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G. VICTOR SŌGEN HORI

Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery

Popular images of Japan tend to cluster around two conflicting cultural stereotypes. One depicts Japan as a ritualistic, rule-governed, hierarchical society where obsession with preserving traditional form and with conformity to group goals stifles individual creativity. The other pictures Japan as the repository of a mystical culture that produces gentle, creative, slightly foolish sages. These two stereotypes clash. How can one society be both? A closer look at teaching and learning in the Japanese Zen monastery allows us to see how ritual formalism coexists with mystical insight.

I propose to divide the spectrum of human learning into three domains: (1) ritual formalism, (2) rational teaching and learning, and (3) mystical insight. In modern Western society, we have focused upon, and greatly developed, what I have labeled rational teaching and learning, but we seem to have less interest in, or confidence about, the two ends of the spectrum. A Japanese Zen monastery, on the other hand, substantially discounts rational teaching and learning and teaches both ritual formalism and mystical insight. In fact, it teaches mystical insight by *means of* ritual formalism.

By “ritual formalism,” I am stretching one term to cover several kinds of behavior: repetition, rote memorization, behaving according to traditional prescription. In ritual formalism, students imitate form without necessarily understanding content or rationale. They are instructed in “what” to do, but given very little instruction in “why” and “how” to do it.

By “rational teaching and learning,” I refer to that pattern of education in which a teacher of a body of knowledge and/or skills usually formulates

I wish to express my appreciation to the following people: to Thomas Rohlen of the School of Education, Stanford University, both for inviting me to the Conference on Teaching and Learning in Japan and for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper; to the other conference participants for several days of rewarding intellectual discussion and good fellowship; to the Department of East Asian Studies at Brown University for inviting me to give a presentation of some of the ideas in this paper; and to the referees and editors of *The Journal of Japanese Studies* for very helpful criticism.

its general principles, even if crudely, and then through instruction seeks to transmit an understanding of those general principles to the students. Instruction is usually by verbal explanation, demonstration, conducting drills, or some combination of these and other techniques. It is not part of rational teaching and learning to teach students to perform tasks without an understanding of general principles (the “reason why”), nor is it part of rational teaching and learning to expect the student to perform the required particular tasks without prior instruction.

I am using the term “mystical experience” to refer to that moment when one experiences oneself as no longer fundamentally distinct from the objective world, when there occurs a breakdown in the usual distinction we make in ordinary life between the self as subject of experience and the world about us as the object of experience. I make no judgment about whether that experience is in some sense genuine or false. My description of mystical experience in these terms no doubt presupposes some hidden assumptions to which someone will object. If this essay stimulates such criticism, it may then be necessary to rethink this definition.¹

I was first struck by the connection between the formalism of rote learning and the spontaneity of insight long before I entered the Zen monastery. As a graduate student in philosophy, I taught propositional logic to first- and second-year university students and noticed that the class divided into two groups, those who could solve the logic problems and those who could not. Those who could solve them started by memorizing the basic transformation formulae of propositional logic. These formulae are to propositional logic what multiplication tables are to arithmetic or the basic equivalence equations are to algebra. Having committed these formulae to memory, these students were thereby able to solve the logic problems because they could “just see” common factors in the equations and then

1. Part of my purpose in this paper is to demystify the notion of “mystical insight.” The rhetoric of both the Rinzai Zen monastery and Western language descriptions of Zen describe *kenshō*, the Zen experience, as if it were totally transformative of the human experience, as if its genesis were completely indescribable in words. There is a point to this rhetoric, but one should not get carried away by it. The entire monastery *kōan* curriculum operates on the assumption that beginning monks start with a slight insight which further training systematically deepens and makes intelligible. The training system presupposes, although this is never expressed in so many words, that Zen mystical insight is in some sense connected to ordinary experience (negation is a kind of connection) and that there is a logic to its development. I have not considered what bearing my description of Rinzai monastic life has on any of the issues raised in the recent scholarly debates over the nature and existence of mystical experience. See Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Robert Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

cancel them out, or could “just see” logical equivalences. However, the other students, those who had not committed the transformation formulae to memory, were more or less mystified by the problems though many made serious attempts to “reason” their way through. Some of these latter students said that the ability to solve such problems was like musical ability, that successful problem solvers had a special ability to “just see” the answer to the logic problems just as people with musical ability can “just hear” when a note is flat or sharp. And they excused themselves by saying that they had not been born with that particular gene. But in fact, those who had done the rote memory work had developed logical insight, while those who had not developed logical insight were the ones who had skipped the rote memory work thinking they could reason their way through the logic problems.

If you can calculate in your head

$$\frac{25 \times 500}{50 \times 10} = 25$$

you can do so because you have already memorized the multiplication tables and can “just see” that 50×10 is the equivalent of 500 and that therefore 500 and 50×10 can be cancelled out of the top and bottom of the fraction. Without this piece of rote memory, the insight in “just seeing” would not be possible. To one who has not memorized the multiplication tables, the ability to “just see” the answer here must seem exceedingly mysterious, something like mystical insight. Much the same can be said for the ability to “see” a solution in algebra and all other forms of mathematics and, indeed, in many other forms of organized learning. Spontaneous insight is built on rote learning. Chains of logical reasoning in turn are made up of links, connections, which were first seen in small moments of insight but which over time have become the “just obvious.”

It is a long way from logic problems in a philosophy classroom to the Zen Buddhist monastery. Teaching and learning occur in both places but they are directed toward quite different goals. Education in the school classroom is directed toward giving students knowledge and skills, but it is not primarily concerned with developing a certain kind of personal character or religious outlook. A monastery, on the other hand, is deliberately trying to develop a certain kind of religious person and transmits a body of knowledge and skills as a means to that end. Yet despite the distance between these two kinds of teaching and learning, I believe there is a connection. Rote repetition and memorizing on a larger and institutional scale grows into ritual formalism in the Zen Buddhist monastery, while the logical insight of the philosophy classroom expands into what I call mystical insight.

Thus, the connection between ritual formalism and mystical insight,

which I will attempt to describe in this paper, is matched by a connection between rote memorizing and logical insight in the academic classroom:

Ritual Formalism	Rational Teaching and Learning	Mystical Insight
Rote Memorizing	Reasoning	Logical Insight

In the “just seeing” of logical insight, a logical formula shifts position across the subject-object line in experience. At first, the logic formula is the object of my attention, a piece of information I try to memorize just as I do a line from the multiplication tables. But in the experience of “just seeing,” the logic formula is no longer the object I am *attending to*; it becomes part of what I, as subject of experience, am *attending with*. The logic formula becomes, so to speak, part of the conceptual lens through which I now look at the objects to which I am attending. Logical insight is not mystical insight, of course, but the two share family resemblances: what was once an object of experience becomes (part of) the subject of experience. And in this paper, I hope to show a further resemblance: that both the logical insight of the philosophy classroom and the mystical insight of the Rinzai monastery are taught through ritual formalism.

Right from the beginning, some people will not want to agree with this thesis, not because they have data and survey results that support a different conclusion, but because the very idea of teaching by rote repetition offends their moral sensibilities. Those who advocate rational teaching and learning affirm that schools should not teach students to memorize facts merely to regurgitate them on tests. The educational mission must be to teach students to “analyze,” “explain,” “articulate,” “generalize,” “contextualize,” and “apply to concrete situations.” Education should treat students not as mere recorders of data but as creative, rational beings and autonomous individuals. Rote methods are blamed for making classroom education boring for children and for deadening their innate creativity. Given freedom, children will find the learning process intrinsically interesting and will enthusiastically teach themselves, so it is said. I remember a traditional Japanese tea ceremony teacher saying, “Don’t ask questions. Just do it this way for three years and you will know.” Many educators are offended by such ritual methods which seem to demean the students’ sense of self-esteem and belittle students’ confidence in their own ability to understand. The moral vision of the student as an autonomous individual full of rational and creative potential continues to propel educational theory. But when this moral vision causes people to reject rote teaching methods out of hand, then moral vision blinds rather than illuminates.

These are dangerous waters, I realize, for I am talking about what distinguishes the culture of Japan from that of the West. In recent years, the ideas of “culture” and “cultural difference” have been considered in-

tellectually suspect. Critics say either explanations in terms of culture really explain nothing at all (“Such and such way of doing things is typically Japanese”), or such explanations reify culture, creating the illusion of an “ethno-centric, culture-bound notion of common moral impulses, common values, located like a little pacemaker in each person’s heart”² in a society. In addition, these days, any item of cultural difference is liable to be taken by *Nihonjinron* theorists as further evidence of the uniqueness of the Japanese race. Not surprisingly, in reaction, there are now many people who are impatient with discussions of how different Japanese culture is. Nevertheless, everyone who has lived and worked in a Japanese group knows without a doubt that the Japanese group does function differently. I write this description of monastery life to try to describe that difference, but I realize that many will find “naive” or “implicit” theories here and take me to task for taking sides in these intellectual and ideological disputes. Here, let me just make a small defensive move against possible critics.

Negative characterizations of Japanese culture are subject to accusations of “Orientalism” or “Japan-bashing,” and positive characterizations to accusations of playing into the hands of *Nihonjinron* theorists. But let us draw a distinction between the truth of a statement and its ideological use. The statement “What’s good for General Motors is good for the United States” is ideological; it is uttered to enhance the economic and political position of General Motors. But just because such a statement is patently ideological does not mean it is false. As a matter of economic fact, it may just be true that what is good for General Motors is, at a certain historical period, good for the American economy. My overall conclusion in this paper is that the Japanese Zen monastery employs a style of teaching and learning not found, to the best of my knowledge, in the West. While recognizing that such a conclusion can be used ideologically, I would hope that ideological argument does not prevent us from first trying to assess its truth.

In 1976 I was ordained as a Zen Buddhist monk and for 13 years from 1977 to 1990 lived, worked, and practiced in Rinzai Zen Buddhist monasteries and training halls in Japan. In this essay, I write not as a scholar-observer bent upon maintaining “objectivity” (I do not believe such a thing exists) but as a practitioner speaking from within the tradition. Please pardon my use of very general words like “the Japanese” and “Westerners” as if there were no individual differences among the members of these groups. Each instance of these terms should be prefaced by some quantifier

2. Eric Wolf, “Inventing Society,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1988), p. 755, quoted in Robert J. Smith, “Something Old, Something New—Tradition and Culture in the Study of Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Nov. 1989), p. 722.

like “a few,” “many,” or “most.” But to do this could invite a challenge to show statistical evidence—evidence that does not exist.

Also, I use male pronouns throughout and write as if only men engage in Buddhist practice. It is manifestly not true that only men engage in Buddhist practice; it has not been true of Buddhist practice in Japanese history and especially it is not true now of Buddhist practice in the West. But Rinzai Zen monasteries for women no longer exist in Japan. Sōtō Zen nuns have reestablished monastic practice for women but, according to a recent study, theirs is a very different style of teaching and learning.³ Unfortunately, it does seem that at present only men engage in the style of teaching and learning depicted in this paper.

*Temples and Monasteries*⁴

Japanese Zen Buddhism divides into three schools, the Sōtō School, the Rinzai School, and the Ōbaku School. Sōtō Zen is by far the largest school with almost 15,000 temples spread across the country. Rinzai has fewer than 6,000 temples and Ōbaku has fewer than 500. There is consequently no single temple which represents all of Japanese Zen nor is there any single priest who heads up the entire priesthood. The Rinzai Zen temples are further divided into 16 lineages, each led by a head temple called a *honzan* (literally “main mountain”) which is usually a large temple with a prestigious history. The local Zen temple is normally a branch temple (*matsuji*) of a *honzan*. The larger *honzan* maintain monasteries (*semmon dōjō*, “halls dedicated to training,” or *sōdō*, “monks’ halls”) where the next generation of priests receives its training. A few *honzan* are large enough to support more than one monastery.

In order to become the resident priest of a temple, a monk is required to spend some time in training at a monastery, the exact duration to be determined by local tradition and *honzan* regulations. Most monks probably spend between one and three years at a monastery but some manage to get away with shorter stays. On the other hand, a priest of one of the Daitokuji *honzan* temples is required to have at least five years of monastery training behind him. A Rinzai Zen monastery then functions somewhat like a Christian theological seminary by training monks for parish priesthood. However, the ethos and style of training make it a very differ-

3. I would like to thank Paula Arai Wang for several conversations regarding Sōtō Zen monasticism for nuns and for letting me preview several chapters from her dissertation, “Innovators for the Sake of Tradition: Zen Monastic Women in Modern Japan” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993).

4. For a fuller description, see T. Griffith Foulk, “The Zen Institution in Modern Japan,” in Kenneth Kraft, ed., *Zen: Tradition and Transition* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), pp. 157–77.

ent place. The Zen monastery has a reputation for fierce discipline. For those associated with it, it embodies the essence of Japanese manhood, fierce samurai loyalty, unswerving dedication, and strength of character.

The monastery itself is under the sole direction of the Zen Master, called *rōshi* (literally “aged teacher”). Under him are the monks, who are divided into two unequal halves. The larger half, called the *dōnai* (“within the [meditation] hall”) includes all monks who for that term have no office, along with a few officer monks associated with the *dōnai*. Chief of these is the *jikijitsu*, head of training. The smaller half is the officers’ quarters called the *jōjū* (literally “permanently resident”) which includes the cooks, attendants to the *rōshi*, and other officers.

In Rinzai Zen, monastic practice is centered around *zazen* (meditation) and the *kōan*, a paradoxical problem assigned by the *rōshi* to the monk to be used as the focus of concentration during meditation. The monks meet daily with the *rōshi*, in a one-to-one meeting called the *sanzen* to present their response to the *kōan*. Other formal teaching includes the *rōshi*’s regular lectures. Although there is a great deal of rhetoric about Zen understanding being beyond books and texts, right from their first year Zen monks are studying a text called the *Zenrin kushū* (Zen phrase collection) as part of their *kōan* practice. In the advanced stages of *kōan* practice (which most monks do not experience because they leave at less advanced stages), monks spend a great deal of time researching Zen and other texts in order to compose essays in Japanese and poetry in classical Chinese which they write in brush and submit for approval to the *rōshi*.

This description so far may give the impression that the monks are engaged in a quite ordinary style of teaching and learning, but it is not so.

*Teaching Without Teaching*⁵

A new monk arriving at the gate of a Japanese Zen monastery is called a *shintō* (new arrival). Once admitted to the monastery, the *shintō* has much to learn. Immediately, he must learn monastery routine: where things are kept, what happens when, who is responsible for what. He must learn proper language, deportment, attitude, and pace. He must memorize sutras and ceremonial procedure. He must learn how to do *zazen* and how to penetrate the *Zen kōan*. After an initial period of six months to a year, he will be assigned to one of the offices such as *tenzo* (cook), *enzu* (vegetable gardener), *densu* (keeper of the shrine), or perhaps even *sannō* (attendant

5. For descriptions of Zen monastic life, one may consult D. T. Suzuki, *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (New York: University Books, 1965), and Satō Giei (drawings) and Nishimura Eshin (text), *Unsui: A Dairy of Zen Monastic Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973). Suzuki’s description of Zen monastic life, however, is so idealistic as to be misrepresentative.

to the *rōshi*). If he remains at the monastery for many years, he may in time become a *yakui* (senior officer), one of the group of head monks who hold the positions of senior responsibility, which include *jikijitsu* or leader of training in the *zendō* (meditation hall), *fusu* (administrator), and *daiten* (head cook). A monk constantly moves back and forth between the officers' quarters and the communal *dōnai*, usually spending one term (a half year) in office and then one term in the *dōnai* concentrating on meditation. During his entire career, the monk is constantly learning.

Ancient tradition rests heavily upon new monks. The *rōshi* and older monks remind the new arrivals that the robes, rituals, sutras, language, personal relations, and the entire life of Zen training itself date back to the ancient past and that the new monks must do their share in preserving this ancient tradition against the encroachments of modern life. Much of a monk's life consists of committing sutras and Zen texts to rote memory, practicing traditional forms of ceremony and ritual, and in general eating, dressing, speaking, and living in a style reminiscent of medieval Japan. One could then be pardoned for thinking that teaching and learning in a Buddhist temple consists of nothing more than exercises in rote memory and formalized ritual. But in the Rinzai Zen monastery, Zen monks are expected to learn the ancient tradition without really being taught.

Twice a year offices change. At seven o'clock on the evening before the day of the change, the names of the new officers are announced. At eleven o'clock the following morning, the new officers take over and from that moment forward are on their own. The brand new cook must prepare nourishing and tasty meals for 20 monks every day; the brand new keeper of the shrine must perform all the detailed ritual and ceremony for the many sutra services; the brand new attendant to the *rōshi* must heat the *rōshi*'s bath to just the right temperature and iron his laundry just so. But there is no break-in period when the old officer shows the new officer what to do; the incoming officer cannot apprentice himself to the outgoing officer to learn the ropes. The new officer must perform his duties without receiving prior instruction.

If the new *tenzo*, or cook, makes a mistake in the ringing of the gong which calls everyone to meals, a senior monk will surely give him a tongue-lashing in front of everyone. The cook will be criticized if the rice is too hard, the soup is too salty, the vegetables have been cut too small, the tea is lukewarm, the faucet is left dripping. If the monks eat up all the food he has served, he must scurry around and cook more food while the monks wait impatiently at table. If he makes too much food, he is forced to eat all the leftovers. After the meal is over, one of the head monks may further criticize him for not using the heaps of cabbage sitting ripe in the fields, or for overcooking the squash, or for always making the same few dishes. He may choose to criticize the cook in private or to humiliate him

in public. The new cook suffers this constant harassment until he can cook properly, manage the kitchen without making mistakes, and use all the temple's food supplies resourcefully. He is greatly motivated to learn all this as soon as possible.

Let us call this method of teaching "Teaching Without Teaching." At first glance, this may not seem to be a teaching method at all. Some observers here will only see a form of hazing, an initiation ritual for inducting new members into a group. If the goal is to teach the new cook how to do his job, there seem to be much more direct and efficient methods of teaching. For example, if we were teaching a new officer "rationally," perhaps a week or so before the change of office, we would have the incoming officer apprentice himself to the outgoing officer. The outgoing officer would explain in careful detail the various tasks as he performed them on the job and gradually during the week would allow the new officer to try his hand at each task. By week's end, under the watchful eye of the outgoing officer, the new officer would be trying to do all the jobs by himself. Here emotional tone is a factor. A skillful instructor would try not to embarrass or humiliate the new officer since he believes that students learn better in a supportive atmosphere where they feel accepted and can maintain self-dignity. Most certainly, the outgoing officer would not engage in any deliberate verbal and physical abuse of the new officer. Let us call this rational, reasonable way of teaching "Teaching By Teaching."

Opposite or Complementary?

These two styles of teaching, Teaching By Teaching and Teaching Without Teaching, are not so much opposite as complementary. Similar elements—person and task—are present in both teaching situations. But what one teaching method emphasizes the other ignores. Teaching By Teaching is task-oriented, aiming to get the task done in the most efficient way possible; it trains the person only as much as is required by the task. On the other hand, Teaching Without Teaching is the opposite, or shall we say, complementary. It takes as its ultimate goal the training of the person. It is person-oriented; teaching how to do the task is only a means to the goal of the spiritual training of the person.

In the Rinzai Zen monastery, the daily meditation and meetings with the *rōshi* over the Zen *kōan* provide the main focus for this training, but all activities in the daily life of the monastery—chanting the sutras, growing vegetables, sweeping the garden, cooking, etc.—are nevertheless systematically used as arenas of Zen practice. The entire regime of monastery life is not task-oriented but person-oriented, done not just to get the work done, but to help monks test and train their powers of egoless concentration, so that they may eventually achieve awakening or enlightenment.

Monastery-style Teaching Without Teaching thus does not, on the surface, seek to find the most efficient or convenient way of doing the job. In fact, in order to test the monk, Teaching Without Teaching deliberately requires that the jobs be done in what appear to be inefficient or inconvenient ways. Thus the cook has no budget for shopping and is expected to make his meals entirely from the vegetables that grow in the garden and from whatever donations of food the monastery has received. He may not use the conveniences of electricity or gas but instead must cook everything over a wood fire. If he wants hot water, he first brings water from the well in a bucket, pours it into a cauldron, and lights a fire under it; 20 minutes later he has hot water. Some few concessions to modernity have been made. A pump and faucet have been attached to the well so that hauling up water by rope is no longer necessary. Most monasteries probably have refrigerators now and vacuum cleaners as well. But nevertheless monastery life is still deliberately kept at a fairly primitive level: no heat in the winter, no chairs to sit on, no money to spend, no flush toilets, no creature comforts—all this creates an appropriate ascetic environment and gives the monks more room to use their ingenuity in resourceful ways.

In rational Teaching By Teaching, on the other hand, once a person is designated to do a job, that person is encouraged to do it in the most convenient and efficient way possible. Thus the modern cook uses not only gas and electricity but also microwave ovens, refrigerators, automatic potato peelers, electric vegetable choppers, dishwashers, and, of course, the cook also submits an ever-increasing budget to maintain all this mechanical support. Little thought is given to what effect such mechanized convenience has on the cook as a person, his resourcefulness and self-discipline when using scarce ingredients, his respect for the tools he uses daily, his awareness of the farmers who grew his produce, his attitude toward the people whose food he prepares, or his mindfulness as he chops carrots.

Although Teaching Without Teaching offers no advance instruction and leaves the monk on his own, the monk cannot do anything he wishes. He must maintain the traditional formalized ritual life of the monastery. The monastery system prescribes precisely what the monk is required to do but gives little direction on why or how to do it. Since he receives no instruction, the monk must constantly use his own insight and intuition, be original and resourceful, in maintaining that prescribed form. How does one get both the spinach and the noodles cooked ready to be served at exactly 10:20 A.M. A novice would cook one, wash out the cauldron, and then cook the other. But under the pressure of a tight schedule, the monk suddenly realizes that he can cook the spinach in the still hot, leftover water from the noodles and save himself 20 minutes. Every monk who has spent time as cook will have tried and abandoned the standard cookbook way of

slicing radishes. The cookbook says to first cut off the leaf and stem and then slice thinly. But it is impossible to slice the entire radish this way since one cannot slice the part held by the fingers of the left hand. Before the monk gets scolded for serving radishes sloppily sliced, he will have seen some better way of slicing radishes (retain the leaf and stem and use it as a handle) which will slice the radishes thinly as required by tradition, use the radishes more efficiently, and get the food on the table on time.

Despite the ritualized form of monastery life, efficiency thus is very highly valued. And every cook is under great pressure to devise ever more efficient ways of work. Constantly he is scrutinizing every step of his actions, asking is it faster to reverse the order of these two jobs, can I use the residual heat from this fire for some other task, do I get a better cut if I hold the blade of my knife this way, and so on. Although “what” he is required to do is prescribed for him, the cook subjects every detail of “how” he does the task to minute examination in a constant search for improvement.

The term I am using, ritual formalism, includes a variety of activities: repetition, rote memorization, behaving according to traditional prescription, and more. Common to these various activities is the idea that the performers are imitating form without first learning why or how those activities are to be done. But although the very notion of ritual seems to imply the unthinking repetition of tradition, the Zen monastery requires its monks to carry on that tradition while at the same time refusing to teach it to them. The monastery deliberately does so intending to create monks who are innovative and resourceful. The monastery teaching tradition ridicules the *tanpankan*, “the fellow carrying a board” on his shoulder who thus can see only one side of things, and instead urges monks to develop *rinki ōhen*, “on the spot adaptability.” Under this system of training, each monk develops his own untraditional solution to maintaining the traditional, his own original way of continuing the established convention. Necessity is the mother of invention, but in a Japanese Zen monastery, maintaining ritual form is the unexpected father of insight.

Confucianism I: Motivation

Few Zen monks question why Zen monasteries teach in this way. For them, it is just the tradition. But I have met two older priests who have reflected on the matter. They quote Confucius:

The Master said, Only one who bursts with eagerness do I instruct; only one who bubbles with excitement do I enlighten. If I hold up one corner and a man cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not continue the lesson. (*Analects*, VII, 8)⁶

6. Arthur Waley, trans., *Analects of Confucius* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938).

In this passage Confucius is teaching a student how to lay out a field plot and insists that having shown the student where to lay out the first corner, the student should have enough initiative and resourcefulness to determine the other three on his own. Older Zen priests who are familiar with the Confucian classics go on to quote further passages such as:

He hears one part and understands all ten. (*Analects*; V, 8)

In the Zen temple, colorful traditional verses are often quoted to express the same point:

With a good horse, does one need to use even the shadow of a whip?

Seeing just the shadow or hearing just the sound of the whip, a good horse will at once know the rider's wishes and begin to gallop.

In other words, the key factor in successful teaching and learning is not so much the ability of the teacher. It is whether or not the student is strongly motivated and has initiative.

The Master said, If a man does not continually ask himself 'What am I to do about this?, what am I to do about this?' there is no possibility of my doing anything about him. (*Analects*, XV, 15)

I once heard the priest of a Zen temple say, "That new disciple is no good. You have to tell him everything."

Here one may object that only a few students are clever enough, in the manner of Sherlock Holmes, to deduce the entire plot in the teacher's mind after detecting one clue. Most students just simply are not that intelligent, it will be said. But Teaching Without Teaching insists that the ability or inability of the student to understand all ten parts from seeing only one part is not merely a matter of native intelligence, about which nothing can be done; it is also a matter of motivation, and there is much that we can do to motivate the student. Thus, the fundamental problem facing a teacher is not in teaching the content of any lesson but in motivating the student to seek for himself. The entire discipline of monastery teaching and learning is constructed upon this assumption, that true teaching and learning cannot occur while the student remains a passive recipient of the teacher's instruction but occurs only when the student is actively motivated to learn.

An American friend of mine in Japan took lessons to learn how to dance and chant *nō*. She found that when she did not practice and walked mechanically through the steps and movements, the teacher merely said, "Fine, fine," with no further comment. But when she put effort into her chanting and danced with intensity, then the teacher suddenly came forward full of criticisms, "This is wrong, that is no good, do that again but slower," and so on. In very similar fashion, the *rōshi*, like the *nō* teacher, reserves his criticisms only for those of his monks who make effort, but that is because for him the other, passive, students present him with no opportunity to teach.

The learning process is student-initiated not only when senior monks teach junior monks the concrete tasks of monastery life, but also when the *rōshi* trains the monks in the *kōan*, the practice which is often thought to be the mystical heart of Zen. By the nature of the case, the *rōshi* cannot teach the point of the *kōan* to a monk. He could of course merely tell the monk the traditional answer to the *kōan*, in the same way that a tax accountant informs his client that his total tax for the year is \$5,231. But just as the tax client does not know why his tax is \$5,231, so also the monk would not understand why that answer was a correct response to the *kōan*. He must see for himself the connection between *kōan* and answer. If the monk makes no effort and listlessly proffers only “I don’t know” at his encounters with the *rōshi*, the *rōshi* cannot direct him in any way. Only when the monk first makes great effort, and concomitantly makes many mistakes, does the *rōshi* have any opportunity to teach the monk. The *rōshi* is likened to a bell. First one must strike it.

The *rōshi*’s teaching consists primarily in motivating the student and very little in teaching the content of the *kōan*. He assigns the monk a *kōan* such as “Two hands clap and there is a sound; now, what is the sound of the single hand?” and gives no hints about how this question is to be answered. The monk usually meets the *rōshi* over the *kōan* twice a day; during intensive retreats they meet three, four, and even five times a day. Very quickly the monk exhausts his list of possible replies. The *rōshi* continues to pressure the monk to bring an answer. He sometimes ridicules the monk, sometimes presents a stony face, sometimes ignores the monk. He scowls, he jeers, he feigns astonishment at the stupidity of the monk. But he is relentless in demanding an answer. The monk feels cornered and helpless; he is confused; he vows to make a great effort and when his efforts yield nothing, he may fall into great disappointment or even depression. But he is desperate to know what that *kōan* means and would give anything to be able to penetrate it. There is no better student than one so desperate to learn.

Confucianism II: Mutual Polishing

Though Teaching Without Teaching can work in one-to-one situations, it develops a special dynamic in groups. Monks do not reserve their criticism and admonishments just for the new monk. Teaching Without Teaching is not merely hazing, an initiation ritual for newcomers. Long after initiation is over, monks continue to constantly admonish, warn, reprimand, and lecture each other:

The seam of your robe is crooked. Fix it!
 Your collar is dirty. Wash it!
 Chant louder. Put more guts into your voice!
 The floors are dirty. Are you sure you mopped them today?

Walk quietly. Make no noise when walking!
 Shut up! No talking!
 Your sitting cushions aren't in line. Fix them!
 If you have so much time on your hands, go sit!
 Your attitude is wrong. Be grateful when someone corrects you!
 No running away!

Whether or not he has experienced awakening, every Zen monk is expected to lead the life of enlightened action in all his daily behavior. A monk may not know the enlightened way to act in any given situation, but if he does anything clumsy or mistaken or selfish or in any way unenlightened, some monk senior to him will be sure to chastise him.

In a large community of course, a single *rōshi* cannot monitor the daily behavior of all his monks. The community of monks thus monitors itself. This self-disciplining action is called *sessa takuma*, another Confucian phrase (*Analects*, I, 15), which means, literally, “cutting, chipping, filing, polishing” but which I translate here as “mutual polishing.” The image is of a pile of rough stones all placed into a stone mortar and constantly stirred. The rough edges of the stones cut and chip each other away, rubbing against each other in constant friction until they become round, smoothly polished gems. No one stone is superior to any other but through mutual friction all become gems together revealing the unique individual nature of each. Through the constant abrasive action of their criticism upon each other, all monks learn though no single teacher teaches. Through mutual polishing, each attains an individual uniqueness.

In Teaching Without Teaching, the process must be initiated by the student, not by the teacher. Despite the very great authority of the *rōshi*, fundamentally the learning process is student-dependent not teacher-dependent. However, the monastery does not make the naive assumption that monks left on their own will spontaneously teach themselves in a burst of creative self-education. It realizes that although some few monks need no external motivation, most monks are all too human and will make little effort unless pushed to do so. In mutual polishing, monks constantly push each other to learn. The dynamic works without a specific teacher in charge because every person is charged with the responsibility of being teacher. By teaching, one deepens one's learning.

Generalizability and Genuineness

In defense of traditional monastery-style teaching, I have heard Zen *rōshi* offer two arguments: (1) a monk taught the traditional way generalizes his ability to learn beyond the original context while a student taught by the new, rational methods must be retaught for each new task; and (2) a student taught the traditional way genuinely knows for himself why he is

doing what he is doing, while a student taught the rational way is merely following someone else's example.

After a monk has survived his first assignment to office, usually he returns to the communal *dōnai* to spend a term without office. But he knows that in the following term, he may very likely be appointed cook or attendant to the *rōshi*. In his off-term, he watches every move those officers make, remembers the stories that older monks tell of their terms in those offices, and every now and then will ask them what the cook is normally doing at 7:30 in the morning or what is the *rōshi*'s favorite food and how it is to be prepared. If the monk happens to be near the kitchen, he will observe where all the kitchen utensils are kept, the order in which the cook does his many jobs, the way the cook works together with the *rōshi*'s attendant, and so on, trying to deduce the overall pattern of the cook's job from a few observations. Long before he actually gets appointed cook or *rōshi*'s attendant, he tries to build up a picture of the daily routine of these jobs. He is learning without being taught in a situation outside his first learning experience. He is generalizing.

During my time in the Zen monastery, we were told stories of how model students learned without being taught. In the traditional carpenter's shop, we were told, a new apprentice would spend his first three years doing nothing but drudge work. He would arrive first at the shop in the early morning to light the fire, bring in the water, wash the toilets, make tea, and do all the other little tasks of getting the shop started. During the day he would not be allowed to touch a tool. Instead he would have to haul lumber, clean up cuttings, deliver a cabinet to Mr. So-and-So, and so on. In the evening, when everyone had left, he would do a final sweep of the floor. During this initial period, no one would actually teach him any carpentry. But after three years when his formal training began, the older carpenters would expect him to know already what wood to use for what kinds of job, how that wood is cured, where that wood is kept, etc. Though no one would have taught him, he would be expected to know the names and uses of all the tools, all the language and terminology used to describe joints, types of construction, methods of finishing, etc., as well as the names of all the customers and suppliers of the shop. Like a carpenter's apprentice, a Zen monk is urged to be always observant, to be able to understand the entire task long before he is required to do it.

In Teaching Without Teaching, the student genuinely learns. In using the English word "genuine," I am constructing a concept to correspond to the casual, everyday Japanese phrase *hontō ni* as in *hontō ni wakaru*, which normally is translatable as "truly understand." Let me try to explain what this ordinary-sounding phrase implies in the monastery. When a student is told in advance and in detail what to do and how to do it, he has no opportunity to test out different ways of doing the task and to discover

through his own exploration which methods work and which fail. Probably the rationale for this procedure would be efficiency: why ask the student to reinvent the wheel? But if asked how the method he has learned from the teacher or textbook compares with other methods, the student cannot answer from his own experience of those other methods. He has never tried the other methods and failed; he has only succeeded at the one method which he has been taught is successful. In that sense, he does not really know why he is doing what he is doing; his understanding is not entirely first-hand, not based on personal experience, not entirely genuine.

Power and Hierarchy

To some, the Rinzai monastery's method of teaching may appear to be nothing more than indoctrination or brain-washing, especially since the teaching method is imbedded in a hierarchical social structure. Here it is necessary to make a few comments about power and hierarchy in the monastery.

The monastery has an explicit hierarchy. The *rōshi* warns the head monk who will afterward scold one of the middle-ranking monks; the middle-ranking monk in turn will deliver a blistering lecture to the *shintō*. Except for the single monks at the very top and very bottom of the hierarchy, every monk is simultaneously subject to discipline by higher-ranking monks and in turn responsible for disciplining lower-ranking monks. An outside observer may object, first, that since the monastery is a hierarchical system, teaching and learning are not truly reciprocal since younger monks may not criticize senior monks, and second, that such a system of hierarchy must inevitably encourage senior monks to abuse the power of their position.

Criticism is not traded reciprocally, of course; junior monks do not criticize senior monks. Nevertheless, like the junior members of all groups in Japanese society at large, the younger monks have their own techniques for managing senior monks. The general literature on Japanese groups and on the practice of *amae* has made us familiar with this phenomenon. But more specifically, in an indirect but very real sense, older monks truly are taught by the younger monks. With superiors, a monk can be dependent and concede authority, but when he himself occupies the role of senior monk, the responsibility connected with senior position demands that he lead, direct, and teach. It is the duty of senior monks to be severe, critical, and demanding of their junior brethren. The *rōshi* has two attendants, one junior monk serving his first term in the office, and one senior monk serving his second term. When I was senior attendant, the *rōshi* told me to order the junior attendant to make a certain dish rather difficult to make. I

myself could not make that dish and when after a few days, the ordered food had not appeared, the *rōshi* asked why. When I told him that I did not feel right ordering other people to do what I myself could not do, he scolded me severely for my self-centeredness. Many younger monks will not learn how to cook difficult dishes or learn to do difficult tasks unless they are pressured to do so, he said; not everyone is like this, of course, but monks are only human. When they are resistant, it is the responsibility of the older monks to push them into these difficult tasks for their own good; only in this way will they grow and gain in competence. Then he pointed to himself and said, “Look at me. I cannot do anything and yet I must order everybody else around” (the humility of arrogance!). The courage to take authority, the humility proper to authority, responsibility for others—some aspects of these lessons cannot be learned until one is cast into the role of teacher. In this indirect but very real sense, the student teaches the teacher.

Against the charge that the monastery hierarchy encourages abuse of power and that younger monks surely must suffer, I can say that in my experience, this did not happen often. There were occasions in which a senior monk would try to use his position to personal advantage but this did not happen enough times to be a problem. There was one monk, however, who consistently disregarded monastery rule and very often took advantage of others. He was detested by many but, strangely, he was also admired by others. Eventually after many years, he was expelled from the monastery. But this charge raises the question of what we mean by “abuse of power” and here I believe different cultural perspectives produce quite different expectations and divergent moral evaluations. When a young monk enters a monastery, he expects to be ordered around in very rough language, to be humiliated in public, to be slapped, cuffed, and hit with a stick quite often. Yet he does not consider himself “abused” or think himself the victim of injustice. In fact, he may very well look back upon this experience with great gratitude, as I do.

A *sesshin* is a week devoted to intensive practice. In the yearly calendar, *rōhatsu* is the most intense *sesshin* because it commemorates the Buddha’s own enlightenment celebrated on December 8. In my second year, I went through the entire week of *rōhatsu* without once passing my *kōan*. Since first- and second-year monks are required to announce after every meeting with the *rōshi* whether or not they have passed their *kōan*, my failure to progress was public knowledge. As encouragement, the *jikijitsu*, head of the *zendō*, hit me with the stick with increasing frequency each succeeding day. At first, I attempted to keep count of how many times I was hit with the stick. By the fourth day, my count had risen to more than 500 times. During the second half of the *sesshin*, the *jikijitsu* was even

more ferocious with the stick and although I lost count, I estimate that I received well over a thousand hits with the stick by the end of the week. At the end of *sesshin*, the *jikijitsu* showed me a blister on his right hand and said, "You gave that to me, I had to hit you so often I got a blister on my hand." We laughed and I thanked him for his efforts on my behalf.

Such use of force and apparent punishment is not considered physical abuse. In fact, it is called *zen no shinsetsusa*, "Zen kindness." What explanation could justify calling this "kindness"?

Zen monastic practice is essentially directed at spiritual freedom or liberation. In our ordinary understanding of freedom, to be free is to be able to do whatever one wants or desires; to be forced to do otherwise is compulsion or bondage. But in Buddhism, one finds a different conception of freedom. It contains the notion that our wants and desires themselves are not freely chosen nor maintained, and that our wants and desires are various masks for attachment to self. The constant need to protect and enhance the self is what makes us unfree. Freedom is not conceived of as being able to follow one's wants and desires without hindrance. Instead it is conceived of as freedom from attachment to one's wants and desires. For ultimately, in addition to external sources like oppressive society and authoritarian government, the original agent of compulsion is the self.

These ideas are not the exclusive cultural property of Japan, of course. Most educators have probably criticized the idea that "to be free is to do as one wants" in confronting the practical problem of how to help students who imprison themselves by wanting very little for themselves. Also, Christian monasticism, psychotherapy, and other sources share the insight that when we are doing what we want or desire, the surface feeling of freedom may really mask a form of compulsion at a deeper level. But while the modern secular teacher may use as many enticing carrots as desired, the teacher may not use the stick. The use of force or compulsion violates modern notions of the autonomy and dignity of the individual and is thought to damage the student's self-esteem. In addition, a stick-wielding teacher will probably be perceived as requiring psychological treatment. Corporal punishment and coercion were formerly part of school education in both Japan and the West but since World War II, modern Japanese schools follow Western example and actively discourage their use. But the Zen monastery does not. According to traditional Buddhist and Confucian notions of discipline and self-cultivation, one seeks to overcome the attachments to self by living in a wholesome environment with good role models and then imitating them until one has eradicated self-centered wants and desires. In addition to providing such an environment, the Zen monastery also has other more direct methods. If self-attachment is the cause of why one is not free, then the quickest way to liberation is to cut

one's attachment to self. The use of force and coercion is justified on the ground that to do otherwise is to allow the monk to indulge the self.⁷

Back and Front

Despite the hierarchical social structure and the "authoritarian" teaching style of the monastery, the life of the monk has an informal, more relaxed side. Again, although it would take this paper off on a tangent to go into detail, a short description might help to balance the picture of monastery life presented so far.

To the outside world, the Rinzai Zen monastery appears to be a disciplined group of dedicated and sincere monks all committed to maintaining the purity and severity of the monastic institution. Behind this facade, however, the monks carry on an active life not revealed to the public. Monks look forward to *takuhatsu* (begging) days since they have a chance to leave the monastery for the morning and remove themselves from the watchful eye of the head monk. Sometimes they enjoy themselves so much they come back from begging rounds slightly drunk. Late at night after the last *zazen* (meditation) is over, some of the monks may gather for a cigarette behind the woodshed where the firewood is stacked. Carefully pulling a thick piece of firewood from the stack, one of the monks will reach into the open space and pull out a bottle of whiskey. Suddenly everyone has a teacup in hand and little pieces of dried fish are being passed around. In monastery language, this is *sarei*, "tea ceremony," and on a winter's night, after sitting out in the open until almost midnight, a little drink is most welcome before crawling into a very cold mattress. Other monks may climb over the wall to go to the local public bath and afterward enjoy a bowl of noodles. Some of the more adventurous ones may even head downtown to sing in the *karaoke* bars, always mindful that wake-up is 3:30 or 4 A.M. Of course, in the monastery there will be one or two monks who are very fussy about keeping all the rules, and they will receive their share of good-natured kidding, perhaps even be dragged against their will on some outrageous escapade.

7. I realize this discussion leaves many questions unanswered. In the wake of several scandals in which Buddhist teachers have engaged in sexual liaison with their students, women members of Buddhist practice centers in the West have argued that the traditional monastic hierarchical system does encourage abuse of power. I stand by my statement that in the Japanese Zen monastery in Japan, there is little abuse of power. But Zen instruction in the West has become Westernized and is now quite different from traditional monastic practice. Part of the evidence for saying this is that the problems of authority and power in Zen teacher-student relations in the West are the same as teacher-student relations elsewhere in Western culture in general. I am sorry that I cannot here discuss this very complicated question further.

The formal life of disciplined obedience masks an informal life of pranks, deceptions, and even betrayals. The *densu* is responsible for waking everyone up at 3:30 (summer) or 4 A.M. (winter) every morning. If he fails to get up, everyone sleeps in late, an event appreciated by all. To make that much-appreciated event occur more often, monks are not above sabotage. A careless *densu* who leaves his alarm clock near a window will likely find that during the night a hand from outside the window has reached in and turned off the alarm. The next morning as the head monk chastises the *densu* for his idleness, everyone will sympathetically agree that the *densu* certainly has a difficult office. Slipping back and forth between the formal life of strict discipline and the informal life of play, monks constantly slide in and out of inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory, relations with each other.

To outside observers, such behavior may seem to be the epitome of hypocrisy, but in the monastery not only is it tolerated, it is considered quite necessary. Few people can live entirely and completely in the abrasive world of strict discipline. In fact, one might even argue that monks can practice with such strict discipline only because they play so hard on the shadow side. But although the shadow life of pranks and play is a break from the strict discipline, it is still considered an integral part of monastery practice. Monks are required to make great effort in both the formal and informal sides of monastery life. Because the *rōhatsu ōzeshin* commemorates the Buddha's own enlightenment, all other activities are cancelled so that the monks can devote all their energy to *zazen* and *sanzen*. As the daily 22-hour schedule begins with wake-up at 2:00 A.M. and ends after midnight, a late-night snack of hot noodles is served at about 10:00 every evening. The *jikijitsu*, of course, wants to get his monks finished with eating as quickly as possible in order to return to the *zendō* to continue sitting. But the monks deliberately eat as slowly and as much as possible in order to extend the eating time to a maximum. With effort, they will be able to cut off an entire half-hour, a full period of *zazen*, from the time they spend afterward sitting in the cold *zendō* under the stick. The *jikijitsu* cannot complain since the rule is that everyone may have as many second helpings as desired. In this way, the monks silently and playfully resist the *jikijitsu*.

However, one year an interesting incident occurred. During this particular *rōhatsu ōzeshin*, the monks were not eating much; the evening noodles were quickly eaten and within 15 minutes, everyone was back in the *zendō* for further *zazen*. This attitude was symptomatic of the entire *sesshin* that year for the monks in general moved and sat with an air of tired lassitude. After noodles one night, the *jikijitsu* gave us a furious scolding for failing to eat more noodles, criticizing us for not making ef-

fort, for being passive, for not arousing fighting spirit. Later that night, as we brushed our teeth, we all agreed our performance at noodle-eating had been shameful. From the next day on, everyone ordered second and third helpings and the general air of lassitude lifted from the entire *sesshin*. With that, the *jikijitsu* told us that we had finally worked up some of the fighting spirit required for the most important *sesshin* of the year.

Much more can be said about this aspect of monastery life, but here it is worthwhile only to make two points. First, in addition to allowing the monks time and space for rest and relaxation, the behind-the-scenes life of play teaches monks not to make a religion out of Zen practice, not to treat monastery practice as something holy. A beginning *shintō* quite naturally is rigid about trying to maintain as strictly as possible all the rules and regulations of monastery life. But in time he soon learns the concrete meaning of the teaching that the *samadhi* (state of consciousness attained in deep meditation) of the advanced Zen practitioner is *yūge zammai*, “the *samadhi* of play.” Second, while the formal life of monastery discipline often isolates a monk and tests his individual personal resources, the shadow life affirms that beyond distinctions of rank and office, all monks share common social bonds and a fundamental humanity. This sense of shared life is often expressed in the traditional Japanese way by taking a bath together and sharing a drink.

All social organizations have a formal and an informal aspect. But in other contexts, while the informal behavior is often thought to be antithetical to the formal, perhaps even a degeneration or corruption of an ideal, in the Zen monastery, both the formal and the informal life of the monastery are thought to be equally important arenas of Zen practice. The informal life is neither antithetical to, nor a corruption of, the formal; it is the partner or complement of the formal.

American Mysticism

In the Rinzai Zen monastery, all aspects of monastic discipline direct the monk toward the attaining of Buddhist enlightenment through the use of ritual formalism. I have sometimes described this by saying that enlightenment is just as much impressed from the outside as expressed from the inside. But this description of how one reaches enlightenment is not easily accepted in North America. For despite their unfamiliarity with the Zen monastic tradition, Westerners do have a preconception of what ought to happen in mystical insight and in the attainment of enlightenment. True mystical insight, they will object, is not something that can be imposed from outside by a social system; instead it is a welling up of psychic energy from within, a breakthrough in which the true self erupts through the shell

imposed by intellect, self-images, and socialization. From this point of view, the Zen monastery's imposition of ritual form must seem to be just the opposite of mystical insight.

This conception of mystical enlightenment—as the inner inarticulate self breaking through the shell of externally imposed self-images, morality, and conventional understanding—is just what one would expect to find in American culture, the culture of romantic individualism. The culture heroes of the West are heroes precisely to the extent that they assert their individuality against a dehumanizing society. In America, from an early age, children are urged to stand on their own feet and assert their individuality, to not be swayed by society or get lost in the crowd. In the images that define American identity, the Pilgrim fathers assert their right to individual worship against an oppressive church, and action heroes single-handedly defy society to defeat the authoritarian mastermind who would destroy the world. It is not surprising that in America, one associates “to be an individual” with resisting the group, rejecting tradition and institution, opposing authority. Translate this culture legend into psychological terms and at once the outlines of the Western conception of mystical experience appear.⁸

Of course, intertwined with this culture of romantic individualism is another culture of pious work, Puritan self-denial, self-righteousness, and repression of sexuality. We cannot take time out here to follow these different strands in American culture in detail. Suffice it to say that for romantic individualism, the culture of pious work, Puritan self-denial, repression of sexuality, etc. represents the conventional culture that traditional society has programmed into the individual and against which the individual must rebel.

Individualism, antiauthoritarianism, the self of feeling, rejection of institution, etc. are the themes that Western interpreters of Zen have wanted to find in Zen. Of course, they have succeeded just as they were preordained to do. One then should not be surprised at how American-like (how Protestant) the chorus of claims made about Zen sound: Zen is not a religion, Zen is individualism, Zen is iconoclastic, Zen is antiritualistic. But in this American interpretation of Zen, ritual formalism and mystical insight are diametrically opposed. Ritual formalism is thought to be the very agent of that suffocating, moralizing, self-image that prevents the true self from free expression. One who has only these conceptions will not under-

8. Though the authors make no mention of mysticism, I have profited from reading Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985) and also Robert N. Bellah, “The Meaning of Dōgen Today,” in William R. LaFleur, ed., *Dōgen Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 150–58.

stand teaching and learning in a Japanese Zen monastery, where in Teaching Without Teaching, ritual formalism is the means by which one gains mystical insight.

Development or Self-Discovery?

In thinking about how we conceptualize personal development and how we attempt to understand other cultures, I have found it useful to use a typology of models: a Development model and a Self-Discovery model.⁹

The Development model presupposes that the learner has a set of innate dispositions to develop in a certain way. The process of learning is a gradual response to external stimuli in the learner's environment. If there are no traumatic occurrences to impair or truncate development, the learner will develop naturally, actualizing all innate dispositions in a sequential development. Biological metaphors, expressed in language such as "nurturing," "organic," and "blooming," come easily to mind. The process of learning is depicted as systematic and reasonable; innate dispositions work their way out according to their own internal logic. The learner in the beginning is the passive receiver of nurturing from the physical and social environment, and the self comes to full form only through interaction with the environment.

On the other hand, the Self-Discovery model presupposes that buried within the learner is a fundamentally pure, true self. But from earliest childhood, we are socialized to accept a self-image imposed by our parents, a morality imposed by society, a set of conventional beliefs about our place in the world sanctified by tradition. It is only when the true self breaks free of this false consciousness that a person attains true self-knowledge, maturity as a person, and individual creativity. The Self-Discovery model therefore depicts learning and personal development as the destruction of the encrusted, unnatural shell around the self, a struggle often described as traumatic, liberating, and very sudden. Mythic metaphors of "quest," "ultimate ordeal," and "rebirth" come easily to mind. Although one may encounter guides along the way in one's journey, in contrast to the rational and interactive learning of the Development model, learning in the Self-Discovery model is fundamentally solitary; the lonely self wells up from inside, breaking through its environment in an irrational thrust to come to the light.

Zen has appealed strongly to Westerners because it seems to be one of the few areas of Japanese culture that embodies Self-Discovery. However,

9. I do not know who first coined these terms. They are used by Lee H. Yearley in *Mencius and Aquinas* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 59–60. However, I have extended and amplified these terms in my own way. I would like to thank Harold Roth of Brown University for pointing me to this text.

in this paper, I am questioning whether the Self-Discovery so often associated with Zen is truly part of actual traditional monastery practice. Is the attainment of mystical insight in the Rinzai Zen monastery Self-Discovery or Development?

Ritual Practice

We are now starting to close in on the problem of how ritual formalism can reside together with mystical insight. Let us start by pointing out that this is not a problem for Japanese people, who are quite used to the idea that one goes to a Zen monastery to engage in a highly ritualized form of life in order to gain spiritual enlightenment. It is in the secular West that a conjunction of ritual formalism and mystical insight is difficult to grasp.

Traditional Buddhism and Confucianism employ ritual in many ways. Actions are ritualized to endow them with special or sacred meaning; ritual acts function as symbols; ritual is done for cathartic effect; and so on. There is also an educational use of ritual formalism: it trains consciousness. Each particular ritual act in Confucianism has not only a prescribed behavioral form but also a prescribed attitude, emotion, or state of mind. The making of prostrations or the offering of food to deceased ancestors, for example, is to be done with an attitude of repentance or devotion. The ritual fails if not done with sincerity. Meditation, one of the central ritual practices of Buddhism, similarly is often explicitly directed toward the cultivation of feelings, emotions, and attitudes such as loving kindness, compassion, or sympathetic joy. Other ritual practices aim at the eradication of the attachments found in ordinary consciousness. One repeats and repeats the prescribed act with the prescribed state of mind until one no longer has to will them consciously, until one can act naturally with sincerity, or devotion, or loving kindness.

Buddhist meditation practices here exemplify the simplest form of rote repetition. In many sects, the beginning student repeats again and again the mere watching or counting of the breath going in and out of the body. In some forms of Tibetan Buddhist practice, the beginner starts off with 100,000 full-body prostrations, 100,000 repetitions of a short mantra, 100,000 creations (and destructions) of a mandala, and 100,000 repetitions of a longer mantra. These practices are merely repeated again and again with little attempt made to understand why or how one is to do them. In fact, often students are cautioned that too much thinking about the practice inhibits the practice. All of these are ritual practices performed with the explicit intention of disciplining consciousness.

Practitioners perform these meditation exercises, at least in the beginning, in the belief that to do so leads eventually to Buddhist enlightenment. But Zen priests also teach that wanting enlightenment is itself a form of

attachment and thus a hindrance to the attainment of the non-attachment of enlightenment. This makes enlightenment seem especially mysterious, for what, then, can one do to gain enlightenment if the very attempt to gain enlightenment is what prevents it? Despite this rhetoric about the apparent futility of practice, the very existence of monasteries and of monastic discipline presupposes that one can engage in concrete practices that advance one toward the goal of enlightenment. And the concrete practices that form the path to that spiritual insight consist of ritually performed acts.

The Zen Kōan

In the Rinzai Zen monastery, monks are given *kōan* upon which they focus their attention during long periods of *zazen*, sitting meditation. The traditional beginning *kōan* include, for example, Hakuin's famous, "Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of the one hand?" and Jōshū's Mu: "A monk asked Jōshū, 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?'; Jōshū replied 'No!' " (pronounced *mu* in Japanese). Sitting in meditation, the monk blindly repeats the *kōan*, posing the problem of the *kōan* to himself again and again. The *kōan* has a correct response—a single response, which that monastery's lineage considers correct—and the monk is under enormous pressure to produce it. The remarkable point of the *kōan* method is that with concentrated effort, monks regularly do start to penetrate the *kōan* usually within six months of their arrival in the monastery.

Some critics have charged that the *kōan* question and answer is mere ritual, that the monk merely presents a set response which the *rōshi* ritually approves. If the monk is too dull-witted to come up with the appropriate answer on his own, then the *rōshi* will just tell the monk the answer, so it is thought. In fact, a "crib" of set answers to *kōan* has been published in both Japanese and English and the existence of this book leads many people to believe that the encounter between *rōshi* and monk is little more than a *pro forma* stage play. But the fact that a crib exists proves nothing. A high school algebra crib will provide all the answers to the algebra problems, but the student who wants to pass the final test in algebra must not only know the final answer but also understand the reasoning that leads from the problem to the answer and be able to perform the necessary intermediate calculations correctly. Similarly, giving the correct response in *kōan* training can degenerate into merely an exercise in rote memory, but understanding the connection between the *kōan* and the correct response requires insight. In order to test whether the monk has true insight into the *kōan*, the *rōshi* asks numerous "checking questions" called *sassho*. For the *kōan*, "The Sound of One Hand," the checking questions include "Cut the sound of one hand into two with one slash of the sword," "Did you hear the sound of one hand from behind or from the front?" "The sound

of one hand—let me hear it too,” and many more. If the monk has true insight into the *kōan*, he will be able to answer these checking questions as well. If he is merely a parrot repeating a set phrase, he will not.

Nothing is more mysterious than the way in which rote repetition of the *kōan* triggers the mystical insight called awakening or enlightenment. The monk repeats to himself over and over again, “What is the sound of one hand?” constantly posing anew the question to himself. The repetition becomes so ingrained that without conscious effort the *kōan* always rises to consciousness whenever attention is not fixed on anything else. As he drifts off to sleep at the end of the day, the last thing involuntarily drifting through his mind is the *kōan* endlessly repeating itself. And on arising in the morning, the first conscious thought is again the *kōan* continuing its ceaseless repetition from the night before.

In the beginning, the monk seeks for the answer to the *kōan* expecting that the answer will arise someday in his consciousness like an object illuminated by a spotlight. But as he continues to work on the *kōan* and yet still fails to penetrate it, he starts to react to his own inability. He begins to have doubts about the *kōan* practice. He will doubt his own abilities. He may fall into a deep disappointment or depression. He challenges himself to have faith and pushes himself beyond what he thought were the normal limits of endurance and willpower. In this region beyond his normal limits, he panics, turns desperate, becomes frantic. Here all self-consciousness is gone. No longer is there a self constantly watching the self. By such forceful techniques, the Rinzai Zen monastery pushes monks into a state of mind beyond the dualism of ordinary consciousness.

At the extremity of his great doubt, there will come an interesting moment. This moment is hard to describe but on reflection afterward we might say that there comes a point when the monk realizes that he himself and the way he is reacting to his inability to penetrate the *kōan* are themselves the activity of the *kōan* working within him. The *kōan* no longer appears as an inert object in the spotlight of consciousness but has become part of the searching movement of the illuminating spotlight itself. His seeking to penetrate the *kōan*, he realizes, is itself the action of the *kōan* which has invaded his consciousness. It has become part of the very consciousness that seeks to penetrate itself. He himself is the *kōan*. Realization of this is the response to the *kōan*.

The Zen Buddhist term for enlightenment or awakening is *kenshō*, often translated in English as “seeing one’s nature.” This translation and the usage of this term in English is extremely misleading for several reasons. It suggests that there is seeing, on the one hand, and an object of seeing, called “one’s nature,” on the other. This is misleading because awakening occurs at the breakdown of the subject-object distinction expressed in “seeing” (subject of experience) and “one’s nature” (object of experi-

ence). Further, *kenshō* in Japanese is as much verb as noun: “How do you *kenshō* this?” is a typical Zen challenge.¹⁰ Finally, in Japanese *kenshō* is used to cover anything from a slight insight to a total spiritual transformation of character and personality, unlike the English usage which tends to use it only to label something total and absolute.

In *kōan* training, the insight comes precisely in the fact that the traditional distinction between a subject of consciousness and an object of consciousness (“two hands clapping”) has broken down. The subject seeing and the object seen are not independent and different. “One’s nature” and “seeing” are not two. To realize, in both senses of “realize,” this fundamental non-duality is the point of *kōan* practice and what makes it mystical insight. One gets to this fundamental realization not through the rational understanding of a conceptual truth, but through the constant repetition of the *kōan*. One merely repeats the *kōan* without being given any instruction on why or how. Ritual formalism leads to mystical insight.

Self

Does monastery Zen practice fit the model of Self-Discovery or of Development? The more prominent elements of Zen practice—it is chaotic, full of anguish, capped by *kenshō* (“seeing one’s nature,” a translation that suggests a pure original self)—fit the Self-Discovery model nicely. These are the elements emphasized both in the rhetoric of native Zen practitioners and in descriptions by outside observers. But there is an important point that does not fit the model nicely. Whereas the Self-Discovery model attributes the false consciousness that obstructs our self-awareness to the conditioning that our parents, schools, and society in general forced upon us, Zen follows traditional Buddhism in attributing that false consciousness not to society and external forces but to us ourselves. Not “them” but the self’s own attachments, its own anger, greed, and ignorance, are responsible for the distorted way it perceives the world and for its own alienation from itself. For those who thought Zen justified rebellion against society, this is not good news.

Rinzai Zen monastery practice, however, brings monks to the point of insight through practices that fit only into the Development model. Despite the emphasis on sudden enlightenment in Zen literature, the Rinzai Zen monastery creates a ritualized environment that encompasses all daily activity, formal and informal. Far from playing the role of the suffocating environment that prevents the self from true self-awareness, as depicted by

10. This point will be of interest to those who are interested in whether mystical consciousness has intentional content. The form of this question, “How do you *kenshō* that?” is similar to “How do you interpret that?” and other questions that clearly imply that the state of mind in question has intentional content.

the Self-Discovery model, monastery life provides a complete environment structured to stimulate the personal growth of the monk through an organic sequential development, as depicted by the Development model. The very existence of the Zen monastery as an institution presupposes the belief that the social environment is not a barrier, but rather an aid, to the monk in his quest to attain enlightenment.

Behind these two models are two different conceptions of self. The Self-Discovery model describes personal growth and development as getting in touch with the independent self buried beneath the obstructing layers of false consciousness created by the social environment. The Development model rests on the assumption that the self does not exist fully formed prior to its contact with its environment and that personal growth occurs through the self interacting with it. The rhetoric of Zen, with its dramatic accounts of the struggle for self-awareness, would lead one to believe that Zen monastery practice is a pure form of Self-Discovery, but actual monastery practice with its ritualized environment more closely fits the Development model. The Zen phrase that denotes enlightenment, “seeing one’s nature,” seems to invoke an independent autonomous self, but in fact, “seeing one’s nature” refers to the collapse of subject and object of experience. Self-Discovery in Zen is discovery that the autonomous self is not real (although neither is it unreal).

Reflections

At the end of this essay, there are many loose ends.

Against the dominant attitude in education, I have argued that ritual and rote methods are necessary in teaching and learning. The ability and disposition to imitate is both primitive and widespread. Young animals, soon after they are born, begin to imitate the adults of their species; the behavior they learn is said to be “imprinted.” Children imitate their parents and also other people around them including other children. Teenagers imitate popular idols and students take professors as role models. A great deal of learning goes on outside the classroom and some huge portion of it is accomplished through imitation without any accompanying rational explanation.¹¹ Yet in the classroom, rote repetition is not highly valued as a method of teaching. In this paper, I have tried to show that there is a connection between ritual formalism and insight, that there is a connection between instructing a student merely to imitate and repeat without explaining “why” or “how” and the student’s development of insight later. From the point of view of specialists in psychology or philosophy of education,

11. At the Teaching and Learning in Japan Conference, April 9–12, 1992, Thomas Hare of Stanford University pointed out that the original meaning of the Japanese work *manabu* is “to imitate.”

I have probably made several blunders in trying to argue for this. The ideas in this paper would benefit from their criticism.

This essay tries to describe some phases of the actual *kōan* practice as it is conducted in the Rinzai monastery. I am afraid however that this essay gives the mistaken impression that the *kōan* is merely a means, a clever irrational instrument, to induce the experience of *kenshō*. The *kōan* however has more than one function, as Hee-Jin Kim points out.¹² The *kōan* as instrument may be non-rational but the *kōan* as realization is discursive and says something. Furthermore, different *kōan* have different things to say. The entire *kōan* curriculum takes more than ten years to complete, each *kōan* expressing some new facet in the total Zen teaching. It would be unfortunate if readers took away the impression that a *kōan* is merely an irrational paradox whose function is to create a psychological crisis as a precedent to Buddhist enlightenment. To explain this would, however, require another essay.

Scholars interested in the contemporary debate about mystical experience and pure consciousness will probably feel that the account in this essay supports the claims that mystical experience is reconditioning not deconditioning, that there is no pure consciousness shorn of all intentional content, that mystical experience is not autonomous from its conceptual, historical, and religious context. I myself am not so sure about any of these claims.

An unintended but relevant consequence is that my description of the operation of the Zen monastery reveals features of the monastery that resemble what has been called the Japanese managerial style. The work-group autonomy of the Japanese corporation corresponds to the autonomy given to a monk newly appointed to office. The explicit vertical structure of the corporation is paralleled by the explicit hierarchy of the monastery. Both the corporation and the monastery give a great deal of attention to detail. *Kaizen*, the constant step-by-step analysis, standardization, and improvement of tasks in, for example, a Japanese automobile factory nicely parallels the monk's constant attempt to make his way of working more and more efficient.¹³ Corporation *hansei*, "reflection," is paralleled by the criticism of mutual polishing in the monastery, and both are institutionalized ways of learning from failure. In her study of the Japanese Red Army, Patricia G. Steinhoff discovered that despite their revolutionary stance

12. Hee-Jin Kim, "Introductory Essay: Language in Dōgen's Zen," in *Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), pp. 1–47. Reprinted as Hee-Jin Kim, "'The Reason of Words and Letters': Dōgen and Kōan Language," in LaFleur, ed., *Dōgen Studies*, pp. 54–82.

13. See Paul S. Adler, "Time and Motion Regained," *Harvard Business Review*, Jan.-Feb. 1993, pp. 97–108, Reprint 93101. Adler's paper, in several ways, is similar in purpose to this one.

against the mainstream values of Japanese society, over the years the members of the Japanese Red Army developed through trial and error a working style that spontaneously reinvented several features of the Japanese managerial style.¹⁴

What is the significance of the fact that such diverse organizations—the business corporation, the Zen monastery, and the Red Army—should share such a resemblance? Do all Japanese, by virtue of the fact that they are Japanese, carry a genetically determined template that causes them to create very similar social organizations wherever they find themselves? Or is there some other explanation? Patricia Steinhoff speculates that the source of “this quintessentially Japanese style of organization can be located explicitly in the culture of the postwar Japanese elementary school.”¹⁵ Her point is that Japanese children, including those who later went on to become members of the Red Army, learned non-traditional decision-making procedures introduced by the American educational reformers during the postwar occupation period. In similar fashion, Paul Adler in his study of the Toyota automobile production system shows that it was originally inspired by the time and motion studies of the American, Frederick Winslow Taylor, the original efficiency expert. Is the present social organization of the Rinzaï monastery similar? Is the social organization of the Rinzaï Zen monastery a recent, postwar creation, too? Is there some non-traditional influence in its formation?¹⁶ These questions need further investigation.

Many Buddhist practitioners in the West are attempting to distinguish what in Zen is Buddhist and what is merely Japanese culture. I hope that this essay does not leave them with the mistaken impression that the entire monastic system is one more variant of a standard Japanese cultural pattern

14. Patricia G. Steinhoff, “Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Nov. 1989), pp. 724–40. This study also describes how in a crisis in 1972, the group mechanisms of vertical authority, peer pressure, and self-criticism combined to create an uncontrollable purge which after six weeks left twelve members dead. This raises the question, under what conditions does this style of social organization break down?

15. *Ibid.*, p. 733.

16. The 86-year-old Rinzaï *rōshi*, Sasaki Jōshū, says that some important monastery vocabulary changed after World War II. Before the war, the standard word for Zen enlightenment was not *satori* but *taïtoku* (“bodily attainment”). *Satori* became popular with the younger generation of monastery *rōshi* after the war because of the influence of D. T. Suzuki and the philosopher Nishida Kitarō who psychologized enlightenment. Nishida’s first and most popular book was *Zen no kenkyū* (translated into English by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives as *An Enquiry into the Good* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990]) which expounded the notion of *junsui keiken* or “pure consciousness.” Nishida’s footnotes to *Zen no kenkyū* show that he was inspired by both Wilhelm Wundt and William James. There is, of course, the question of whether Nishida used the notion of pure experience in the same way that Wundt and James did.

and that very little of it is Buddhist. My own feeling is that the question, "Is it really Buddhist or is it just Japanese culture?" is another one of those either-or questions whose very asking mistakenly creates a false dichotomy.

Finally, my overall conclusion is that the Rinzai Zen monastery in Japan employs a unique style of teaching and learning in which ritual formalism leads to mystical insight. One might well ask, does the Christian monastery in the West not employ ritual formalism and does it not lead to mystical insight as well? There is a great opportunity and need here for a study of comparative monasticism. However, my initial impression is that although Rinzai Zen and Catholic monasteries are both ritualized training centers whose common goal is mystical insight, nevertheless there is a distinct difference in style. The Zen monastery is person-focused, the daily schedule and the methods of training all designed to focus great pressure on the individual person and bring him quickly to a moment of awakening. By contrast, the Catholic monastery is place-focused, the emphasis being to create a total time and place environment that perpetually reminds the monk of his vocation to God. Such a monastic style does not systematically confront him with a daily challenge to demonstrate his spiritual understanding and is not designed to induce sudden moments of insight. While the Zen monk progresses in sharp bursts, it seems, the Catholic monk's progress is more smoothly graduated. I do not wish to speculate on differences in spiritual maturity measured over the years.

Finally, in order to show how teaching and learning function in the Rinzai Zen monastery, I have also had to describe some monastic teaching practices and sketch the different cultural assumptions that underlie them. Without this exploration into cultural assumptions, I fear that a mere surface description of monastic practices will be misunderstood. To point out cultural differences almost inevitably leads to comparisons which in turn will inevitably cause someone offense. Critics of earlier versions of this paper justly criticized me severely for making invidious cultural comparisons. I stand chastised. Nevertheless, it is a legitimate problem for intellectual study to ask why people in one culture construct and reconstruct certain fixed images of other cultures.

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