

## Vigil on the Eve of Pentecost, May 29-30, 1971

Fourteen Christians had gathered for a vigil on the eve of Pentecost. About half of them were disciples of Kōun Yamada Roshi regularly practicing Zazen, the others were not, several of them sitting for the first time, i.e. staying quietly on their cushions in whatever posture.

At first we were sitting three rounds which took us an hour and a half. After that there was the first part of Mass, the liturgy of the Word during which three short paragraphs from the Bible were read. (Genesis 1, Ezekiel 37, Acts 2). We also chanted some hymns. Again we sat for an hour and a half, and finally the Eucharist followed and concluded the night.

Before we started sitting, we were told to think of our sins. Although it was passed over very lightly, it was said, however. I wonder how anybody can practice true Zazen, when remembering his sins. To do so would make Zazen impossible. While such thoughts involve personal attachment they are worse than other passing thoughts. Where, after all, are the sins right that moment? They are but an idea.

The liturgy of the word was for me slightly distracting. Afterwards I asked myself why this had been so. Why do I never feel any disturbance when a teisho of Yasutani Roshi or Yamada Roshi follows a period of Zazen? Moreover, why is the reciting of “Hakuin Zenji Zazen Wasan” or a sutra not felt as an interruption while the chanting of hymns is? What is the difference? There are in fact some profound differences as similarly as the events may seem on the surface.

The teisho is held by a Roshi who has experienced the depth of the words he reads and says. He speaks of his own experience while using a given text. But those who read from the Bible have no experience of what they read. So the words remain dead. It is a subtle form of lie. What makes words alive and true is the power derived from experience, not the literal contents. The teisho is concerned with the world of enlightenment and the way which leads to this experience. So it is only another expression of what we try to do by practicing Zazen. It gives the task with which we are concerned. Nothing is said that is not directly the same as what we are pursuing. A teisho is Hearing-Zazen, “Mon-Zen”.

Although the paragraphs from the Bible were carefully chosen: The spirit of God hovering over the dark void – the bones that come to life again – the Holy

Spirit descending on the disciples, all images somehow indicating the transformation from a lower state of consciousness to a higher one, they lack the immediate impact on our practice. The one word “Die!” thrust at the sitters by a Zen-godo from his own experience has an incomparably deeper effect than the story of the bones resurrected to living men, read by somebody who is not one with it.

Moreover, three texts are simply too much even though there was a little pause between each reading. At the level of the head/mind, one can jump from subject to subject easily. However, at every teisho, we get just one paragraph, one koan being carried forth and brought to life by the whole being of the Roshi. Whatever is said serves to illuminate that one koan.

Then there was the chanting. I am not musical and have nothing to say from this point of view. But one thing became clear to me: Western religious chants express some kind of feeling, some joy or sadness, some longing or asking. The sutras we chant give facts, e.g. “All sentient beings are intrinsically Buddha” (Hakuin Zenji Zazen Wasan), or “Form is no different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form” (Makahannya Haramita Shingyō), or we recite a darani that is totally unintelligible to the intellect. It is just a proceeding in meditation that is voiced. No feelings! “Mu-shin” – no-heart; “mu-ga” – no-ego. No emotions interfere.

We chant the sutras practically on one note, while Western songs have elaborate melodies. This one note arises naturally from Zazen, the melodies do not. Does anybody who is absorbed in an intensive search sing melodies? Certainly not, because such melodies require some imagination and a different kind of attention.

The conclusion I have arrived at by this experience is:

One cannot mix two paths. To me it does not seem favourable to put Zazen and a Christian celebration together. Either path may be alright. Mixed, they hardly can lead anywhere. We have to discover the root by one path, the root that is common to all true religions. From that root different paths have branched off, the different religions. To reach the root we cannot run zigzag from one path to another. If we do so, it will take us a tremendous amount of time to reach the root. The moment we experience ourselves in that ROOT, all those branches are withdrawn into that one Root-Point.

But are we in this state of consciousness? Even if we may have caught a slight glimpse of it, we are far from experiencing it continuously, and even farther from living it. For the time being, we are on the path - that is we experience

ourselves as being in this state. So this is the only truth for us, no matter what the Truth may be. As long as the Truth is not our continuous experience, the only genuine thing to do is to act according to the truth of our present state. That in fact is the Truth! But acting in a way of a priori anticipating the Truth, the Truth becomes a lie.

The mixing of two religious paths at one occasion is somehow an anticipating of an ultimate state, a state we haven't reached, and as such it is false. As far as I can see, it amounts to what Yamada Roshi calls a "binding together of the branches".

The question may arise: "Then, should a Christian who is practicing Zazen not got to Mass?" To me it seems he may well do so. But a Christian Mass is a Christian Mass, and Zazen is Zazen, and one should not mix the two on one and the same occasion. One should keep them as long apart as possible, i.e. until by a deep enlightenment experience they snap back into the Original-Point. That then is Oneness, the Root-Point. Any other way of putting them together amounts only to an emulsion. Such an emulsion is a pretended oneness; it is that subtle lie that is so much more dangerous than any gross lie.

So after all the Pentecost vigil was valuable to me. Things I sensed before have become much clearer. Therefore I am grateful.

Kamakura, June 2, 1971

(Brigitte D'Ortschy)