bristol Caroline Paine 0117 9245332
Bury N Manchester Simon Child 0161 761 1945
Cheadle S Manchester Ron Henshall 0161 491 0612
E Midlands Hilary Richards 0115 9242075
Edinburgh Frank Tait 01721 721146
Gillingham Stuart McLeod 01634 571659
Glastonbury Ned Reiter 01458 833663
London Bruce Stevenson 020 8961 7802
York James McCarthy 01904 330977

Associated Groups:

Aberystwyth Ken Jones 01970 880603
Brighton John Mitchell 01273 846261
Cardiff Eddy Street 029 2069 1146
Guildford Roger Taylor 01483 202422
Mid-Wales John Senior 01885 488323
Swindon Hughie Carroll 01793 343447

New Ch'an Forum is published and distributed by the **Western Ch'an Fellowship**, registered charity number 1068637, correspondence address 24 Woodgate Ave, Bury, Lancs, BL9 7RU.

Subscriptions: WCF Fellows receive NCF as a benefit of Fellowship. Others may subscribe at a price of £7.50 per three issues (we aim for three issues per year) by writing with payment enclosed (cheques payable to Western Ch'an Fellowship) to Tim Blanc, 29 Gwilliam Street, Windmill Hill, Bristol, BS3 4LT. Back Issues available at £4 per issue.