

***Kensho* and the Unborn Buddha Mind;**
Shingaku, Enlightenment Intensive and 'Big Mind'™

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Introduction

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

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

By way of comparison, The Western Chan Fellowship, a UK Chan/Zen Buddhist Sangha that runs regular 5,7, 14 and 21 day retreats throughout the year, services about 170 retreatants per year at Maenllywd, its mid-Wales retreat centre. Of those, up until recently, there were very few *kenshos*. There have been many ‘one-mind’ or unified mind type of experiences, some very deep, but few occurrences of ‘seeing the nature’. However, I am reliably informed that recently there have been some 4 *kenshos* within this Sangha. These latter *kenshos* have been from among long-term meditators that have trained closely with the Teacher for many years and have themselves, maintained a high level of training.

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

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

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

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

Kensho or ‘Seeing the Nature’

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

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

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

Whilst Harvey tells us that in Zen, man’s ‘original nature’ is experienced as a state where thought has stopped and there is a clear, tranquil awareness; a state also known as ‘serene observation’¹, in the Chan tradition this is not enough. The idea of ‘seeing the nature’ (Ch. *jianxing*, Jp. *kensho*) which is an initial breakthrough or a ‘glimpse into one’s true nature’ entails a key element or better; there is a key element that is noticeable by its absence, this key is that of the absence of a sense of ‘self’. In line with the Buddha’s teaching of ‘*anatta*’ (Skt *anatman*) or not-self, an insight into Nirvana includes the dropping off of the notion of a separate, permanent self. The state of ‘serene observation’ that Harvey describes may well be a prelude to ‘seeing the nature’ but may not necessarily do so. It is possible to have a brightly shining mind (*pabhassara citta*) and still cling to some idea of a permanent self which would not then constitute ‘seeing the nature’².

¹ Harvey, P., 1990, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, p271

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

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

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

Upon hearing Tendo Nyojyo, the 50th Ancestor in line from Mahakasyapa, telling the assembly, “To practice meditation is indeed to drop off body and mind!” Dōgen had a great awakening (*satori*). He arose and then went to the abbot’s quarters and made an incense offering to the Buddha³. Seeing Dōgen offering incense, Nyojyo asked him what the reason for his actions was. Dōgen replied “Body and mind have dropped off.” Nyojyo confirmed “Body and mind have dropped off the dropping-off of body and mind.” Dōgen then urged Nyojyo not to be too hasty in confirming this attainment, to which Nyojyo said, “I am not giving you my Seal arbitrarily.” Dōgen asked, “What is that which does not give the Seal arbitrarily?” Nyojyo replied, “That which drops off mind and body.” To which Dōgen bowed in respect. Nyojyo then said, “The dropping-off has dropped off.”⁴

This account gives us something of the flavour of *dokusan* or

³ This practice of offering incense and/or making three prostrations to the Buddha is standard procedure in Ch’an/Zen training when one has experienced *kensho*

⁴ Keizan Zenji, 1993, p 278

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

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

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

Furthermore, *kensho* is arguably directly related to the context of the Buddhist Dharma. Chan Master Sheng –yen in conversations with Dr John Crook, the founder and Teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship, has said that ‘an understanding of self as emptiness rather than as an inherently existing subject, provides the *kensho* experience with its unique insight into the reality of impermanence..’ (Crook J., 2002;12). It is not that ‘no-mind’ experiences are only limited to Buddhists; Master Sheng-yen acknowledges that these

experiences are panhuman [p.86]. John Crook further clarifies that these experiences are “interpreted within the the terms of the belief system or ideology in which the experiencer anchors their faith” [p.86]. Arguably, it is the Buddhist context of *anatta* (not –self) and *anicca* (impermanence) that separates *kensho* from other 'no-mind' experiences.

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

Shingaku Sekimon

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

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

Ishida Baigan

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

After a long time of being unsuccessful in finding a teacher, Baigan eventually had an interview with an old teacher called Oguri Ryouin who, as well as being learned in the Sung nature philosophy (Jp *sieri* Ch *hsing li*) was also a Buddhist adept and was well versed in Taoist teachings. When questioned by this old teacher, Baigan was unable to express himself and evidently saw more clearly the inadequacies

of his previous intellectual approach. Impressed with the old Ryoum, Baigan became his follower and began to meditate night and day.

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

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

This instruction stimulated Baigan to practice meditation with even greater resolve, even going without food and sleep for days and nights. After more than a year, he was lying down exhausted one night and was unaware of the break of dawn. He heard a sparrow cry in the woods behind and experienced his body as the serenity of the great sea or a cloudless sky and felt that sparrow’s cry as a cormorant diving and entering the water.

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

shingle’.

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

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

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

In Baigan’s system of teaching there could be distinguished two ‘directions of process’. The first was that which leads to *kensho* and “knowing the nature” and “knowing the heart”. The second direction

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

was that of the ethical practice that follows on from that *kensho*. However, within Baigan's texts, knowledge and action are identical. Paradoxically here, one can see ethical behaviour as being a condition and part of the process leading to enlightenment as well as issuing from it.

Teshima Toan

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

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

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

“no mind”, “no self”, and “no body”. This “no eye” can be seen to echo the instruction to ‘lose the eye’ as given to Baigan by his teacher, Ryouin .

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

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

According to Toan, the ‘unborn’ of Zen Master Bankei is just another name for the ‘original mind’. ‘Consequently, the realm of no calculation and the unborn Buddha-mind are the same... the original mind with which one is endowed with at birth by one's parents is empty and mysteriously clear. Bankei called this emptiness “unborn”. Unborn means not a single thought is born-it is the place

where everything is thoroughly understood and judged before thought arises. Therefore he also called it ‘mysteriously clear’ [Sawada,1953;60].

The techniques used by Teshima Toan to lead his followers towards an experience of the ‘original mind’, included pointing to the senses of his audience. He would bring out a fan and ask what it is and then ask ‘What sees the fan?’ If the answer, ‘the eye’ or ‘the mind’ was given, Toan would go on to point out that this was a conjecture based upon calculated thinking. People were then urged to stay with this question and also similarly with ‘What hears this sound?’ and ‘What knows it is a certain sound?’ and ‘What is the mind at that moment?’ This was done until it was experienced that it was the fan that was the mind, as the nature of the mind is to reflect whatever comes into its purview.

This method, according to Toan,

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

Similarly, Nakazawa Doni, Toan’s number one disciple, would hit the podium with his fan and ask his audience how many blows were struck. He would then go on to point out to them that whilst they

were listening to him strike the blows, nothing except the sounds themselves existed. Sometimes he would raise the lens of a pair of spectacles from up behind the open fan, simulating the rising moon. Again he would point to the spontaneous, un-premeditated occurrence of perception that needs no subjective self.

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

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

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

In Shingaku, the backward-step method of much early Chan/Zen

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

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

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

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

educate the city classes previously overlooked by the *bakufu*. These factors nailed the coffin lid shut for Shingaku as a movement.

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

Enlightenment Intensive

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

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

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

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

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

Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress [Ud 1.10, Thanissaro 1994a,].

This is not to suggest that the work done in Intensives is without value, but it is argued here that the reported breakthroughs are rarely bona-fide *kenshos*. In reading Noyes’ book, ‘The Enlightenment Intensive’, we are given that the experiences on the retreats reported

in the book are *kenshos* or *satoris*. In reading the reports included in the book, of all the reports, perhaps only one is a possible candidate for *kensho* as we have previously defined it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concerning the evaluation of retreatant experiences, John Crook and Simon Child of the WCF, both of whom are Dharma heirs of the Venerable Chan Master Sheng yen, are well aware of the dangers in wrongly attributing the title *kensho* to an illuminating experience arising for an individual who is simply well into the process of either mind calming or *koan* evaluation. Most such experiences are of self-world unity - the "One mind" experience and not "seeing the nature" with no-self present. In his talks with John Crook, Master Sheng-yen has clarified the difference between ‘one-mind’ experiences and ‘no-

mind'. 'The unified mind remains of the same structure as the divided one. It is not yet gone beyond. It is not the no-self' [Crook, 2002;41]. This usually becomes clearly apparent in the manner of a practitioner's self presentation during confidential interview with the master .

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

Master Sheng-yen has argued that One-mind experiences are very important and valuable on the path. He has this to say about one-mind and its relationship with no-mind:

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

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

- finding no-one there in zazen and then on checking finding no-one looking at the face in the mirror. (i.e. rational observation continues even in absence of I, - strange!)

- walking down a street - suddenly finding oneself "returning" when trying to cross a road in traffic.

- extreme emotional release followed by self-emptiness. Another similar experience could not be adequately verified due to the too great emotional intensity at the time .

-Finding no-one driving the car .

Crook adds that the ultimate test of the occurrence of *kensho* is the effect of the experience on the Dharma understanding and conduct of an individual as life goes on.

(John Crook in private communication)

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

Big Mind™

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

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

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

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

Another important point that has been raised by John Crook⁶ among others, is that Merzel in his sessions is operating a technique not unlike hypnotic induction using suggestion with his audience to engage with the different sub-personalities. Here, Merzel is in control. This is in stark contrast to established Buddhist meditation techniques and also to the EI techniques of dyad communication where it is the individual that has increasing control of their internal processing.

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

⁶ In email to WCF Leaders March 28th 2008

Conclusion

Having reviewed the three approaches to *kensho* of Shingaku, Enlightenment Intensive, and Big Mind™, the only systems that have reported results satisfying our criteria approaching bona fide kensho appear be Shingaku Sekimon and the Retreats run by the WCF. Since WZRs are closely related to traditional Chan intensive retreats one may also surmise that these also can produce *kenshos* as claimed in the literature but that these too may be relatively few.

The key elements of the Shingaku movement appear to be:

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

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

The Enlightenment Intensives certainly can accelerate insights into one’s personal make-up. However, the procedure in itself is not fundamentally orientated towards setting up a *kensho* unless given under the direction of a ‘master’ who themselves have had an

authentic awakening. Berner, in his manual, has said that any one who has read the manual is free to run EI whether or not they have had deep experiences themselves. This to my mind is dangerous territory and I recommend any potential participants check the EI leader's credentials before engaging in the EI process.

Big Mind™ and its Voice Dialogue again can apparently loosen up one's view of 'self', but to claim 100% kenshos in a day may be no more than a marketing ploy. It should be noted in this context, that on Merzel's web site, he offers special retreats at \$50,000 per person, 5 persons per retreat. He has 6 such retreats listed that are full or nearly full, grossing some \$1.5 million⁷.

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

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

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[http://www.genpo.org/Big Mind Big Heart/Big Heart Circle.html](http://www.genpo.org/Big_Mind_Big_Heart/Big_Heart_Circle.html)

Postscript

If you find that you are interested in delving deeper into the techniques and practices that underpin the Shingaku movement, I believe you need look no further than the Surangama Sutra, especially chapters I – V. I have no evidence that the Surangama Sutra played a part other than the striking similarity between the presented methods of Baigan, Toan and Doni and those of the Buddha in his teachings to Ananda as presented in the Sutra.

I recommend a New Translation of the Surangama Sutra, by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, published in 2009, which has excerpts from the commentary by Chan Master Hsuan Hua.
ISBN 978 -0-88139-962 - 2

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