# The Faces of Buddhism in America

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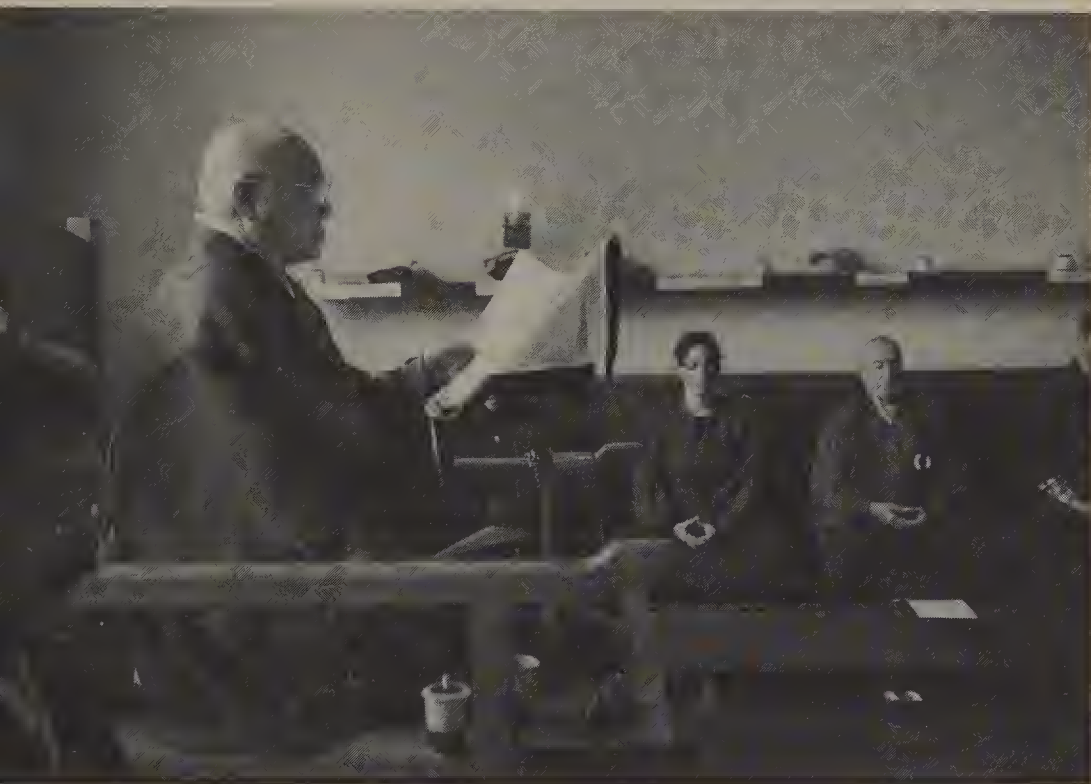

# *Japanese Zen in America: Americanizing the Face in the Mirror*

G. VICTOR SŌGEN HORI

Is the practice of Zen in America like the observance of Valentine's Day in Japan? Any set of practices that has originated in one culture takes on a different significance when transplanted to another. Valentine's Day is now celebrated in Japan in the following way: Through skillful sales promotion, the chocolate manufacturers of Japan have spread the impression that in the West, Valentine's Day is marked by sending a gift of chocolate to the person who is the object of one's romantic affections. Chocolate sales around Valentine's Day have now become so large that chocolate manufacturers do most of the year's business in the month of February. Also in February, one can often find newspaper articles with the results of yet another survey showing that among Japanese people buying chocolate, young women outnumber men by a huge percentage. The newspaper article may reveal too that a young woman will buy chocolate for several men, persons to whom she stands in a position of social obligation (*osewa ni natte iru*). These may include her supervisor at work, a senior colleague, or a teacher in some capacity, among others. Sometimes in a reversal of hierarchy, older women will buy chocolate for their students, mothers for their sons. In a small minority of cases, the woman may even give a gift of chocolate to a man for whom she feels romantic affection (and to whom she may also, coincidentally, be socially obligated—like her husband). The chocolate companies, sensing a chance to increase sales, have tried to encourage even more chocolate buying by creating White Day on March 14, one month after Valentine's Day. On White Day, men who have received chocolate on Valentine's Day are enjoined to return the favor (*okaeshi*) by buying a gift of white chocolate for the young lady. Men give white chocolate in contrast to the dark chocolate which the women gave.

The example of Valentine's Day in Japan reveals how a practice transplanted from one culture to another culture acquires a different meaning. As anthropologists have pointed out, Japan is a gift culture. Despite the advertising that utilizes the symbols and rhetoric of love and romance, on Valentine's Day, the giving of chocolates reflects traditional Japanese gift-giving that expresses the intertwined feelings of gratitude and obligation which arise out of social role as much as the personal affection of one individual for another. In such a gift culture, a man is likely to give a gift of white chocolate as much from the feeling of obligation to return a favor as from a feeling of personal affection (sometimes those two feelings are not so easily distinguishable). A scholar of religion and culture might want to generalize and say that Valentine's Day chocolate-giving in Japan expresses a pattern of social relations defined not by individual romantic affection but by Confucian ideas of social hierarchy, reciprocity, and obligation. Such a scholar might also notice that the creation of White Day chocolate-giving can be seen as a yin-yang separation and pairing of complementary opposites. As in Western culture, women in Japan seem to keep up the social forms more than do men, but chocolate manufacturers have exploited some traditional Asian ideas about gender separation and difference to get men to do likewise. At a deeper level, the scholar might also notice that love, the theme of Valentine's Day, has a different connotation in Japanese society. The word for love in Japanese is *ai*, and *ai* is the same word that expresses the Buddhist notion of attachment, or self-centered clinging, which is a source of suffering in human existence. I once saw a television program in which a marriage expert said that in *mukashi*, "the old days" (whenever that was), one sought in a marriage partner not someone to love for the rest of one's life but someone who would share one's suffering in life. While some Japanese cultural practices, such as a culture and economy of gift-giving, have made possible the easy transplantation of Valentine's Day, these and other cultural practices and assumptions, such as about the relative importance of social obligation vis-à-vis love, have changed the day's significance. Of course, one should not think that the background context of Japanese culture is fixed and unchangeable. The very introduction of Valentine's Day strengthens the position of romantic love in relation to social obligation in Japanese culture, changing Japanese culture even as Japanese culture changes the significance of Valentine's Day. All this occurs not quite at the level of awareness. One lives in one's own culture without necessarily making it an explicit object of examination. Only belatedly have Japanese people begun to realize that in the West, Valentine's Day has little to do with buying chocolate.

One can thus see the point in wondering whether Valentine's Day in Japan—gift-culture commercialized, Confucianized, yin-yangized, seen

through a Buddhist perspective on romantic love—is the same custom with the same meaning as Valentine's Day in the West. Now, is Zen in America the same as Valentine's Day in Japan?

A century has passed since the first Japanese Zen monk, Shaku Sōen, came to North America in 1893. Though there was some literary and academic interest in Zen in the first half of the twentieth century, the first of the serious Zen practice communities did not open in North America until 1959. The late start, however, sparked a surge: by 1975 there were more than a hundred such centers.[1] Then just as suddenly, the tide turned. In the early 1980s, several of the Zen centers in North America developed a new institutional rite of passage—scandal that exposed the sexual involvement of the revered Zen master with his students. A series of one crisis after another triggered criticism of the "autocracy of the Zen master"[2] and, more generally, of the authoritarianism of the entire "samurai," "Confucian," or "Asian" tradition.[3] The problem and its solution, it seems, are cultural: voices all around agree that Zen needs to be Americanized or Westernized. The blanket call for Americanization, however, tends to reduce the complex issue of the cultural understanding of Zen to a few simpleminded labels like "autocracy," "authoritarianism," and "samurai." Further, it encourages people to lay the blame on the perceived other before understanding the complexity of the issues. Before rushing to judgment, we should first comprehend clearly this thing called Zen in America. When we do, I believe that we will see that, like Valentine's Day in Japan, Zen in America, as a historical entity, has been shaped as much by its present American cultural context as by its Asian history. Americanization of Zen started long ago, the very first time any American heard or read anything about Zen and said, "Hah!"

In what follows, I propose to look at several different features of Zen in America—ritual life, methods of teaching and learning, social organization, and meditation practice—and contrast the Japanese and the American versions. Or perhaps I should say "a Japanese and an American version," for I am not implying that there is a single Japanese version of, say, Zen ritual, or a single American version of the same. As in the case of Valentine's Day in Japan, however, surrounding the particular examples are complex nets of traditional patterns, expectations, moral standards, social roles, images of self, and even economic forces (remember those chocolate manufacturers) which mold the particular Zen practice I talk about and which are shared much more widely than any particular example.

I write from my personal experience in Zen and scholarship practiced in different cultures. I originally started out specializing in Western philosophy assuming I would have a career in academic teaching. In Japan to study Japanese philosophy, I instead found myself gravitating more toward

Zen meditation and *kōan* practice, which quickly became more important to me than academic study. After completing the doctorate degree and several years of preliminary Zen practice, I asked to be ordained and admitted to the Zen monastery. During the following thirteen years, the *kōan* practice put me under five different rōshi in several Zen temples, monasteries and training schools. Once back in North America, I discovered that although it was possible to continue *kōan* training under a Zen rōshi at a North American Zen center, I did not feel at home in the Zen center itself. This chapter is the result of my reflections on the cultural habits and influences that have already reshaped Zen in America and have already Americanized Zen. The attempt to understand Zen in a Western context has helped me understand Zen in the original Japanese context in which I first experienced it. I have come to see that Japanese Zen is just as uniquely shaped by Japanese tradition and culture, but that Japan has had the advantage of many more years to meld meditation practices, social relations, ritual, language, and so forth to create a seamless total environment which is both Japanese and Zen. This has not yet happened in America.

My background is in Rinzai Zen; it differs in significant ways from the Sōtō lineage and from the mixed Sōtō-Rinzai tradition of the Yasutani-Harada lineage, which has influenced much American Zen. While many readers may not be familiar or sympathetic with Rinzai Zen practices, I cannot write about anything beyond my personal experience. I hope such readers may derive some benefit from my discussion of more general issues of cultural shaping.

## Ritual

I did my early training at Ryōshōji, the main *sōdō* or monastery for the Daitokuji line of Rinzai Zen temples in Japan. It is located on the compound of the headquarters temple in Kyoto, the only monastery among twenty-five sub-temples. Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the number of active monasteries in Japan has declined steadily, indicating the gradual loss of institutional vitality of Japanese temple Buddhism. Those remaining house fewer and fewer monks, who come for shorter and shorter periods of time. Today there are about fifteen to twenty monks in active training at any time at Daitokuji.[4] About half of the monks at any given time, in my experience, are the sons of temple priests, most of whom will leave after two or three years of *sōdō* training to return to their temples, eventually to succeed their fathers. Historically "sons of temple priests" are a recent phenomenon, since before the Meiji Restoration, there were no officially married priests in Zen and therefore no sons. The *sōdō* population is quite uniform compared to the membership of an American Zen center. The

monks are all male, all ordained, usually in their early twenties, usually single, and usually all looking forward to a similar life afterward as a temple priest.

The ABC Zen Center in the United States was founded twenty-five years ago by a Japanese Rinzai Zen priest. The present community consists of the rōshi, a small number of monks (four or five), and an always changing, larger number of ordained, lay-ordained, and unordained students and trainees, both men and women, young and old, totally committed and just testing. There are two ninety-day practice periods a year, one each in summer and winter. During these practice periods, the Zen Center holds several *sesshin,* weeks of intense *zazen* practice, to which an additional thirty or more people come. The *sesshin* is considered the quintessential Zen practice combining long hours of *zazen* with four *sanzen* a day (*sanzen,* or *dokusan,* is a one-to-one meeting with the rōshi in which the practitioner offers a response to a *kōan*). The rōshi maintains an extremely full schedule, conducting up to fifteen major *sesshin* a year, which frequently draw forty or more people. By contrast, in Japan an average rōshi conducts only six or seven major *sesshin* a year in monasteries with often fewer than fifteen monks.

ABC Zen Center chants all its *sūtras* in Japanese rather than in English; the terminology for the daily schedule is Rinzai monastic vocabulary; the feeling of Japanese origin hangs in the air. But though the center tries consciously to transmit Japanese monasticism, it has developed ritual "traditions" never practiced in Japan. What ideas and attitudes shape those new rituals?

## *Ritual Time*

Both ABC Zen Center and Ryōshōji mark periods of *zazen* using the same traditional signals: one clap from the wooden blocks followed by four slow rings of a handbell starts a period of *zazen*; a single ring followed by two claps of the blocks ends the period. ABC also has introduced a new "tradition": a candle on the altar is lit whenever *zazen* is in progress. The new custom is also a new rule: no *zazen* allowed if the candle is not burning. When the candle is blown out every night, *zazen* ends. When it is lit the next day, *zazen* begins again.

In the Daitokuji monastery, *zazen* is not just another activity in the monastery's daily schedule; in a ritual sense, *zazen* is the only activity of the monastery. At the end of the day, the *jikijitsu* (head of the *zendō,* or meditation hall) leaves everyone in sitting position and walks out of the *zendō* without formally ending the period of *zazen.* That period of *zazen* continues through the night. When he reenters the next morning, everyone is sitting

in place as if unmoved from the night before. The *jikijitsu* starts the morning by ringing once and clapping twice, thus ending the period of *zazen* started the night before. Ritually speaking, everyone has slept the night within *zazen*.

Meals begin and end in the *zendō* in *zazen*. After the *jikijitsu* begins a period of *zazen* with the appropriate claps and rings, the monks proceed from the *zendō* to the dining hall. Ritually speaking, the monks are still in *zazen* while eating. Posture and concentration while eating should thus be the same as while sitting in *zazen*. After returning to the *zendō*, the *jikijitsu* deliberately does not end the period of *zazen*. Instead, he walks out of the *zendō* leaving everyone sitting in position. *Zazen* never ends.

In traditional monastery vocabulary, monastery activities are classified as either *hajū*, literally "holding on and residing," or *hōgyō*, literally "releasing and going forth." These categories correspond to the classic Mahāyāna distinction, emptiness and form, for *hajū* indicates the realm of the undifferentiated, where there is no separation into host and guest, while *hōgyō* is the realm of the differentiated, where host and guest are separated. *Zazen* is *hajū*, a ritualized instance of emptiness. Other activities are *hōgyō*, ritualized instances of form. The Daitokuji monastery is always in *zazen*, as a monastery should be, and performs all its activities—sleep, meals, work, *sūtra* services, *sanzen*, and so on—from within *zazen*; it ritually resides within *hajū* or emptiness and from within emptiness emerges into *hōgyō* or form.

The ritual at the ABC Zen Center is the reverse. The center employs the traditional signals for beginning and ending a period of *zazen*. There too the *jikijitsu* leaves the *zendō* at night leaving everyone seated in place. But the introduction of the burning candle rule shows that the ABC Zen Center thinks that *zazen* is an activity with a beginning and an end; this reveals a lay or secular, rather than monastic, understanding of *zazen*. It resides first in the realm of daily activity, *hōgyō* or differentiated form, and from there withdraws into *zazen, hajū*, or emptiness.

I once asked the rōshi why there was a burning candle rule. His answer was very instructive. He made a series of remarks to the effect that candles are used a lot in the West, that this is probably the influence of Christianity, that candles are used on dinner tables in the West, and that he has even eaten in restaurants where candles were used. At other times, he spoke of how his monks had created many of the traditions at the Zen Center. For him, the burning candle rule was just another example of this. By contrast, the monks say that the rōshi decides everything and they are merely following his instruction. This, I think, exemplifies a general rule: Americanization occurs under the guise of a sincere belief that one is following Japanese Zen tradition.

## Ritual Space

At Daitokuji, monks who have no office (the majority) all live together in the communal *zendō;* only the officers have separate rooms. But at the ABC Zen Center, which inherited rooms and cabins from previous owners of the property, no one sleeps in the *zendō* and everyone sleeps in separate rooms. ABC officers usually share a room, two or three together; lay participants are housed seven or eight to a cabin. Nevertheless, every participant has a bed in a room, which, for the week of training, is thought of as "his own." An individual room creates a division in one's mind between a public sphere and a private sphere, between the place of practice and a place to "be oneself" (an anomaly in a tradition that emphasizes no-self). The same ritual classification concerning space can be applied to time. Sleeping communally in the *zendō* ritually represents *hajū,* residing in non-differentiated emptiness. Individuals sleeping in separate rooms ritually represent *hōgyō,* dividing into differentiated form.

## Meal Ritual

Of the many aspects of the meal ritual, perhaps the washing of the bowls reveals best the process of implicit Americanization. Hot water is circulated at the end of the meal. Practitioners all wash their bowls in this water and then chant the *Senpatsu Ge* (Verse of Washing the Bowls), also called the *Sessui Ge* (Verse of the Waste Water):

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ga shi sen passui* | The water in which I wash the bowls |
| *Nyo ten kanro mi* | Tastes like heavenly nectar. |
| *Seyo kijin shu* | I offer it to all ghosts and spirits. |
| *Shitsu ryō toku bō man* | May all eat and be satisfied. |
| *On ma ku ra sai sowaka.* | *On ma ku ra sai sowaka.* |

The wash water consists merely of water and leftover particles of the food just eaten. It is just as pure as the food itself. To think it dirty is to be fixated on distinctions that one projects onto the water. Accordingly in traditional monastery practice, one contributes part of the wash water to the "hungry ghosts" and then drinks the remaining "heavenly nectar" while chanting the verse. But the ABC Zen Center follows worldly custom and stipulates that one is not to drink the wash water but instead throw it out.

Other Zen centers in America follow the Japanese ritual much more closely, preserving the ritual of providing for the hungry ghosts and conscientiously teaching its meaning to its members. Some Zen centers depart from Japanese tradition altogether. At one Zen center, when I inquired about the meal ritual, I discovered that the entire practice of washing the

bowls had been discarded and instead all the dishes were collected and washed by automatic dishwasher.

These distinctions are not merely quibbles about the "symbolic meaning" of meal practices and other ritual forms. The point of the meal practice is not to eat the food and get out as quickly as possible. The point is to eat the meal cultivating the *samādhi* of nondiscrimination; after all, the meal is part of *zazen*. The "symbolic meaning" is the point and the eating of the food is the skillful means by which it is embodied. Without awareness of the point of meal ritual practices, ritual quickly degenerates into pro forma regimentation. When this happens, the enforcing of strict discipline is in danger of becoming an end in itself rather than a means to encourage the nondiscriminative *samādhi* of the participants.[5]

## Teaching and Learning

There were many kinds of teaching and learning conducted in the Rinzai Zen monasteries I experienced: instruction in *sanzen*, instruction in daily ritual and work, instruction in how to instruct, and so on. Over the years, the Japanese Rinzai monastery has evolved a single style of teaching used both inside the *sanzen* room for instruction in the *kōan* and outside the *sanzen* room for instruction in daily work and ritual. It has also fitted together this style of instruction with social organization, and has developed a single language to talk about both *kōan* practice and the activities of daily life.

### *Teaching without Teaching*

As is well known, the rōshi in *sanzen* does not directly teach the point of a *kōan* to his monk. Instead, a monk must seek and search for himself until he comes to a genuine firsthand insight into the *kōan*. It is not necessary here to present again the image we find in Zen literature of the master whose apparently harsh and arbitrary methods turn out to be skillful means by which he brings the student to awakening. What is not well known, however, is that in everyday work situations, senior monks use the same teaching methods with junior monks. Senior monks usually do not directly teach junior monks how to do daily work and ritual. When a monk newly appointed to office makes a mistake, immediately the older monks will scold and humiliate him but they will not offer instruction. If a new *densu* (the officer who chants the dedication after each *sūtra*) makes a mistake in chanting, one of the older monks will shout in a loud voice, "Mistake!" and the *densu* will have to figure out for himself what he did wrong, and then repeat the chant until he gets it right. When a new cook makes a mistake and the monks do not eat what he has prepared, he literally has

to eat all the leftovers. This motivates him to learn as quickly as possible how to calculate quantities precisely and what does and does not please the monks. In all these and other cases, the new monk is required to seek and search on his own until he truly understands the work for himself and devises his own efficient way to get the work done. This method of teaching I have called "teaching without teaching" as opposed to "rational" teaching.[6]

Such a method of teaching seems irrational and inhumane by the standards of teaching and learning that predominate in most schools of Western education. It is widely accepted in Western education that teachers should cultivate powers of critical reasoning among their students, that schools ought to be teaching students to think for themselves. This is done in the belief that the enemies of true education are rote learning, ritual formalism, and mere memorization without understanding the reason why. Thus a great deal of emphasis is placed on understanding the reason why and on intellectual comprehension. In the teaching and learning that is common in a Zen monastery, there is a similar desire to break through mere repetition of forms and to arouse authentic understanding, but there is a quite different conception of what constitutes authentic understanding. Intellectual understanding does not constitute authentic understanding, for beyond the ritual form and beyond intellectual understanding is personal experience and insight. Mere intellectual understanding that is not backed up by personal experience and insight is denigrated as *rikutsu*, "intellectualizing," "theorizing," "playing with words." In this context, intellectual understanding is not the cure for rote repetition but its cause. Without genuine personal experience and insight, a person falls back on the intellectual theory and repeats behavior unsuited to the context.

One should not think that ritual formalism has no positive role to play. In fact, in this conception of teaching and learning, ritual formalism is the quickest way to arouse authentic personal experience and insight. In the practice of the *kōan*, the monk repeats and repeats the *kōan* ceaselessly, discarding all intellectual interpretations that inevitably arise, until finally the *kōan* is no longer merely an object of attention, and the monk comes to experience the world from inside the *kōan*. Here the usual division between self and other, subject and object, breaks down. Similarly in work and ritual outside the *sanzen* room, the monk repeats and repeats the assigned task, discarding all preconceptions of how to do the work, until finally the monk no longer thinks about the work to be done as "the work" but just does the work. In such personal experience and insight, there is a breakdown of the division between self and other, subject and object. In chanting, the voices of all the monks come into my ears and go out my mouth. Chopping wood, there is no wood; carrying water, there is no water. But in intellectual understanding, the subject of understanding constantly

conceptualizes its object as the work, the wood, the water. That is why ritual formalism, not intellectual understanding, is the more direct route to experience and insight.

Students of Zen in the West are used to the idea that insight into a *kōan* cannot be attained merely through intellectual reasoning; on this basis, they are willing to accept the seemingly arbitrary teaching methods of a Zen teacher, for these are taken to be skillful means for inducing the direct, nonintellectual experience of Zen insight. But there would be a variety of objections to the suggestion that the same teaching methods ought to be applied to all instruction regarding work and ritual activity outside the *sanzen* room: it is wrong to demean and humiliate another person deliberately in public; it is damaging to the learner's self-esteem and therefore counterproductive; "You are not the rōshi"; and so on.

ABC Zen Center has developed several instruction procedures, depending on the person being taught, all of which are straightforward rational methods of teaching. In the simplest form of instruction, a sheet of paper is posted in a room or work area with numbered instructions: (1) Sweep the floor; (2) straighten the benches and tables; (3) beat the cushions and replace neatly; and so forth. At the other end of the instruction spectrum, when a monk is training to take over an office, he is apprenticed to an older monk who already knows the office. They take turns performing the duties of the office, the older monk showing by example what to do one day, coaching the other day. The idea of applying the rōshi's teaching methods to work and ritual outside the *sanzen* room is not considered even as a possibility.

## *Mutual Polishing*

The style of instruction I call teaching without teaching is imbedded in, and made possible by, a social hierarchy. And it is this social hierarchy, wherein one person presumes to be an authority over another person, that Westerners find difficult to accept. For this reason, some Western critics depict the Rinzai Zen monastery as a place of heartless totalitarian control.[7] Each monk occupies a unique place in the monastic hierarchy. He acknowledges the authority of every monk higher in rank and himself has authority over everyone lower in rank. This system of hierarchy, combined with teaching without teaching, means that each monk is involved constantly in correcting the mistakes of any monk lower in rank, while at the same time receiving the criticisms of any monk higher in rank. The Confucian term *sessa takuma*, "cutting, chipping, filing, polishing" (*Analects* I, 15)[8] describes this group dynamic. The assembly of monks is likened to a pile of rough stones placed in a stone mortar and stirred. The abrasive action of stone on stone chips away at rough corners and eventually

smoothes and polishes each stone into a gem. Only then does the individual nature of each gem become apparent. No one stone is more important than the others; the newest novice is just as essential as that of the head monk. A higher-ranking monk is obliged to respect and teach the new novice. Teaching too is learning.

This horizontal "mutual polishing" action of monk against monk could not occur unless the monks were ordered into a vertical hierarchy. As in all social groups, a monk feels hesitant to correct another. The explicit hierarchy, however, allows senior monks to make direct criticism of juniors; it also requires them to shoulder unpleasant responsibility without evasion. The explicit hierarchy requires junior monks to listen to correction while at the same time giving them the right to expect leadership and direction from seniors. Though some monks do get carried away by their inch of authority, the hierarchical structure of the monastery does not exist merely so that senior monks can engage in hazing junior monks; it combines with the action of mutual polishing, which is both lateral and reciprocal. Take, for example, that symbol of Zen severity, the *keisaku*, the stick used to wake sleeping sitters and instill discipline. In the usual custom in America, only two or three officers have the authority to carry the *keisaku*. But in the Daitokuji *sōdō*, every monk in the meditation hall takes a turn carrying the *keisaku*. Hierarchy and discipline do not exclude compassion. When I was a monk I heard the story of how a certain well-known rōshi in the previous generation broke his shoulder when he was a *sōdō* monk. As *jikijitsu* during *sesshin*, his job was to challenge all the beginning monks as they returned from *sanzen*, "Did you pass your *kōan*?" He then wrestled with those who had not passed, forcing them to go to *sanzen* one more time. This wrestling took place on a deck several feet above the garden. In one match, the two monks, locked in wrestling holds, teetered on the edge of the deck. When the *jikijitsu* realized they were falling off, he deliberately twisted his body so that the other monk would fall on top. They landed on his shoulder and broke it. He did his duty as the officer with rank. Compassion, hierarchy, authority, discipline, fellowship: in the Zen monastery, these regularly function in ways surprising to a Western perspective. It is a misreading of culture to liken the Zen monastery to "boot camp" and to think that an officer in a Zen monastery acts simply like an army drill sergeant.

I cannot do more than sketch some of the broader features of teaching and learning in the Rinzai monastery. But even this sketch is enough to show that this style of teaching and learning is complex, has a justification in Zen practice, and works in its own cultural context. To dismiss these practices using simplistic labels like "autocratic" and "authoritarian" prevents any understanding of their function in Zen practice. I believe that if people were not so distracted by the "authoritarian" stereotype, Westerners could learn some lessons applicable to another culture. First, the same

style of teaching and learning is used both with the *kōan* and with work and ritual in daily life, thus establishing their connection with each other. The question of how Zen practice applies to daily life is easier to answer if the teaching methods are the same both inside and outside the *sanzen* room. Second, the discipline, the support, and the energy that make a successful *sesshin* do not come exclusively from the leadership above but also come laterally from the anonymous people, the true people without rank, who fill up the benches. Mutual polishing, in the Japanese context, skillfully brings ordinary people into contact to help each other in their practice. *Sesshin* is not isolated retreat.

## *Language*

Teaching and learning inside the *sanzen* room is the same as teaching and learning outside the *sanzen* room. So also is the language that is used. When asked, "How does Zen apply to daily life?" the standard Zen answer we have come to expect is, "Just be one with whatever you are doing. When washing dishes, just wash dishes. When driving your car, just drive your car." This is the *hajū* approach, in which there is no differentiation into host and guest. But responses to the *kōan* in the *sanzen* room divide into *hajū* (non-differentiated emptiness) and *hōgyō* (differentiated form). So also do work and daily activity outside the *sanzen* room. And *hōgyō* provides us with another language in which to talk Zen (scholars here might see a connection to the Buddhist notion of twofold truth, but this is not the place to engage in that discussion).

In *hajū*, the task is to *narikiru*, to "become completely one" with whatever one is doing. If one is grappling with a *kōan*, then *hajū* is *Mu* itself, is the Sound of One Hand itself. If one is doing work, then *hajū* is just to do the work itself without differentiating host and guest, the self that works and the work to be done. There are many ways of not doing the work. Whenever a junior monk is fumbling, or being artificial, or seeks to flee from a situation, or is being too sincere, an older monk will bring him up short with *Bokeru na* (No daydreaming!) or *Mōzō wo kaku na* (No needless thinking!) or *Kyōgai ga warui* (Your spirit is bad!) or *Shikkari shiro* (Get a hold of yourself!). These are also the rōshi's favorite words in the *sanzen* room.

In *hōgyō*, the task is to come forth from nondifferentiated emptiness into the realm of differentiated form. In the *sanzen* room, *hōgyō* is *Mu* climbing the mountain and rowing on the river, the Sound of One Hand at dinner and at the point of death. In work, *hōgyō* is the doing of work differentiating subject and object, being aware of efficiency, personality, environmental impact, and so on. Concretely, this means that one engages in calculation, evaluation, discrimination, intellectualization, but all from the point of view

of bodhisattva compassion. One discriminates, calculates, differentiates, dualizes not for self-advantage but for the purpose of bringing all beings to Buddhahood. Monks are responsible for helping all of the materials and tools that they touch attain Buddhahood by never wasting them and by always finding another rebirth for them. The water used to boil the noodles is not thrown out but instead used again to cook vegetables; the water used in mopping the floors can afterward be used again to scrub the outside stones. This use of materials should not be mistaken for mere thriftiness. The language of work reflects this. To reuse water is to give it "rebirth" (*sairai*), to help it "be reborn" (*umarekawaru*). If water is thrown away, how can it "attain Buddhahood" (*jōbutsu*)? Not even the smallest thing is to be wasted. Thus the rice storage box of Ryōshōji bears the inscription, "Ichi ryūbei shumisen no gotoshi": A grain of rice is like Mount Sumeru—a nice example of the nonduality of big and small together with the compassion of the bodhisattva for a grain of rice.

The bodhisattva activity embodied in work is reciprocal. At the same time that the monk helps his materials and tools attain their Buddhahood, those same materials and tools are helping the monk attain his Buddhahood. For this, the monk is to show gratitude. A monk's underwear is a rectangle of white cotton attached to a waiststring; it is dropped down the back and passed up the front and over the waiststring. I remember a monk who had patched and washed his underwear until finally it started to disintegrate. He washed it one last time and then placed it in the fire while he chanted a *sūtra*—a small funeral, done in gratitude, for a piece of underwear. There was an old priest who was also a schoolteacher. After he died, relatives discovered a desk drawer full of one-inch pencil stubs. Though the stubs were unusable, he never threw them away because, it was explained, *empitsu ni mōshiwakenai:* To the pencil, he would have no apology. Work conceptualized in this way shows how all sentient beings interrelate by mutually performing bodhisattva activity for each other and gives concrete meaning to the Mahāyāna understanding that all sentient beings are endowed with Buddha-nature.

## Retreat Instruction

While teaching without teaching may be tolerated in the *sanzen* room from the rōshi who is acknowledged to have a special position of authority, it will not be tolerated outside the *sanzen* room from other monks. In the vacuum thus created, indigenous American styles of instruction are employed, such as printed instructions, apprenticeships, or the like. Laypeople, who account for the greater proportion at *sesshin*, are at a particular disadvantage. The *sesshin* schedule, though an efficient means of learning for monks in its original Japanese context, is not necessarily an efficient

means of learning for laypeople in the American context. During *sesshin,* the laypeople have an intense experience consisting of many continuous hours of *zazen* a day, numerous *sanzen* daily, all in a highly regulated schedule. In the jargon of learning theory, they receive massed practice and frequent, regular reinforcement under invariant conditions. While such intense, invariant practice improves performance on one occasion, retreat-style teaching does not instill long-term retention or the ability to transfer learning to altered conditions. To accomplish that, retreat training should involve a variety of different practices, an intermittent schedule of feedback, and reinforcement under constantly changing conditions. This is, in fact, what is provided by mutual polishing in the Rinzai monastery. For the monk in a Japanese monastery, the intense and highly regulated training of *sesshin* is balanced by the open-ended, informal, less predictable schedule of daily work. But for the layperson attending only intermittent retreats at a Zen center, there is no significant mutual polishing work practice in daily activities to supplement the intense training of the *sanzen* room during *sesshin.* This is somewhat akin to teaching theory in a science course without a lab section, to teaching the theory of swimming without allowing anyone to get into the pool. It is not surprising that people complain they lose the effects of *sesshin* soon after they return home and that they cannot apply Zen to their daily lives. Retreat-style teaching of Buddhism encourages that result.[9]

Full-time residents of a Zen center, of course, get the benefits of being on-site all of the time. Full-time practice means many different things depending on whether the center attempts to run itself like a Japanese monastery, a Christian monastery, a lay center, or a business. Much also depends on how closely the teacher imposes form on daily time, meals, work, relations between people, spending of money, and so on. The important point is that the conduct of daily life can contribute to, or distract from, *kōan* and meditation practice. In her study of religious communes and communities in the United States in the nineteenth century, Rosabeth Moss Kanter tried to identify the factors that distinguished successful communes from those that ultimately failed. One aspect of successful communes was that they conceptualized their everyday activities and social relations as applications of the principles of their central teachings. The failed communes did not do this and allowed their members to conduct their daily lives—their work and play, their social and sexual relations—according to their individual wishes without conceptualizing them as aspects of religious practice.[10] Among other surprising results, Kanter found that religious communities that practiced total abstention from sexual activity and those that practiced "free love," obligating its members to take a variety of sexual partners, were functionally similar; in either case, the community regulated love relations and sexual activity so that they did not compromise the fundamental

religious principles of the community.[11] Sitting in *zazen* and working on the job, the *samādhi* of the *kōan* and the *samādhi* of bodhisattva action, Zen for oneself and Zen for others: there needs to be one way of teaching all this and one language to talk about it.

## Social Organization

Commenting on social organization is most difficult. In hindsight, it seems clear that in some Zen centers, coherent social organization used to depend significantly on the presence of the charismatic first-generation teacher. When the second-generation teacher took over, the center had to reorganize itself along quite different lines, and in some cases, this reorganization was traumatic. Perhaps eventually someone will peer inside the American Zen center and give us an analysis of its inner workings. Until then, we can only make a few simple comments about the more formal aspects.

### *Tribe, Family, or Church?*

How is the American Zen center to be governed? Is a community based on Buddhist principles inherently democratic? Commentators have implied as much by declaring the early Indian *sangha* "democratic."[12] The early *sangha* did have features that we might loosely call democratic. For example, elders of the *sangha* deliberated major questions and then proposed their answer three times before the entire assembly; if no one disapproved, the proposal passed. This "democracy," however, contained no counterpart to what moderns call "the rights of the minority." Since unanimity was demanded, the only recourse for persons who disagreed with the majority was to form a separate *sangha*. This is why schism is such an important topic for the early *sangha*.[13] It is a mistake, however, to think that Buddhist teachings make necessary any particular form of government. When we are told that society at the time of the Buddha divided people into four castes, we find ourselves wanting to think of the Buddhist *sangha* in terms of a paradigm in which popular democracy struggles to assert itself against an oppressive elite class system. Yet the apparent democracy of the early Indian *sangha* resulted not from putting Buddhist principles into action, but from adopting features of the "tribal council" form of government practiced by the Śākyas, the tribe from which Gautama came.[14] Thus, one should not speak as if the early *sangha* was foreshadowing North American democracy.

The *sangha* in China, as well, reproduced the leading features of an already existing form of social grouping—the extended, hierarchically organized, ancestral family system. In the biographies and stories that comprise the textual basis for Chinese Ch'an, one can see that the head of a temple became the father-priest, his disciples were organized as elder-

brother or younger-brother, they all practiced a monastic version of filial piety, the Buddha and patriarchs were ritually revered in ancestor ceremonies, lineages were transmitted, and so on. Again these historical examples show us that the Buddhist *sangha* does not have a particular form of government but adapts a model that the local culture provides.

This principle, that the *sangha* adopts a style of government provided by the local culture, seems to be holding true in North America as well: North American Zen centers seem to be gravitating toward the kind of governing structure found in most Christian churches and Jewish synagogues. Boards in Zen centers have been created in conformity with the law governing the incorporation of religious bodies, and these religious bodies are usually Christian or Jewish in North America. Instead of accepting the authority of a single teacher with overriding powers, increasingly the Zen center is governed by a lay board and a resident Zen teacher, who together share power.

The San Francisco Zen Center now elects its rōshi from a pool of senior students for a four-year term. This experiment, deliberately compounding Zen teaching authority with American-style political authority, looks like a dramatic cultural innovation. But from another point of view, it is merely a variant of the way Christian and Jewish groups in North America have tried to exercise control over their ministers and rabbis. From still another cultural point of view, the San Francisco Zen Center is not the first to elect its chief priest. During the American occupation of Japan after World War II, the law for the incorporation of religious bodies in Japan was revised. Imposing American forms, the new law required that the *kanchō* (chief abbot of a *honzan*, or headquarters) of a line of temples in Japan had to be elected, and in the election, at least two candidates had to stand to ensure fairness of election. Despite the American form, Japanese ideas about seniority, about circulating the office, and so on continue to operate. In one election, which I witnessed, the priest who became *kanchō* was by seniority the logical choice but he hated the job and was forced to stand for election against his will. In another election, which I heard about, the logical candidate for *kanchō* asked his own disciple to stand for election also, so that there would be two candidates and a "fair" election. So, both the San Francisco Zen Center and a Japanese *honzan* elect their chief priest. Are they doing the same thing?

## Managerial Zen

The new local conditions of Zen in the West cause American Zen groups to be organized and operated internally in a way not found in the Japanese monastery. In a typical ABC Zen Center *sesshin*, there are two classes of people: a smaller number of ordained monks and a large number of lay

practitioners. The ordained monks wear robes, sit at the top end of the *zendō*, share a room with only one or two others, and in general hold all the important offices and give the orders during *sesshin*. They also pay only a token fee to attend *sesshin*. The lay practitioners wear rather plain clothing compared to the robes of the monks, sit in lower positions in the *zendō*, sleep eight or ten to a cabin, and in general are passive participants in running the *sesshin*. They pay several hundred dollars to attend. Although several of the lay practitioners will have jobs like assistant cook or assistant *jikijitsu*, the lay practitioners do not hold offices of important authority. This is a firm distinction: even across long periods of time, so very few people cross the line from lay to ordained (or from ordained back to lay) that when it occurs, it is an occasion of note. In effect, the distinction between ordained and lay divides the people at *sesshin* into two social classes with quite different membership, power, and status. This distinction between monk and layperson looks something like the familiar distinctions between management and worker in an American business corporation, or between hospital staff and patients, or between staff and guest in a hotel, but it does not quite correspond to anything in a Rinzai monastery.

The distinction between monk and layperson is an important distinction in any Asian Buddhist tradition, but the Rinzai Zen monastery does not organize itself into two groups, one monk and one lay. A few laypeople do attend *sesshin* but their numbers are so small that in most monasteries, their presence is barely felt. There is, however, a clear and important distinction between those monks who have office and those who do not have office, although that distinction is not a rigid class distinction dividing monastery membership into two fixed classes with different membership, status, and power, as it is in the American example. First, the officer class is itself divided into two—a very small group of two or three head monks, *yakui*, who are permanent officers and who can be considered an elite, and a larger number of monks who fill their particular office for the half-year term. Some functions of the permanent *yakui* cannot be performed by anyone else, for example, representing the *sōdō* on certain occasions, keeping track of all monies, and setting the calendar schedule. But where possible, the *yakui* delegates authority down the line as part of training. Except for the *yakui*, all other officers trade places with nonofficers every six months so that the officers as a group do not form an elite class. During their tenure in office, monks move into a room, follow a different schedule, and have privileges not shared by nonofficer monks in the communal *zendō*. But once the term is over, the officer monks give up their privileges, return to the communal *zendō*, and let someone else take a turn in office. At any given time, the *muyaku* "no office" assembly of monks contains many monks senior and more experienced than the younger monks then taking their turn in office. If an officer makes a mistake, then those in the *muyaku*

who already know that office will immediately shout "Mistake!" and force him to correct it. To be an officer thus does not put a monk in a position of superior authority over the assembly of monks without office. It is often quite the reverse—to be exposed and singled out for their sometimes uncomfortable attention. And although officers are expected to provide active leadership and support, the no-office assembly is not merely the passive recipient of the officers' orders.

Stereotypical labels often come in contrasting pairs. If Asian culture is "autocratic," then America must be democratic. Such labeling prevents us from noticing the action of mutual polishing in Rinzai monastic training, as I have argued, but it also prevents us from seeing the presence of elitist elements of American social organization. Typically distinctions of social class are not called such in American organizations; some other label like "management," or "faculty," or "staff" is used to rationalize the difference in status, power, and privilege. The ABC Zen Center has had many monks who have spent several years in training there and then gone on to head one of the branch centers elsewhere. When they return for *sesshin,* they are given an office even though there is no real work to be done; two monks are appointed to a single office, doubling the number of officer spaces so that these visiting monks can be considered officers, housed with the officers, and considered separate from the lay participants. Although one can justify this custom on the grounds that there is instructional benefit in a senior monk working together with a junior monk, I think the real function is to maintain a distinction of social class.

When the American automobile industry discovered that Japanese manufacturers operated car assembly plants that were more economically efficient and turned out a better product than did American car plants, researchers in business management subjected the Japanese manufacturing plant to intense examination. Many Japanese practices have since been adopted by Western companies, such as just-in-time delivery, which eliminated wasteful warehousing; quality control circles, which combined the roles of worker and quality checker in one person; conceptualizing product manufacture as "value-streaming," and so on. One of the more important lessons learned was that the American-style adversarial relation between management and workers created many problems—such as hostile labor unions, huge grievance backlogs, and just plain disrespect for the other—and that Japanese factories were more efficient and profitable because they involved the plant line workers in the direction and operation of the plant. Driven as much by profit as by cultural pride, American car companies transplanted the Japanese system into the American context. General Motors, through a joint venture with Toyota, transformed its plant in Fremont, California, which had earlier been shut down as inoperable after acquiring a reputation for being "the worst plant in the world."[15] In 1984 Toyota

reopened the plant as NUUMI and replaced the old coercive management system, which generated worker contempt, with a worker production team system in which the workers assumed responsibility for the direction and improvement of work on the line. In the revamped plant, the workers worked harder but for the first time felt pride in the product and loyalty to the company; the plant was more bureaucratic but less hierarchical; work procedures were more precisely defined but always under constant improvement by the workers themselves. Management came to think of its role as support staff. This is the industrial version of mutual polishing. An important point in a discussion of cultural perceptions is the fact that the Japanese manufacturing system was itself only a recent development, the Japanese response to the time and work studies of an American, Frederick Winslow Taylor, the original efficiency expert.

There is a lesson here. Distinctions among different groups of people are often class distinctions marking different status, power, and privilege, even though they are rationalized as different abilities or competencies. This is true in all cultures. In the context of American Zen, I am suggesting that the distinction between a privileged group of ordained officers and a not privileged group of laypeople without office, though it looks Asian, is in fact much closer to the status, power, and privilege distinction between American manager and worker. Here again Americanization has been going on in the guise of being faithful to Japanese tradition. Hierarchy in the Japanese monastery merges with mutual polishing, the two together complementing each other in creating a context for Zen practice. But recreating the division between managers and workers, with its institutionalized hostility and disrespect, does not look like a promising strategy for creating a new context for Zen practice.

## *Zen Master: Person and Office*

Zen literature presents us the figure of the Zen master, an enlightened being who resides in awakening where there is no struggling with the strictures of society. Whether he lives alone in the mountains or whether he scratches his big belly in the marketplace, he teaches without intention, is wealthy without money, is free without acquiescing to power. There are several versions of the Zen master. I once met Shunryu Suzuki Rōshi, who immediately struck me as a man of great quietness and humility, the kind of man whose presence calls forth one's respect and perhaps a little shame. But my first *sōdō* rōshi in Japan, Nakamura Sojun, was an intense, fierce, burning furnace of a man, always ready to erupt into a passionate tirade about making constant effort in practice. Some rōshi manage to combine both personalities. Students of Yamada Mumon Rōshi say that outside the

*sanzen* room, he looked and acted like a tiny, wispy, immaterial Taoist hermit, but that inside the *sanzen* room, he suddenly turned into a lion. With such examples both in literature and in person, it is hard to believe that Zen master is an office, that one relates to a Zen master not "mind to mind," but through social forms, protocol, and ritual.

I write about the Zen master, of course, because of the several cases of Zen masters in the West who were found to be sexually involved with their students.[16] The string of crises raised the issue of "guru worship"—the fear that both men and women had become so psychologically dependent upon the rōshi that they had lost any sense of independent judgment. This issue is much too complicated to be analyzed here, but since I am dealing with the different cultural incarnations of traditional Buddhist ideas and institutions, I need to comment on how the Zen master is understood in Japan and America.

In Japanese Zen, there is a pronounced rhetoric about the complete intimacy that exists between monk and rōshi. Beyond external words and gestures, the rōshi knows directly the monk's *hara no naka,* the inside of the hara, the seat of heart and mind. In return, the monk is supposed to know his rōshi so well that, to use a typically vulgar Zen expression, he knows the number of hairs around the rōshi's asshole (*ketsu no ana no mawari no ke no kazu*). When I was in the *sōdō,* an older monk once said to me that I could not do proper practice unless I "loved" the rōshi (*rōshi o ai suru*). In enlightenment, one's identification with the entire lineage of masters becomes complete: one sees with the eyes of the Buddhas and ancestors themselves. Here the very distinction between subject and object, self and other, disappears. This colorful language describes an intimacy that seems to be absolute, totally unrestricted, and beyond the influence of any cultural shaping.

The same Zen literature supplies numerous particular examples of masters whose intimacy is quite strange to Westerners. In his "grandmotherly kindness," the master fiercely twists the monk's nose, or cuts off his finger, or slams a door and so breaks the monk's leg. Like the lioness who trains her cubs by pushing them over a cliff, the Zen master's total kindness expresses itself as relentless severity.[17] In return, when the monk finally attains the same enlightenment as the master, he returns the severity of the master, the classic example being master Ōbaku slapping monk Rinzai and Rinzai slapping Ōbaku back. In addition, stories of master-monk relations circulate in the Japanese monastery, which include stories of monks who understood the master's needs without having to ask, or who selflessly cared for the master in his old age. Particularly admired are stories of monks changing the master's diapers when the master's bodily functions started to fail in old age.

These examples of the relations between master and monk show that the concept of intimacy between the two has a particular cultural interpretation. The intimacy presented in these examples is always intimacy between master and monk in the context of Zen practice. In these examples, we see that master and monk always retain their hierarchical status (the story of Rinzai slapping his master is important only because Rinzai is still monk and Ōbaku is still master), and that in general, Zen has absorbed Confucian models of social roles, strict teacher-student relations, and self-sacrificing filial piety. Here it is tempting to think that this is a culturally relative, Asian misinterpretation of Zen which obliterates the absoluteness of intimacy. There is, however, no such thing as an objective or neutral understanding that is untainted with the point of view of any particular culture. In fact, the example of Zen masters in America in sexual relations with their students de facto expresses the way the intimacy of master and monk has been culturally interpreted in America. Despite the antinomian rhetoric, the relationship between master and monk in Japan is so strongly constrained by social conventions in Japan that male teachers do not often get sexually involved with female students. First, monasteries were segregated by sex, so that, in general, only men taught men and only women taught women. That, at least, was the theory. In fact, the monastery system for women has atrophied. The last Rinzai monastery for women closed its doors in the early 1970s; there are still Sōtō monasteries for women. Because there are almost no training halls for women, a woman who wants to do Zen practice with a rōshi must seek out a male rōshi and make an individual arrangement with him. When his monks have *sesshin*, she comes to the temple and sits in a separate room rather than in the *zendō* with the male monks. When they have *sanzen*, she tags along at the end. The rōshi is free to make of this relationship whatever he wishes, but my impression is that there is not much of a problem here simply because the number of women wanting to do *sanzen* is so small (of course, the number is small because the system makes it difficult and unappealing for women to do *sanzen*). So in fact, a male Zen teacher in Japan can have female students, but the numbers are not many.

A second extremely strong distancing factor is the social protocol that structures all interaction between monk and rōshi. Western students of Zen know that on entering and leaving the *sanzen* room, they must make a formal bow. What Western students do not understand is that this ritual formality is actually much more detailed than they realized and also pervades every interaction, formal and informal, between rōshi and monk. As part of the same social protocol, monks in a Japanese monastery also do not look at the face of the rōshi but point their eyes downward. Aside from their proffered response to the *kōan*, they do not actively pose questions and engage in so-called question-and-answer *kōan* dialogue until they have

reached a modicum of seniority; they remain passive and do not speak unless spoken to. This formality extends outside the *sanzen* room as well. Monks bow to the floor whenever they enter and leave the rōshi's room even when it is not *sanzen*, keep their eyes pointed downward whenever they are in the rōshi's presence, and never initiate conversation. An American practitioner who had become quite friendly with a Japanese rōshi on the latter's trips to the United States and England was amazed at the way the same rōshi was treated in Japan. In particular, he could not understand the silence of the monks in the presence of the rōshi at what appeared to be a somewhat informal tea in the mornings. For them, even to presume to speak to the rōshi would have been out of place. In addition, Westerners who speak in English to their rōshi do not face the social protocol required in speaking the Japanese language. In Japanese, the choice of every pronoun, the inflection of every verb, and the selection of much vocabulary reflects the social distance (distant-close, above-below, inside-outside) between monk and rōshi.

This social distance, however, is quite compatible with intimacy between master and monk. An attendant monk is supposed to know his rōshi's needs without being told. Before a rōshi reaches for his teacup, some one will fill it. Before he moves toward a door, someone will open it. (Because this ritual protocol is so pervasive, one can make jokes; about a clumsy, incapable person, monks sometimes say, "He can't do anything for himself; he'll have to become a rōshi.") Because there are many stories in the Zen tradition of people who defied social expectation, it is easy to get the impression that in Zen practice one transcends the usual social and moral conventions. It is not so simple. One transcends social conventions by fulfilling them. The quite profound and dynamic intimacy that can develop between rōshi and monk is both a development of Zen "mind to mind" transmission and a complete fulfillment of, not the overcoming of, the social conventions that govern interaction between teacher and student. When Zen gets transplanted to a culture where people believe the teacher-student relation in Zen permits the disregard of social convention and the erasing of social distance, there is no telling what mayhem can occur.

In addition to segregation of sexes and social protocol, Zen monastic practice does not encourage a monk to become dependent on the rōshi as a single authority figure. As I have described, the monastery is a system of mutual polishing where most of the training in work and ritual is done not with the rōshi but with the other monks; all senior monks become one's teacher and all junior monks become one's students. Thus the vertical effect of the rōshi's authority is offset by the lateral effects of mutual polishing. Though one is always learning, one is also always teaching. Though one never forgets one's dependence on others, through teaching others one also forges a sense of competence, of maturity, of independence. All

this is done in the eminently public arena with all the other monks. The rōshi contributes to this mutual polishing by delegating decision making as much as possible to his monks, who in turn delegate as much as possible down the line. The rōshi has great authority but does not actually exercise it (scholars might like to see this as an example of Taoist or Asian notions of power, where authority is exercised through its nondisplay). He rarely joins with his own monks in informal activity. Although this secludedness may increase his charisma, he does not become the object of adulation. I myself had been a full-time monk for three years before I ever met the rōshi outside of the *sanzen* room and engaged in a conversation with him. In the years thereafter, I was twice his personal attendant. In many ways, the experience was the most demanding yet fulfilling part of my monastic career, as I had a chance to live day by day with a strong teacher. Yet though I was in constant attendance upon him, we rarely engaged in a conversation that could be called intimate (he once asked some questions about my parents, their age, their health, and so on) and I never had a chance to develop psychological dependence on him.

In America, the relationship between Zen master and student will naturally gravitate toward an indigenous American paradigm. What paradigm? Here is Helen Tworkov's account of the relation of Zen students at the San Francisco Zen Center to Richard Baker Rōshi.

> At Zen Center, *dokusan* became the place where students discussed their marital problems, affairs, unwanted pregnancies, alcoholic parents, abused childhoods, and so on. . . . Baker was told things that people didn't tell each other, contributing to psychological dependencies that he was not trained to handle. He became the sole arbiter of personal decision and what actions did or did not hurt others or the community. Case by case this may have had its merits, but as a strategy for community harmony it became a disaster. In addition to spiritual omniscience and paternalistic jurisdiction, it also invested him with the very potent power of private information. This blocked open communication, making it less accessible by placing Baker on an ever-higher pedestal. The more students invested in him, the more perfect he had to be in their eyes to justify that investment.[18]

The particular causes behind the problem of the Zen master at San Francisco Zen Center may be unique and unduplicated at any other place. But in Tworkov's account, one can see the widely shared assumption that Zen and psychotherapy are in some way similar.[19] The relationship of client to psychotherapist is unusual, for it is supposed to be a formal relationship (service for fee paid) yet one in which the client reveals his or her most private and intimate feelings. The psychotherapist is not one's closest friend but an expert who has training, advanced degrees, authority. Paradoxically such distance and authority encourage rather than discourage intimacy, allowing one to say things that one would not say to one's closest

friend. I do not wish to engage here in an attempt to distinguish psychotherapy from Zen. My purpose is just to point out that this assumption is not widely shared in Japan. While Japanese people think that a little Zen practice is admirable and good for building character (so much so that many companies sponsor weekend Zen retreats for their new company employees), psychotherapy is considered an admission of mental illness, a cause for shame. The social stigma attached to psychotherapy discourages people who actually do need psychotherapeutic help from getting it. I recall a Zen scholar in Japan trying to distinguish Zen from psychotherapy by saying that psychotherapy was for those people who were *seishinteki ni nayande iru,* or mentally troubled, while Zen was for those people who were *ningenteki ni nayande iru,* or humanly troubled. Whether this distinction is tenable is not the point. And this is not to deny that psychological dependence on a spiritual authority does take place in Japan—the recent example of the Aum Shinri Kyō clearly shows that it does. The point is that in Japan the relation of Zen master and student is imbedded in a system of social constraints and compensating checks so that developing dependency is very difficult. In such a context, the Zen rhetoric of being of one mind with the master balances the distancing effect of those social constraints. But in America, the relation of Zen master to student comes with no accompanying system of social constraints and is assumed to be similar to the relationship of psychotherapist and client, with all the accompanying dangers of dependence, transference, and projection. Here both rōshi and student are on new ground where both are tempted to exploit the situation to push formalized intimacy to greater extremes.[20]

## Meditation and Enlightenment

### *No Dependence on Words or Letters*

Perhaps the majority of practitioners in America believe that Zen practice is meditation and that meditation leads to *satori* or *kenshō,* an ecstatic state of consciousness in which the discriminations of conventional life are obliterated. This state of experience, it is thought, is obtained only by breaking through the accumulated habits, concepts, ideas, and social conditioning which prevent us from seeing the world as it is. Once one experiences *satori* or *kenshō,* one is no longer bothered by the decisions, anxieties, and suffering of life. Instead one will know spontaneously, naturally, "without thinking" what to do: "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes; grass grows by itself."[21]

In accordance with this vision, Zen practitioners believe that the Zen experience has nothing to do with intellectual study and thought, and they repeat as their justification the Zen slogan "No dependence on words or

letters, a separate transmission outside of scripture."[22] Despite this rhetoric, *kōan* training in Japan assumes that the practitioner will eventually be able to devote a great deal of time to literary study, memorizing long passages of text, writing Chinese-style commentary on *kōan,* composing Chinese verses and then writing them in brush. *Kōan* training, in fact, presupposed the culture of the Confucian literati (and this is an example of the influence of Confucianism on the formation of Zen).

Some may urge that the literary and intellectual aspects of *kōan* study be simply dropped; after all, Zen is meditation and enlightenment itself, nothing more. Maybe so. But a full understanding of Zen requires that one knows the Zen within history, language, and culture. More practically speaking, without that literary and intellectual understanding, one is crippled as a teacher no matter how clear and open one's eye of enlightenment. The two Zen phrases *yako zen* and *zen temma* display the interdependence of "beyond words and letters" with "words and letters." One who speaks of Zen with only the secondhand knowledge derived from books and no genuine insight of one's own is said to practice *yako zen,* or "wild fox Zen." One who insists on the personal experience of Zen but has not done the study required to express that personal experience in words and understanding is a Zen *temma,* or "Zen devil." The literary aspect of *kōan* training begins rather early with *jakugo,* "capping phrases."[23] A rōshi investigates the student's first insight into any *kōan* by posing a series of subsidiary questions, called *sassho,* "checking questions." The checking questions for the *kōan Mu,* for example, contain two *jakugo* assignments. In *jakugo* practice, the student is required to present a verse that expresses the point of the *kōan* just passed. Several thousand capping phrases have been collected together into a book called the *Zenrin Kushū* (Zen Phrase Collection); monks are required to select their *jakugo* from within that collection.[24] Constantly searching through this verse collection, monks automatically memorize quite large portions of it. Since the verses are drawn from the entire range of Chinese literature and history, monks receive an introduction to the history, literature, and philosophy of China.

Somewhere around the mid-point of a full-time monk's career, he will start to receive assignments: *kakiwake,* or "written explanation," and *nenrō,* which I translate as "deft play." The *kakiwake* is similar to the rōshi's *teishō,* or lecture. It is composed in Japanese and then written in brush. The monk submits his *kakiwake* to the rōshi, who proceeds to grade it with a red pen. Once a *kakiwake* assignment has been completed, the monk advances to *nenrō,* "deft play." The *nenrō* is written not in Japanese but in Chinese, not in prose but in four-line verse of five or seven characters per line. Master Mumon's verse appended to each of the *kōan* in the *Mumonkan* is the model. Together these two sets of written assignments consume all the part

of a monk's career, a period of easily more than five years, in which he is engaged in hours of literary study every day.

No one has studied the various *kōan* curricula offered in the different American Zen centers. One center bases its entire curriculum around the *Hekigan-roku* and the *Mumonkan,* which are studied twice. Other places apparently offer the more traditional curriculum right up to the Five Ranks and Ten Precepts. Some centers use "Western" *kōan* specially created for Westerners. So far as I know, however, none of these American curricula includes the traditional monastic literary and intellectual study of the *kōan.*

## Satori: *Breaking Out or Breaking In?*

American Zen centers have vigorously created new institutions and practices unlike any seen in Japan—residential communities, farms, businesses, neighborhood foundations, hospices, and so on. But there is disagreement on whether the new Zen organizations distract from Zen practice or are a new form of Zen practice. There is no agreed upon rationale for Buddhist businesses. Bernard Tetsugen Glassman Rōshi at the Zen Center of New York, for example, has created a city center which runs the Greyston Bakery, a full-time business supplying premium quality baked goods to hotels and restaurants in the New York area. The bakery takes homeless people off the streets and trains them to work in the bakery. In addition, the revenue generated by the business is used to purchase and renovate local buildings for low-cost housing. Glassman Rōshi is insistent that such intensive work is Buddhist practice, but many of his people say that the business is, or should be, only a supplement to support Zen practice. Doing business and social work through baking may, or may not be, a Buddhist practice. What makes the difference?

Cooking by itself is not a Zen practice, but cooking in a monastery is, because there one finds a culture of practice in which *sanzen* teaching methods extend into daily life, work itself is seen as bodhisattva activity, and the members in the community all engage in mutual polishing. Under those conditions, the work of cooking helps dissolve our preconceived notions of self and other. In the acts of boiling, slicing, frying, pickling, shining, fermenting, and washing this food and handling these utensils, I help this food and these utensils attain their Buddhahood, and in turn, they help me attain mine. Baking cakes in New York City could be the same.

I believe, however, that North American Zen has not yet reconceptualized social relations, authority in a group, daily work, literary study, and business as Zen practices partly because these activities do not conform to a fixed image of Zen. All of these activities are thought to be irrelevant to, even a hindrance to, the attainment of that ecstatic state called *satori* or

*kenshō*. In *satori*, we transcend the ordinary consciousness which categorizes the experienced world into dichotomies; in *kenshō*, we break through the shell of conditioned responses which prevents us from being natural and spontaneous. Although there is a point to talking in this way, this description of *satori* or *kenshō* is fundamentally false.[25] It dichotomizes human experience into two quite opposite states: *satori* or *kenshō* on one side, and ignorance-filled, attachment-ridden ordinary experience on the other. As do all such false dichotomies, this conception reifies *satori* or *kenshō* into a golden idol, a state supposedly devoid of attachment but itself the object of attachment, a state supposedly empty of intellectual activity but itself the object of furious intellectualizing. For beginners, there is some excuse for speaking of *satori* or *kenshō* provisionally in this way, but there can be no genuine Zen practice unless one realizes (makes real) the nonduality of *satori* and ignorance, of *kenshō* and attachment. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. This means that emptiness never appears as emptiness; it always appears as form. When practitioners assume that *satori* or *kenshō* is only a state of ecstatic consciousness beyond the discriminatory, socially conditioned consciousness of everyday life, they are demanding that emptiness appear as emptiness, dualistically differentiated from form. If *satori* is anything, it is the return from nondiscriminative emptiness back into the conventional world of discrimination, anxiety, and suffering. I remember the title of a recent book in Japanese, *Anshin shite nayamu*, or To worry with peace of mind. That is *satori*.

*Bonnō soku bodai:* "The delusive passions are at once enlightenment." Engineers are constantly designing tools and utensils to reduce friction between moving parts, and in human relations, we are always seeking to reduce social friction between people. Yet it is a mistake to think that all friction can or ought to be eliminated. Wheels would not turn if there were not friction between tire and road surface. Pens would not write if there were not friction between ballpoint and paper. Planes would not fly without the lift that air resistance creates across the wings. At one and the same time, friction between objects hinders movement and makes it possible. Our individual delusive passions—wants, expectations, self-conceptions, needs, presumptions about right and wrong—create the anxiety and suffering of daily life, but they also create the possibility for living in love and civility, with freedom and peace of mind. Mature Zen is about living freely in this world, finally identified with one's ego, utilizing one's karmic endowments, for the sake of sentient beings. Transcending the mundane world is merely the beginner's goal in Zen.

If one gets fixated on the idea of *satori* as ecstatic consciousness, one will not try to understand community life, love and sexual relations, techniques of teaching and learning, authority in group life, daily work, literary study, and business as fields for Buddhist practice. Instead of grappling with these

issues, one will dream of "just being one with the moment" and expect that such problems will spontaneously resolve themselves.

## Conclusion

The transplantation of Buddhism to the West cannot be rightly understood by standard metaphors, such as "old wine in new bottles." This image presupposes that the wine stays the same and is unaffected by the bottle. But Zen in America, like Valentine's Day in Japan, is significantly changed by its new environment. Neither does it help to speak of viewing Buddhism through the lens of American culture. This image has the advantage of implying that viewing can be distortion, but it also seems to imply the possibility of undistorted viewing, that we could remove the lens and see Buddhism as it is in itself, free from any cultural point of view.

The call for an Americanization of Buddhism is unnecessary. Every attempt by Americans to comprehend Zen intellectually and to implement it in practice has already contributed to its Americanization. What Americans have been practicing for the last several decades is already Americanized Zen. Pouring wine into a new bottle immediately made it a different wine, although it is an ongoing process. In the long slow process of acculturation, the host culture and the guest religion change each other. The wine changes the bottle into which it is poured; the object changes the lens through which it is viewed. Valentine's Day changes Japanese culture to some extent, just as Japanese culture changes it. So also Buddhism in America influences American culture, just as American culture reshapes Buddhism.

In this process, everything wears different labels. It is said to be Zen but beneath the labels are often American ideas of ritual time, teaching and learning, social organization, enlightenment. Everywhere we need to see that Americanization proceeds under the guise of preserving Buddhist tradition. Hindsight allows us to see some of the errors of the past but there is no accurate predicting of the future. What history does show us is that as Buddhism entered a new culture, in the initial phase, it was interpreted according to familiar ideas provided by the local indigenous culture and that these very same ideas prevented people from understanding just what it is that is unfamiliar about Buddhism. That is the danger in this strident call for Americanization of Zen. In casting out un-American elements, we are in danger of throwing out the "Buddha with the bathwater."[26]

D. T. Suzuki once described the difficulties he encountered translating the *gan* of *hongan*, the Japanese for the Sanskrit *pūrvapraṇidhāna*, an important term in Pure Land Buddhism. *Hon* means "original" or "fundamental" but the two candidates for *gan*, "prayer" and "vow," both imply an activity of the self and are thus not quite accurate. "Prayer" is also so

heavily imbued with Christian thought that it would take hundreds of years, said Suzuki, for it to become properly Buddhist. Suzuki also commented that the Chinese too had trouble translating this term and that it was only after a thousand years that the term in Chinese finally became imbued with the meaning it was originally intended to convey.[27] Since Shaku Sōen came to America with Zen, it has been only a hundred years.