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Development of Buddhism in America

A Talk at Vesak Celebration,

May 7, 1988

by U. Silananda



The Venerable U Silananda is a Burmese monk of the Theravada tradition. He has been teaching classes at Zen Center for two years. The first year he taught an introduction to Abhidhamma, and this year he has begun a two-year course on the Visuddhimagga. We are grateful that he has been willing to take time out from his many duties to offer these courses.

Three Events That are Commemorated

We are assembled here today to commemorate the three important events in the life of the Buddha. As you may well know, the Buddha appeared in the world more than six hundred years before Christ. According to our traditional reckonings, he was born in what is now known as Nepal in 623 B.C., as a prince, to King Suddhodana and Queen Maha Maya. He was brought up as a prince and was married to Princess Yasodhara at the age of sixteen. He renounced the world and retired to the forest in his 29th year after seeing the Four Great Signs, namely, an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a recluse.

He spent six years in the forest practicing what is known as 'dukkara-cariya,' the practice which he thought would lead to final liberation from all suffering. He later discarded this practice since it did not get him any nearer to his goal, and followed the Middle Way which he discovered by himself and as a result of which he gained Enlightenment as the Buddha. After he became the Buddha at the age of thirty-five, he taught gods and men, and other beings, day and night, for forty-five years. He passed away at the ripe age of eighty. It is interesting to note that his birth, Enlightenment and passing away occurred on the full moon day in the month of *Visakha*, which roughly

corresponds to the month of May.* It is to commemorate these three events that we assemble here today.

The Enlightenment

Among the three events just mentioned, the Enlightenment is the most important, because if there had been no Enlightenment there would have been no Buddha; if there had been no Buddha, there would be no Buddhism nowadays and we would not be celebrating *Vesak* today.

Since Enlightenment is a gateway to end all suffering, and is to be achieved by all successful Vipassana meditators, it is important that we have a correct understanding of it. According to Buddhist teachings, enlightenment consists in realizing *Nibbana* and eradicating mental defilements. There are three kinds of enlightenment, namely, enlightenment as a Supreme Buddha, as a *Pacceka Buddha* (or a Lesser Buddha), and as an *arahant*. Buddhas do not need a teacher or instructions for the enlightenment, and with the enlightenment they come to possess omniscience, the all-knowing wisdom. *Pacceka* Buddhas are also self-enlightened beings, but do not possess omniscience as the Buddhas do. The *arahants* are those who need a teacher or instructions for enlightenment, and who do not possess omniscience.

Since enlightenment of any kind involves eradication of mental defilements, we can infer from the conduct and behavior of the person whether he/she is really enlightened or not. It is stated in the Scriptures that after a person has reached the first stage of enlightenment (there are four stages), he/she is no longer capable of breaking any of the five moral precepts of not killing living beings, not stealing, no sexual misconduct, not taking intoxicants. When one becomes an *arahant*, one's mind becomes totally free from mental defilements such as greed or attachment, anger or hatred, and delusion. By the presence or absence of mental defilements, we can judge a person whether or not he/she is an *arahant*.

The Buddha

As the Buddha was fully enlightened, his mind was totally pure without any trace of mental defilements. He was not born a Buddha, but became one as a result of his own striving. He was a human being, but was an extraordinary human being with no equal or comparison in the worlds of gods and men. He taught us to rely on ourselves for our liberation and advised us to be islands unto ourselves. He showed to us by his example that man is capable of the highest knowledge and Supreme Enlightenment, all by his own efforts. He taught that man can gain his deliverance from suffering and realize the eternal bliss of *Nibbana* without depending on an external God or mediating priests. He granted complete freedom of thought to his followers. He advocated non-violence to all beings. In the history of Buddhism there has never been any war in the name of Buddhism. His gentle but profound teachings have helped millions and millions of beings to obtain true happi-

*Note: this is the Theravada tradition. In the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, we celebrate Buddha's birth on April 8, his enlightenment on December 8, and his passing away on February 15.

ness and to gain liberation from all suffering. He declared that his teachings had but one taste, the taste of liberation.

How Buddhism Came to the U.S.

It is fortunate that Buddha's teachings which have the taste of liberation have come to the U.S. It would be of interest to contrast the coming of Buddhism to the U.S. with the bringing of Christianity to the East. With the expansion of European colonialism from the 16th century onwards, country after country in Asia fell prey to it. Many countries in Asia, especially in the east and south-east, became colonies of one or the other European powers. With colonialism went Christian missionary activities to convert native peoples of these countries to Christianity. In other words, Christianity was brought to Asia by zealous Christian missionaries with the intention of proselytizing the native peoples.

But when we look at the coming of Buddhism to the U.S., we see a different picture. Buddhism was brought to this country, at least in the beginning, out of necessity. People from Asia began to migrate to this land of opportunity quite early. There were already Chinese immigrants in the eighteen-eighties. Some of them came to seek opportunities offered by this land, but many were brought here as a source of cheap labor. Japanese were also among the early immigrants to this country.

These immigrants soon found that the 'paradise on earth' was for them a 'spiritual desert.' They began, therefore building temples and bringing Buddhist monks to this land, and thus Buddhism came to this country primarily for the benefit of the immigrants. As early as 1853, we are told,



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there was a Chinese temple built in San Francisco Chinatown, and the number of temples both in California and elsewhere increased with the passage of time.

Immigrants continued to migrate to this country. Then came the Korean War and Vietnam War in which the U.S. was greatly involved. After these wars, millions of Asian people, some as immigrants and many as refugees, came to settle in this country. They brought their religious practices with them to help them in their religious and spiritual needs. They later brought Buddhist monks over this country. It would not be wrong to say that the United States is the country where almost all forms of Buddhism are found. In the Bay Area alone, as well as in other parts of the country, there are Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism, or Buddhism as practiced in China, Japan, Tibet, Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. All of these groups have one or more temples of their own.

The main purpose of these ethnic groups in bringing Buddhism to this country is to help the members of the respective ethnic groups in their religious and spiritual needs, but teaching, and thus spreading Buddhism to the natives, also was not neglected. Nowadays, American people can go to any temple or center to learn Buddhism or to practice Buddha's teaching. In passing, it should be mentioned that the monasteries, temples and centers of these people were established mainly with the generous donations they themselves made. A beautiful and very important tradition was carried over here by these people.

There are other groups besides the Asian ethnic groups which brought Buddhism to this country. During the Korean War and Vietnam War, many Americans were sent as troops to these countries. Their duty was to fight, but they also came into contact with Buddhist people, Buddhist teachings and Buddhist practices, and became interested in Buddhism. After they were discharged from their duty as soldiers, many of them went again to Asian countries to study and practice Buddhism there. There were also people who went to these countries as members of Peace Corps, or even on their own, and came back as Buddhist converts. A few of them were even ordained there to gain personal experience of the life of Buddhist monks.

These people were those who were dissatisfied with their traditional religion and were seeking a system of teachings and practice which would satisfy their thirst for what to them was a better way of practice. This satisfaction they found in Buddhist teachings they had studied and practiced, and so when they returned to their country they began teaching Buddhism, especially Buddhist meditation, to their native brothers and sisters. Their emphasis is on the practice of Buddha's teachings which, of course, include Vipassana meditation. Thanks to the enthusiasm, zeal and selfless efforts of these people, a great number of people have been able to get the opportunity to appreciate Buddhism and enjoy the benefits of Vipassana meditation taught therein.



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Modern Divisions of Buddhism in America

It is a pleasure to note that Buddhism has been brought to this country and it is going to stay here. During the early days of its introduction to this country, the growth was slow. But it gained momentum especially in the post-Vietnam war period. When I visited this country in 1958, I did not see many Buddhist temples or centers, nor did I meet many Buddhists. But when I came to this country again in 1979, there were many Buddhist groups, centers and temples. In fact, my meditation teacher, the late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, was invited by the Insight Meditation Society of Massachusetts to teach Vipassana meditation and lead retreats here in this country. In the Bay Area alone, we now find Buddhist monasteries or temples of Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, Cambodian and Laotian origin, as well as Buddhist meditation centers founded by native Americans.

Encouraging as it is, the growth, as I see it, is moving towards divisions. The first division will be comprised of different Asian Buddhist ethnic groups. Members of this division want to keep Buddhism as it is practiced in their respective countries, reluctant or even averse to making adaptations. They also want to keep intact their religio-cultural practices, such as the religious rites and rituals which are so important for them, since in their countries native culture and Buddhist practices are indistinguishably blended together. Their national pride as well as faithfulness to their religion encourages them to hand down these practices to the coming generations. In brief, they take themselves to be the lawful custodians of Buddhism, protecting it against the inroads of radical changes and adaptations.

To the second division will belong most native Americans who are willing and even eager to make changes, radical or otherwise, to suit the conditions in this country. Those who will belong to this division think that to what-

ever country Buddhism went, it inevitably underwent changes and adaptations, so it should in this country too. They think that if Buddhism cannot adapt itself to the conditions of the country it could not survive here. Many of these people are also averse to what they term as 'cultural trappings.' They think they don't have to adopt a foreign culture to embrace Buddhism. They want to rid Buddhism of ethnic cultural practices. There are also those who think that monks are not indispensable in spreading Buddhism and keeping it alive here in the West.

There are also women among Americans who are tired of being dominated by men and are trying to set up groups where women are leaders or at least where women enjoy equal participation, status and opportunity. They claim to be moving to create a distinctly Americanized, feminized, democratized form of Buddhist spiritual practice. In brief, this division wants to Americanize Buddhism, as was done to everything that came to America.

There will yet be another group of people, mostly consisting of Americans, who want to keep Buddhism in its pristine purity. They are people who are interested in in-depth understanding of Buddhist teachings, who want to make a serious, thorough and careful study of the teachings of the Buddha as recorded in the original texts and incorporate them as much as possible into their daily lives. They are also interested in and eager to study *Abhidhamma*, the psychological and philosophical teachings of the Buddha, which, they are convinced, is indispensable for the correct understanding of the Suttas. Although the number of such people is small at present, it is encouraging to note that their number is growing day by day. I am very pleased that *Abhidhamma* has taken roots in the American soil.

Which Way Buddhism?

This is the picture I see of the state of Buddhism in America today. The question now is, I think, "Which way Buddhism in America?" Nobody will be able to say with certainty which way Buddhism will go. Will a compromise be possible? In my opinion, it is very difficult for these divisions to come to an acceptable compromise. The most we can hope is that they coexist and cooperate in the general development of Buddhism in America.

Whether, on the one hand, we like it or not, we will have to admit that Buddhism did change in different times in different countries. That is why there are so many Buddhist denominations in the world today. Moreover, wherever Buddhism went, some native cultural practices crept into it imperceptibly and wore the garb of Buddhism no less than Buddhist teachings were blended into the native cultural practices. If we pass Buddhism mixed with purely cultural practices and not in its pristine purity to our future generations in this country, we would be doing what is impossible, because however much we want to keep our cultures intact, a day will come--and that I think is not far distant--when most of our cultures are forgotten by our descendants who are by that time totally absorbed into the mainstream American culture. Therefore it is our duty to educate our future generations, telling them which are cultural and which are pure Buddhist practices that are essential and so are indispensable.

On the other hand, if we are to make changes whenever we think conditions call for them and do not try to change ourselves, we will surely end up with changes only and not the original. Buddha once told us that the great ocean and his 'dhamma and discipline,' meaning his dispensation or the community of monks, have eight strange and wonderful things, and with regard to the fourth wonder, he said:

"And even, monks, as those great rivers, that is to say the Ganges, the Jumna, the Aciravati, the Sarabhu, the Mahi which on reaching the great ocean, lose their former names and identities and are reckoned simply as the great ocean, even so, monks, (members of) these four castes: noble, brahman, merchant and low, having gone forth from home into homelessness in this dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, lose their former names and clans and are reckoned simply as recluses, sons of the Sakyan . . . this, monks, is the fourth strange and wonderful thing from constantly having seen which monks delight in the *dhamma* and discipline." (*Book of Discipline*, Pt. 5, p.332).

We must note that in the quotation given above, that Buddha did not say that the ocean adapted itself to different rivers flowing into it, but he said that different rivers lost their former names and identities and came to be called simply as the great ocean. In other words, Buddha said that it was the rivers that adapted themselves to the ocean and not the reverse.

A fascinating story of how people who made changes ended up with losing the original totally was also told by the Buddha and elaborated by the ancient commentators. The story goes like this:

There was once a huge crab in the region of Himalayas. It was killed by elephants and when its body rotted, its claws floated with the flood into the River Ganges. A princess by the name of Dasaraha, who was playing in the river, had it picked up and made it into a big drum. When it was struck, its



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sound spread all over the city. So it was made into a ceremonial drum and kept in a hall. Since people were summoned by its sound, it was called the Anaka Drum. As it began to rot and split, the princess fixed it with another peg made of silver or gold, until the time came when the drum's original body had vanished and only the framework of pegs remained. And when it was struck, its sound did not reach even to the end of the hall. (See *Samyutta Nikaya*, vol.ii, p.266).

So there is the danger of totally losing the original in making one change after another. We must also be careful that in our eagerness to rip cultural trappings off Buddhism, we do not substitute one trapping for another.

Therefore, in my opinion, the ideal state would be a form of Buddhism exactly as is found in the original texts and not that which is mixed with purely cultural practices or which is radically changed, a form of Buddhist practice where theory is corroborated by practice, and practice guided by theory. If we can create such a state, I believe we will be discharging a faithful duty to the Buddha whom we so respect and adore. Whichever form Buddhism takes in this country, though, it will still be 'for the good of many, for the welfare of many and for the benefit of many.'

Conclusion

Dear friends, I have presented to you the development of Buddhism in America as I see it. I have talked about Asian ethnic groups wanting to keep to their respective religio-cultural practices, and I have talked about some American people eager to change and Americanize Buddhism. I think all these desires come from the notion of 'self' which is the source of all suffering. Because we are yet unable to discard this notion of self, we speak of our country, our culture, our religion; or we speak of Asian Buddhism, American Buddhism or Western Buddhism. If we can only discard this notion of self, as Buddha taught us to do, there would be no talking about this country or that country, this culture or that culture, this person or that person, he or she, or you or me. If we correctly understand the Buddha's teaching of 'no-self' not only by reading books, hearing talks and mere speculation, but also by real experience through meditation, all these problems which originated in the notion of self will certainly disappear, and we will be able to enjoy inner peace for ever. After all, as the faithful disciples of the Buddha, this is what we should really do, as the Buddha said:

*"As one down smitten by impending sword,
As one whose hair and turban are aflame,
So let the brother, mindful and alert,
Dwell to leave soul-fallacy behind."*

(See *Kindred Sayings*, I, 19)

The Peak of Wisdom

by David Komito

Today I would like to approach Nagarjuna a little differently than I normally would. Usually I have to take a rather academic approach, for as you may know, I teach in universities. So, in that environment I have to take on an attitude of "This is how we scholars understand this stuff.." Which is okay, because scholarship has its place, but here in the company of practitioners, I think it would be more interesting to approach Nagarjuna from the practice side. And after all, I am both a scholar and practitioner, a practitioner first and scholar second. I think that this is a very different way to approach Nagarjuna, than if you are merely a scholar. For instance, Nagarjuna is full of a lot of unusual teachings and legends that scholars tend not to take seriously. But I think these legends are really important and contain relevant information for practitioners.

Recently I had the good fortune to visit Vulture Peak, where according to tradition it is said that the Buddha taught some of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajnaparamita*) sutras. It was really wonderful to be physically at the place where this teaching was transmitted; it had a very sacred quality to it. In ancient times, about two days walk from Vulture Peak, was a university called Nalanda where Nagarjuna was a professor. I'm sure Nagarjuna must have visited Vulture Peak, and of course was aware of its history. So when I visited Vulture Peak and Nalanda, I was reminded that Nagarjuna was very much in a practice tradition, and he too must have been inspired when he visited the peak.

Modern scholars often refer to Nagarjuna as a logician or a philosopher and they emphasize his importance in the development of Buddhist thought. This is true, but first and foremost, Nagarjuna was a Bodhisattva. Later literature such as the *Lankavatara Sutra*, also tells us this. So, being a Bodhisattva, he experienced something in his practice, and he taught out of his practice; this is what he reveals to us, his own attainment. Even if he uses logic to do so.

If you happen to read Nagarjuna's works, which are all in verse stanzas, the stanzas come originally out of dialogues between Nagarjuna and other individuals at the university of Nalanda. Dialogue and debate with strict use of logic is very much what this tradition is about. I learned this first hand when I studied with Geshe Sonam Rinchen at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. We would translate the text together, then we would

talk. The commentary section of my book is a result of my questions and our dialogues together, which I then edited into a commentary on Nagarjuna's text. Geshe-la would also ask me questions out of the blue to see if I was learning anything. I usually got the answers wrong, and he'd laugh uproariously. That kept things in perspective....that's an old Buddhist tradition.

Now let me connect with something which is in your experience. If you attend services either here at City Center or at Green Gulch, you will chant the *Heart Sutra*. The *Heart Sutra* was transmitted at Vulture Peak; it is a very concise perfection of wisdom sutra. In one English translation there are only twelve sentences in the heart sutra, which makes it one of the shortest perfection of wisdom sutras. The longest one, which was also transmitted at Vulture Peak, has about 100,000 Sanskrit lines. In fact, Nagarjuna is said to have brought the *100,000 Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* to human beings from the world of the nagas. But more about this later....

In Nagarjuna's time a much shorter version of the *Perfection of Wisdom* was studied, which was only about 8,000 lines. For Mahayanists, this 8,000 line version is probably the most sacred of scriptures, and is probably the oldest version of the perfection of wisdom we have available. Scholars will say that the *Heart Sutra* is not as old as the *8,000 Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

So anyway, when I visited Vulture Peak, I was reminded that this was where the *8,000 Line Sutra* was transmitted. The Sutra is full of mystery and magic, all kinds of phenomena not of ordinary reality. Dragons, tree spirits, all manner of improbable things are part of this Sutra. For example, at the beginning of the Sutra it says:

"Thus have I heard at one time. The Lord dwelt at Rajagriha, on the Vulture Peak, together with a great gathering of monks, with 1,250 monks, all of them Arhats...."

Now that point is very interesting to me, because when I was at Vulture Peak there were about 20 of us on the peak and room for about 20 or 30 more. More than that and people would have been sliding down the hill. Presently there is a foundation of an old temple on the peak, so it is very flat and many can sit there. But in the Buddha's time it was just an outcropping, so certainly 1,250 monks couldn't have been sitting on the top of Vulture Peak, unless they were floating in the air. So from the outset we are in the realm of magic. Bear this in mind as something important, because the perfect wisdom is a way of understanding reality which defies ordinary ways of grasping at things. In fact, that's its point.

Wisdom is something with which we are not familiar in our current life and tradition. Wisdom is a different way of understanding reality. The Perfection of Wisdom is the highest, most unsurpassed way of understanding reality. It is the peak of wisdom and it is certainly not the way we understand reality. I may or may not know what this wisdom is, but I certainly know that I don't know what it is, because it is this very extraordinary, unordinary thing. I think that all these legends and fabulous things in the

sutras are allusions to the extraordinary view of reality that this teaching is about.

One of these extraordinary teachings is about Nagarjuna. As I said, he was a great professor at the Buddhist university of Nalanda. He would give his lectures to huge crowds because he was a very dynamic speaker, and a renowned debater. At a certain point he noticed these two people who would attend his discourses. Although they'd always stand in the back of the crowd, he noticed them because when they came he'd always smell sandalwood incense. Once they left, he would no longer smell it. After this happened at a few lectures, he went to talk to these two and asked them about it. They said, "Well, we are not really human beings. We're nagas (*i.e.*, sea serpents) in disguise. We usually live in the ocean, and we don't like the smell of human beings. So whenever we come here, we cover ourselves with sandalwood paste so that we don't have to smell you. But the reason we have come is that in the Buddha's time, he taught some sutras that no one could understand. But we listened to these discourses, and understood them, and wrote them down. We've kept them in our palace at the bottom of the ocean. We have been waiting for a human being of sufficient wit to understand them. And we've come here because we believe that you are that person. Do you want to come with us and read these sutras?"

Well, of course he did; who wouldn't? Magically he lived in their undersea kingdom. He studied the sutras that they had; he was taught by the nagas. Then he returned to our world with one of the sutras, the *100,000 Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, which he then taught. Traditional scholarship says he was the great commentator on the perfection of wisdom sutras. But I think he was more than the great commentator on them. I believe he was the great transmitter of something very extraordinary, even otherworldly, and that's what this story hints at: Nagarjuna taught the serpent wisdom which comes from a world different than our own.

Now, my modern American mind says that this is all metaphor, and I know that oceans and waters are symbols for the mind. So, to go to the bottom of the ocean means to dive deeply into the depths of the mind. And I know that a certain kind of energy and wisdom is associated with the serpent: Kundalini energy, which is called by Buddhists the "wind in the central channel." So I think Nagarjuna is master of this high energy wisdom, which is associated with snakes and sea serpents. This serpent wisdom/energy has a bad reputation in the Western Bible story of Eden, though not the rest of the world, because it is the wisdom of total non-duality, the wisdom of emptiness, shunyata. It is beyond all the logical pairs, such as "is" and "is not," "good" and "evil." This non-duality is so complete, that if you don't understand it, it is totally terrifying and dangerous, much like a dragon or a serpent. Nagarjuna even says that: "A wrongly conceived [wisdom of] emptiness can ruin the dull witted. It is like a snake incorrectly grasped or some magical knowledge incorrectly applied." (*Mulamadhymakakarika*, XXIV 11). This wisdom is scary; it makes good and evil relative. Grasping it incorrectly is dangerous because one could erroneously reject the necessity for moral action, which as Nagarjuna says in his *Ratnavali* (II 20) is the road

Vulture Peak



to hell. And even more terrifying, the wisdom of non-duality transforms one's sense of self, especially oneself and their relation to others!

So, I don't think it is an accident that in the western tradition of dualism which affirms the logical pairs as absolutely distinct, and one's own individuality as permanent, that all the stories about serpents or dragons are negative. The Knights of the Round Table go out to slay dragons; serpents are the source of evil. In the Buddhist tradition dragons and serpents are not negative, they are positive because they reveal a view of non-duality, a view of the relativity of all logical pairs, rather than the view of excessive duality with which we are familiar. However the sutras do say there is something scary about this view. So let's return to the *8,000 Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* to explore this.

The Sutra begins:

Thus have I heard at one time. The Lord dwelt at Rajagriha, on the Vulture Peak, together with a great gathering of monks, with 1,250 monks, all of them Arhats, - - their outflows dried up, undefiled, fully controlled, quite

freed in their hearts, well freed and wise, thoroughbreds, great Serpents, their work done, their task accomplished, their burden laid down, their own weal accomplished, with the fetters that bound them to becoming extinguished, their hearts well freed by right understanding, in perfect control of their whole minds

Thereupon the Venerable Subhuti, by the Buddha's might, said to the Lord: The Lord has said, 'Make it clear now, Subhuti, to the Bodhisattvas, the great beings, starting from perfect wisdom, how the Bodhisattvas, the great beings go forth into perfect wisdom!' When one speaks of a 'Bodhisattva,' what dharma does that word 'Bodhisattva' denote? I do not, O Lord, see that dharma 'Bodhisattva,' nor a dharma called 'perfect wisdom.' Since I neither find, nor see a dharma 'Bodhisattva,' nor a 'perfect wisdom,' what Bodhisattva shall I instruct and admonish in what perfect wisdom? And yet, O Lord, if, when this is pointed out, a Bodhisattva's heart does not become cowed, nor stolid, does not despair nor despond, if he does not turn away or become dejected, does not tremble, is not frightened or terrified, it is just this Bodhisattva, this great being who should be instructed in perfect wisdom. It is precisely this that should be recognised as the perfect wisdom of that Bodhisattva, as his instruction in perfect wisdom. When he thus stands firm, that is his instruction and admonition. Moreover, when a Bodhisattva courses in perfect wisdom and develops it, he should so train himself that he does not pride himself on that thought of enlightenment [with which he has begun is career]. That thought is no thought, since in its essential original nature thought is transparently luminous.

Sariputra: That thought which is no thought, is that something which is?

Subhuti: Does there exist, or can one apprehend in this state of absence of thought either a 'there is' or a 'there is not?'

Sariputra: No, not that.

Subhuti: Was it then a suitable question when the Venerable Sariputra asked whether that thought which is no thought is some thing which is?

Sariputra: What then is this state of absence of thought?

Subhuti: It is without modification or discrimination.

(E. Conze, *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*; pp. 83-4)

So as I said earlier, when we hear about what is happening on Vulture Peak it becomes obvious that we are in a magical realm. There are 1,250 Arhats on a peak that might hold 50. They are called "great Serpents." The wisest of them all, Subhuti, is a monk so wise that the Buddha tells him to teach the others about wisdom. Can you imagine sitting with the Buddha and having him tell you to teach the Arhats about the highest wisdom? And Subhuti does so "...by the Buddha's might..." which means through the inspiration



of the Buddha. In words inspired by the Buddha he tells the others that wisdom means that a Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva precisely because he has mastered a wisdom, has attained a consciousness, which is characterized as wise because when he instructs Bodhisattvas he does not see Bodhisattvas! And he is wise because he does not think of himself as wise!

This is what the Sutra means when it says "...neither apprehend, nor see a dharma 'Bodhisattva,' nor a 'perfect wisdom'...." A dharma is a "phenomenon" in Buddhist technical language. So wisdom is, as Subhuti says, abiding in a state of consciousness which is free of mental modifications, is free of discriminating thoughts, is free of the thoughts of the pairs of opposites such as "is" and "is not." It is even free of concepts such as "I am wise" or "I am." No wonder such a wisdom could be terrifying: can you imagine having a conversation with someone whom you perceive as being both there and not there at the same time? And while having that conversation not believe that you are there, but not believe that you are not there?

It defies all our logic and our ability of comprehension, which is why it is wisdom! So no wonder magical things seem to happen on Vulture Peak, because the beings on Vulture Peak are in our reality, but some of them are also in another. They are in a realm without mental modification.

So how did they get to be that way? How did they attain that realm of absence of thought? Well, the Sutra tells us that at its beginning. For one thing, they gained "perfect control of their whole minds," *i.e.*, they mastered the techniques of meditation, they were masters of zazen. They were "fully controlled," *i.e.*, they were masters of ethics, of right thought, word and deed. And "their hearts were freed by right understanding." This right understanding is the subject of the Sutra, it is perfect wisdom, and Nagarjuna excelled at it.

Nagarjuna is viewed as a logician because he teaches a reality in his texts which is beyond the logical pair "is and is not." But he sees it because he has attained a state of absence of thought which "in its essential original nature...is transparently luminous." (The light in "enlightenment!") So why the endless words of the *8,000 Line* and *100,000 Line Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, and why the subtle logic of Nagarjuna's treatises? Because while "right understanding" is not to be found in words, it is also not not to be found in words. If it were not at all in words, why would the Buddha have uttered a single word? But if it were only in words, why would the Buddha have meditated and attained a state of absence of thought?

I suspect it is like this: if you were a monk walking in the jungles of India you might, at some time, step on a thorn. How would you get it out of your foot? You can't go to the medicine cabinet in your bathroom for tweezers to pull it out! You would take a second thorn and dig the first thorn out of your foot. But then you would throw both thorns away and continue walking along. So all the wisdom sutras and all Nagarjuna's texts with their crazy logic are like the thorn which removes a thorn. Words which destroy words.

And Vulture Peak is the place where this method was revealed. The magic place where our reality melts, where Bodhisattvas are Bodhisattvas precisely because they also are not Bodhisattvas. And if they are what they are because they also aren't what they are, why shouldn't they be on the peak of wisdom precisely because they are no longer on the peak of wisdom? They were there when I was there.



Language and Communication

An Interview with Abbot Reb Anderson and Poet-Artist, Laurie Anderson

by Dean Rolston

The last time I saw Laurie Anderson I asked her if she had enjoyed her visit to Green Gulch. She said: "Oh, you know...the smell of Eucalyptus...ever since I was a child...that smell, that particular smell...I've always just hated it." This interview was conducted on a rainy day in the library. The air was pungent with the smell of Eucalyptus. We drank tea in front of a roaring fire. When I began to transcribe the tapes, I discovered that while the voices were barely audible, the fire sounded like shrapnel. Because the interview was originally commissioned by Interview magazine, I worked in Andy Warhol's off-line studio, using his excellent mixers and speakers. For two days the five-story factory building resounded with the artillery bursts of this conversation.

- Dean Rolston

DEAN ROLSTON: Once Laurie said that William Burroughs was Buddhist in his use of language. What would a Buddhist use of language be?

REB ANDERSON: I would say it's using language to set us free from language. The main limit on human beings is language. The Zen Buddhist way of becoming free of words is through words. Words are very much how we become entrapped. We can start by admitting how limiting and binding language can be. When you recognize how it limits, that very limitation can set you free. You may eventually find that the binding and the person bound are not really separate. There's very much an interface between the bondage and the bound one. It's not so much that we use language to set ourselves free, because that would just be motivated by a desire to be free, but rather that by understanding how language is working, we recognize its unbound character.

LAURIE ANDERSON: On the one hand there's spoken language, and on the other there's the printed word, and in the middle there's music - which is kind of like the chanting we did this morning. Language is a terrible trick. Sometimes people think that just because they know the name, they know the thing. Burroughs understands that trick. But he also understands how to use language so precisely and beautifully that it reaches a third level, the musical. He can say nonsense, but the meaning is really in his voice. He's not really a writer. Sometimes he doesn't even write down his stories. He's some kind of weird narrator with stuff that comes out of nowhere. He can start out talking about Egyptian mummies and say "guns" in the same sentence - and it's not really about either. Of course, he said "Language is a virus from outer space," which is an incredibly strange thing for a writer to say.

RA: Human language and words are our consciousness. Human consciousness is basically a consciousness that is aware of differences, and that kind of consciousness "is" words and phrases. So we can see language in DNA, in viruses, in the Milky Way – can see it in plants. That kind of consciousness is language.

LA: Do you think that basically we are word systems, and that the words and phrases give meaning to our reality?

RA: There is a language in the way chemicals work. There is a grammar, a syntax and also a logic. From our point of view the universe looks like words and phrases. Whether it's because we've been using words and phrases or because discriminating consciousness built itself up out of those words and phrases is a chicken-and-egg problem. But the Bible says that "In the beginning there was the word." The way nature is and the way our mind is are basically the same, but somehow we've done this little trick of separating ourselves from the rest of the universe. By putting our sense organs between ourselves and the rest of the universe we can be "aware" of things.

I used to have the experience of saying something had happened and someone else would say, "No, it didn't." And I'd say, "Yes, it did." But after practicing meditation for a while I realized that it did happen for me and didn't happen for them; I didn't prove that it happened but rather I constructed that thing in my memory. If another person is willing to admit one experience that I had, and then the next experience, and then the next, then, finally, they'll admit the experience that I had and they didn't have, because they'll join the way I build my memory. In fact, you never really remember the past: you're just now making up what you "call" the past.

DR: Isn't there some verifiable correlation between what happened in the past and, say, what's recorded on film?

RA: To me that's just group psychosis. Some people may have been at the event and not remember a thing that's on the film. I feel that all history, including its documentation, is just totally concocted.

LA: Of course it's concocted. People may read about it happening, but that's not what really happened.

RA: We may have a memory of having breakfast together today, but that's not what really happened. Powerful people, or people powerful with guns, have been very influential in creating what we call history. For example, generals come in and level libraries full of historical data - they destroy them. Then new libraries are built and new historical data are put in them. This relates back to "the word" and William Burroughs, because it's all storytelling.

LA: Don't you have confidence from day to day that a book is the same book it was yesterday?

RA: I'm just sort of going along with the convention. I think it's healthy for

me to remember that the way I can tell it's the same book is through this thing called memory. But what we really mean is that I decide to "say" that this book is the same book it was yesterday. It's a convenience to think that all the same books will contain the same words tomorrow. You might think this is an advantage, but what I really think is an advantage is to have things be limited. That the history of the world is written down in books is an opportunity for us to fall for the trick of language. We can't experience the joy of freedom until we enter the bondage of the trick of language. So we enter the dirty old trick and then we have an opportunity to experience freedom from it. People who won't be bound never get free.

DR: Laurie made a PBS special called "Who You Mean We?" which told about a performer who gets so busy doing the press circuit and giving "photo opportunities" that she has to create a clone to do all her creating. This led me to think about the distinction that some people see between the art of the East and the West. In the West we have this idea, recently by way of Apollinaire, that it's the artist's ego that's really important. And in the East we have this idea that it's by transcending ego that we get pure art. Do either of you have any thoughts about this?

LA: Sometimes I try to create an alter-ego who has a very different perspective on reality. I created that clone by passing him through my computer and squeezing the perspective very extremely until he was three feet tall.



Lay Ordination Ceremonies were conducted in January by Abbot Reb Anderson at the City Center, and by Abbot Mel Weitsman in February at Green Gulch Farm.

RA: And did that allow you to speak in another way?

LA: Yeah. And I could see things from another perspective, as well. He was in a position of extreme vulnerability. You don't really care what anybody thinks of you, because you kind of know already. For most artists it's not "Look what I did." It's more about creating something that other people can enter into.

DR: Does this seem incongruous in a world where some artists are immediately treated like rock stars?

LA: There's a kind of problem for the artist when he instantly becomes the subject of a *Sunday Times* story. The painter may make a painting and sell it for \$50,000, and then it's going to go into a collector's living room and speak only to the people who are there. And, to use a gross generalization, the collectors tend to be somewhat to the right politically. So, who is this piece talking to, and why? Why is the artist bothering to make this thing? For myself, I would rather work in these more popular media that allow me to speak to a lot of people.

DR: I heard there was a conflict between director and star in your film "*Home of the Brave*."

LA: It was very bad – very bad for me to direct and star in my own movie. Confronting my own image thousands of times, day after day. I went through a lot of stages about that. No one should be forced to confront their own image so many times.

DR: Why do you suppose artists want to exhibit, or Zen teachers to teach, when they could just as well stay home and enjoy their arts?

RA: Originally Buddha did not have the idea of exhibiting art. He didn't want to teach. He didn't think anybody would understand. It was just an experience that was wonderful for him. But then he was pretty strongly encouraged to say some things and he did.

LA: He didn't think anyone would understand him?

RA: One story has it that he said how it was for him and that no one but very advanced celestial beings understood. So he didn't especially want to say anything. Some people forced him to talk, yet just as he expected, they didn't understand. Then something happened. They asked him to try again. This time he actually simplified it and organized it and translated it into the "Four Noble Truths," which people could understand. Finally, towards the end of his life he could again say the way it was for him at the beginning. By then people could understand. He had to start at the place where they were and gradually build up to the place where he was. Then he could unfold his vision, which is that everything is connected. You entirely include me, and I entirely include you.

Buddha first spoke to some people he worked with, some Indian sects. Basically he said, "I woke up. I actually woke up to what's going on." They

didn't understand what he was talking about, and nothing in the way he spoke or looked made them understand. But he had a lot of integrity and had never lied to them before. So because they trusted him, they sat and listened to his teaching. And eventually "they" became aware, too.

Laurie, I find something about the way you talk, the cadence, the quality of your voice, aside from the content - it's a great encouragement to me in my life.

LA: Sometimes it's torture to talk.

DR: What was it like to spend two weeks at a time in absolute silence at Barre (Massachusetts: Insight Meditation Center)? What did it do to your internal equilibrium?

LA: See, I didn't understand that it was about pain; I thought it was about concentration. First it affected my eyes incredibly. I felt as if the inside of my head were rotating in one direction and the outside in another. But then after working for a while I thought, "Wow! this is what sculptors see. I get it. This is three-dimensional." Everything had a quality of depth that I had never seen before. That was a shock. And I had never realized how clever and precise the coding system of pain was. My arm felt as if it had been wound back a hundred times and allowed to spring forward again - and then it just hung there. I realized this is where I keep jealousy, in this arm. Different feelings are carefully placed in different parts of the body.

DR: Reb, do you remember what you said about pain in your lectures?

RA: What did I say?

DR: Well, you were using Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus" as a starting point.



This past fall Linda Cutts organized a series of four Sunday evenings on topics related to the goddess and feminism, called Drawing Down the Autumn Moon. Visions of the Sacred Feminine was led by Hallie Inglehart Austen. The Soul and Her Beloved, a performance of South Indian dance was given by Karen Elliott. Awakening the Goddess, a slide presentation and book signing was held with Mayumi Oda. Images of Divinity: Tara and the Black Madonna, was a slide show presented by China Galland Fisher. The events celebrated and honored the creative feminine energy in all of us and were a great joy.

RA: One thing about pain is that it reminds us why we were born, why we went to all the trouble of taking this form.

LA: Do you mean that we remember the pain of being born, or is it just the pain of being here at all?

RA: Well, there are different kinds of pain. The earliest pain is the pain of corrupting your mind by taking on dualistic thinking. At a certain point, after we die, we get a break - no more pain. All the dualism has dropped away for a while. It's no longer a question of there being somebody there who is free or not free. A lot of people run away from pain. As we proceed through life, pain can be a constant rectifying message. The message is pain and the meaning is: I am here to help.

DR: I'm wondering about death in our culture, and especially the way AIDS is affecting and reflecting our culture.

RA: If someone dies at 95, all weak and shrivelled, we don't think: death, love. But if a young, virile male is well one day and dead a month later, we're much more likely to make the connection between love and death. Then you connect sex and death, love and death. I feel that for the connection to be so apparent is kind of a gift.

Sex and death are always very close. Birth and death is one thing. Sex and birth and love are all one game, but many people try to separate them. I think women may be a little bit more aware of the relationship of sex and death because of their experience in pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. Lots of people associate sex and weddings — they can be a great place to fall in love. Everybody's dressed up, lots of pretty ladies and well-dressed men — but actually, I find that life can be even more affirmed at a funeral and that lots of sexual feelings come up.

Being a priest, I meet people at weddings and even more people at funerals. Very often, people will say, "I'm very happy to meet you, but I'm sorry that it had to be under these circumstances." I say, "Yes," but inside I'm thinking, "This is an excellent opportunity to meet." A Buddhist funeral is a beautiful place to be; you can feel all this life coming up through the cracks. It's not just death, it's also life in its proper context. Growing up in America, I thought funerals were ghoulish and self-pitying. After studying Zen, I went to a funeral and had a totally different feeling. I thought, this funeral is for the living. The whole feeling was turned around.

DR: I went to Anthony Tudor's funeral at First Zen Institute in New York. It was a joyful meeting, with all his friends telling funny, touching stories about him. But there is the fact that the community of artists in New York, for example, is being depopulated by AIDS.

LA: It's too soon to tell how this will affect us. And what really can you do? This is very trivial, but I do miss the joy that used to be there. That joy is in danger of disappearing.

DR: Fun City isn't so fun anymore. Would anyone like to take a walk?



Laurie Anderson and Abbot Reb Anderson

News

A Study Curriculum for Zen Center

Suzuki-roshi encouraged us to study the teachings of Buddhism. He invited Edward Conze, the leading western scholar on the *Prajna Paramita*, as well as other Buddhist Scholars to teach at Zen Center. Former Abbot Zentatsu Baker followed up on this by forming the Mountain Gate Study Center. Abbot Tenshin Anderson was the first director of the Study Center and he himself studied with several Buddhist teachers at U.C. Berkeley.

In the last few years we've had a renewed sense of the importance of this study for practice. And so, inspired by several visits to Green Gulch Farm by Tibetan Abbot Tara Tulku Rimpoche, whose Gelugpa lineage (the lineage of the Dalai Lama) has a strong emphasis on scholarship, we decided to do some work on organizing and conceptualizing a thorough-going study curriculum for Zen Center.

Dogen-zenji and Suzuki-roshi both taught that Zen is a practice that turns on and manifests the essential point of all the Buddha's teachings. For this reason, it is helpful to study the range of Buddhist scriptures not as literature but as living words that can truly awaken us. It is in this sense that Zen is a "special transmission outside the Sutras."

And so our starting points in working out a curriculum for Zen Center have been first, that our study return always to the actual experience of practice; and second, that we try to include an appreciation of all Buddhism in our study, not only Zen or Mahayana.

In the Fall of 1988 a group of Mountain Gate Study Center instructors including Tom Cabarga, Zen Center Board Chair and Head of the Study Center, Michael Wenger and Paul Haller, City Center Practice Leaders, and Norman Fischer, Tanto at Green Gulch, met regularly with David Komito, a professor, curriculum administrator and translator of Buddhist texts, as well as a practitioner of Dharma, to work out a preliminary plan of study for Zen Center. We consulted with Zen Center Abbots, and with other Zen teachers and scholars.

As our discussions evolved, we reaffirmed the value of text study for American Zen students to help clarify the experience of practice. In Japan, where Zen practice has always existed within a developed Buddhist context, text study within the walls of the monastery was often underemphasized (although it has always been a part of the schedule in Soto monasteries). But in America where students often begin with little or no knowledge of the Dharma it is even more important that study be included as part of a practice program.

As a way of assuring that the study was relevant to the practice, we decided to use as our model not the secular Western university but rather the

monastic study system that has been employed in India, China, and Tibet over the centuries. In general, this system is text-based, that is, it uses the close reading of primary texts as the basic structure of study. And so we say our approach to study is "text-based and practice-oriented."

The next problem was how to limit, for practical purposes, the vast literature of Buddhism. Many students of Zen Center do not intend to develop extensive textual knowledge of the Dharma nor do they have time to do this even if they did intend it. So our problem was how to simplify and condense the study without watering it down. After much stimulating and enlightening discussion, we finally arrived at the concept of five "Root" studies, each interconnected with the other, yet each describing a different general topic of Dharma study. Each of the five roots is comprised of a basic list of classical root texts to be studied in detail over a number of years. We felt that a mastery of these texts would give a student a real grasp of the essentials of Dharma study. The system would be flexible enough for a student to specialize in certain areas, and still get a clear view of the whole range of the territory.

The curriculum is far from an accomplished fact. We see it rather as a process of on-going study and understanding, and part of our plan calls for several meetings each year of Study Center instructors to "debate the Dharma" by way of refining and questioning our basic approach. In the future we intend to develop workbooks that deal with each of the roots, extensive bibliographies of each root, and compendia of various essential volumes.

What follows is a draft for the initial brochure setting forth the basic plan for the curriculum.

Purpose

Zen practice emphasizes "direct pointing to the heart, beyond words and letters." It is not necessary to accumulate information about Buddhism in order to practice, but it is necessary to know what Buddha taught. So we have discovered, over the years, that some understanding of Buddha's teaching, as it is found in traditional texts, is very helpful if one is to practice effectively.

Dogen Zenji, founder of our Soto Zen tradition, was himself a great scholar and writer on the Dharma. He emphasized study of the entire Buddha Dharma, not just Soto Zen. Consequently, since 1973, the Mountain Gate Study Center has offered classes in various aspects of Buddhist teaching.

The Five Root Curriculum organizes our study into five interrelated areas, and provides a map of the territory of Buddhist teaching. The Five Roots form the Study Center's foundation curriculum. The Study Center will continue to offer courses in other areas of study, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

Method of Teaching

Our study is not based on a modern university model; rather it is based on the monastic education system as practiced in India in the first millennium C.E., and its descendants in China and Tibet.

The study is text-based. This means that classes will focus on the close reading of primary texts in translation. The study is practice-oriented. This means that our emphasis will be on understanding the material for its direct relevance to our practice, not for its informational content.

The Five Roots

Root I: Early Buddhism and the Life of the Buddha

In this root we study the Buddha's life in detail as it exemplifies the life of every practitioner of the way. We study sutras that lay out the basic teachings upon which the Dharma is built.

Texts:

Life of the Buddha compiled by Bhikku Nanamole; *Lalitavistara*; *Buddhacarita* ("Acts of the Buddha"); Jataka Tales; Selected Texts from the Pali Canon

Mitsu Suzuki Sensei, more informally known as Okusan, joined her husband Suzuki-roshi in America in the early 1960's. She has stayed ever since, teaching tea and sharing her life with us. This past April she celebrated her 75th birthday. We all wish her a "Happy Birthday!" Thank you, Okusan.



Root II: Buddhist Psychology

In this root we study the highly developed scholastic teachings that detail the Buddhist map of Mind. In the Buddhist model, mind and body and world are interrelated and inseparable.

Texts:

Abhidharmakosabhasyam ("Treasury of the Abhidharma"); *Vijnapatimatratasiddhi* ("Attainment of Mere Concept")

Root III: Wisdom

In this root, we study the teachings on emptiness that form the basis of the Mahayana movement and the essential pivot point of Zen insight: "O Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form." (*Heart Sutra*)

Texts:

Heart Sutra; *Diamond Sutra*; *Prajnaparamita in 8,000 Lines*; *Selected Readings in Nagarjuna*

Root IV: Ethics and Compassion

In this root, we consider compassion, the active aspect of wisdom, and its embodiment in the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, the way of action for awakening beings. We will study the cosmic Mahayana sutras that emphasize the interdependence of being. We will study the six paramitas, the guide to the bodhisattva's way of life.

Texts:

Ethics

Vinaya Texts; *Ordination Ceremony with Commentary*; *Bodhisattvacaryavata-
rata* ("Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life")

Compassion

Avatamsaka Sutra; *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*; *Lotus Sutra*; *Pure Land Sutra*

Root V: Zen

In this root, we will study Zen teachings and their lively, direct approach to the fundamental Buddha Dharma. We will cover the tradition from the Sixth Patriarch through the Golden Age of Zen, to Dogen Zenji and on to Zen Center's founder, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Tantra and other schools related to Zen will be discussed.

Texts:

Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch; *Sandokai* ("Merging of Difference and unity"); *Hokyo-zammai* ("Jewel Mirror Samadhi"); *Mumonkan* ("Gateless Gate"); *Hekiganroku* ("Blue Cliff Record"); *Shoyoroku* ("Book of Equanimity"); *Shobogenzo* ("Treasury of True Dharma Eye"); *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*; *Clear Light of Bliss*

Abbot's Term Extended

At the November 22nd meeting, 1988, the Board unanimously resolved to ask Sojun Mel Weitsman to serve a three-year term as an Abbot of Zen Center, beginning in January, 1989. Reb Anderson expressed gratitude to Mel for his participation and the Board concurred. Mel had been appointed to a one-year term as Abbot the previous fall as an experiment in having two Abbots share the responsibility for the religious leadership of Zen Center. The Board's extending the term for an additional three years is an indication that everyone has felt the experiment has been a great success.



The two Abbots at Tassajara

New Zen Center Board

The Zen Center Board's new elected members are Emila Heller, Dan Howe, Alan Margolis, and Katherine Thanas. Anne Heller is the new appointed member. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of outgoing members Ed Brown, Robert Lytle, Keith Meyerhoff, and Lewis Lancaster. Abbot Reb Anderson, Tom Cabarga, Linda Cutts, Marc Lesser, Meg Porter, Laurie Schley, Furyu Nancy Schroeder, Abbot Mel Weitsman and Michael Wenger continue to serve on the Board. The Board asked Carl Bielefeldt, Bruce Fortin, and Michael Phillips to serve another one-year term as appointed Board members. Tom Cabarga was asked to continue as Board Chair for another year. We are grateful for the efforts of all these people.

The Grocery Store

Zen Center began the Green Gulch Greengrocer in 1974. Located on the Southeast corner of Page and Laguna streets, it has been a much appreciated asset to this neighborhood for many years. It has provided good, healthy food, and, more importantly, it was a place where neighbors could meet and greet each other. The store was unusual for a neighborhood grocery in that it did not sell meat, alcohol, or cigarettes.

However, in 1983, when many Zen Center community members moved away, the store income began to go down. As there were fewer Zen Center members who were interested in working in the businesses, it became necessary for Zen Center to legally separate from them in order to maintain the integrity of Zen Center's non-profit status. In 1986, Everyday, Inc. was formed. Even before the separation, wages at the Greengrocer had been raised somewhat, and when Everyday took over the management, a benefits plan was instituted for workers in all three businesses.

For the Grocery, all of this added up to higher expenses with less income. Over the last two years much effort has gone into making the Grocery store break even. Despite these efforts, in two years' time the Grocery has lost \$92,000.

Everyday reported to the Zen Center Board that they might need to sell the Grocery. The Board voted to support Everyday in making whatever decision they considered would best protect Zen Center's interests. In March, 1989, Everyday decided to engage a broker to try to sell the Greengrocer.

Because its major expense was for labor, Zen Center's financial advisors thought that the Grocery could be run feasibly as a family-owned business. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that we announce that, starting May 1,



George and Rima Nazzal began operating the grocery store as *Rima's Green Valley Grocery*. They are looking forward to serving our neighborhood and getting to know the area residents.

There was some concern about what the grocery store would become when Zen Center no longer ran it. We feel very lucky to have found the Nazzals who have, in the past, operated a Grocery which, like the Greengrocer, did not sell alcohol or cigarettes. To insure that these policies continue, Zen Center has given a very restricted lease that doesn't allow the sale of alcohol, tobacco, or meat.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank all of the workers, who have done such a good job of serving our neighborhood through their warmth and effort at the Grocery. Our special thanks, of course, to Chris Anderegg, the manager, who came in contact with us through his volunteer work for Neighborhood SAFE, and who continued his commitment to community involvement through his management of the store.

We hope that those of you who live in the area will stop in and get to know George and Rima. Tell them what you like; they want to hear from you. They want the Grocery to continue and to increase its role as a neighborhood meeting place.

Decision to Sell 317 and 331 Page Street Buildings

Zen Center bought the buildings at 317 and 331 Page Street in 1975. The idea at that time was to tear them down eventually and build a college or study center. As an interim measure they were used for members' housing; they were not intended as low-income housing, per se, but rents were kept low because wages at Zen Center were low. They were very useful to Zen Center in this capacity for several years.

Beginning in September, 1985, the Zen Center officers and Finance Committee began to look at selling these buildings for two reasons. First, they did not seem to be central to Zen Center's religious purpose. Although we have all enjoyed and appreciated having this neighborhood function as a Buddhist community, it was questioned whether it was Zen Center's purpose to provide low cost housing even for its members. Furthermore, fewer members were working for Zen Center. Wouldn't Zen students move into this neighborhood even if Zen Center was not their landlord?

The second reason was financial viability. Many rents were very low and expensive repairs were needed. This discussion was continued, on and off, until February, 1989, when the Zen Center Board unanimously (with three abstentions) decided to sell them.

Because it seemed likely that the buildings would eventually be sold, all new tenants since 1985 have been informed verbally, and in writing, that the buildings might be sold, and that rent increases and evictions were possible if they were sold. All of the current tenants of 317 and 331, except one, have moved in since 1985, understanding that the sale might happen.

In September, 1986, we decided to charge near-market rents for vacated apartments. All but one apartment in the two buildings are renting at about 80-90% of estimated market value. An increase in rents, following the sale of the properties, will not be as great for the present tenants as it would have been in the past.

In early 1987, Zen Center spent several months helping the tenants explore the possibility of a tenant cooperative with the advice of Jacques Kaswan of The Alternatives Center. Both an ownership co-op and a leasing co-op were considered, but the tenants decided that they were not interested in a leasing co-op and would do no further work on an ownership co-op until Zen Center was sure that it wanted to sell.

In 1988, when it began to look as though there would be a decision to sell, Zen Center called a meeting and sent a letter to inform the tenants of the probable action and invite them, again, to consider a co-op. No substantial interest was expressed. Zen Center is still very open to an individual member or a group of tenants or members buying the buildings.

The main impetus for the decision to sell has been the possibility of directing more of our attention, energy and money towards activities which are clearly part of Zen Center's central religious purpose and which we wholeheartedly want to do.

Zen Center has a tremendous need for essential improvement and repair at the three practice places: for example, zendo repair and housing needs at Green Gulch; repair of the "Stone Rooms" and other cabin replacement at Zen Mountain Center; and roof, plumbing, and electrical repair at City Center.

This year we sent out a letter asking members if they would like help in starting small zendos, either by having Zen Center send priests for short stays or by putting them in touch with other practitioners in their areas. The response has been heartening. People want very much exactly what Zen Center has to give.

Many of us are wondering what more Zen Center should do in the realm of social action. We began our Hospice program two years ago and are committed to continuing our support. Should we give more to other programs, such as those designed to help the homeless, or the Hartford Street Hospice?

Also, many people think that Zen Center should have an endowment fund in order to be firmly established for future generations. These are all areas where Zen Center could make use of more capital.

On the other hand, even though we have done considerable maintenance in the last few years, if we had kept 317 and 331 Page for much longer, they would need further repairs. They are already barely break-even. To put money into them will take even more capital from other areas of Zen Center.

In February of this year, when the Board voted to sell these two properties, it also voted to set aside \$25,000 as a donation to help the homeless, or to support low-income housing, and to offer assistance to the current tenants with difficulties that may arise because of the sale. We are very sorry to cause a disturbance in these people's lives and will do what we can to ease the transition for them.

Former Abbot Richard Baker

On April 17 and 18, a number of Zen Center Board members, and current Abbots Reb Anderson and Mel Weitsman, met informally with former Abbot Richard Baker. The meetings seemed to indicate that the former Abbot was interested in renewing his relationship with Zen Center. Former Abbot Baker made many contributions to Zen Center, and to Buddhism in America, during his time in office from 1971 to 1983. He resigned in December of 1983 after serious questions were raised about his personal conduct. His letter of resignation as Abbot and Chief Priest was reprinted in the Spring, 1984, *Wind Bell*. He has not had an institutional relationship with Zen Center since that time.

Recently, in letters to members of Zen Center, and in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of May 30, the former Abbot has claimed that he is still Chief Priest of Zen Center. In addition, it has come to light that, without the knowledge or approval of the Zen Center Board, he has attempted to change the Articles of Incorporation of Zen Center which are on file in Sacramento so that he would have unchallenged authority as Chief Priest. Despite this attempt, the State of California recognizes the current Articles with Abbot Reb Anderson as Chief Priest. The Attorney for the Secretary of State has asked that former Abbot Richard Baker either prove or withdraw his claims.

Dharmadhatu

Zen Center has gone through many difficulties since its inception over thirty years ago. Some of the problems we've faced were institutional, some were religious, some centered around individuals, and some were just growing pains. Many have been intensely stressful. It is from this perspective that we feel for our fellow Buddhist communities, such as the Dharmadhatu, when they are in the midst of a heart-wrenching problem. May our practice and combined wisdom help all of us.

Rick Fields

The *Wind Bell* is sorry to hear of the separation of the noted Buddhist journalist, Rick Fields, from the editorship of the *Vajradhatu Sun*, the publication of the Dharmadhatu. Rick, who chronicled Buddhism's coming to America in his book *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, has made a great contribution to Buddhist Journalism. Rick left when his decision to print an account of Dharmadhatu's troubles was blocked from publication.

Related Zen Centers

Buddhism is often likened to a lotus plant. One of the characteristics of the lotus is that it throws off many seeds from which new plants grow. A number of zen centers have formed which have a close relationship with San Francisco Zen Center. A partial list of these follows.

Zen Center has a number of teachers ready to lead small sitting groups. If you can help support, or are interested in forming, such a group, please write to Zen Center at 300 Page Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.

CENTERS WITH DAILY MEDITATION

Within California

Berkeley Zen Center: Mel Sojun Weitsman, *Abbot*
1931 Russell Street, Berkeley, CA 94703 (415) 845-2403

Hartford Street Zen Center: Issan Dorsey, *teacher*
57 Hartford Street, San Francisco, CA 94114 (415) 863-2507

Jikoji: in the Santa Cruz Mountains near Saratoga
Contact Doris Griffin (408) 741-9562

Kannon Do Zen Center: Keido Les Kaye, *Abbot*
292 College Avenue, Mountain View, CA 94040 (415) 948-5020

Santa Cruz Zen Center
113 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
Contact Maggie or Jerry (408) 426-0169

Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, Genjo-ji: Jakusho Kwong, *Abbot*
6367 Sonoma Mtn. Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95404 (707) 545-8105

Outside California

Hoko-ji: Kobun Chino, *Abbot*
Taos, NM (505) 776-8677

Minnesota Zen Meditation Center: Dainin Katagiri, *Abbot*
3343 East Calhoun Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55408 (612) 822-5313

WEEKLY MEDITATION GROUPS

Within California

Cole Valley Zen Group: zazen, Sundays 6:30 P.M.
1000 Cole Street, San Francisco, CA 94102
Contact: Linda Cutts for lecture/instruction times (415) 863-3136

Community Congregation Sitting Group: Friday 6:30-7:30 A.M.
Community Congregational Church of Belvedere - Tiburon
Contact Yvonne Rand (415) 388-5572

Mill Valley Sitting Group – Monday evenings
43 Oxford Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941 (415) 383-8863
Contact: Steve Stucky

Modesto Sitting Group
Monday evenings 5:00 P.M.
Contact: Stan Cunningham for location (209) 577-8100

Monterey Zen Meditation Group: Katherine Thanas, *teacher*
Contact: Joan Larkey (408) 624-9519

Oakland Sitting Group: Thursday 7:00 A.M.
4131 1/2 Piedmont Ave. Oakland, CA 94611
Contact Vicki Austin (415) 864-2813

Occidental Sitting Group — Wednesday evenings,
last Saturday of month
3535 Hillcrest, Occidental, CA 95465
Contact: Bruce or Chris Fortin (707) 874-2274

Peninsula Sitting Group
Wednesday 8:30 P.M. and Tuesday and Friday 6:00 A.M. followed by service
Skyline at Hwy. 84
Contact: Kathy Haimson for directions (415) 851-7023

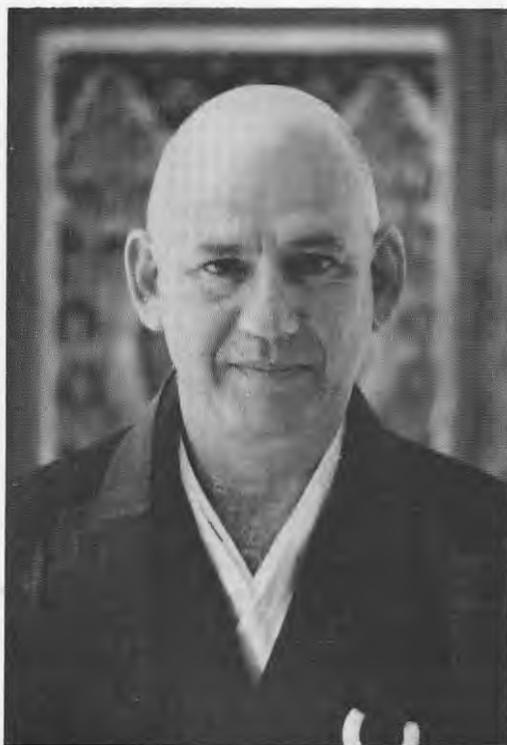
Sacramento Meditation Group
Zazen/Discussion Mondays 7:30-10:00 P.M.
Contact: Brian M. Toole for location (916) 925-0704

Outside California

Chapel Hill Zen Group — Tuesday evenings, Friday mornings
307 West Cameron St., Chapel Hill, NC 27514. Call: (919) 967-9256

Eugene Zen Practice Group — Wednesday mornings
1515 Hayes, Eugene OR 97402 (503) 343-2525. Contact Gary McNabb

New Haven Sitting Group — Wednesday evenings
New Haven CN (203) 432-0935. Contact Elaine Maisner



Lecture

Abbot Mel Weitsman

June 16, 1988

City Center

There is a koan in the *Mumonkan* collection: "When the bell rings, why do the monks put on their seven piece robes and go to the meditation hall?" It seems like a simple enough story, but it's an interesting question for us. When there are so many wonderful things to do in this world which is so vast and wide, why do zazen? As you know, zazen may be the most restricted activity we do. You fold your legs and sit in a certain posture and don't move, no matter what happens. Why do that when we can just run around in this big wide world?

Last night and this morning it was raining. It was nice to be inside, but perhaps this afternoon the sun will come out and it will be wonderful to walk around in the wet, damp city with the sun shining. Why should we do this formal activity, putting ourselves under restraint? After all, what one really wants is freedom, freedom and the pursuit of happiness. If you can pursue happiness, well and good. But I wonder if happiness is something that one can pursue. Happiness is usually the result of something - if we pursue it as an object, chances are we will end up chasing our fantasy. So,

when the bell rings, without thinking about it or wondering about it, the monks simply put on their robes and go to the meditation hall.

On one hand we have the desire for unrestricted freedom to do whatever we want; and on the other hand the necessity for some kind of form which will be the vehicle for the full expression of our life force. But we often feel that the forms we encounter in our life are a restriction. We feel that, the less form we have to deal with, the more freedom and happiness is possible. Back in the sixties many of us were trying to leave behind everything that restricted our behavior, or inhibited our freedom. And then we ran into Suzuki-roshi and zazen, and he helped us to realize that without form there is no freedom; that freedom and limitation go hand in hand.

As you know we pay close attention to the forms of our practice and the forms we encounter in our life. We limit our activity and, within this limited focus, our life becomes magnified and within the restricted form of zazen we find the widest freedom. No matter how far we wander, wherever we go we cannot leave ourselves. At some point, we have to just settle where we are, with who we are.

After Shakyamuni Buddha wandered for six years, finally he just sat down and said; "I'm not going to leave this spot until I understand." He stopped his life of wandering and just sat down. "Until I really understand, I'm not going to move from this spot."

From our Buddha ancestors we have inherited the way of zazen. The form of just sitting and taking refuge in this moment without retreating or avoiding. And we are grateful to the long line of predecessors who, over along period of time developed the forms of our practice and kindly handed them on to us.

When we come to Zen Center we encounter this very formal style of practice. People wear robes and bow to each other, bow to their food, their seats and all manner of inanimate objects. We hold our hands in a certain way, and sit in a certain way. This is a very formal way to conduct ourselves, but we should understand that the teaching itself is conveyed within the form. Form is a way of aligning ourselves with the teaching of mindfulness and attention to the present. When we allow ourselves to merge wholeheartedly with the form, to be one with the form, at that moment it no longer feels like "formal" practice. It is simply a wonderful way to move with ourselves, each other, and our surroundings, with awareness and intimacy.

On the other hand, there is no special form of zen. Zen practice has no special form. But the form makes our practice visible and tangible. We have something to work with. The first stage of practice is to accept the formal side and find our freedom within it. And when we leave the formal side, we can enter into any situation as a form of practice.

So, as we know, zazen is not restricted to sitting on a cushion with our legs crossed. Leaving the zendo we encounter the various forms of life and mingle with these forms. We take them on and become those forms. So

practice is not restricted to a special place, or some particular room. The whole world is our meditation hall. There is no place we cannot practice and there is no obstacle to practice. Often people feel that they don't have the freedom to practice because they can't spend much time in the meditation hall. It is important to understand how our practice is extended from zazen and how the forms we encounter become the various forms of zazen. No problem, or no event in our life, is an obstacle to realizing truth or establishing our life in reality.

We come to practice for various reasons. We may hear about enlightenment and realization, but it's hard for us to know what that is until we absorb through our pores the meaning of zazen. Usually, when we enter practice we want something for ourselves. That is natural and understandable. But when we mature in our practice we realize that what we are doing is not just for ourselves, nor a reinforcement for our own opinions. When we want too much for ourselves, our practice can easily become self-centered. The more generous side is to feel that we should help others, which is very good. But that can also be a kind of self-centered way: "I am helping others." So, do we practice for ourselves or for the sake of others?

Either way there is a little problem. When we can take care of the practice for the sake of the practice we are on the way to true maturity. When we take care of Buddha, when we take care of Dharma, when we take care of Sangha, then Buddha, Dharma and Sangha take care of and nourish myself and others. This kind of faith or confidence is necessary.

It's important to be aware of our own self-centeredness and to know how to deal with it. According to Buddhism, self-centeredness is delusion, because there is ultimately no self to be centered on. When we realize that we are totally interdependent with all things we can begin to live our life with real freedom. As Master Tozan said, "Everywhere I turn I meet myself." When the bell sounds the monks put on their seven piece robes and go to the meditation hall. They just take care of the Dharma; they are not so worried about themselves or what they want. Their whole life is dedicated to the welfare of all beings.

This is renunciation; letting go of self-centricity and living a life of conscious intention. Conscious intention is sometimes called a vow. "Vow" may be a little strong, so I use the word intention. Consciously intending we maintain our direction. Even when we are pulled or overwhelmed by aspects of greed, anger and delusion we can maintain the way through the power of our strong intention. Sometimes we say, to live by vow or intention rather than by karma. And even though we are pulled along helplessly or unwillingly by habit and the consequences of our compulsive actions, our sincere intention and strong steady practice contains within itself the power of transformation.

To practice the way in the midst of our difficulties is renunciation, and to acknowledge our faults and make the effort to re-establish ourselves in whole mind, wholesome mind, is repentance. It's easy to get stuck justifying our mistakes, when we are forced to take a stand in self-defense. This is not

just fault finding, but clearly knowing or acknowledging in a lucid way and returning to wholeness. Acknowledging our actions and re-entering the way, we can start from a clear place.

In renunciation we find our real freedom, our own face, the true joy and happiness we were always pursuing. True freedom is in the unburdening. In the sutras Buddha often says, "Lay down the burden." We can carry this burden of self for a long time. But when we lay it down we feel some great relief. Given the complexities and entanglements of our lives and our society it's not so easy to lay down the burden. The more complex our lives become, the more we feel that we need.

For a zen student real freedom means laying down the burden of partiality, the enslavement to our thoughts, feelings and emotions, as well as the desire for security in material things. The point of our practice is to be able to unburden ourselves and return to reality moment by moment. It is not necessary to know everything. Renunciation is simply choosing to wake up moment by moment. Life is constantly giving us our cues. When the bell sounds, the monks put on their robes and go to the meditation hall. When anger arises, the bell sounds and we take refuge in calmness of mind. When confusion arises, the bell sounds and we take refuge in equanimity. When greed arises, the bell sounds and we take refuge in the coolness of appreciating what we already have. In this way, everything in our life is helping and supporting our practice. I make a bow with deep appreciation.



The City Center and Green Gulch Farm, in partnership with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, offer several Family Practice days each year.

Merging of Difference and Unity (*Sandokai*)

The mind of the great sage of India
Is intimately communicated between east and west.
People's faculties may be keen or dull,
But in the path there are no 'southern' or 'northern' ancestors.
The spiritual source shines clearly in the light;
The branching streams flow in the darkness.
Grasping things is basically delusion;
Merging with principle is still not enlightenment.
Each sense and every field
Interact and do not interact;
When interacting they also merge -
Otherwise they remain in their own states.
Forms are basically different in material and appearance,
Sounds are fundamentally different in pleasant or harsh quality.
'Darkness' is a word for merging upper and lower;
'Light' is an expression for distinguishing pure and defiled.
The four gross elements return to their own natures
Like a baby taking to its mother;
Fire heats, wind moves,
Water wets, earth is solid.
Eye and form, ear and sound,
Nose and smell, tongue and taste -
Thus in all things
The leaves spread from the root;
The whole process must return to the source;
'Noble' and 'base' are only manners of speaking.
Right in light there is darkness, but don't confront it as darkness;
Right in darkness there is light, but don't see it as light.
Light and dark are relative to one another
Like forward and backward steps. All things have their function:
It is a matter of use in the appropriate situation.
Phenomena exist like box and cover joining;
Principle accords like arrow points meeting.
Hearing the words, you should understand the source;
Don't make up standards on your own.
If you don't understand the path as it meets your eyes,
How can you know the way as you walk.
Progress is not a matter of far or near,
But if you are confused, mountains and rivers block the way.
I humbly say to those who study the mystery,
Don't waste time.

- Based on a translation by Thomas Cleary

"It Is Not Always So"

Sandokai Lecture

No. 12

by Suzuki-roshi

Tassajara, July 4, 1970



NOTE: This lecture covers the following lines of the Sandokai:

"Koto o ukete wa subekaraku shu o esubeshi mizurkara kiku o rissuru koto nakare sokumoku do o esezunba, ashi o hakobumo izukunzo michi o shiran" [If you listen to the words, you should understand the source of the teaching. If you don't understand the Path even as you move your feet, how can you know the way?]

Tonight's lecture will begin with "*Koto o ukete wa subekaraku shu o esubeshi.*" *Koto* means "aforementioned things or words," the previous words of the *Sandokai*. But it also means all the various words, things or ideas which we see or hear. So *koto* includes everything. *Ukete* is "to receive" or "to listen to." The character for *ukete* looks something like a hand. *Subekaraku* means "you should" or "by all means," or "necessarily." *Shi* means "the source of the teaching which is beyond our words." *Esubeshi* means "to have actual understanding of it." So, "when you listen to the words, you should understand the source of the teaching." Usually we stick to words, and so, it is difficult to see the true meaning of the teaching. We say "words or teaching are the finger pointing at the moon." Words are just to suggest the real meaning of the truth.

If you stick to the finger pointing at the moon you cannot see the moon. So, we should not stick to words, but we should know the actual meaning behind the words.

In Sekito's time each master had his own way of introducing the real teaching to his disciples and as they stuck to their teachers' words or

personal Zen characteristics and to his particular way, Zen became divided into many schools, and it was hard for the students to know which was the true way. And actually, to wonder which was the true way was already wrong. Each teacher was suggesting the true teaching in his own way, so each teacher was suggesting the same truth, the same source of the teaching which was transmitted from Buddha. To stick to words without knowing the source of the teaching is wrong, and that is what the teachers of Sekito's time were doing. And that was the student's way of studying Zen. So Sekito said, "If you receive words, you should understand the source of the teaching which is transmitted from Buddha and is beyond each teacher's own way of expressing or suggesting the truth."

The next sentence is, "*Mizukara kiku o rissuru koto nakare.*" "You" is understood in this sentence. *Nakare* means "not." *Kiku* means "rules." *Rissuru* means "to establish." *Mizukaru* means "by yourself." "You should not establish rules for yourself." And you should not stick to them or be bound by them. Most people are doing that. When you say, "this is right!" or "this is wrong!" you establish some rules for yourself. And because you say so, naturally you will stick to them and be bound by them. And this is why Zen was divided into many ways or schools -- Soto, Rinzai, Obaku, Ummon, Hogen and Igyo. Originally there was one teaching, but each teacher, or his disciples established one school and they stuck to their "family way" and were bound by it. They understood Buddha's teaching in their own way and then stuck to their understanding and thought that it was Buddha's teaching. In other words, they stuck to the finger pointing at the moon. If three teachers are pointing at the moon, each one has his own finger and so there are already three schools, but the moon is one. So Sekito says, "Don't establish your own rules for yourself."

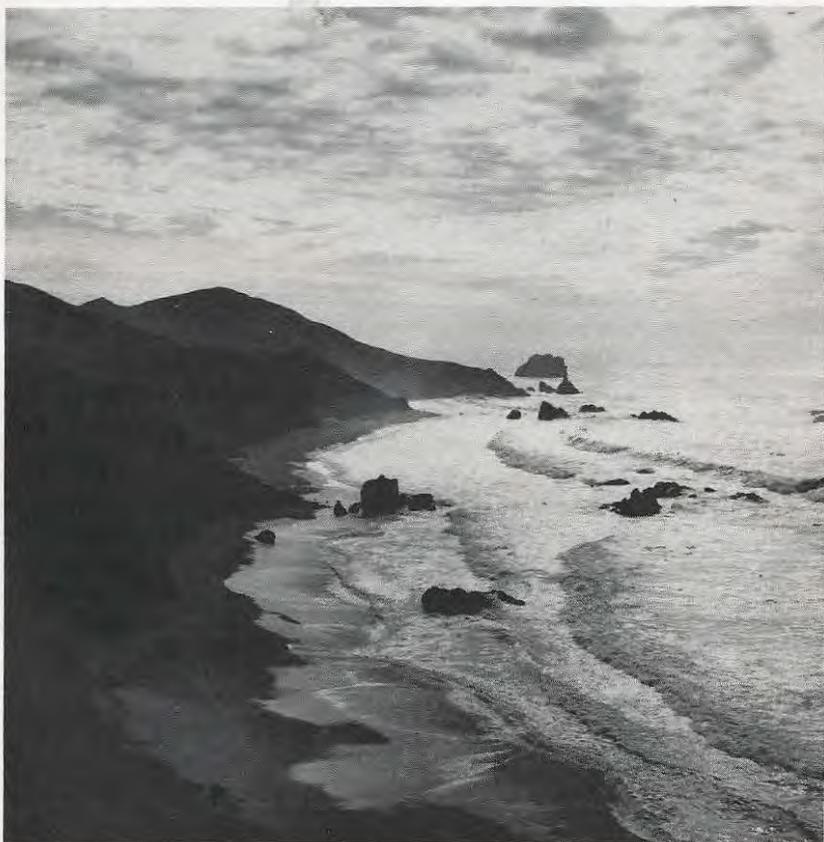
This is very important for our practice. We are liable to establish our own rules. "This is the rule of Tassajara," you may say. But rules are the finger which points to how we have good practice at Tassajara according to the situation. Rules are important, but you shouldn't think, "this is the only way; this is the true permanent teaching, or the rules they have are wrong." You shouldn't stick to your own understanding of things. Something which is good for someone is not always good for someone else, so you should not make special rules for everyone. Rules are important, but when you stick with rules and force them on others too much it means that you are making a rule-bound establishment.

So when you enter a monastery you shouldn't say, "this is my way." If you come to Tassajara you should obey Tassajara's rules. You should not establish your own rules. To see the actual moon through Tassajara rules is how to practice at Tassajara. Rules are not the point. The actual teaching the rules will catch is the point. So by observing rules you will naturally understand the real teaching.

From the beginning, this point may be missing in all of us. Most people start to study Zen in order to know what Zen is. This is already wrong. It means they are always trying to provide some understanding or rules for themselves.

The way to study Zen should be like a fish picks up its food—snap! They do not try to catch anything. They just swim around. And if something good comes... snap! Even though it is very hot you are observing Tassajara rules, eating in the hot Zendo like a fish swimming around, and if something good comes ... snap! and as you are doing so, you will get something. I don't know whether you realize it or not, but as long as you are following the rules, you will have something. Even though you don't have anything or you don't study anything, you are actually studying, like a fish who doesn't seem to know what he is eating. That's all. In that way we should study. To understand does not mean to understand something through your head.

If you ask the question "what is good?" of a Zen student, his answer may be, "something you do is good and something you don't is bad." That's all. We don't think so much about good or bad. So Dogen Zenji says, "the power of "do not" is good." This is something intuitive. The very inmost function of ourselves. Our innate nature. Our innate nature has some



Blind Beach, Jenner, California For Suzuki-roshi

function before you say "good" or "bad." That function appears to be sometimes good and sometimes bad. We understand in that way. But our innate nature is beyond the idea of good or bad. So when you wonder why we practice zazen in such bad weather, that is the first step to your confusion. We should be like a fish, always swimming around in the river. That is a Zen student. Dogen Zenji said, "the bird does not need to know the limit of the sky or what it is before flying in it." They just fly in the big sky. That is how we practice zazen.

So you should not try to make rules for yourself. These are very strict words. They may not seem to mean much, but actually when Sekito Zenji says so, he is waiting with a big stick. If you say something, he answers, "don't make rules for yourself!" "Don't try to understand by your head." He is waiting like this. So when he says so, we cannot say anything. "Hai!" That's all. You needn't even say "Hai!" You should do things like a mule or an ass.

You may say "this is absolute surrender." But it is not so. It is the way to understand the teaching. This character *shu* means "the source of the teaching." We are liable to wonder what it is. But it is not something which you can understand by words, but something you have when you do things quite naturally and intuitively, without saying good or bad. Time is going on and on and we do not have to say "good" or "bad." Moment after moment we should follow the flow of time. You should go with time. When you become tired of doing something you may say "this way" or "that way," just to kill time. But when you see the vegetables in the garden which have almost dried up in the hot weather, you do not have much time to say what will be the appropriate thing to do today. While we are discussing it you are becoming more and more hungry.

So the kitchen people should go to the kitchen and prepare food for the next meal. That is the most important thing. But it does not mean that it is a waste of time to think about things. It is good to think about things, but we should not stick to words or rules too much. This is a very delicate point. Without ignoring rules, and without sticking to rules, we should continue our Tassajara practice. This is the way Sekito is suggesting.

And he says, "*sokumoku do o esezunba, ashi o hakobumo izukunzo michi o shiran.*" *Soku* means "antenna of insects or sense organs." *Moku* means "eyes." So it means to use our eyes and our fine senses. *Do* is "tao" or "the way." *E* means "understand." *Esezunba* is "not." "If you don't understand Tao with eyes and other sense organs." *Ashi* means "foot." *Hakobumo* means "to carry on," "to go." So *Ashi o Hakobumo* is "to move your feet." "To practice."

Esezunba means "how" or "how can you do that?" *Michi* is another word for "way." *Shiran* is "to know." "Can you know the way?" It means that the only way is to use your fine sense organs wherever you go and at the same time to understand the source of the teaching. If you don't do that, even though you "operate your feet," (practice) you cannot know the true way (*michi o shiran*).



Abbot Dainin Katagiri of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center has been quite ill. We wish a speedy recovery to our friend and teacher.

So the most important thing is not rules but to find the true source of the teaching with your eyes and ears wherever you are -- this is a more direct way to know the source of the teaching without trying to establish some particular way for yourself. If you stick to words, if you do not see the true way through your own eyes and ears or if you stick to some rules and ignore the direct experience of everyday life, even though you practice zazen, it doesn't work, he says. So without thinking "Rinzai," or "Soto," "this way" or "that way," to have some direct experience of everyday life is the most important thing and that is how we understand the true source of the teaching from Buddha.

The true way could be a stick. The original way of Buddha could be a stone. Like Master Ummon said, "It may be toilet paper." What is the true way? What is Buddha? Buddha is something beyond our understanding. So Buddha could be everything. So instead of the word "buddha" we could just say "toilet paper" or "three pounds of hemp," as Tozan said. So, if someone asks you "Who is Buddha?" the answer may be "you are Buddha too." Then, if someone asks, "what is the mountain?" "The mountain is also Buddha," you may answer. In Japanese we say *momata*. *mo mata* means "also" you shouldn't say "this is Buddha." That statement will lead you to

some misunderstanding. "but if you say, "this is also Buddha," it is okay. If someone asks, "Where is Buddha?" you may say, "Here is Buddha too." "Too" is not so definite. Buddha may be somewhere else too.

So the secret of the perfect Zen statement is, "It is not always so." As long as you are at Tassajara, this is our rule, but it is not always so. You shouldn't forget this point. This is also Buddha's rule. If you know this, there is no danger and you will not invite any misunderstanding. This is how you get rid of selfish practice. Even though you think you are practicing Buddha's way, you are liable to be involved in selfish practice when you say "the way should be like this." You should definitely say, "this is our Tassajara-way." But you should be ready to accept some other way too.

This is rather difficult; to have a very strict, strong confidence in your actual practice and to be flexible enough to accept another's way too, is rather difficult. You may say that to be ready to accept another's teaching is not a strict way. But unless you are ready to accept another's practice, you cannot be so strict with your own way, or else strictness becomes stubbornness. Only when you are ready to accept someone's opinion can you say, "you should do so!" It means that if someone else comes we can observe his way. Otherwise, you cannot be so strict with yourself.

Usually strictness means to be rigid, to be caught by your own understanding and not to provide room for the understanding of others. Do you understand this point? That is not our way. If someone asked my master's opinion about some matter, he always said, "If you ask me, my opinion is this!" (*hitting the table with his stick*). When he said so, he was very strong. Why he could be so strong was because he said, "If you ask me." That is our way. So, to be just yourself is to be ready to accept someone else's opinion too. Each moment you should intuitively know what to do. But it does not mean you should reject someone else's opinion.

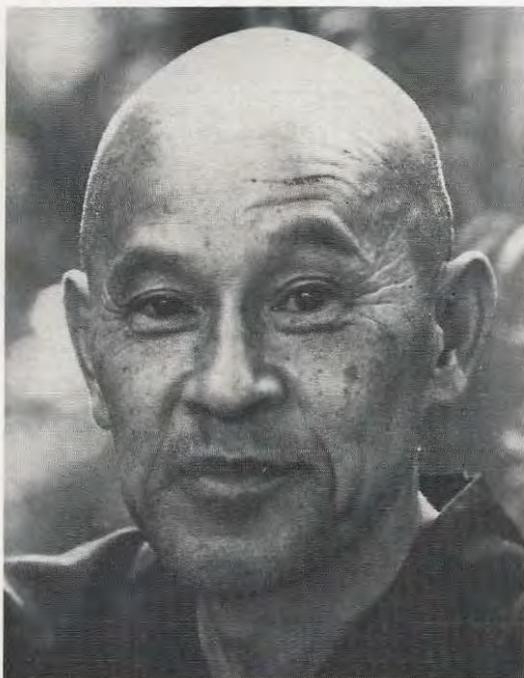
In every day life there is Tao, and if you do not practice the way in every-day activity there is no approach to the true way. That is what Sekito means. Don't stick to words. Don't make your own rules and force rules on others. It is not possible to force rules on others anyway, because each one has his own way and should have his own way.



Jaan Kaplinski is the leading poet of Estonia. He has written a few poems in English. This is one of them. Our thanks to Michael Katz for passing this along to us. It's from the book The Wandering Border, by Copper Canyon Press.

— Michael Wenger

*Shunryu Suzuki
a little Japanese living
and teaching in California
couldn't be my teacher
one of my non-teachers
a little lit match from God's matchbox
sea wind soon blew out
somewhere between California and Estonia
somewhere between East and West
between somewhere and nowhere
nobody can find out what remained of him
after the wind has blown and the tide
come and gone - the white sand
as smooth as before - but his smile
from the back cover of Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind
has silently infected book after book on my shelves
and perhaps shelves themselves and walls and wallpapers too*



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San Francisco,
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SCHEDULES

SAN FRANCISCO	GREEN GULCH FARM
MONDAY through FRIDAY 5 — 7:10 A.M. — zazen & service 5:40 — 6:35 P.M. — zazen and service	SATURDAY through THURSDAY 5 — 7 A.M. — two zazens and service
SATURDAY 7 — 8:10 A.M. — zazen & service 8:10 A.M. — temple cleaning 8:25 A.M. — open breakfast 9:10 — 9:50 A.M. zazen only 10 A.M. — lecture (8:30 A.M. — zazen instruction)	FRIDAY 6:00 A.M. — zazen and service
SUNDAY — no schedule	SUNDAY 5 — 7 A.M. — two zazens & service 8:30 A.M. — zazen instruction 9:25 A.M. — zazen 10:15 A.M. — lecture 12:45 P.M. — lunch

ONE-DAY SITTINGS: once monthly SEVEN-DAY SITTINGS: twice yearly
THREE & FIVE-DAY SITTINGS: offered periodically

Each year we hold residential practice periods of two-to-three months' duration at Green Gulch, City Center and Zen Mountain Center. For more information, please write to the City Center.

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