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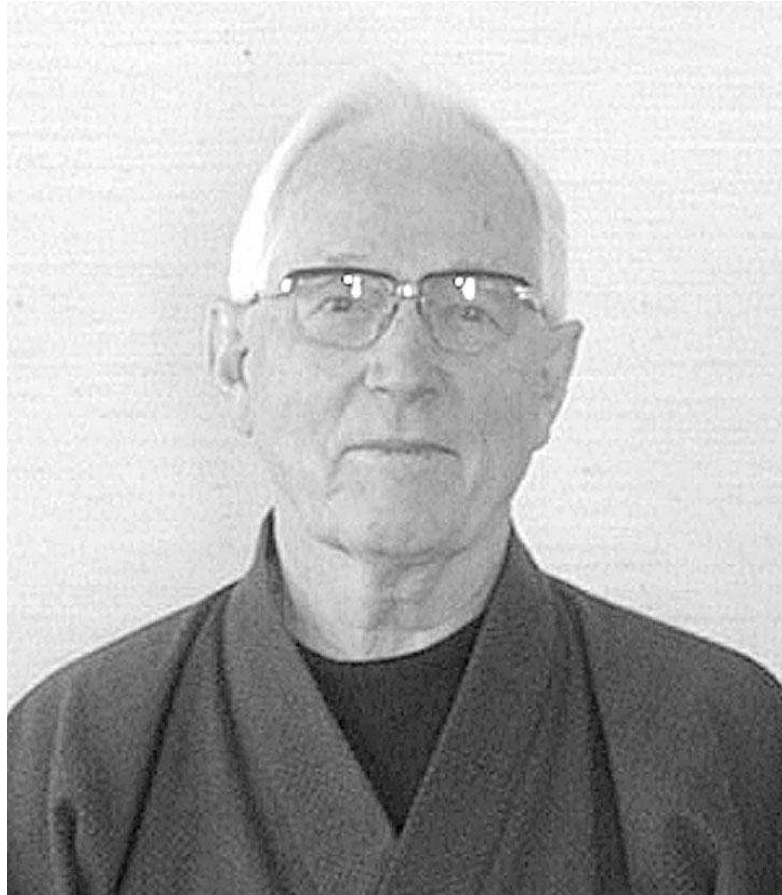
HANDOKAI

CROSSING OVER TOGETHER

Walking the Zen Christian Path

Selections from the writings and talks of
Thomas G. Hand

Edited by Judy Howe Hayes



Thomas G. Hand, S.J. (1920–2005)

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CROSSING OVER TOGETHER

Editor's Introduction

“O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new” —St. Augustine

During the past several decades, many sincere Western spiritual seekers faced the East and did not look back until an impulse arose from within calling them to return to their roots, or to at least re-examine the traditions they had left behind. The interfaith dialogues and ecumenical discussions that have been going on within the religious community over the years to address the issues of spiritual identity and practice in this pluralistic age have revealed the inner conflicts that some have experienced. Among many of those who did not look to the East for answers but stayed within their Christian tradition, there had also been growing dissatisfaction as they longed for a deeper interpretation of the scriptural texts they had relied on for so long for inspiration.

The need for a new examination of some fundamental questions began to arise as the teachings of Eastern spiritual traditions and terms associated with their practices became integrated into the vocabulary of these seekers. With this influence, some new definitions of old terms began to take shape within the meditation commu-

nity. As these sincere seekers tried to reconcile issues of faith and practice, they also began seeking supportive spiritual communities. Thomas G. Hand, S.J., whose evolutionary and at times revolutionary ideas are presented here, has provided a home for such seekers.

Through the thoughtful and inspired teachings of Fr. Hand, we have come to understand even more fully how spiritual life is a process of revelation which involves an evolution of consciousness and transformation of perception. The new heaven and the new earth that can be experienced is a coming to the fullness of Presence that is our fundamental nature, an all-inclusive expansion of awareness in which we always “live and move and have our being.” In fact, it is this awareness that is Being itself and we need look no further than our experience as it arises moment to moment to enter into this “reign of God.” Fr. Hand has always encouraged the group of meditators who sit together as the Handokai at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, California, in Japan, and other locations, to simply expand their awareness within their own paths. This is done without the burden of doctrine or dogma that one often feels one must conform to in a spiritual community.

Although well grounded and professed in the Christian tradition, his twenty-nine years in Japan, six of them having been spent in Zen meditation training with Yasutani and Yamada *Rōshi*, have profoundly influenced his thinking, given him a unique understanding of the deeper message of the Christian scriptures and opened up new possibilities for interpretation of the traditional teachings. He suggests that it is essential that the New Testament be read not necessarily as a factual account of external events, but as a manual for a coming to the internal experience of enlightenment. By doing so, we discover that it is by entrusting ourselves to and sharing in the enlightened state of Christ, right here and now, that we may attain

freedom, rather than through the promise of a salvation to be realized in some distant future.

Through the years, Fr. Hand has always indicated in his talks that he is a fellow traveler on the path and that truths are provisional, representing an aspect or stage in the continuing process of the evolution of perception, a journey that we are all on together. It is because he has taught with the humble attitude of being a participant in this process and with a willingness to share his insights openly, honestly and fearlessly, that so many consider him to be not only a spiritual mentor and teacher, but a friend in a continuing refinement of thought and unfolding revelation of a more global approach to religion for this stage in our evolution.

I am humbled and inspired by this project of compiling a small portion of the teachings presented in the talks and writings of Fr. Hand for students to reflect upon. This project is being done in 2004 as part of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Handokai, and for the friends and students who together celebrate and commemorate the life and work of its founder, who has affectionately become known simply as Hando. This effort is being made in gratitude for the spiritual home he has created wherever the group of Handokai meditators gather in the spirit of openness and sincerity to explore the many facets of spiritual life. This is a home where all can engage in meditation and the spiritual quest without prejudice or demands of any kind, where all can sit together in one heart, and for which we are all grateful.

—J. H. H.

Editor's note

The process of editing this small portion of the lectures and writings of Fr. Hand has been challenging. First, as spoken language and written language are often quite different, the problem of making the changes necessary for the text to flow, and not change the meaning, provided ample opportunity for reflection. In addition, there was so much material to choose from that I just let my intuition guide me as to what to include in this small book. Throughout the process, my intention has been to preserve the language and the characteristic way in which Fr. Hand expressed himself in his talks, while at the same time removing repetitions that are always present in lectures and combining and re-arranging sentences to create a smooth presentation. I have also entered a few passages from other sources which he has used over the years.

To keep the integrity of Fr. Hand's message, presenting the complete talks would have been the ideal. However, for the sake of including as many of his thoughts as possible, it was necessary to minimize the text and combine his teachings from various sources. Although I was kindly encouraged by him to make this project my own, I hope that through the editing process I have not inadvertently changed the meaning of a sentence or a phrase, and that despite the editing, we can still clearly hear his voice and his heart speaking to us from these pages.

Since the first printing of this book, our dear teacher and friend has "crossed over." Although we miss his physical presence, we rejoice with him in his passing.

HANDOKAI

“Crossing Over Together Community”

The name given to the meditation group and the program developed by Hando is Handokai which means “together we gather together in crossing over to new life.”

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HAN The meaning of the first character is “to accompany.” It is formed of the character for “person” and the character for “half.”

渡

DO The second character is “to cross over” and has a rich variety of meanings. One image is to cross over the stormy seas of life to the new life of heaven. Another way of understanding this is to cross over the relative world to the Absolute, to establish one’s consciousness in both realms and then simply move along in the flow of non-dualism. Again, it means

to cross from our egocentric, dualistic, subject-object awareness to the non-dual self-awareness of Being itself, i.e. Divine Consciousness.

KAI The third character indicates a meeting, party, society or group.

Combined, these ideograms indicate we are a “crossing over together society.” This is what we are all about. We are on the pilgrimage together, and this makes all the difference. The Zen teacher Dōgen says that in just sitting we manifest enlightenment, in the sense that every action is of the Divine Source. In the same way, by just sitting and being together on the path, we express and bring to our awareness our most intimate reality-our oneness.

“We are only whole when walking with another/others.”

PART I
A PARADIGM SHIFT

FROM EGO-CENTERED TO SOURCE-CENTERED

After living and working for so many years in Japan, in late spring of 1984 while spending some time in California, it became clear that I was not to return to Japan. It was then that I joined the staff of Mercy Center, Burlingame. Fifty years before, during the Great Depression, these very Sisters had taken me into their school for almost nothing. It was high time to directly pay back a little of the debt I owed them. This man with one foot on either side of the Pacific was now to become a bridge on the spiritual path joining East and West to, I hoped, benefit both.

As I gradually adapted to life back in the U.S., one thing was clear—that there is a deeply felt dissatisfaction in the hearts of many Christians. For example, the movements begun by the Vatican Council II for a greater place for the laity at every level of the Catholic church life seemed to me to be engendering in thousands of people: (1) a longing for deeper spirituality, and (2) for those who had gone to Eastern religions to fulfill this longing, a need to integrate all that they had experienced together with their Christian roots. Ever since coming to Mercy Center, I have been working with such people in a highly ecumenical and inter-religious effort toward the revitalization of both our humanity and Christianity. There are many movements in Christian churches today that are working toward renewal. I am convinced that one of the most important is that which learns from the profound enlightenment of Eastern spiritual heritages. Like all elements in creation, Christianity must evolve.

What appeared to me at that time was that what I was observing was all about paradigm shift—the need for a new paradigm on which to build a whole new world. The movement toward such a

shift continues to swell around the world. Before looking at the components of this in detail, I feel that we need to focus more in general on the paradigm shift itself. How big a shift is needed? Where is it to come from? How can it happen? Is it even allowed and is it essential to the revitalization of Christianity?

For a profound paradigm change, the integrating center of the construct must change. With the Copernicus revolution, the center shifted from the earth to the sun, and a whole new and more real experience of our world entered human consciousness. In the matter of our experience of self, for well over 4,000 years the human ego has been more or less the center of our vision of reality for most of humanity. All during this time, the voices of Buddha, Lao Tzu, Moses, the great Hindu mystics, Christ Jesus, Mohammed, and all such enlightened beings have proclaimed the error of egocentrism, but its widespread tyranny has continued right up to the present. Jesus' message was to deny your ego self, and "Follow me" into the reign of God. But how few have *really* done this?

There is much we can learn from the great Copernican paradigm change of over 400 years ago. For centuries and centuries, the earth was taken to be the center of the universe. Sun, moon, planets, and stars were seen to move around it in perfectly circular, regular orbits. The earth was fixed in its position and everything was seen as related to it. That was geo-centrism. From very early times in the West, there were people who saw the error of this prevailing cosmological paradigm.

The fundamental teaching about the human self was presented by Jesus two millennia ago, yet ego-centrism remains rampant. How long will this time lag continue in the case of the shift from the little local self to the God-centered paradigm for human living? I believe that we have the opportunity for a huge reduction of this

lag as we move into the 21st century. The astounding acceleration of change even in the 20th century is apparent to everyone. However, because of the internet and other amazing means of communication, the rate of change increases by quantum leaps each year. The actual possibility of a massive paradigm shift for all humanity is right here before us. It is all tremendously exciting. What must we do to insure its appropriate realization? There is no question that what is called for is a profound shift away from the model of human life that is built on the ego-centric consciousness of our day to a wholeness-centered life. This may sound a bit vague, but it should become clearer as we go along.

There is bound to be powerful opposition to the great paradigm shift of the post modern era. Probably this opposition will come from many groups with obvious good will such as conservative churches and scripture-based fundamentalist groups, from the scientific community, perhaps, and from all those elements in the general culture which cherish stability and are uncomfortable with radical change. Such groups perform the necessary and important functions of putting the brakes on over-rapid change and forestalling future shock. In general, the greatest opposition will arise from the pervading mental-egoic consciousness still prevalent and certainly present to some degree in all of us. The law of change is that death to one stage is an absolute prerequisite for movement to a new stage. But the ego certainly doesn't want to relinquish its central dominance. It does not want to die. Yet, nothing other than this great death can create the shift. The lines are drawn. The evolutionary challenge is ringing out, out of the depths of our own being.

CONSTITUENTS OF REALITY

The world is moving, changing, dynamic. The flow of life is the movement of the formless Source into form manifestation. It is also the movement of manifestation back to the Source, in order to move or rise into new form. In this we find three basic constituents of reality: the Source, the form and the movement. Here it is extremely important to realize that these are not three beings. The Source alone is not an existent being. A form manifestation alone is not an existent being, nor is the movement. The three together constitute a being and Being itself. You could describe them as components of existence.

To “exist” is an interesting verb. It means to stand (*sta*) out (*ex*). The form manifestation stands out from the pure undifferentiated Source. To exist demands all three of the components. Every being is a dynamic formless/form/movement reality. All reality is only the one flow. This is the flow of the formless into form and form back to the Source—the Source in infinite potency. Every form-manifestation is an existential act of this potency. One Source, many manifestations; the flow is the Holy Spirit. These three are not distinct beings; they are constituents of all being. In fact, to put it in other terms, the Source and the form in movement constitute the bi-polar energy field of all reality.

When we speak of three constituents, where is God in all this? Let’s take the matter of the third constituent first. Actually, it is indicated in the English word be-ing. This “ing” expresses action or movement. Be-ing is dynamic. It is moving. There is only being when the formless Source moves into form, into act. Without this movement, there is no being. Thus movement is the third constituent or component of being. I like to call this movement the

flow. The flow is circular—Source to form, and then form back to Source. Only by returning to the Source can a being rise to a higher state, receive more life. This is at the heart of evolution.

I'd ask you to keep these ideas in mind when we examine Christianity and enter into a deeper understanding of the Christ-life and the Trinity.

EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

About 4500 years ago, a definite change began in human consciousness. It did not happen everywhere at once, and even today there are some cultures left where the change is still to take place. What happened at that time was that humans began to be aware of themselves as separate, unique, responsible, individual subjects. Before this, the self was primarily a group self. The individual did not experience her/himself as distinct from the family and tribe. The discovery of the self as an individual subject with personal responsibility was such a great event that this kind of ego-centric self consciousness has taken over and dominates human consciousness today. In the West, certainly, most of us live under the tyranny of ego consciousness.

What we see is determined by the *way* we see reality. Jesus expresses this very well when he told us, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:34) In this stage of evolution a person can understand Christ as the archetypal human and at the final stage one experiences the bi-polar nature of Reality, that everything is formless and form, what is known in Western philosophy as the "coincidence of opposites." In Christianity this translates into the teaching of the Trinity. God as Source is formless. The Logos or Son is the Source in form manifestation. The continual

movement from Source into manifestation and back to the Source is the Spirit, the basis of all evolution.

How can the discovery of the Source reveal that each of us is one with everything and why does this experience so change our self-identification that the “I” of each one now extends to the universe? Why does enlightenment move us from a self awareness that excludes everyone and everything else—“I am not you”—to one that includes everyone and everything—“I am you”? The reason is that the Source cannot be divided. In the formless there is everyone and everything.

the impossible. On the one hand we have an actual way of being that is unlimited, unbounded in any way. On the other is a mode of being that is essentially limited. These two modes of being are incompatible. Again I ask you, how can infinite “Being” and finite “being” become one without the destruction of one side? Union is two becoming one, while remaining two.

Along this same line is the problem of God being totally “other” to us. Because God is said to be infinite and we are finite, God is spoken of as “the Other.” With this perspective, given the absolute other-ness between divine nature and human nature, how can we become one with God?

In Zen we speak in terms of form and emptiness; these two are equivalent to finite and infinite, but we do not speak of them as “beings.” That is the crucial point. Form (finite) and emptiness (infinite) are not distinct beings. They are distinct constituents of being. To describe enlightenment in philosophical terms, this is what is seen. Full enlightenment always includes an experience of both emptiness and form. This emptiness is not “nothing.” It is “no-thing-ness” and it is important to understand this subtle difference.

It may sound like a contradiction, but what I mean to say by “no-thing-ness” is that the void, or emptiness that Zen speaks of is not a “being” but the inexpressible, formless, constituent of being. It is pure potency, whereas, form is act. I think those philosophical terms shed light on what Zen enlightenment is. The void is infinite power to manifest itself in an unlimited number of limited ways. Any and all possible forms are contained in the emptiness potentially. Likewise, we think of God as having infinite power to manifest and all possible forms are contained within the potentiality, the creative drive of this divine, all powerful Being.

What one discovers in the enlightenment experience of Zen is

the infinite, but it's not infinite "being" as something distinct. It is the infinite source of being—just one of the three constituents of being. The void is experienced as the Source of all form beings. Pure potency manifests itself in the myriad of finite beings, the form world, the world of phenomena. A form is an act of the pure potency. Form is act. emptiness is potency. Form is also a constituent of being. Form and emptiness are one because they are two constituents making up being. As human beings, you and I are formless/form beings. Every existent being is formless/form.

A BI-POLAR GOD?

These four short sentences, the very heart of the *Heart Sutra* in Mahayana Buddhism, have had a powerful and enlightening influence over my mind. The Ultimate Reality is that which Christians call God. The Ultimate is complex; it is bi-polar as the Heart Sutra indicates, and is also what the Christian doctrine of the Trinity enunciates. The connection between the formless/form teaching of Buddhism is a way of enlightening the concept of the Trinity.

Shiki fu i kū. Form is not other than emptiness.

Kū fu i shiki. emptiness is not other than Form.

Shiki soku ze kū. Form is emptiness.

Kū soku ze shiki emptiness is Form.

Shiki The ideogram means color, but here it certainly has the meaning of the original Sanskrit *rūpa*—physical shape, form, phenomenon, manifestation.

- Kū* The first meaning of the ideogram is sky, precisely as empty space. Here it expresses the famous Sanskrit term *śūnyatā*, emptiness.
- Fu* A negative like “not.”
- I* Means apart from, separate, different.
- Soku* An important word meaning immediate, nothing between.
- Ze* Has various meanings: right, exact; this; the verb “to be.”

There are various translations and interpretations of these lines and there are many nuanced understandings of both form and emptiness, especially of the latter. What I want to expose here is how my understanding of these lines has affected my whole version of reality. The profound effect the Heart Sutra had on me occurred even though my reading of the text may not have squared with the traditional Mahayana interpretation.

First, I would like to note that form and emptiness seem to be put on equal footing. In lines one and three, form is the subject. In two and four, the subject is emptiness. Form is not reduced to emptiness. *Rūpa*, form, stands in some kind of equality with emptiness, *śūnyatā*. In his excellent book, *The Heart of Buddhist Wisdom*, Douglas A. Fox works from a Sanskrit text of the sutra. Immediately following our four verses, the Sanskrit has a line that is not in the Chinese version. Fox’s translation of this line enforces the balance of *rūpa* and *śūnyata*: “That which is form equals emptiness, and that which is emptiness is also form.”

Wisdom is insight into reality. The insight given in this wisdom text reveals that at the very heart of reality there is duality but this cannot be the duality of two existent beings. It is not as if you have one building block called form and another block called emptiness

which you place side by side and then have that which we name “reality.” This would totally contradict the other insight found in all wisdom teachings—that somehow everything is one. Mahayana, above all, completely rejects a block-plus-block dualism.

On the other hand, these two are somehow distinct and radically opposed to each other. The word “form” certainly indicates something different from emptiness. Emptiness, in itself, surely has no form and is beyond all categories. This analysis teaches that existent reality is form/formless. Everything that is, is constituted of these two principles of “being.” Existence is a bi-polar coincidence of opposites. Again, neither of these two opposite poles, neither form nor formlessness, is an existent being of itself. They are constituents of being. As opposites they come together to constitute reality.

Let us turn now to Ultimate Reality, to that which Christians call God. The expression “bi-polar” is especially helpful here. Once while preparing a presentation for a Buddhist-Christian dialogue day sponsored by the Center for the Pacific Rim at the University of San Francisco, while putting together some reflections on the Heart Sutra, I came across the title of a talk given at a recent convention of the American Academy of Religion: “Complex Ultimates: The Three-Bodied Buddha, the Two-Natured Brahman, and the Bi-polar God” given by Jeffrey D. Long, University of Chicago. The words “complex ultimates” and “bi-polar God” rang a bell within me. Yes! The Ultimate is complex; it is bi-polar. This is just what the *Heart Sutra* says. It is also what the Christian doctrine of the Trinity enunciates.

THE TRINITY

When I made the connection between the formless/form teaching of Buddhism and the Father/Son doctrine of Christianity, I found this Mahayana understanding of reality enlightened the Trinity for me. Let us reflect for a moment on what Christian tradition says about the first two “persons.” The first is father, mother, generator, creator, the source out of which everything arises. The second is son, daughter, only begotten, generated, manifestation, the pattern (*Logos*) according to which everything exists. These two are clearly distinct and opposite to each other, but at the same time are one Ultimate Reality. As with formlessness and form, neither the first nor the second Person is a self-existent being, because they join (together with the Spirit) to constitute only one God, one divine Being. Neither ever exists apart from the other. In the Christian paradigm the Ultimate is clearly a complex being, a bi-polar God who exists as a “coincidence of opposites.”

The question, of course, arises as to the validity of identifying the emptiness pole of the Heart Sutra with the Father and the Form pole with the Son. Certainly there are many things in the Buddhist and in the Christian analyses of reality that do not totally agree; however, the two systems do come together in positing a bi-polar ultimate.

At the beginning of the New Testament Letter to the Colossians, there are some profound and beautiful poetic lines. They appear to be a quotation of what was most likely an early liturgical hymn. Lines 13-14 of Chapter one spoke of “His beloved Son.” This is the subject of the relative clause that follows: “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and earth. . .” (Colossians 1:15–16) God

is here called “invisible.” This is traditional Hebrew teaching. Yahweh cannot be seen, therefore one is to use no graphic image of God. As this insight developed in Christianity under the impact of Greek philosophy, God is always affirmed as infinite, beyond all limits, but can an infinite reality have no form since the very idea of form means shape and boundary?

THE INFINITE GOD AND FINITE FORM

We are so accustomed to the statement “God is infinite” that we don’t often notice the possible confusion it contains. If you take the sentence to mean that God is only infinite, then how can God be triune? How can there be two, let alone three “Persons” in God? To have two there must be some kind of difference and distinction. But if infinity is the only reality in God, how can there be any difference? There can be no boundaries in infinity to distinguish it from infinity. The opposite of formlessness cannot be formlessness. An absolutely empty sky (*kū*) has nothing to distinguish it from empty sky.

Take the example of an empty cup. It is a bi-polar reality made of the cup and the emptiness. Remove the confining cup form and you do not have anything at all! To have cup emptiness you must have a form (container) that is empty. So also, there cannot be *Śūnyatā* without *rūpa* (emptiness without form), *yin* without *yang* (expansion without contraction), negative without positive, a parent without a child. Ultimately, mono-polar reality is a contradiction in terms and unreal.

Let us return for a moment to the lines in the *Heart Sutra* “*shiki soku ze kū. Kū soku ze shiki.*” Earlier I gave the usual translation of these sentences: “Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form.” But this hardly brings out the force of the word “*soku.*” Take the

Japanese expression “*sokushi*” which means “instant death.” A person is alive; the next instant dead. There is nothing between the two states. *Soku* means nothing between, immediate, so immediate that when it joins two, the two constitute only one reality. To bring this out we can translate the sentences as: “Form ‘is-es’ immediately together with emptiness” and vice versa. They never exist apart. To say that God is formless must be balanced by God as form. If we say that God is infinite, we must also affirm that God is finite.

To say that the Divine is infinite, invisible, indivisible, indescribable and formless is true. But this can only be said of one pole of the bi-polar God, the first “person.” If there truly are two “persons” then the second must be distinct and opposite, i.e. in some sense finite, visible, describable and in form. I feel that the logic in all this is impeccable. This “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” is the “Son,” the universal form, the Logos (pattern) according to which are “created all things in heaven and earth.”

I would like to reinforce this unusual position about God by looking again at the other two sentences from the Heart Sutra which we have been considering: “*Shiki fu i kū. Kū fū i shiki.*” They can be retranslated into, “Form is not incompatible with emptiness. Emptiness is not incompatible with form.” This translation expresses one of the great lights of my life. For many, many years I have pondered over the connection between God and creatures and how it is that we can become one with God. I was brought up on the fundamental affirmation that infinite and finite are absolutely distinct. If a being is infinite, it cannot in any way be finite, and vice versa. The two are contradictory opposites. How, then, can a finite creature be one with the infinite God? What is more, how can there be a “God-man”—divine Incarnation?

As I recall, one of the early shifts toward some solution of this

problem came during a stay in Taiwan. One day while walking, tired from writing, it suddenly dawned on me: Infinity and finiteness, eternity and time are not incompatible! They do not mutually exclude each other, because they are not in the same category. Large and small with regard to the same norm are incompatible because they are both in the category of size, but infinity is not in any category at all. At the time I hardly understood all the implications of this insight. As the light grew over the years, I came to realize that the two opposites are compatible also, because they are not existent beings and then the term “constituents of being” came to me in regards to form and emptiness, and finally as to the persons of the Trinity.

PERSONAL GOD—THE RESPONSIBLE ONE

What is the most evolved notion that man has of this universe? It is intelligence. . . in the beginning that intelligence becomes involved, and in the end, that intelligence becomes evolved. The sum total of the intelligence displayed in the universe must, therefore, be the involved universal intelligence unfolding itself. This universal intelligence is what we call God. This Cosmic intelligence gets involved, and it manifests, evolves itself, until it becomes the perfect person, the Christ-like, the Buddha-like one. Then it goes back to the Source. That is why all the scriptures say, “In him we live and move and have our being.”

—Vivekananda

To talk about God as formless Source moving into form-manifestation seems terribly impersonal. First of all, let me say that I certainly hold that God is personal. The divine Source is intelli-

gent and knows how to act according to the divine nature. What we call a “person” is an intelligent, responsible doer. From this we can understand that God is a vast, unlimited “person” whose power of intelligence and action is unlimited. This is the “One True Person of no rank,” that the great Zen master Rinzai speaks of. It is hard to speak about this divine person in English because we have to use either “she,” “he” or “it.” All these put God into a limited category and are false designations. The Source is intelligent and responsible for all action everywhere in the universe. In this sense, it must be thought of as personal—not a limited, human person, but the all-embracing, divine Person manifesting as individual persons. And again, each one of us is identical with this Source.

Take the very enlightening text where Moses meets God on Mount Sinai when attracted by the burning bush. This was a Self-revelation of God to Moses. When Moses asked how he should respond when the Israelites asked for the name of the God who sent him, God replied, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:13) This was Moses’ great enlightenment experience. He came to know the “Person of no rank.” The people of that time had many gods as it was still the age of the gods. There was the god of fertility who produced the harvest and gave children, the god who waged war, the god who gave peace, the god of the sea, the god of this nation or that. But this was a revelation of the “One God of Being.” This is the God who is simply the great I AM. Wherever there is “is-ing,”—manifestation—this God is responsible. The name “I AM” is written “Yahweh” in the Bible. Yahweh is the third person of I AM, “the One Who Is.” This is the one doer in all creation, the “person” who is doing everything. So we may understand that God as essentially personal.

But please do not think of God—of the Source—as a big imper-

sonal power running everything. The Source I speak of is an intelligent, loving, personal power. The very essence of the Source is to give life, to manifest. In philosophy, one of my professors liked to quote the Latin phrase, “bonum est diffusivum sui”—good is diffusive of itself. The Source wants only to flow out into form manifestation. This flowing is love—total self-giving. Though we are many, we are all one flow. We live in love. Rejoice in Yahweh, the One-Who-Is.

IS ETERNITY IN TIME?

As we often understand it, everlasting means that a life starts and then continues forever. But that is not eternal life. Eternal has neither end nor beginning. This point is crucial. I’m sure we can agree that eternal life is God’s life, divine life. Union with God and possessing eternal life mean the same thing. If you follow the ordinary Christian thought system, “entry into union with God” and “entering eternal life” seems to me to be contradictory. As I understand Christian thought, there is the same difference between eternal and temporal life as there is between God and creatures. It is a difference in be-ing. Therefore, if you enter eternal life, your temporal life has to cease. What’s more, if you enter eternal life, your participation in eternal life has a beginning. Zen says that you already are eternal life. Entry into divine life, eternal life, is an awareness event. You become conscious of what your life already is. All life is eternal/temporal.

The word “eternal” must be understood as being outside time altogether. Eternal does not mean a long, long time as we ordinarily think of it. It is not “time” so it does not compete with time! Just as each of us is formless/form flow, so we are each eter-

nal/temporal flow. There is no incompatibility between time and eternity, form and formless, because they are not separate states of “being.” They are components of being. Our actual life is always and ultimately eternal/temporal. We are very conscious of being in time. To become aware of ourselves as eternal is “entry” into eternal life.

What is the experience of the formless like? It is the experience of the infinite, of total disintegration. It is like being in pure space, the empty sky-no categories, no boundaries, no boxes. There is no relativity, no here, no there, no inside, no outside. There are no dimensions, nothing to go around. You are not a point in this space as there are no objects in this space; therefore, there is no time. Your being, your existence is not a point in time for “you” have entered into eternity. This is the eternal life that Jesus is always talking about, but in Christianity it is referred to as everlasting life, something that goes on and on in time. But both the Hebrew and Greek word for this means no beginning and no end which is not in time but is the eternal Now. It has no reference to the past or the future.

In this experience of entering into the infinite, if there is no point, or place, no time or object, then there is no “self.” There is no “me” looking at all these objects. There is no relationship between “me” and the rest of the world. The “me” is gone (and there is simply “I AM”). There is no “looker” or anything to think about. Therefore you have no name. Jesus says to deny our self but we do not know what that means.

Do not try to withdraw into yourself, for to put it simply, I do not want you to be anywhere, no, not outside, above, behind, or beside yourself.

But to this you say: “Where shall I be? By your reck-

oning I am to be nowhere!” Exactly. In fact, you have expressed it rather well, for I would indeed have you be nowhere. Why? Because nowhere, physically is everywhere spiritually. Understand this clearly: your spiritual work is not located in any particular place. But when your mind consciously focuses on anything, you are there in that place spiritually, as certainly as your body is located in a definite place right now. Your senses and faculties will be frustrated for lack of something to dwell on and they will chide you for doing nothing. But never mind. Go on with this nothing, moved only by your love for God. Never give up but steadfastly persevere in this nothingness, consciously longing that you may always choose to possess God through love, whom no one can possess through knowledge, wrestling with this blind nothingness, then to be like some great lord traveling everywhere and enjoying the world as if he owned it.

(The Cloud of Unknowing, chapter 68.)

WHOM DO WE FOLLOW?

“If you want to become my follower, you must deny your self, take up your cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

Who is the “me” that Jesus says we are to follow? The condition for enlightenment is non-attachment to the ego self, a surrender of the ego self that we have so laboriously built up. This non-attachment will certainly lead to a whole new experience of our selves.

When Jesus says you must deny yourself and invites us to follow him into his self-experience, he is leading us into a whole new self-reality, self-identity. The real meaning of “deny yourself” is to urge us to that experience of reality in which there is literally no self,

no other, and where we have no name. No self, no name. When Jesus invites us to “follow me,” he is not asking anyone to become a male Jew of the first century (as an exclusive self). Rather, he is saying that when we follow his “me” in “follow me,” we are invited to actualize our True Self.

We must clearly understand what Jesus is calling us to when he says, “Follow me.” Is he merely inviting us into a great social organization called the Church, in which we find the emotional support of many kind people, the guidance of clear doctrine, the strength of moral teaching and the inspiration of beautiful liturgies? It is true that these make up what we call a religion, but all these elements, as helpful as they are, are secondary. In them we do not have the core of the call Jesus offers to each of us and to every human being. Simply put, he invites us to join him in his experience of Reality, his enlightenment.

The actual being of each one of us is far more than we think it is, and our being includes a more perfect power of perception than the one we ordinarily use. Many elements make up our self-identification, and the powers of perception we use to determine this identity are our senses, our memory and above all, our intellect. The intellect distinguishes, puts things into box-like categories which exclude all other categories. We feel we fit into a particular box based on family, race, society, etc. The self-identity of Jesus Christ as the enlightened one is outside all boxes and is far more than we have ever thought ourselves to be. When Jesus says “follow me” we are to follow him into his experience of reality, to share in his (all-inclusive) self-identity and to do this we need to employ a totally different mode of perception than that which gives us our ordinary self-knowledge.

After Jesus’ baptism experience—an enlightenment and

empowerment experience—he was in an immensely advanced state of awareness in which he experienced himself and all creation differently than we usually do (with our ordinary mind). As physical matter evolves to higher and higher forms, the awareness that goes with all existence also advances. Nowadays some people say that we humans are about to experience a quantum leap in consciousness into a new age. Jesus and all the great masters were pioneers of a New World. The advanced consciousness of Jesus is a model of evolution and is saying to you and to me that it's time to move on.

“Ever since the words ‘Follow me’ were first spoken to Matthew, they have echoed down through the centuries to this day, releasing the divine power within.” —Hando

PART II

THE FLOW OF LOVE

INTO THE LIGHT

“Beloved, I am writing no new commandment to you but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word you have heard. And yet I do write a new commandment to you, which holds true of him (Jesus) and among you, for the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.” (John 2:7–8)

This commandment invites us to follow the imperative that is at the heart of humanity, at the heart of each one of us. This is not a law enacted outside us. Jesus is simply telling us to follow this fundamental drive from within. If it were a command only from the outside it would take away our freedom. If this commandment arises from within, then why does Jesus call it new?

Snow covers earth and sky,
Everything is new.
My body is concealed inside a silver world
Suddenly I enter a treasury of light
A place forever free of any trace of dust.

—Te-Ch’ing

The light is the truth about what we humans are. What is new is that everyone is called to enter into this light. Jesus represents the next great advance in the evolution of human consciousness. The Old Testament was a great advance for its time, but Jesus, by his own enlightenment, is calling all to move to a new way of experiencing reality. This light was present in old times, but it was not thought of as being general and available to all. Now we are all invited to a new age of light and love. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 19:19) The self referred to here is the true and uni-

versal Self. Expression of this love is an expression of the light that we are.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit like a dove descending on him. And a voice came from Heaven and said "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Here he receives the fullness of divine energy. In the scriptures the dove is a symbol not of peace, but of love. Since to love is to discover the oneness of all things and fully live it, for Jesus this was an experience of profound oneness with all creation.

A Christian baptism is to be plunged into the flow of the Source and the form in movement. The movement is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son. I take this to mean that there is movement from the Source into form; then movement from the form back to the Source. That is the nature of all reality. There is only the flow.

Christians seem to believe that at their baptism they receive eternal life for the first time and become children of God. I have problems with that way of thinking. When Zen teachers talk to Christians they sometimes describe *kenshō* (an enlightenment experience) as a baptism because in enlightenment a person's consciousness is plunged into awareness of the true self that has always been within. It is just as it was at the baptism of Jesus. He was told, "You are my beloved Son." He was not newly made into the Son of the Father. His true self was revealed to his awareness. So it is with any Christian baptism, I'd say. It is a revelation of what you already are. The newness is in the awareness and in the integrating of one's

whole life according to this self-realization. For Jesus this was the *daigo tettei*, the great enlightenment that Zen talks about—the great (*dai*) definitive (*tettei*) enlightenment (*go*). This experience led to the total transformation of his life. This transformation was a process of integration.

After Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, he spent forty days in the desert in integration. And as was described, temptations are a part of this process. He stayed in the desert until every thought he had was born of God, every word he spoke, every emotion he had, every step he took—all his actions—were born of God. That is integration or “perfection” as we used to call it. Each element in his human composite matured as a perfect manifestation of the light and love of his inner core. His every thought and sensation, his every emotion and act of will was born of God. He is now experiencing the “reign of God.” From this time on, each step he takes, each word he speaks, each gesture he makes is born of God. Wholly in the flow, he is one with the wild beasts and the angels. Filled with light and power he now goes forth as the “Light of the world,” manifesting light and power. Simply put, he himself is the Good News.

“I am the light of the world,” says the Lord within. Are you willing to see the light? To follow the light means to die to all security except the light.

FAITH, FLOW AND THE REIGN OF GOD

“And indeed, your Heavenly Father knows that you need all of these things. But strive first for the reign of God and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

The basic idea is simple: Do not think about winning; if you do,

you lose. When you think about winning, you are not free. That is karmic action, action (action with desire), and you will not be able to produce pure action. You are not in the divine flow. When you are not thinking of yourself, you are doing *wu wei* (ego-less action or no effort). If you are doing something with the desire to win, you are doing *yu wei* (action with effort, not moving with the flow).

What do we act for? Often we act in order to have others think well of us. We do not like to be embarrassed. We do not like to make a mistake. We like to be thought well of. Faith means that we intuit that there is an abundant providence at work and we allow ourselves to surrender to and go into that flow. This is *wu wei*. It has no goals. It simply gives. This flow is the self-giving nature of God.

Jesus says, “Strive for the reign of God.” How does God reign? How do we enter into the reign of God? If we do, then all our needs will be taken care of. How do we enter this reign of God? God is inside us and within all creation. There is a movement that we call the Holy Spirit or the reign of God, the active providence, the active governance of God that is taking place within everything. We surrender and get into that flow and that is entering into the reign of God. It is not something from the outside. As it says in Acts 17:28, “In Him we live and move and have our being.”

When you are really inside yourself, then you’re an “inside-out” person. You are free. When you are really inside yourself, what is that self that you find? It is the very self of God. As Catherine of Sienna said, “God is my ‘me’.” And Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” When we get into that oneness we are in the reign of God. If you want to know what God’s will is for you, go in and find out what you really want to do, go in and in. The will of God is not to be known from the outside-in, but from the inside-out. You will

still be acting, and you will be the same in a very real sense, but you will be acting from inside the divine self. Your little personhood is inside the divine personhood. Our little being is inside the divine being. In God's life—in God's (creative) movement—we move. In God's being we “be.” That is the reign of God.

INSIDE-OUT LOVE

“In meditation we surrender, let go, let down the barriers so that the inner eye of love may be opened.”

—Hando

When something takes over our mind such as when we are “in love,” we become bound in a kind of captivity. We lose our freedom. The ideal is complete freedom in the midst of deep love and affection. When you are truly free you are an inside-out person. You can be said to be an outside-in person when we are made happy or sad merely by the way the one we love smiles or frowns at us; then we are governed by someone outside us and we are not free. Although the affection we feel is natural and good, it must also be free and detached. This freedom can only be activated when we go deep into that place where we are all one and unbound, in Christ Consciousness. Only the human love that is nothing but divine love in manifestation is truly free. This may seem heartless to some, but it is attachment itself that makes us heartless. It robs us of our true heart, which is always free and unattached.

When you react, you are pitting your ego against another. Reaction is to return the same action as the one done to me. This is slavery. Love does not react.

DIVINE LOVE AS SELF-GIVING

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

The key to understanding this text, in fact the key to the whole Gospel, is found in the word “my.” The most important word in all our scriptures is Jesus’ personal pronoun I, me, my, mine. These little words do not primarily refer to Jesus of Nazareth as separate and distinct from every other human being. Through this pronoun Jesus is not identifying his all-exclusive, individual self. Rather, he is indicating his all-inclusive Self. This is the one archetypal Self that is present in every person, without exception. His disciples discovered this universal Self shining out perfectly in Jesus. This means that when they met him they were meeting their own self.

How does God act? The action of God is to give—to give life, to give being. That is what we mean by “Creator.” God never reacts, but simply acts, simply gives. There are no conditions to God’s actions. If there were any conditions to God’s actions, he would be a servant to those conditions and would be dependent on them. There cannot be any conditions to God’s giving, otherwise God would be dependent. Let us think of when we act from our self without being dependent upon a result. When we act from our self in this way, what do we give? We give our self. We are independent. We simply act.

What God is, God shares. God is life, God is being, so all God’s actions are life-giving and self-giving, are giving of the divine self. Now what do we call that kind of action? We call it love. That is what love is. Love is to give your self. Love is a many-faceted

thing and one of the ways of talking about love is that love is giving. Love is self-giving. What did Jesus say? “If you have love for one another, by this shall all people know that you are my disciples.”

Willingness to receive is all there is. What we bring to this process is the willingness to receive. If you are willing to receive the movement of the spirit, if you are willing to let this process take over your life, it is absolutely going to change your life. It will change the life you have been living. It will destroy your security, destroy your little self-rule. It’s going to destroy your ego. Because of this, there are not many people who are willing to receive, to give up, to give in, to open up (to this love) and surrender our resistance.

“Like the bird that leaves the security of branch and tree and rises to be carried on the wind in the sky, so we leave all things to go with the flow of the Spirit.”

—Hando

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Compassion is a manifestation of unconditional love. It is hard for us to really envision such love, even to accept it, let alone practice it. And yet this is what every Christian and every human being is called to. This is the way the evolution of the human spirit is leading—to love with no conditions. Most of our love is reactive. If a person is good to us, we like the person, and if they do very much good, we love them. If people do us harm we hate them. That is reactive. But true love does not react. Jesus says there is a different level of seeing things, of seeing people. “Re-act” means you do again, you return the act that was done to you. Somebody is good to me, I do good to them. Somebody does me harm, I want to have revenge.

The reason that love is not reactive is because it is always present from the moment we meet a person because they are human. You are already one with every human. Whatever the person does, it does not change this actual, fundamental oneness.

If someone you love does something unkind, you will feel sorry, more sorry for the person than for yourself. Once we actually see the oneness of all people and all things, then we actually are “in love” with everything and everybody, no matter what the person or thing does. Jesus never said, “Do this and I will love you. Stop doing that and then I will love you.” Actions will change the appearance of love into sadness, joy, happiness or unhappiness, but the basis of love is unconditional. Jesus helps or heals a person, shows them that love and compassion, and then says, “Go now and sin no more.” (John 8:11) The love is independent of the sin. In fact, if anything, sin attracts Jesus. He came to call sinners. This is a different type of relationship than what we ordinarily understand and experience.

On the cross Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) Here we see unconditional love turn into unconditional forgiveness. Sometimes the church errs in this matter by putting conditions on forgiveness. Forgiveness must come first, and then it may be necessary to do something to right the wrongs.

More is in us than we dream of. We are unique individuals but at the same time we are the embodiment of the human archetype, the “Son of Man.” We are Christ. All our lives we are nothing but divine energy, the Trinity individualized, the Spirit, the flow. At the root of each human being is a radiant being, a revolutionary dynamo, reaching for resurrection. Each time we see a person we see the whole potential of the spirit, individualized, no matter what condition the person is in.

THE FLOW OF FREEDOM

“Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17)

When each one of us as an individual is governed by what others think or say or do, we are still in a kind of servitude. Ask yourself, “What are my chains and how heavy are they?”

We find this explanation of the flow in the 25th chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching* by Lao Tzu:

Human energy flow is governed by that of the earth.
Earth energy flow is governed by that of the universe.
The universe energy flow is governed by that of the flow.
The flow (*Tao*) is governed by its own self.

Pure freedom is found in the last line. When all creation shares in the pure flow (*Tao*), then the whole cosmos is free. We humans are the problem. We can get out of the flow. The only being that is truly free is the one who is not ruled by a force outside of itself. A liberated person is self-actualized. When A Zen master examines a student, the one great characteristic looked for is spontaneity.

Anyone who comes to directly experience reality just as it is has no inhibitions from the outside or inside. The ego-self of individual manifestation takes its place within the one true Self and shares in the one great, non-reactive action (*wu wei* in Chinese). The flow, the Tao, is this one source-in-action.

This creative flow is unconditional. It asks for nothing. It only gives of its own being, its life. All conditions destroy this freedom. Attachments to success, reward, avoidance of punishment—attachment to anything—creates captivity. An independent person is an inside-out, not an outside-in person.

In John 8:31 Jesus outlines the independence (salvation) process perfectly: “If you remain in my words, you will truly be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” To paraphrase this we may say “If you live my transmission of enlightenment, you will experience Reality as it is and Reality—the Divine Flow—will draw you into freedom.”

THE BODHISATTVA CHRIST

In reality, no man is a stranger to him because he looks on each one as a brother. And none is his enemy. All are his friends. Even those who hurt or offend him in everyday life are as dear to him as his best friends and all the good he desires for his best friend he desires for them. . . the warmth of his love reaches out to them all—friend, enemy, stranger, and kin alike. If there is any partiality at all, it is more likely to be toward his enemy than toward his friend. (*The Cloud of Unknowing*. See Johnston, p. 82.)

An earthly bodhisattva is one who is here on this earth dedicated to living a life of love and compassion out of his or her wisdom, and along with everyone else is returning to the Source with great struggle. Christ was such a bodhisattva. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus had to become like his fellow humans in every way in order to expiate the sins of the people. Since he himself was tested through his suffering, he was able to help those who were also suffering. He has traveled the path and through entrustment we can follow the same path.

A characteristic of the bodhisattva is the use of “skillful means.” This term means that she or he takes up any possible means to be of help to people, to induce people to enlightenment and ultimately

assist in liberation for all. A bodhisattva is one who uses any and all skillful means to be of service and the primary means that an earthly bodhisattva uses is his or her own life. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus demonstrate this.

There is a famous poem from the Indian Buddhist tradition of the ninth century which expresses the love an earthly bodhisattva has for all humanity:

Thus by the virtue collected
Through all that I have done,
May the pain of every living creature
Be completely cleared away!

May I be the doctor and the medicine,
And may I be the nurse
For all sick beings in the world
Until everyone is healed.

May a rain of food and drink descend
To clear away the pain of thirst and hunger.
And during the eon of famine,
May I change myself into food and drink!

May I become an inexhaustible treasure
For those who are poor and destitute;
May I turn into all the things they need
And may these be placed close beside them!

Without any sense of loss,
I shall give up my body and enjoyments,
As well as my virtues of past, present and future,
For the sake of benefiting all!

By giving up all, sorrow is transcended
And my mind will realize the sorrowless state.
It is best that I now give up everything to all beings
In the same way as I shall at death!

Having given this body up
For the pleasure of all living beings
By killing, abusing, and beating it,
May they always do as they please!

When anyone encounters me,
May it not be meaningless for him!
Whether those who encounter me
Conceive a faithful or an angry thought,
May that always become the source
for fulfilling all their wishes.

May all who say bad things to me
Or cause me any other harm,
And those who mock and insult me
Have the fortune to awaken fully.

May I be the savior for those without one,
The guide for all travelers along the way,
May I be a bridge, a boat and a ship
For all who wish to cross the water!

Just like space
And the great elements such as earth,
May I always support the life
Of all the countless creatures.

And until they pass away from pain,
May I also be the source of life
For the realms of varied beings
That reach unto the ends of space.

Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, quoted
in *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, p. 74.

We need an unlimited display, or offering of love to shake us
out of our ego-centric ways. You cannot have true love if you are

ego-centric. The only true love is that which is Source-centric, not ego-centric. That is the reign of God and the reign of love. Only that is the ultimate and unconquerable love. We must go to the source of our union, the source of our oneness because love is to discover and accept our oneness. Jesus as a true bodhisattva, by living a life of love and going through his terrible suffering and death, shows us the way to die and to enter into this love. He is giving us what we need for our own salvation.

We see by the way Jesus died the way we also have to die—by giving up everything. He lost everything. In this detachment, in making oneself totally free, we can go into the unlimited infinite Source and find that Source as the essence of our being. Jesus manifests through his suffering and death what is happening within his own heart and what must happen in our own hearts. To die physically is useless and not at all liberating unless we die to our own will, to our mind. Unless we have that total detachment we do not really die when we die physically. If there is no Great Death of the small, limited ego there can be no Great Resurrection.

Jesus' physical dying represents his internal detachment which we must go through ourselves. He was stripped of his garments and had no possessions left. We must do the same. He had no reputation or good name left and was treated as nothing. That is what we must become willing to experience ourselves. He lost his place in society and his identification as a teacher as all of his disciples fled. He showed that he had given up his family identity by telling Mary that John was her son; Jesus was no longer her son. There were no qualifications left. Finally there is his relationship with God which was lost. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He teaches us, through his own death, how to face the absolute void and surrender. We all have to do that. We have to face the void and

simply surrender.

At Gethsemane he accepts the loss of everything and the characteristic of his death becomes apparent to him. He accepts all the terrible aspects of humanity, transforming it all into love. He experiences his communion with all humanity, accepting the burden of unity with the terrible suffering of humanity and takes it all to his heart. This then becomes his own suffering. It is all an act of love. There is nothing *but* love which brings Christ to this suffering and loss. He loses everything and goes into the empty tomb that, as the early Church Fathers liked to say, becomes the womb out of which new life is born, the womb of the eternal Mother, the Source out of which all life arises.

He is still Jesus the individual, but the pure bodhisattva archetype of compassion, wisdom and power that are universal to all creation is now a perfect flow within him. The flow of the spirit is pure and at ease. The Chinese understood that when they talked about *wu wei* which means there is no ego action interfering with the pure flow. That is resurrection. What does that mean? There is perfect freedom with no restraint of any kind. In the infinite Source manifesting freely there is no obstacle to the flow of compassion, wisdom and power. This is the Bodhisattva Christ.

BODY ENERGY FLOW

“Where attention goes, energy flows and life grows.”

—Hando

In a state of relaxation, energy can move more freely within you, especially in the three great centers of the belly, the heart and the brow. Enlightenment is an energy flow that goes on beneath our

ordinary awareness. It is ultimately the movement of the Holy Spirit and our bodies also become enlightened. The patterns we have in our bodies can be great obstacles to full awareness. Over the years our muscles, nerves, organs and even bone structures take in many tensions, fears and constrictions from within our own psyches. These psychological patterns get locked into the body as stubborn physiological patterns. These blocks are resistant to the free flow of energy and the spontaneous movement of the divine spirit.

As energy moves throughout the body, it runs into places of resistance in the muscles and nerve complexes. Since these places in the body can be material solidifications of psychological patterns, the energy flow activates and comes up against powerful emotional habits. These patterns themselves arise out of a general mind-set which governs the whole human complex. This mind-set, this overarching personal structure, is centered around what we call “the ego.”

The ego arises when we perceive ourselves as unique, separate individuals. At present the ego way of identifying ourselves is so strong that it has become a tyrant that will allow no rivals. A full-blown ego tends to assume center stage in our psyche as a ruler. Everything is seen and processed in reference to “me.” And this “me” is the exclusive, separate, unique individual. The result is ego-centrism. We become self-centered in the narrowest meaning of “self.” This is self-love at its worst and it is not in tune with our true reality.

This ego is always afraid of anyone who threatens to supercede its reign over our lives. It defends its territory by casting doubt on the reality of the higher Self. It rejects as untrue any other way of living than its own precious self-centered way. The narrow ego way of reacting to being displaced by a higher, more inclusive,

integrated self is through fear, anger, anxiety, doubt and rejection. When we become defensive, these aggressive reaction patterns of the ego manifest directly in our bodies.

Consciousness arises only as and when there is movement. Full consciousness can come only when there is full movement of energy. Each one of our human powers must be holistically integrated into the one great flow of the spirit. All of our psychological and physical blocks must melt away and allow the spontaneous action of a “child of God.” It is a process of integration even into the cells of your body. Our whole value system and our way of seeing things may make us feel that we are separate from many people and from the world, but later in the process you will be able to experience a full integration with everyone and everything. In Zen there is the saying, “*Daigo kizoku*”—in Great Enlightenment there is a return to the world. Only after full enlightenment and complete integration will we really feel at home in this world.

REPENTENCE AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Lakes, mountains
Brooks, flowers, trees
Never sin.

—Shin Min

Nature is impeccable. A morning glory never sins. Even if a seed falls into a crack in the blacktop of a parking lot, the flower doesn't complain. It simply manifests its being in its given circumstances. Nor does it envy the flower two meters away that is growing in fertile ground. A flower's life is one of entrustment, total surrender to the creative flow of the Source. Isn't it remarkable that we can read

the word “flower” as “flow-er”? This pattern of living purely in the Flow of the Source is what we call Logos. Jesus of Nazareth as the embodiment of logos says, “I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father has instructed me.” (John 8:28) Nature lives this Christ pattern.

Forgiveness means freedom to be, to become the flow of the spirit. That is what forgiveness from sin means in the New Testament. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News.” (Mark 1:15) In the phrase “the time is fulfilled,” the English word “time” refers to the Greek word *kairos*. This word refers not to temporal time which the Greeks called *chronos*, but to a period when some preordained, special event is about to happen. Here the event is the reign of God and Jesus is inviting everyone to share in his experience.

This invitation to enter the reign of God is concealed by the word “repent” which is the inadequate translation of the Greek word *metanoieite*. Repent means to feel sorry, to regret, which comes from the Latin word *penitemini*. This is the word used for *metanoieite* when the Bible was translated from the Greek by Saint Jerome. *Meta* means a change over, and the verb *noeo* means to perceive, to apprehend. So *metanoieō* has to do with a change of perception, a moving into a whole new way of seeing reality. Within its context this one word also calls all the followers of Jesus to a contemplative way of life. To become contemplative can be understood as engaging in the practice of meditation which is fundamental in our spiritual training.

This word “repentance” does not simply mean to be sorry, but to change your whole way of seeing reality. However, the ordinary understanding of repentance is to be sorry. Sin is regarded as an offence against God, as though God might forgive and say “Okay, I

am no longer offended.” Is this the core of the message of Christ? I believe it is not.

What do we mean by forgiveness of sin? We must re-translate this as it is not adequate. Over the years our understanding has deviated from the real meaning of those words and we have lost the message. Therefore, in Christianity is it meant that when we received the first preaching of the Word, the Good News, it was simply to be sorry, to admit our offence against God and receive forgiveness for the guilt? It is much more than this, but the words do not tell us this. We only understand that we are to be sorry and be reconciled with God.

We must take up the idea of forgiveness in order to understand repentance. It has been said that sin is, before all else, an offense against God, a rupture of communion with Him. In other words, it is by sin that we separate ourselves from God and by sin God cannot help but be offended. Sin is regarded as a disobedience to the commands of God, that it makes God angry and God punishes us for this offense. An offense is to feel hurt, angry, and it is justice to punish us for this offense. This is not the New Testament teaching and it is not what Jesus came to teach. Simply put, it is low-level awareness and we must move on from there.

When we think of justice, there comes the idea that there are scales that must be balanced—the punishment equals the crime. Is this what Jesus meant? Not at all. He says, “You have heard an eye for an eye” (Matthew 5:38) as in the scale of Justice. But then he says “Love your enemies.” (v. 44). Love does not know that kind of justice so the whole idea of sin should not be taken in that legalistic way. The Hebrew mind was very legalistic and they had covenants and laws regarding sin. Unfaithfulness to the law, a breach of the law, created the need for punishment. An eye for an eye, accord-

ing to this legalistic system of justice, demanded penance, making amends, reparation—we mend what we’ve done.

All of this must be looked at as simply being off the path and the primary thing that must be done is to get back on the path, get back in the flow. God does not demand payment and you do not need a punishment. We have come to understand through this legalistic way of thinking that if we repent God will accept us as no longer being guilty of our offenses and we are back in the state of grace. The whole issue of offense against God is dualistic thinking, seeing God as the Great Other. We feel that we have done something against God. The spiritual path of Christianity is much more than this. We even regard the sacrament of communion as something that frees us from the power of sin—God has been offended and we reconcile ourselves.

Forgiveness means “to free.” What are we becoming free from? We are becoming free from sin which is conceived of as having a power over us. The New Testament idea personifies sin. We bring God down to the human level, anthropomorphism, and we bring sin up to the human level which is called personification. The original “fall” gave a personification of sorts through the serpent. Sin is conceived as a living power and we are slaves to this sin. With forgiveness we are simply free from a power that takes us away from the truth. There is a power that moves us away from our true path and that is “sin.” Forgiveness of sin means freedom from that power.

When we say the words “forgiveness of sin” we must ask ourselves, “What does that mean to me? Does it now express what the New Testament writers said? Does what it means to us today mean what they said then?” To understand this, we must look at the type of language, the symbolism, the underlying mindset of the Hebrews

of Jesus' time and the early Christians.

The Hebrew word for sin means primarily to make an error, to be wayward. The element of offense against God is not in that word. The idea of offense is only there when we treat God as a human form. We anthropomorphize God and give God human emotions and qualities such as kindness and anger. We say that God hears, thinks, desires, loves, hates, commands, moves. We continue to use language that we easily understand but which is a very misleading means of using words. We feel that God is just the "Big Boss" upstairs, a "Big Superman." We are not careful enough in the use of these words. We now speak of God as a divine presence, but there is no word for that in Hebrew. We translate "the face of God" to the "presence of God." Presence is a more abstract way of speaking of God and not as anthropomorphic.

The basic idea of sin in the Judeo-Christian tradition is that it is an aberration, waywardness, being off the mark—a very simple idea. The result is that if we go against the truth, we will feel pain; we will feel dis-ease and will have diverted our energy off our true path. That suffering is what is called "dukkha" in the Buddhist tradition. We feel a need for the truth, for true life, and it is this aberration, this feeling of need that we call suffering. Along with this we may also feel the suffering of remorse and regret.

Great problems arise when we take the anthropomorphisms of the Bible not as figurative language but as literal and factual. The problem then becomes thinking of God as the Great Other and we sink into profound dualism; this is the great problem of Christianity. In past times they knew that God was beyond all human traits but they used anthropomorphic language. The problem then became that we began to think we have a relationship with God as "the Other."

Psychologically we may feel a separation from God, but God is not an “other.” Saint Augustine says, “God is more intimate to you than you are to yourself,” and Meister Eckhart says, “Between God and me there is no between.” The relational idea must be revised and we must ask ourselves if there can really be an offense against God. We are never separated from the rest of humanity and God, but everything we do affects the universal human energy form field and this is where the offense is, how the separation may be felt. Every human being is within and affected by that form field and that form field is operative in their lives, so everything we do is affecting everybody. Thus if I sin and get off the path I contribute to the whole form field of humanity by moving away from reality, from truth.

THE FLOW OF GRACE

Does God then ever change? Stop giving? Cannot. The only thing that can stop the movement of this giving of divine love is our unwillingness to go along with the process. We can take ourselves out of the process and that is what we call sin. It is being off the mark, off the path. There is a path of divine life—giving, always giving greater and greater life—but we take ourselves outside the path of that divine giving. So what do we do about sin? All we have to do is get back on the path. God does not get angry or put down conditions to the giving of life. God cannot do that, for he is faithful to his own reality which is Self-giving. You do not have to do anything but get back on the path, get back into this stream of life, the self-giving of God’s love. God’s giving, God’s love is unconditional. No conditions. This is what is meant by grace. Grace simply means favor and we cannot fall out of God’s favor. We can only

take ourselves out of the stream by putting obstacles in the way of this life-giving love, but that does not change God, as that love is unconditional.

Take for example the prodigal son. Isn't it revealing that we took the wonderful parable of unconditional love and called it the "prodigal son"? That is not the emphasis, the accent—the prodigality of the son. What Jesus is teaching here is the Father's unconditional love, of the Father's giving, of grace. The son certainly did go off the path and was outside the father's influence. He took the talents that the father had given him and wasted them. But when the son appears in the distance the father rushes towards him and embraces him, showing he is in the family. He did not chastise the son, telling him, "You have gone off the path, you have offended me, you have to do this and that and then you can come back into the family." There is no need to earn the father's love, even if we have gone off the path. It is love without conditions.

GRACE OR PAYMENT—WE CAN'T HAVE BOTH

We hear in the language used in the New Testament that we are "redeemed" by the blood of Christ. Now what is this sacrifice of appeasement? Is this the message of the New Covenant? Absolutely not. We say that we are saved by grace and that means that God gives love and grace and self freely and unconditionally. But then we say that Jesus put down conditions and that God would save us through a ransom or through Jesus' death which paid a price. Making Jesus into a redeemer in that sense goes against the teaching of grace. It is a total contradiction and you cannot have both. If you pay a price for something, you are not getting a gift, but getting a payment. This is not grace. We are children of God; we are ruled

not by the old law, but by the rule of the spirit and this is the key to all the rest. *Metanoia* means that we open ourselves up to the light of the spirit and we are totally transformed. We entrust ourselves to the flow of the spirit.

Well, what *did* Jesus do? What was it that happened on Calvary? What *did* he give? Jesus offered himself so that he could be taken to the highest level of divine manifestation and that action of offering oneself, of dying to everything and being taken to the Father as the highest level of divine manifestation. That movement to the Source he has imprinted in the human energy form field. That is why when we hear of this, we feel it as a yearning of our own heart and also want it for ourselves and when we allow this action to take over our lives, we are made holy. It is surrendering to this action of Jesus, of self-sacrifice that saves. Salvation is moving into pure freedom so that every action we do is born of God and not out of need or wish to attain a goal. This action is born out of pure love of God.

This is what the death of Jesus was about. It was not a sacrifice that pays a penalty or a price. It was a making holy by becoming detached from everything, by giving up everything so that he would be taken into the pure freedom of God. This pattern has been given to us so we may attain freedom in our own lives. When Jesus says "Follow me," we can understand it to mean that through following him into this experience we may also become sanctified and be taken into the pure freedom of God.

PART III

WALKING THE ZEN CHRISTIAN PATH

Caught by the call

Of the flowers and mountain, I forget

How steep the path is.

—Hando

A BETTER CHRISTIAN

“Tasukaremashita!” translates as “I was saved!” (Or helped! Or rescued!) This is what I’ve always said about my experience in Japan: “Tasukaremashita!” The Japanese consciousness in general and, in particular, my contact with Buddhism has totally changed my life, made me into a better, richer human, and revitalized my Christianity.

Direct and intimate contact with Buddhism didn’t actually begin for me until 1969. I had been going to the *zendo* (meditation hall) in Kamakura for about three months when I was granted *shoken* (*sho*–mutual, *ken*–seeing). In this simple ceremony, I met the Zen master Yamada Kōun Rōshi in a very formal way and was accepted as his disciple in all things pertaining to Zen. Actually, Yamada Rōshi was still called Sensei (Teacher) at that time. He was gradually taking over the direction of the Kamakura Zendo from its founder Yasutani Rōshi. As I remember, there were three of us who went into the Sensei’s room together for a simple ceremony and then were interviewed individually. The Sensei’s question to me was, “What is your *kokorozashi*?” (Your aspiration or intention in entering the Zen path.) I wasn’t very clear about this. My life still abounded in vagueness. In going to the *zendo*, I hadn’t followed my head at all. I’d obeyed a gut feeling, so I had no ready answer to the question. I finally blurted out something about *togo*, integration. Well, the Sensei didn’t quite understand what I meant and neither did I. For some reason, I went on to say that I was a Catholic Christian—that I intended to live and die as such, but that I really felt Zen was important for me. “Oh,” said Yamada Sensei. “Yes. Remember that there are two kinds of Zen. There’s Buddhist Zen with all its teachings, images, chants, etc. Then there’s just Zen, which goes

with any religion. You just do Zen and you will become a better Christian.”

Yamada Rōshi was a big man both physically and spiritually. His heart was broad and his insight true. With that *shoken*, I formally entered a path that, just as he said, was to transform my Christianity. Looking back now, I realize clearly that my problem, as a Christian, was that I was too much in my head. My spiritual path was intellectual rather than experiential.

A REVELATION

I was standing on the platform of the old wooden station of the Taura district of Yokosuka waiting for the familiar cream and blue Yokosuka Line train and reading a small book by the theologian Karl Rahner titled, *Nature and Grace*. Over 40 years later, as I check in this book, I find Rahner arguing against “the widespread view of grace” as “a supernature above man’s conscious, spiritual and moral life.” He says that it’s not surprising “when a man takes very little interest in this mysterious superstructure of his being; this grace is not present where he is present to himself in his *immediate self-awareness*.” Rather, he maintains that the movements of grace are a real part of one’s conscious existence; that these “existential facts” of his concrete (his “historical”) nature are not just accidents of his being beyond his consciousness, but make themselves apparent *in his experience of himself*. (All the italics in these quotations have been added by the author.)

Even now, after all these years, I can still remember the impact such words as these had on me on that station platform and after. To say that we can and should be conscious of grace in our daily lives opened up a whole new level of life to me. Rahner was speaking

about direct experience—“*immediate* self-awareness.” It seemed as if all my life I had been thinking about these things. Especially during my three years of philosophical and four years of theological training I had studied and learned all about grace. However, the realities dealt with in all those studies had remained just ideas. Above all, supernatural grace, essential as it was deemed, had always seemed far above and beyond any direct experience.

Some years after my reading of Rahner, when Thomas Merton spoke in Anchorage as he left the U.S. for the last time, he said very simply that the Church in the U.S. is too cerebral. Well, I was certainly a product of my time in this regard. For years and years I lived mainly in my head, in my intellect. My approach to life was to analyze, categorize, and define. None of these operations of the mind can bring one to immediate awareness, which is the only experience that transforms us.

FREEDOM FROM SIN IN MEDITATION

At Handokai our meditation practice has roots both in Zen and Christian meditation practice. It is an amalgam. Though basically Christian, the Zen roots are apparent in the externals of our sitting together. Buddhist insight has had a profound affect on me, to such an extent that I have literally not only become a better Christian and generally a better person, but my whole understanding of Christianity has been enlightened, profoundly enlightened, and I have a much better and deeper understanding of what Christianity is all about because of Buddhism.

“When you sit even once, the merit obliterates countless wrong doings. How can there be evil realms? The Pure Land is not far away.”
—Hakuin

One text we have often used for our Wednesday night talks is this famous poem written in rather ordinary Japanese by the great 17th century Zen master, Hakuin. In it he says that for the person who does one sitting, one session of true meditation, the accumulated immeasurable waywardness (sins) will all be annihilated.

What is he speaking about? The main thing is to remember what sin means to the Japanese Buddhist, or to any Buddhist. We must get out of our western idea of sin. We were taught when we were little children that sin is an offense against God; in a sense it makes God angry and we must do something to atone for that sin. That is not what sin means here. It does not mean sin in the western sense. It basically means “waywardness,” of being “off the mark.” When he says that all of our sins will be wiped away with one sitting he means that all our waywardness is simply gone, has perished (while sitting).

Where are our sins? Every action that we perform goes into our individual human energy form field, as into a memory bank. Every action that we have done, good or bad, has gone into and become a part of the individual energy field, our being, our “is-ing.” It also goes into the universal energy form field. Everything that we are doing now and have ever done in the past or will do in the future influences the whole energy field and influences the whole human race. Everything we do is there in that field. However, if we sit and really go into true meditation, we go into what we like to call the flow. There is one great movement that is our fundamental life movement, our life force into action. That movement and action come directly from our fundamental Divine Source. We are nothing but that movement manifested in that hour of sitting and when we forget all our waywardness, forget everything and just open and allow the attention of our heart to bring us into that one flow, at that

moment we are pure—we are impeccable.

When I was studying theology, we were taught that if a person *really* turns to God with all their heart, by that very act all their sins are forgiven. Legalistically, in regards to church doctrine, we should confess our sins, but they are already forgiven. It is interesting that Hakuin uses the word “Pure Land” in his poem—that the Pure Land, indeed, the Pure Land is not far away. You have already come into the state you are trying to get to. The Pure land is the Buddhist Heaven. It is called “pure” because there is no waywardness there. This Pure Land can also be understood as “the reign of God” and is not far away, but *here now*.

If we allow ourselves in meditation to really let everything go, and by just watching our breath, saying the Jesus prayer or by doing centering prayer—whatever our focus of attention is—by really doing it and forgetting everything else, we will be taken into the Pure Land, into the reign of God. We have already reached where we are trying to go, but the reason why we have to keep meditating is because we don’t stay, we slip back. This beautiful text of Hakuin tells us what a wonderful thing it is to sit in meditation. So, as we always say, “Let’s sit.”

ENTERING THE HEART THROUGH ZEN

“Our hearts are made for Thee, O God, and they are restless
until they rest in Thee.”

—St. Augustine

Zazen, the practice of meditation, is holistic. We quiet the body so that we may influence and quiet the mind in order to allow the heart to take its natural course to the Source. This is the “heart” St. Augustine speaks of in these famous lines. This heart is not the

physical organ or the seat of emotions. It is the power by which we can experience the Infinite.

Perhaps no word in Buddhist writings is more important than “*shin*” (*hsin* in Chinese). This Sino-Japanese ideogram is consistently translated into English as “mind.” I feel this to be a very serious mistake as for most westerners, mind has to do with our ordinary intellection, our thinking. The basic meaning of the ideogram “*shin*” is in a sense the physical heart, the emotional center, the whole of a person’s psychology, and finally, as the core or inner essence. All these meanings can be found in Buddhist texts, but the last is most common.

Although for many years *shin* was usually translated into English as “mind,” anyone who knows Chinese or Japanese knows that this is too restrictive a rendering. Lately many translate it as “heart/mind” or even as “psyche.” The point is that *shin* is an extremely big, all-encompassing word. Besides meaning the physical heart and the vague “heart of a person,” it also refers to all the interior faculties and activities of the human person such as intuiting, conceptualizing, reasoning, willing, imagining, and emoting of all kinds. English words such as “core,” “essence,” and even “soul” if you will, are much closer to the real meaning. It is the meaning of *shin* as the heart, the essence of pines and cedars that the nun Ryō-Nen asks us to listen to with our *shin* in her famous poem:

Sixty-six times have these eyes beheld the changing scenes
of autumn.

I have said enough about moonlight. Ask me no more.

Only listen to the voice of pines and cedars,
when no wind stirs.

THE ZEN TRADITION

There are basically two schools in Zen regarding enlightenment, the sudden and the gradual enlightenment schools. In general, Sōtō Zen favors the gradual, Rinzai the sudden. The Sambo Kyodan School, which has roots in both Sōtō and Rinzai practices, seems to favor the sudden, but yet acknowledges the gradual. Sudden enlightenment is usually preceded by a build-up of tension and happens in very perceptible experiences that clearly lift a person up to new levels of awareness. The practice of using a *kōan*, assigned by the master or naturally arisen, takes over the mind and the person is grasped by intense searching. Finally, there is a strong, even tremendous breakthrough, followed by an often extended period of integration of the light into the person's psychology and behavioral patterns. [Editor's note:] Chinul, the Korean Zen Master of the 12th century, says in regards to a seeker who experiences sudden awakening and the process of gradual cultivation that follows:

...He looks for the Buddha outside his mind. While he is thus wandering aimlessly, the entrance to the road might by chance be pointed out by a wise advisor. If in one thought he then follows back the light of his mind to its source and sees his own original nature, he will discover that the ground of his nature is innately free of defilement, and that he himself is originally endowed with the non-outflow wisdom nature which is not a hair's breadth different from that of all the Buddhas. Hence it is called sudden awakening.

Next let us consider gradual cultivation. Although he has awakened to the fact that his original nature is no different from that of the Buddhas, the beginningless habit-energies are extremely difficult to remove suddenly and so he must continue to cultivate while relying on this awaken-

ing. Through this gradual permeation, his endeavors reach completion. He constantly nurtures the embryo, and after a long time he becomes a saint. Hence it is called ‘gradual cultivation’.” (*Buddhist Scriptures*, edited by Donald Lopez.)

On the gradual path to enlightenment there are not as many fireworks and the steps are not as large and intense; there is just a steady growth, in small increments, of insight and integration. I often speak of the gradual path as that of the commonplace *kenshō* (enlightenment experience). There are little insights, shifts of consciousness that take place in our lives all the time. Sometimes we hardly perceive them, but they are real growth. A very great deal of progress goes on within us at a level we are not aware of at all. I often ask students to not sell themselves short. They are all enlightened to some degree, and that the phenomenon of commonplace *kenshō* is actually quite common. The important thing is to keep faithful to one’s practice.

Zen is totally consistent in strictly down-grading the ordinary intellect. Ideas and concepts are suppressed (i.e. given no attention) because they are not “open” and are always at least one step removed from direct experience. They categorize, put things into boxes, whereas what we are seeking has no boundaries and can never be boxed in. Although Zen teachers do, of course, use the ordinary intellect and ordinary language in communicating experience and in practical instruction, nevertheless, they are entirely sincere when they describe in the four famous phrases one hears again and again, what Zen is:

A special transmission outside teaching	(<i>kyo-ge-betsu-den</i>)
Not dependent on writings	(<i>fu-ryu-mon-ji</i>)
Direct attention to a person's inner essence	(<i>jiki-shi-nin-shin</i>)
Seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha	(<i>ken-shō-jo-butsu</i>)

EMPTY BEING, WONDROUS BEING!

Zen meditation begins with what is called a “Great Faith Root”—“*Daishinkon*” in Japanese. (*dai*—big, *shin*—faith, entrustment, *kon*—root.)

What do we have faith in? We accept the reality of something and we entrust ourselves to it. In Zen, we accept the reality of the Buddha-nature (Christ-nature in Christianity), and in the idea that everything is the Buddha-nature. That is basic faith and you entrust yourself to this reality to reveal itself. Not only are you the Buddha-nature but you can be conscious of and experience yourself as such. You are entrusting yourself to your true self.

In Japanese this Buddha-nature is called “*kū*.” In Sanskrit it is called “*śūnyatā*.” Both of these words in a sense mean “emptiness.” However *kū* is not mere emptiness. It is that which is living, dynamic, devoid of mass, unfixed, beyond individuality or personality and the matrix of all phenomena. All phenomena arises out of this emptiness which is only empty from the standpoint of our fixation with categories. It is empty of all categories. It does not mean “nothing” in the sense of annihilation as in “no thing.” It means “nothing” in the sense of having no identifiable, concrete category, and all phenomena arise out of this emptiness. The meaning of *kū* as emptiness simply negates any identifiable being or category. “*Shin kū nyō yū*” is a beautiful Zen phrase meaning “true emptiness is

wondrous being, indescribable being.” It is this experience of the formless that is bliss, is perfect oneness. This is ultimate reality, basic teaching. This formless is here and it can be experienced. I can experience it. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “I must go to the Father.” The Father is this emptiness as formless Source.

How do we experience our own formless nature? It is only by insight. It is not done by talking about it. You will not become enlightened in any way but through intuition, by direct perception. The opposite of this is conceptual thinking. It is like looking at a map. You will not have the experience of the place by looking at the map. It is only when you actually go to the city that you experience it. That is direct perception. Concepts, images, memories—all those things—are not direct perception and that will never satisfy our hunger for the discovery of our true nature which is only experienced through direct knowledge.

My body is like a phantom, like bubbles on a stream. My mind, looking into itself, is as formless as empty-space, yet somewhere within sounds are perceived. Who is hearing? Should you question yourself in this wise with profound absorption, never slackening the intensity of your effort, your rational mind eventually will exhaust itself and only questioning at the deepest level will remain. Finally you will lose awareness of your own body. Your long-held conceptions and notions will perish, after absolute questioning, in the way that every drop of water vanishes from a tub broken open at the bottom, and perfect enlightenment will follow like flowers suddenly blooming on withered trees.

With such realization you achieve true emancipation. But even now repeatedly cast off what has been realized, turning back to the subject that realizes, that is, to the root bottom, and resolutely go on. Your Self-nature will then grow

brighter and more transparent as your delusive feelings perish, like a gem gaining luster under repeated polishing, until at last it positively illumines the entire universe. Don't doubt this!

—Bassui, quoted in Kapleau, *The Pillars of Zen*, p. 171.

THE ORDINARY MIND

Why can't we come to this insight? What is in the way? All kinds of things get in the way of this basic, saving insight. This insight is salvation, but there are all kinds of obstacles and they differ with each one of us. The main problem for us human beings at this stage of consciousness evolution is our ordinary mind. We are in a mental, egoic state of development. It took thousands of years for the human race to come up to this level of intellectual perception and to come to a full consciousness of "self" as an individual and now we find when we get here that we have to drop it all. To get to the next stage we have to die to this stage.

What does this "ordinary mind" mean? What is this mental movement within us? It includes conceptual knowledge, reasoning through comparing, judging, memory, images and imagination. A concept is a mental picture (which is a great accomplishment) but concepts are different than direct experience. We perceive through concepts. You can have a wonderful concept of sugar but you cannot enjoy it. It is a mental abstraction. We are standing back from the object of our perception and are not in direct experience. Our sense perception is the closest thing to direct perception.

Secondly, you take those mental images and compare and analyze and do all kinds of mental gymnastics. The third thing is judging. To judge you must stand back and compare—this is good, this

is bad, this is right, this is wrong, this is pleasant, that is unpleasant. You stand outside the flow and are not in it. Judging is dualism, separation.

The next is memory. It is amazing how much time we can spend recalling things. Memory is not direct perception. It is not salvation and is not really living. We can only imagine things in the past and in the future. It takes us out of our direct experience of the here and now.

Why is it that this ordinary mind is such a problem? It is because it took such work to develop this way of conceptualizing, reasoning, judging and so forth that it has now taken over our psyche and we are governed by it, dominated by it. In as much as it does not allow us to go beyond it, it is a tyrant. We are slaves to the mind! It took so long to develop it and now we find we have a tyrant. However, there is no reason why we cannot go beyond that stage of development today. We can be pioneers of the new age in the very best sense of the term "new age." What can we do? How can we still the mind and allow the intuition of Being to be experienced? The answer is meditation. In fact, Zen means meditation.

DIRECT EXPERIENCE

All of these mental operations are dualistic and imply a separation from experiential reality. They are separating us from direct experience and we will never be satisfied with them. We think about some object, we imagine some object. When we have a subject thinking about some object we have a subject-object consciousness that is dualistic. It is not oneness and it is not holistic.

We long for oneness, for unity, but without destroying our individuality. How do we come to that? None of these operations of the

ordinary mind can give us direct experience. We must leave them aside if we are to enter into experiential insight. However, we can use them to gradually move us towards the experience of the Source, of our true nature. It may help us to sit and think, “Who am I?” and to use the mind, the imagination. One can get all kinds of answers with the ordinary mind, but you will ultimately not be fulfilled. That ordinary mind can bring you closer and closer to the experience of reality through refinement of this mind until finally it has to say “I give up,” and that giving up is death to the ordinary mind and to the ego structure that is created by that mind. Surrendering, dying, you go into the experience of emptiness, of the Source, to the “Father.” When you experience that emptiness as Source, everything comes back and reveals itself in truth.

The teaching of my first Zen teacher, the great Yasutani Rōshi regarding *kenshō* is that it is seeing directly into your true nature and realizing that you and the universe are basically one. You do not have an ultimate nature that is different or separate from mine. At the level of the formless we are one, but not a numerical oneness, as the void cannot be enumerated, cannot be divided.

“Once you have perceived this you will know down to your bowels the meaning of human existence and therefore know the peaceful existence that arises from such a revolutionary insight. The road to such knowledge is *zazen* (meditation).”

—Yasutani Rōshi

FOLLOWING THE BREATH, FOLLOWING THE HEART

“Each breath is a priceless work. Each time you let go of thoughts of past and future it is an erosion of your ego. It

can only be done one breath at a time.”

—Hando

With *shikantaza*, the meditation practice of “just sitting,” there is nothing but the naked stirring of the heart. You do not clothe that stirring with anything. What are you doing? You are just following your heart, which is formless. But what about Zen meditation with a minimal object, with something to put your monkey mind to, something to focus on? You can start with counting your breath which may be a complex process. You can be aware of the breath going into your nostrils. You can feel your chest expanding and contracting. You can feel that you are breathing from the belly, or from the whole body. Just the breathing itself is complex, and then you may add to that the counting. You can just count the inhalations which is more activating or the exhalations which is more quieting. If you feel you are going to sleep you can count your inhalations. If you feel okay or you are restless, you can count your exhalations. With meditation on the breath you must decide whether you are going to be attentive primarily to the sensations experienced in the breathing process or to counting, to saying the numbers.

Whatever it is you decide upon, it is a rather active process and that is how one can come to a focus, to one-pointedness of the mind. Once you have done that, it is recommended that you stop counting and just become aware of the breathing process, of being aware of the breath in the nostrils, in the belly, of the chest expanding and contracting. You make no judgments while practicing; you are just aware and may find that eventually the breath becomes slower and deeper. My recommendation is that you just breathe from the belly and be aware of the whole body expanding and contracting.

This little exercise in breathing then becomes imbued with the fundamental search of your being, the yearning of your heart for

the experience of the Infinite. Each breath takes on the dignity, the immense importance of that search, which is the most fundamental thing in human nature. Each breath becomes a tremendous event. When you begin to experience that, you know you are on the path and each breath becomes more and more wonderful and you find that you can engage in this practice of following the breath for years.

NENJŌ

A flower blooms purely
Falls purely
And without complaint
Lives in the now
Saku mo mushin
Chiru mo mushin
Hana wa nagekazu
Ima wo ikiru

—Shinmin Sakamura

Two Sino-Japanese characters form a perfect ideogram to express mindfulness: *Nen* indicates the present, now; *Jō* indicates the whole interior of a human being from the physical heart to the very core or essence of all reality. Here it clearly means all our power of awareness and attention. When these powers are together and focused on the “here and now,” we are in a state of “*nen*.” A powerful practice is to focus all one’s powers of attention as an expression of praise, devotion and entrustment to a name or presence of a savior such as Amitabha for Pure Land Buddhists (or to Christ for Christians.) In Christianity this practice is paralleled by the *nen* of the Jesus prayer. For this practice to bear fruit a person must become totally absorbed in the recitation. This is indicated by

the second Japanese character “*jō*” (Chinese—“*ding*”). This same ideogram the Chinese used to express the Sanskrit samadhi which indicates fixed, stable.

When you totally fix your attention on saying a verbal phrase, on your breath or on any “here and now” event, you become absorbed in it. You, as subject, are no longer separate from the event—the breath, the word, the act of sitting. The dualism of you, subject, observing your breath, object, is replaced by non-dual awareness. Now you are in the state of *nenjō*. You are fixed in mindfulness. Ordinary mental activity recedes and you are in the here and now, directly experiencing and not looking from the outside. You are experiencing from the inside out rather than from the outside in. This, and only this, is the state in which the flower of enlightenment blossoms. That is why stable, total mindfulness is the immediate goal of our practice.

NATURE COMMUNION

I experientially learned about mindfulness one crisp winter day in the hills of Kamakura across the road from our Language School in Japan. I was walking by myself on a trail along one side of a small valley. The other side was a typical winter scene—a slope covered with bare trees and thickets, with a few pines and other evergreens interspersed here and there. I stopped, stood still and stared at the scene. At first glance it was nice, but not all that arrestingly beautiful. However, as I kept looking I became aware of an immense variety of shapes and colors. The vegetation was brown, russet, tan, grey, green and even chalky white, in amazingly subtle pastels. As I gazed, the shape of each tree, bush and outcropping of rock came to stand out as individual and unique. Fascinated, I kept gazing. Next,

the distinct clarity of details began to merge into a remarkable harmony. No shade or shape was out of place. Everything was melding into, as G.M. Hopkins said, “One sweet especial rural scene.”

Here, sad to say, my ordinary mind interrupted the process. It effectively stopped the movement into communion. I began to reflect about the scene and about my gazing. Even at the time I knew that if I could have continued to gaze without adding on mental reflections and labels, if I had not begun thinking about how I could share this with others, I would have lost myself in the harmonious oneness of the Self. The subtle, quiet, “nothing unusual” reality there before my eyes was radiating the Whole. All the trees, shrubs and grasses of that hillside were impeccably manifesting the Whole. By mindfulness my perception was becoming attuned not just to the many, but also to the One. If my simple, bare attention had not wavered, I could have entered in and discovered the Self.

If we quiet the pluralistic and dualistic mind, the rest of the process is almost inevitable. The heart will take its natural course to God. A new mode of perception will arise in the psyche. In the light of non-dual consciousness, we will experience the coincidence of the many and the one. This is true contemplation

It is this contemplative ideal which has effectively kept me in the Society of Jesus these many years. Our founder, Ignatius of Loyola, gave us as our primary mode of living the finding of God in all things. A true Jesuit is said to be a *contemplativus in actione*, a person who is contemplative in his activities, no matter what. What I didn't really understand for many years was the crucial importance of mindfulness practice in order to realize this ideal. In point of time, it was only after I had been a Jesuit for about thirty years and had begun the disciplined attention of Zen that I experienced that “contemplative seeing” in the Kamakura hills.

CONTEMPLATIVE AWARENESS

Contemplation is a matter of direct awareness. It is a mode of perception in which you share in the very being of, say, a daffodil. Every movement, i.e., every act of existence has a built-in self-awareness. We call this consciousness (con, from *cum*, together with; scious, from *scire*, to know, be aware). This daffodil's being is constituted by both its act of existence and its built-in self-awareness. If, through simple, bare attention, you come to forget your own self-awareness, you can actually share in the self-awareness of this daffodil. Your identity melds into the identity of the flower. In this sense you become the flower. Such a contemplative communion can only happen when you go out of your preoccupation with the self-centered awareness of your being as separate. Subject-object perception must drop away. Once in this contemplative mode of perception, it is an easy step to move into the Self-awareness of Being itself. Plants, because of their purity, are excellent for such contemplative insight. This results in becoming one with Being itself and therefore with all beings without exception. This is why Zen teachers say that the universe is in every grain of rice. And why Ignatius of Loyola calls on us to find God in all things.

“I stopped, stood still, and stared.”

Consider the word “stopped” in the above account of my seeing the Kamakura hillside. The first step on the contemplative path is to stop. Often this means to stop physically. You are walking in thick woods. Suddenly a beautiful meadow opens out before you. To enjoy the scene you stop walking; this for the sake of simplicity of attention. While walking you have to keep one eye open for rocks,

roots, puddles on the trail. So, to put your full attention on the meadow, you stop. Meditation, for example, zazen, is the same. You stop all physical movement so as to enter into mindfulness. Even the walking done during meditation time is done in simplicity on a clear, level place as you fix your total attention either on each step or on the same focal point you've been using while sitting.

However, interior stopping is vastly more important and, sad to say, immensely more difficult. In order to reduce and then stop our ordinary pluralistic/dualistic awareness, we draw our attention away from the past, the future, from abstractions, reflections, from expectations and worries—from all such distractions—and move into simple, bare attention to one focal point (e.g. breathing). This can even shift into attention without any object.

If we were perfectly disciplined in attention, one moment of bare attention would bring us into unity consciousness. As it is, we usually have to keep on looking and looking, often plagued by distractions. This is the hard part and takes real effort. We need to persevere until non-dual consciousness begins to arise in our psyche. When this happens, the effort to focus turns into effortless effort.

Take again mindfulness to the flower. Our path to true awareness begins in the individual existence of this flower. The eternal One is to be found in this “here and now flower.” This flower is what leads us to experience the common whole.

Put yourself again beside a lovely meadow you have discovered in a forest. Having stopped, you keep looking at all the unique details. As you continue to give bare attention to the meadow, the beautiful harmony of all the various elements of the scene arises in your awareness. Each flower, each blade of grass, fallen log, tiny shrub and bit of moss—all separate—come together. Each unique, they join in a commonality. Their diversity is existentially compat-

ible with their being one. This is the bi-polar universe before your very eyes. Think of how colors in nature never clash. The tints and shades we humans put together are often in disharmony. Isn't it because, apart from when humans interfere, nature is always in the flow, which means not just harmony but oneness?

Deep among ten thousand peaks I sit alone cross-legged
A solitary thought fills my empty mind
My body is the moon that lights the winter sky
In rivers and in lakes are only its reflections

—Te-ch'ing, cited in *The Clouds Should Know Me By Now*.

Harmony is only a passage to communion. Not only are all the elements of the meadow scene together in one energy flow, you are in that same flow, too. As you keep gazing, you enter into the oneness of the meadow and all things. In this experience, the duality of subject (you looking) and object (flowers, grass, etc.) drops away. You enter into what truly must be termed divine awareness. You and the scene, while existing as many beings, are at the same time one being. Just as each being has its concomitant singular and unique awareness, Being has unity consciousness. Mindfulness is engaged in to bring us all the way to the one ultimate awareness we all share. In the state of full consciousness we must say to each tree, rock or blade of grass, "We are one Self." "You are me and I am you." This Being/being Self-awareness is enlightenment—the goal of mindfulness.

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Editor's Note: Fr. Hand has often talked about coming to a state of consciousness in which one can say "I am the tree." An illustration

of this state of full consciousness in regards to nature that Hando has spoken of can be found in this experience of Ashokananda, the Vedanta teacher from India who was head of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco for many years until his death in 1969:

One day, looking at a huge Banyan tree, he was suddenly thunderstruck by the tremendous life force manifested there. When he was near trees, his mind would sometimes grow very quiet, and his ordinary, human consciousness would be obliterated, as it were, and tree consciousness would take its place, a consciousness entirely unlike our own—a different time sense, a different way of knowing and feeling, indescribable in terms of human (ordinary) consciousness. He felt at one with trees, just as we feel at one with human beings. Later, when returning to human consciousness, he could not remember what tree consciousness was like. Human (ordinary) consciousness is so very different. . . . Finding trees to be not at all inferior to human beings, he came to the conclusion that there are different types of consciousness in the scheme of things—not higher or lower in the scale of evolution, but different types—of equal value and equal potential. But this, he always added, was his own peculiar idea which one may or may not accept.

(Sister Gargi, *A Heart Poured Out*, p. 63 and p. 70)

THE MYSTERY OF *Ch'ang* AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR

The great Taoist mystic, Lao Tzū, speaks from the heart of reality when he calls the Path (*Tao*) of mystery, “*ch'ang*.” He does this in the very first line of his *Tao Tê Ching* when he says “the Way can be expressed, but not the *ch'ang* way.”

No one English word can give an adequate translation of *ch'ang*. “Usual,” “ordinary,” “habitual,” “common,” and “constant” are all given in dictionaries. The question here is what this word meant to the early Taoist and Zen masters who followed them. This is no idle or simply academic question. To answer it will take us to the very heart of reality. To actually experience *ch'ang* is the first great step to full enlightenment. However, to enter the mystery land of *ch'ang*, we must start from the “Land of Kuan,” as this is where our awareness most often, or always, abides.

A *kuan* is a barrier. The *kōan* collection of The *Mumonkan* is translated as “Gateless Barrier.” The “Land of Barriers” is the world of separation. For example, when we speak of the nineteenth century, we put up barriers when we say 1800–1899, and create a certain segment of time. The segment is separated from all other centuries of the past or future. Such a period of time is not *ch'ang* because *ch'ang* refers to that which is common to all time periods. It can therefore be translated as “eternal.” When I say I live in a certain place, I have delineated a space that is separate from every other place in the universe. This too is not *ch'ang*, which has no space limitation. Even words like “good” and “beautiful” are not *ch'ang* because they have opposites.

So, what is common to all reality? The only thing common to all beings is Being itself, pure and simple. But why is it so imperative that we actually experience “Being” as such? Psychologically speaking, it is because only in this experience do we fully escape the frightening isolation of our egos. Only in the unity of pure Being do we know the love that casts out all fear and enter into unlimited joy. Pure Being is the ultimate reality and we are made for this experience. As St. Augustine says, “Our hearts are made for thee, O God, and they are restless until they rest in thee.”

Full enlightenment is when we know both the “Land of *ch’ang*” and the “Land of *guan*”—both constituents of reality—the absolute and the relative, and the One expressed in the many. This is not the numerical “one” but the One that excludes all other numbers. How can we enter the mystery land of *ch’ang*? Who can ascend the mountain of the One-who-is? “The clean of hand and the pure of heart.” (Psalm 24) The whole psyche must be unrestricted and totally open. It is a matter of attuning our psyche to that which we long to experience—the Infinite.

A ZEN KŌAN

What is a *kōan*? It is an anecdote, or a text from a sūtra, in which a Zen teacher communicates or transmits enlightenment. We must remember what transmission means. For full transmission it means that the light has to come from the teacher and the light must be received, or activated in the disciple. It is very much like a radio transmission that sends out sound waves. If I have a receiver on the same wave length, the transmission is received. *Kōan* work is making oneself into a “receiver.”

Yasutani Rōshi says, “You have been counting your breath and doing *shikantaza*. It is possible to come to awakening through these exercises alone, but the quickest way is through a *kōan*.” To see how one may work with a *kōan*, I would like to take the Zen *kōan* “*mu*,” (or “*wu*” in Chinese) meaning “*no*” in English.

In the Zen story, a monk asked Master Jōshū, “Does a dog have Buddha-nature?” Jōshū responded, “No!” which communicated his profound enlightenment. In Japanese, this “*mu*” is “no,” but it means much more than simply stating a negative.

When Jōshū says “*mu*” what is he saying no to? He is saying no

to intellectualism. Do not just ask about it (with the ordinary mind), do not just think about it. When Jōshū said “*mu*” he put his whole heart and soul into it. Ever since that time this syllable has been echoing down Zen halls and bringing thousands to enlightenment. What do you do with it? You use the syllable to open yourself out to enlightenment. You use it as a skillful means to open yourself out to the very same enlightenment that Jōshū transmitted. You make yourself into a receiver of the transmission by using this syllable *mu*. This usually means by continuing to repeat it to the rhythm of your breathing, such as on the inhalation and the exhalation.

This is not devotional, but shares in the element of devotion as it has a built-in faith. You really do entrust yourself to the transmission of enlightenment that you know is given in that syllable. It is based on faith. The big point is to not let that syllable get into your head and into your intellection. You do not use the intellect to solve a *kōan*. You can use intellect to start by asking, “What is *mu*?” But then you must drop the question.

A *kōan*, contrary to the popular conception in this country, is not a riddle. It is not a conundrum. The example that I have used before is, “What is it that is black and white and read all over?” The answer is a newspaper. You have solved the riddle, but did it affect your life? No. It just made you happy to solve it. A *kōan* is not like that at all. It has nothing to do with this and although it often seems like a riddle, that is not what it is.

The first thing you want to do when you start to use a *kōan* as your practice is to find the “*wato*.” The first character of this Japanese word means a unit of speech, to talk, to speak. The second character means a “head” or the key expression. What is the phrase or word in which the enlightenment experience is transmitted? That is what you look for. In the *mu kōan*, the word that is the

wato is “*mu*.” You then take that *mu*, that transmission of enlightenment from the master, and become totally absorbed in it. It is not a subject-object experience. Yamada Rōshi told me many times: “Become *one* with *mu*!” What he is saying is an excellent expression of what one means when using the word “zen.”

The Japanese word “*zen*” comes from the Chinese word “*ch’an*.” This came from the word “*jñāna*” in Sanskrit which means the state of absorption, or *samādhi*. Such a state is reached through having one’s entire attention dwell uninterruptedly on a physical or mental object of meditation. Your total attention is fixed there and through this absorption in the object the passions fade away—especially the passion to intellectualize. You become totally absorbed in the word or phrase until everything else drops away. Why do you want that? Because it stops the ordinary mind and the inner insight can open. Otherwise you are stuck in mental imagery, mental concepts—you are outside direct experience.

In the *Mumonkan*, the collection of *kōans*, the first is this about Jōshū’s dog. After giving the *kōan*, Mumon gives the commentary. He says, “Make your whole body a mass of doubt.” By this he means we become a mass of frustration because we cannot get it, cannot understand, cannot break through. Then he says to get your whole being into it. “Day and night, keep digging into it. Don’t think in terms of ‘have’ or ‘have not.’ Do not think about such things. It is like swallowing a red hot iron ball. You try to vomit it out but you can’t.” Gradually you purify yourself; the whole world of conditioned thoughts and imagery and everything and all that causes us suffering drops aside. Gradually you purify yourself, eliminating mistaken knowledge and attitudes you have held from the past. “Outside and inside become one. You are like a mute person who has had a dream. You know it for yourself alone. Suddenly

mu breaks open. . . . How then should you work with it? Exhaust your life energy on this one word *mu*. If you do not falter, then it's done. A single spark lights your dharma candle."

In the beginning you try and catch *mu*, catch the *wato*, but then the *kōan* catches you. You cannot let it go. It's got you. When that happens you know that you are working from deep within yourself. The questioning is not presented from the outside, but the whole of that creative power that is keeping you in existence right now, the whole of that power is engaged in that one question. Then you can sit for hours.

Inside Mu

Literally the expression "*mu*" means "no," or "nothing"—it is a negatizer meaning unbreakable, indivisible, empty, formless, infinite. *Mu* is the expression of the living, functioning, dynamic Buddha-nature. However, the significance of Jōshū's answer does not lie in that word. This simple, meaningless sound becomes the symbol of what we are seeking. It becomes the expression of the living, functioning, dynamic Buddha-nature. What you must do is discover the spirit, or essence of *mu*, not through intellectual analysis but by searching into your innermost being. You look inside. It is a process of self-identification. Yasutani Rōshi says, "You must demonstrate to me vividly that you understand *mu* as a living truth without recourse to conceptions, theories or abstract explanations. Remember, you cannot understand *mu* through ordinary cognitions. You must understand it with your whole being." This is the heart of Zen; this is the transmission of Zen.

When you do the practice of *mu* to the rhythm of your breathing, the very simple activity which you put all your attention to is the act

of saying this syllable *mu* within yourself. What you are attentive to is saying that word, the sound inside yourself. At the beginning it is mechanical and sometimes distasteful, but gradually there will be times when this simple act of saying the word becomes imbued with the most fundamental hunger and search in your own being. In Christian terms, when that is felt it is called the “stirring of the heart.” You can continue doing it, saying “*mu*” on and on for years as it becomes that which is most sacred and most profound in your own being. Another word you could use could be “Om.” Just say it within yourself. Don’t think about it and try to understand it with your analytical mind. Just say it. You can also say “Amen.” Just say it with each breath, or you can say “Maranatha—Lord, come.” A word that has no meaning is valuable simply because it has no meaning to our ordinary mind. As one Zen master said: “Words with meaning are dead words. Words without meaning are alive.”

Words with meaning can trap you. You get trapped in the meaning and your ordinary mind draws you away from the object. Likewise, being in the present, fully present in the now, we lose the subject-object relationship. We come into the infinite, into a timeless reality. Distraction by the ordinary mind brings us outside this reality into time and into dualistic thinking.

Going back to that fundamental question of whether the dog has Buddha-nature, we find that the question itself is dualistic. It is not a question of whether a dog has Buddha-nature, or if I have the Buddha-nature. The “no” or “*mu*” of Jōshū is not an answer to the question but an answer to the way the question is asked. It is not a question of whether it has or has not. It is not a question of what you have, but of what you are, the recognition, the discovery of what you are. This Buddha-nature has no concepts but is full Being.

Now, just as the ordinary mind rules, takes over and dominates

our ordinary psyche, so the *mu* search—*mu* or any other word used in this was as the truth of yourself— must take over your consciousness. Your whole psyche is only hearing *mu*, seeing *mu*, tasting *mu*. Everything that happens becomes *mu*.

Regarding this *kōan* practice, Yasutani Rōshi says, “You begin by concentrating intensely but then you slacken off. For a time you hold onto *mu* as I hold onto my baton and then you relax it like this—(drops it). That will never do. You will never get anywhere if you meditate for awhile and then slack off. When you walk, only *mu* walks. When you eat, only *mu* eats. When you work, only *mu* works. When you come before me, only *mu* appears. When you prostrate yourself, it is *mu* that prostrates. When speaking, it is *mu* that speaks. When lying down to sleep, it is *mu* that sleeps, it is *mu* that awakes. Having reached the point when your sleeping, your tasting, your thinking are nothing but *mu*, suddenly you directly perceive *mu*.”

Rōshi also says that “to realize your Self-nature you have to break out of the cul-de-sac of logic and analysis. The ordinary question demands a rational answer, but trying to answer, “What is *mu*?” rationally is like trying to smash your fist through an iron wall. This question forces you into a realm beyond reasoning. But your whole effort to solve it is not without meaning. What you are really trying to find out is, “What is my true Self?”

Do not separate yourself from whatever you are putting your attention to. Do not separate yourself for one second. When you go outside, the bird is singing and it’s singing *mu*. The planes overhead are roaring out *mu*. Everything becomes *mu*. It takes over your consciousness. When you are in that state, *mu* becomes an expression of your fundamental nature, that which you have been seeking. Whether it is *mu*, om, amen, or breathing, remain in that state and

keep coming back to it.

In meditation we concentrate on one simple thing, the breath, the sensations, the counting, the word, the *kōan*, or simply sitting. The act of thinking, imagination, dissipates the power of your concentration and the power of perception. We need to concentrate on one simple thing. Simple means narrow, confined, focused. “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” (Luke 13:14) Entering into the “narrow door” is the same teaching we receive in Zen.

Concentrate on the here and now—not on the past, not on the future. The reign of God is present and “at hand.” This narrow focus opens out to the Infinite and we are taken into the reign of God.

A GOSPEL KŌAN

As we have understood, the *kōan* is an anecdote, a saying or an action in which a true teacher transmits his or her enlightenment. Transmission of enlightenment is the main point. This transmission of enlightenment is to happen within oneself and demands an entirely different mode of perception than that of the ordinary intellect. To help practitioners, Zen created *kōan* collections. Seeing how valuable these are on the spiritual path, we can ask ourselves if there is anything comparable in Christianity. In answer to this I say that the Gospels are truly texts whose primary purpose is to transmit enlightenment. Although somewhat the same type of documents, in Zen the collections are disjointed presentations of different masters. In the Gospels the text is more continuous and only the Master Jesus is presented.

As an example of a Gospel *kōan*, when asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus said in reply, “The

coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'Look, here it is' or, 'There it is,' for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20–21).

How does one work with the text in order to share in this life-giving Light? The first step is to find the key phrase, word or action in which the master is transmitting enlightenment. One phrase may be, "The coming of the kingdom cannot be observed." Here Jesus is speaking from his own experience, is transmitting enlightenment. Only by a radical change of mind-set can this kingdom be experienced.

Another *wato* may be found in "the kingdom of God is within you." Once the key phrase is found, you are to keep it in mind until you become absorbed in it. It must take over your whole psyche. Where attention goes, energy flows. You become so much one with the phrase that the original energy transmitted in it flows into you and you join the Master in the realm of higher awareness. Total absorption is the one essential core of *kōan* practice. Only this will activate the divine creative power within each of us, leading to re-birth and re-creation.

"Come and See"

You may also let the following *kōan* from the Gospel of John (1:35–39) be your practice:

John the Baptist is at the river Jordan standing with two of his disciples and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" ("What are you seeking?") They said to him, "Rabbi (teacher), where are you staying?" ("Where do you

abide?") He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw and stayed where he was staying and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

This text seems so obvious and simple on the surface, but let's go inside because it is an extraordinarily rich introduction to the Gospel of John. How can you actually work with this text?

The two disciples are standing still and Jesus is moving. How to move forward? They follow Jesus. John says "behold the Lamb of God." A lamb is a metaphor. There is something about a lamb that is carried (meta) over (phor) and found in Jesus. What is it about a lamb that is applied to Jesus? Most think of the lamb as the servant of Yahweh as described in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 3, where the servant is compared to a lamb that is led to slaughter. That is the metaphorical element that is brought forward to talk about Jesus. A lamb is a being that follows the will of God, even to its death, without ever complaining.

It is a further elaboration, something added on when we think of a lamb as a sacrifice, as paying a price. It is not necessary to include that in the interpretation. Jesus is obedient even unto death, but that this is atonement and a making up to an angry God for our sins is an element that we do not have to adopt. A lamb obeys, submits, never rebels, a lamb does not go against the movement of the spirit, of the plan of God. That is what is meant here. The original Aramaic word that is translated as "lamb" is "*talyā*" and that means both lamb and servant. Jesus is the one who follows as the "servant" of God and not necessarily as the "(sacrificial) lamb" of God.

The whole scene is set with Jesus as the one who does the will and who follows the will of God, even unto death. So what did the disciples do? They followed the one who follows. That is the Christian path. By doing so they are taken into the divine plan per-

fectly because Jesus is the perfect living out of the divine plan, the movement of the spirit, or the reign of God.

When the disciples heard John and saw Jesus, it was the beginning of their faith. They heard John say, “Here is the servant of Yahweh, the one who follows God.” As Paul said, faith comes from hearing. Jesus turned and saw them following and asks them what they are seeking, why they are following. He tests them by this question and their answer seemed so shallow, on the surface. However, they were not asking if he is staying in a cave, or in a house or a little hut. Although many people may take it that way, that is not what the Gospel of John is communicating. This is a fundamental question that comes out of their faith and insight and their entrustment to follow. They want more clarity and further insight about this being “Jesus.”

The Greek word “to stay” (*menein*) is used often in the Gospel of John and it always has the idea of where you live with your whole being, where your thoughts, mind, heart, interest and will is. *Menein* is not just to live, but to abide, to stay. In this text it is not just bodily staying, but means where you are absorbed, where you are with your total being. One of the most beautiful examples of the use of this word “*menein*” as “abide” is when Jesus says, “Abide in Me as I abide in the Father.” It is a mystical word and a very important word to understand for the intellectual understanding of this *kōan*. This statement, this word used in John, is of fundamental importance and is a fundamental question. When asked where he abides, what does Jesus reply? “Come and see.” It is an invitation to enlightenment. Again, the ordinary Greek word “to see” as it is used in John becomes a mystical word. It is enlightenment. You see it again at the time of the resurrection. The technical phrase is “I have ‘seen’ the Lord.” This is not just physical.

Jesus said to them, “Come and see” and they came and saw where he was staying, where he was abiding. That is their first enlightenment experience and it says they remained with him that day. The same word “*menein*” was used in the text indicating that they abided in the consciousness of Christ that day. In the Zen tradition, *daigo tettei* is a great enlightenment experience in which your whole life is integrated, but this experience of the disciples may have been what the Japanese would call a *kenshō* experience. Going on, the text originally said, “It was the tenth hour” rather than “It was four o’clock in the afternoon.” Keeping the original hour “ten,” which the Hebrew expressed, has greater meaning as in Hebrew, ten also means completion. “It was the tenth hour” means it was the hour of completion.

How do we work on this Gospel *kōan*? What is the *wato* in this text? You can use the phrase, “They followed Jesus,” or, “What are you seeking?” or, “Come and see,” or, “They came and saw.” You just let those words work in you, work until something catches you, something activates the deepest movement of your psyche. You can take any one of those words; however, I would say that the main point of transmission actually is found between two statements, “Come and see” and, “They came and saw.” But let’s just take, “Come and see.”

When working on this phrase “Come and see,” just listen to it. It’s an invitation to enlightenment. And if you really listen to it, even without words you will be asking. “Lord, please show me; let me see, Lord, that I may see.” If you really say that with your whole being, then very easily you may enter into a dialogue with Jesus beginning in your mind. You may find yourself asking, “What is it that I am being invited to? Where is your abode? Where do you live? Is it the reign of God? Is it the flow, the movement of the

spirit? Is that where you abide? Is it the plan of the divine Spirit, the Source, the Father? Is it that you abide in me and everyone and everything else?"

You may continue carrying on that dialogue by asking, "Where do you stay?" Nowhere in the text does it say where Jesus was "staying." Then to the next question, "Do you live in the flow of the spirit?" Jesus may answer "No." "Well, do you abide in me and all people and everything around me?" Jesus may answer "No!" Why does he say "no"? One way to understand this is to remember that all those are ideas and in the realm of ordinary thought. So much of our Christian writing is there—in ideas—but that is not the enlightenment transmission of the Gospel. We are in the "ordinary mind" and spin off into theology and then what are we left with? We are left with the longing to see, to experience our fundamental being. And yet Jesus says that you are not going to "see" with your intellect. It is a different mode of perception.

What we have to do then is to take something like "come and see" and repeat it until the ordinary mind stops or repeat it until it engages the deepest creative power of the spirit that you are, and you do not need the words any more. You just sit. Only by quieting the mind do you say any *kōan*.

Entering the Reign of God

How will the solution to the *kōan* come? Suppose that you are working on the *kōan* and your mind has become quiet. You are just sitting there, rather stuck. You go out from your meditation at the end of the day and may be getting ready for bed when your stomach really starts to hurt. As a matter of fact, it may have been hurting all day or for a couple of weeks and it is really painful *right now*. Well,

your mind kicks in and says, “Maybe I have an ulcer,” or “Maybe I have cancer!” Your emotions start kicking in and that creates more thought, “Oh my gosh, I have to go see a doctor!” and it goes on and on, “Suppose I die and I have all these things I should have gotten rid of,” and suddenly in the midst of all that your Zen comes in and you *stop*—and suddenly there is a little sharp pain and you rejoice because you realize that this little pain *right here* is the reign of God, this is where Jesus is staying. This is where I stay. This is my abode, and it is a very concrete experience. It is not an idea any more. It is a reality, happening. The pain opens you up, and since you had this training of stopping the mind—boom—it happens. *This* is the flow of the spirit. *This* is where Jesus abides. *This* is what I am seeking. And in that pain you find joy and peace, a little enlightenment experience. That is where it usually happens.

Very rarely does a person have an enlightenment experience just sitting in meditation. It will nearly always be a little bit of something that shocks. It might just be the bell at the end of the meditation period. Many people have been enlightened by that sound. This sound can free us from the ordinary mind. The concrete experience of that bell—it is not a thought at all. Another example, and we have all experienced it, is to look at a flower. There is such purity there. There is the reign of God in perfect, unsullied innocence. There is no sin, no waywardness there. Just as in a bird song. There is purity itself.

These are some thoughts that I hope can bring us into the richness of the Gospels.

THE COMING

“But the hour is coming, and is now here...” (John 4:23)

“*Parousia*” is a Greek word meaning “a coming to be beside” and was used when the presence of the person came. The Latin word “*adventus*” means “to come.” The English word “to come to” emphasizes the point that the process we are talking about when we speak of “the coming” is primarily a consciousness process. When we say, “Come, Holy Spirit” what do we mean? When we break out of our little shells and look at this idea of “coming to” we may find an avenue into a spirituality that will really fit where we are today. I would like to look at it as an awareness of global spirituality with its many variations.

We may look at the idea of “coming” as a Biblical way of expressing the creative drive of “being” and since God is pure Being, Being itself, then we are speaking about the creative drive of God. God is the One who Is. That is the meaning of the Hebrew name Yahweh. When Moses spoke to God on Sinai, God said, “Say ‘I AM’ has sent me to you”. (Exodus 3:14) “I AM” is the name of God as Being with no qualifications—not being the god of war, the god of love—just pure Being and this pure Being, this “is-ing” is always creative.

“Creative” is a very interesting word. It comes from the Indo-European root “*ker*.” When we make the ‘k’ into a ‘c,’ that word “*ker*” means to increase, to grow and is related to *Ceres*, the goddess of growing things. So pure Being, God, is always moving into greater self-manifestation. That is what we call creation. We are speaking here of an evolutionary drive, about observing how things change, moving from one form of being always to a higher form. This is the pattern of creation.

The urge to live is always an urge to live more fully. We are never satisfied and we experience suffering from feeling this lack. The suffering of not being satisfied is called “*dukkha*,” the Pali word upon which all of Buddhism is built. Suffering doesn’t mean you have a pain in your little toe. It is the fundamental dissatisfaction we feel as the need to grow. If we go back to the Source from which all growth happens and get into that flow of Being, we solve the problem of suffering. Going back to the Source and experiencing everything evolving, arising out of that Source is enlightenment. I maintain that this is powerfully taught in the Christian scriptures.

Another characteristic of the “coming to” is that it is a presence, a personal presence. It is an experience of oneself within the one Self that is responsible for everything. It is not the Great Other Self. That is a mistake we make about God. It is the Self within whom we have ourselves, the God in which “we live and move and have our being.”

When we speak about evolution, a real insight of our times, we begin to realize that evolution is holistic and not just physical. You cannot separate the physical from the whole human being, the whole of reality. It is the movement of Being, of Reality, to higher forms with increasing levels of perception, increasing levels of consciousness. I like to use this term “coming to,” not just “the coming,” for it stresses a movement into a higher form of awareness as well as a higher form of physical being. What we are looking at is a holistic advance of the whole human species with creation moving towards, a coming to, higher and higher levels of experience, of knowledge, of seeing. We must speak about the evolution of consciousness, the evolution of awareness. The “coming” is a coming to a higher and higher form of awareness, and physical being also.

See what love Abba has bestowed on us so we might be

called “children of God.” The reason that the world does not know us is that it did not know him, the perfect one born of God. Beloved, we are God’s children now. What shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed, we shall be like God for we shall know God as God is. (John 3:12)

That is the completion of the whole process of “the coming,” or the “coming to,” but at the same time we must know that we are *already* the children of God. In old terms this revelation was called the Beatific Vision.

Kūkō Nyorai

All religions contain the idea that we are always moving into higher and higher forms of life. In Japan there is the Maitreya bodhisattva, the savior being that will come and inaugurate a great, new, wonderful age. There is an expression that is extremely deep—a beautiful expression that has taken me at least 30 or 40 years to understand the meaning of—“Shakyamuni nyōrai,” and finally the light has dawned.

In Japanese, Chinese and probably in Korean Zen also, there is the character “*kū*” which means “the void”—the formless, the empty sky, pure empty space with no stars, no sun, no form at all; that is the negative way of speaking of the Absolute—no form. You cannot call it source; you cannot call it anything at all. We must go to this and become this. “*Kō*” means “to go,” to go into that formlessness. The Father is the emptiness, this formlessness. When the formless comes into form, this is the positive expression of the formless.

The term “*nyo*” speaks of this emptiness in a positive way and is saying “the same,” or “like.” When you have total sameness you

have no form, but it is a positive way of saying the same Absolute and the word “*rai*” means “to come.” Therefore, the meaning is the “Absolute come,” or the “Absolute manifested,” having come in Shakyamuni Buddha or any other enlightened being. So we can say “Jesus Nyorai,” the one who is perfectly manifesting the Absolute. The Absolute come, the Incarnation of God. That is what “the coming” is all about. *We are to be that coming. We are to find ourselves as the Absolute.*

We can put the birth of Jesus within the context of this coming process. It is when we look at the birth of Jesus as part of an immense movement of the spirit that is bringing a new and powerful energy into the human energy form field and our individual form field that we see the birth of Jesus in the context that we can really celebrate. All the teachings of the birth of Jesus in Mathew and Luke have been contrived to lead us to an advance in awareness and we need not see them as historical documents. The best modern biblical scholarship does not treat those texts as purely historical documents. They are primarily teaching us the process of a “coming to.” Therefore they are teaching us how to advance to a higher manifestation of divine life.

The church has always taught us that contemplating the birth of Jesus is to enter into the Christ life. So the accounts in the texts of Matthew and Luke are not necessarily a factual account of Jesus’ birth, but a presentation of one human being in whom the Absolute has come, perfectly. Therefore they are a manual teaching us and leading us to our birth as Christ. . . as our coming, as the “*nyorai*.” The Christ state of life is a rebirth, born of the movement of the spirit. Jesus brings us into the reign of God, out of the reign of the ego in which we suffer.

Coming into a New Mode of Perception

When Jesus said he must pass from this world to the Father, to the formless, we understand that one must go into the formless before coming back into the form. We must go into total disintegration before we can come into a new world. Therefore, when the scriptures say the whole world will disintegrate—the sun will lose its light, and so forth—it is talking about this as psycho-mystical experience. When John of the cross says “nada, nada” he is telling us that we must let go of everything and hang on to nothing and he really means it—no thing, no forms. We are talking here about a whole new mode of perception.

That is the only way it is going to happen. Talking about the physical birth of Jesus is talking about the Christ state of life as a rebirth, born by the movement of the spirit. He is one who brings us into the “reign of God” and out of the “reign of ego” in which we suffer. Just as Jesus’ coming process ended with his resurrection, so our process of coming into the experience of ourselves as a manifestation of the Absolute, of the Source, is a coming to a new mode of perception—*metanoia*.

Looking at the eschatological texts in the Gospels which are highly mystical, the coming that is described in the Old and New Testament is talked about as the “Day of the Lord” or simply “that Day.” It is also called “Coming in the name of the Lord,” “The coming of the kingdom” or of “the reign of God.” And finally, these days we talk about the “coming of Christ.” So, what is that really all about?

What this “coming” is, and how and when it is to happen, is expressed in the New Testament. In the thirteenth chapter of Mark we find the term “*eschata*” which means the final things, the com-

pletion, the end of things. This is what “eschatological” means. The New Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible have translated it as “until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) Why did they translate it that way? It is very clear that this phrase means the “consummation” or the “completion.” It means “I am with you until the completion of the process. I have gone through it and I will be with you until you have gone through it.” The word is not a temporal word but a completion word. It means a process, and until the process is complete, I am with you. When we read the Bible as it is really written, it is a challenge to our spirits. The two great terms, *metanoia* and *gregoroiate*, mean to change the whole way you see reality—be awake, watch! This process occurs when we sit in meditation.

Luke 17:20 talks about the coming of the kingdom of God, which is one expression we use for coming to higher and higher life. “Asked by the Pharisees when the coming of the kingdom of God would be, Jesus replied, ‘the coming of the Kingdom of God cannot be observed and no one will announce “There it is!” For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.’” This Gospel *kōan*, if you really understand it, will take you into enlightenment. It is an interior event, a psycho-mystical event. Your whole psyche changes. Your whole mode of perception must change, and then you are brought into the mystery which cannot be expressed.

“Behold I Make All Things New”

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” (Revelations 21:1)

Jesus said the heavens and earth will pass away. The disintegration comes first and then comes a new heaven and a new earth. The

former heaven and earth pass away and then he speaks of the New Jerusalem. “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. . . for the old order has passed away.” (Revelations 1:4) “ For the old order has passed away, and the one who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ ” (Revelations 21:5) We must be mindful and use a little caution about the idea of newness.

In a very beautiful Augustinian phrase we hear the words “O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new.” This is a wonderful expression as there is no newness in God, but God is always becoming new. The manifestation is the same and also new—a new perception. We always have the fullness of being. It is never divided up even though we see a million separate and different manifestations. We have the One and the many, and the One is always ancient and yet the many are always changing; there is always newness. This is an example of the bi-polar nature of reality, that everything is the co-incidence, the happening together of opposites, and you must not choose either. When we speak about newness, we must maintain the Ancient One. O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, never changing, always changing. That is Reality.

With that caution about newness and that dichotomy we spoke of, I would like to look at “the coming” as a coming into new forms of manifestation. The fundamental law of evolutionary movement, call it change or you can call it creation, is to increase or grow. The fundamental law of evolutionary movement is that the old must die so the new can arise. We are familiar with this, but let us accept it as also meaning that for the coming there must be a leaving. There cannot be total transformation without total disintegration. There cannot be rebirth without dying to the old. Things cannot come to pass without passing away.

In order to receive the increase of the creative energy we must

return to that energy Source. We must go back and start over again each time. This death, this passing away is expressed by the words “to return to the Source.” Jesus died to his life in Galilee and was reborn at Jordan. He died at Calvary and was born to a new heaven and to a new earth, a new creation, a new world. John in the Book of Glory, chapter 13, said “Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father.” (John 13:1) It was necessary for him to go into disintegration, into the formlessness of the Source. He embraced that fearful journey out of love and the same verse continues by saying that he loved them until the end. He loved them until the completion of the process.

Now it is time to move on to a whole new way of seeing reality. That is what the word “*metanoia*” means, the word that is so often sadly translated as “repent.” The word “repent” comes right from the Latin. When St. Jerome translated the Bible from the Greek into Latin, he translated the Greek word “*metanoia*” into “*penetemanē*” which means “repent, regret, be sorry,” but that is not what “*metanoia*” means. “*Metanoia*” means to change your whole way of seeing reality and therefore change your whole life. That very word is a call to enlightenment. It is a challenge to move into the new stage of the evolution of perception. So when we speak about the coming, we can call it “a coming to seeing reality the way it is.” The mind that prevents this coming into a new way of seeing reality is clever, cunning like a serpent. The mental mode which is described in the third chapter of Genesis is represented by the serpent, which is the symbol of the human mind.

What is this *metanoia*, this new mode of perception? We may call it insight, or intuition. I love the good old English word insight. It is not standing outside and looking in and thinking, judging, analyzing. It is not a subject-object experience, but being one with

the experience and then seeing. With that energy of experience of being inside Being, you come to the Intuition of Being. When one is perfectly in the flow, one will use anything to transmit this primal experience, the bliss-full experience and this is the Bodhisattva, or the Savior in Christian terms. Not only is he in the flow, he is the flow of increasing action.

In the Here and Now

When is the completion of this process going to happen? Through the centuries people have made a mistake about this. They have conceived it as happening at the end of time, in a long, remote and distant future. The Gospels never say that. They say there are signs of this completion event, but they don't say it is in the remote future. On the contrary, they say it is "at hand," it is right here and now.

The early Christians lived in common awaiting for the *parousia*, the coming. They were awaiting that great day of the coming of the Lord, as though the Lord is coming from the outside! The Gospels do not say that, but that is the picture we get, a waiting for this remote event. The very fact that the Gospels say that the time of the coming is indefinite, means it all depends on you. If you create the proper conditions it will happen and that is the teaching of Christ and it can happen now, today.

The coming is an interior consciousness event. The new creation does not mean that everything (external) is going to change, it means that your ability to experience reality is going to change. If the coming of the kingdom, of the coming of Christ, of the day of the Lord, the great psycho-mystical experience is right here at hand, here and now, why don't we see it? What do we have to do? Why isn't it happening for each one of us? That is the big question. It is

because we are not willing, we are not willing to receive.

The first chapter of the Gospel of John is a highly elaborated text, much more sophisticated than we imagine. We just do not have the consciousness of the mystic. Like a scientist, we collect data and put facts together to come to some conclusion. Mystics arrive at what they know differently. In the Gospel of John the first words are, “What are you looking for? What are you seeking?” It is to be willing. Willing means to surrender your whole being to the evolutionary process, to the creative movement, and that movement can only come to its completion in enlightenment and empowerment if you are willing to surrender.

Do not go off into thinking about experience, thinking about enlightenment. The manifestation of reality, the mystical experience is contained in this breath, this word that you’re saying, this mantra, this act of sitting. It is present *right now!* Everything we want to find is found in *this* breath, *this* act of sitting, *this* step. If you think about it, then you are not in it. We are to unite our will with the creative drive of Being itself, God, and only then will this happen. When we get off into our own will, we short circuit the whole process. We must have the willingness to receive total Being. Jesus put into the human energy form field. It is in that we all have been consecrated, have been made holy, have been made whole.

What we bring to this process is the willingness to receive. If you are willing to receive the movement of the spirit, if you are willing to let this process take over, it is absolutely going to change your life. It will change the life you have been living, will destroy your security, destroy your little self rule—it is going to destroy your ego. Because of this there are not many people who are really willing to receive, to give up, to give in, and not resist.

It is frightening to let go of everything and jump into the abyss—

you have to surrender. Only then can you die and discover your true Self—after you let it all go. This is *metanoia*. This is “the coming.”

“Meditation is like standing on the edge of an infinite abyss and hearing Christ say the word, ‘Come.’”

CLOUDS AND SKY

The kettle
Hung from the sky of freedom.
Is it for boiling tea
Over a cloud?

—Hakuin

Ever since I can remember, I’ve loved clouds. Clouds are like pilgrims, moved by the spirit. Secondly, clouds are the source of water, of life. Third, clouds are misty phenomena that hide and reveal the truth of Reality. The sky is the actualization of that reality that we are all seeking to experience. The sky is emptiness that is pure energy taking shape as all that exists.

In Japanese, the Zen trainee is called an “*unsui*,” a name that is made up of two characters—one which is “cloud,” and the other, “water.” So, the trainee is “cloud-water,” a cloud that is moved by the wind, by the spirit. The trainee’s life is to flow, like water, and that training is to last all one’s life.

Just as a white summer cloud, in harmony with heaven and earth, freely floats in the blue sky from horizon to horizon, following the breath of the atmosphere, in the same way, the Pilgrim abandons himself to the breath of that greater life that wells up from the depth of being and leads beyond the farthest horizons to an aim which is already present within, though hidden from sight.

—Lama Govinda

We are always pilgrims, and a cloud is the perfect expression of the pilgrim life. The cloud never goes against the wind, against the air currents. The shape of the cloud is created by these currents and it moves across the sky according to these currents. The cloud has no ego-centric impulse to go against the flow, even to maintain its visible existence, its form. It does not try to maintain its form and existence contrary to the molding and the melting influence of the air temperature. In fact, a cloud is nothing but air which has cooled to the dew-point. That is all that the cloud is. Therefore, the cloud is the perfect pilgrim, not only moved by the spirit, but existing by the Spirit, Spirit “is-ing.”

Resting at my open window I gaze out at the mountains
A thousand peaks of blue and purple rise above the pines
Without a thought or care, white clouds come and go
So totally accepting, so totally relaxed.

—Te-ch’ing, cited in *The Clouds Must Know Me By Now*.

Secondly, clouds give water, give life. When we think about it, the way a cloud gives water—gives life—is by losing itself, by self-giving. The very rain that we receive is nothing but that cloud changing form, becoming rain and falling down. Most of the rain that is created and falls never reaches the ground. When clouds let go of rain, of life-giving water, they let go of themselves. So much so that in this life-giving process clouds will disappear, unless they pick up more vapor and are “reborn.”

Let us think a little more about clouds, and how they are “nebulous.” As you know, I love words and their derivations, so what does the word “nebulous” come from? It comes from the Indo-European root “nebh” which means “cloud.” From that comes the Latin word “nebulae” and from that we get “nebulous,” which for us

means unformed, unclear. That is one of the very important special characteristics of clouds. They are not fixed in a particular form, and they do not have fixed, categorized boundaries; that is also a description of the enlightened person. So clouds are born of the empty sky (kū); they take shape and melt back into the sky.

Clouds are teachers. They teach us the flow of reality, literally what the stream of life is like. In the forward of the book *The Way of the White Clouds* by Lama Govinda, he quotes from the poem “Song of the Eastern Snow Mountain”:

On the peak of the white snow mountain in the East,
A white cloud seems to be rising toward the sky.
At the instant of beholding it,
I remember my teacher.
And pondering over his kindness,
Faith stirs in me.

Why does the cloud remind this pilgrim of the teacher? What does a true spiritual teacher teach us? It does not have to be about the phenomenal world, this world of color, shape, and all the rest. Rather, the teacher draws us toward the experience of the formless within form, to the Source of manifestation, to the presence of God within the world of appearances. That is just what the sky and clouds do. The faith of the student was stirred because one of the inner meanings of faith is that it is the eye that can see through the phenomena of form to the formless within. Therefore, clouds are our teachers and out of this idea comes the traditional idea that God is hidden in a cloud.

We have seen that perfect humility is an integral part of the contemplative’s simple, blind love. Wholly intent upon God, this simple love beats unceasingly upon the dark Cloud

of Unknowing, leaving all discursive thought beneath the
Cloud of Forgetting. *(The Cloud of Unknowing)*

We have to un-know all those clear categories and divisions the mind creates and become like a cloud and just melt into the oneness of the formless, of the absolute, of the empty sky. So, as the clouds teach us, there is one reality within the myriad of realities. Clouds are never the same shape, yet they manifest within the same sky and exist as constituents of the total reality.

Both the sky and the clouds teach the same message, but in many ways the sky itself is even more mysterious than clouds. First of all, let us look into the sky and see what we find. We find everything. When we really look deeply at the sky, we find clouds, rain, hail, wind, fire as lightning. We hear sound as thunder, find birds and insects and living things. We see mountains piercing the sky. We find the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, including planet earth. We tend to think of “earth and sky,” but planet earth is inside sky. All is existing within what we call “sky” and this is a key point. We cannot experience sky if we see it in opposition to earth. We must give up our earth-centric consciousness to truly experience the sky. In the same way, we must give up our ego-centric consciousness to experience our true Self.

Also in the sky we see all colors, all the colors of the rainbow. We experience air, and that is also a most important point. The sky is not just around us everywhere, but we are the sky energy existing in this form. I think of the famous poem of Gerard Manley Hopkins called, “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe” in which we find the line:

Wild air, world mothering air, nestling me everywhere. . .

We see that the world and sky is all around us and we are never

separate from it. As we go higher, or deeper into the sky the air gets thinner and thinner. The sky becomes colorless and is no longer blue, and although we call it empty sky, it is always full of energy. There is no place where there is not energy. In fact, where there is the greatest energy, there is no form because it is unbounded and not confined. Empty sky is pure energy, and everything is born out of this energy. Everything is nothing but energy congealed into a form. Energy takes on air and light form, then cloud form, rain, snow and water form, grass and tree form, mineral, rock and mountain form—“you” and “I” form. We are empty sky, pure energy in this form I call “me.”

God As Manifest Activity

This is an amazing reality—that out of this empty space arises material form which becomes you and me. Pure energy is everywhere, from the most dense, concrete forms of existence to the most unclear, wispy forms of existence. Therefore, existent reality is this formlessness, this pure energy manifesting in a form; with this form/formless reality you can never find anything that is pure form or pure formlessness. Not one centimeter of the atmosphere is motionless. Not one tiny reality is completely motionless. We are form/formlessness in motion and that is what everything is. That is what we call the universal energy field. Out of this universal energy field we find that everything is nothing but its own little energy field patterned after the manifestation of the universal energy field. Put in religious terms, St. Paul tells us that “in God we live and move and have our being.”

God is this universal energy field which is pure intelligence, pure subjectivity, and this energy field is the source of existence—

it is existence itself. It is life-giving through movement from the formless into form, but the form does not remain fixed. The form idea which we call a “soul”—even that must evolve, because everything is the movement of pure energy, coming into form and then being destroyed or transformed to enter into a new form, a new life. Therefore, we have creation, destruction and rebirth and that is the Pascal mystery, this mystery of going back to the Father and then being reborn in the Spirit, the mystery of life. That is what Christ Jesus came to teach us. All that mystery of emptiness coming into form and going back into emptiness to be reborn into a higher form of life is taught in the sky. The sky is the actualization of that reality we are all seeking to experience.

I would like to go back to Buddhism which so strongly influences my mind and my heart. In Buddhism, one of the objects of devotion is the bodhisattva. What is a bodhisattva? It is the personification and movement of divine power. It is the personification of divine energy. It is a “personification” way of speaking about the universal energy field by focusing on various aspects of the movement of this energy field. The bodhisattva of compassion in Chinese is Kuan Yin, or in Japanese, Kannon. The way this universal energy is acting for our good is to bring us into oneness and into new life, to remove our suffering. That is mercy and compassion. No matter what we do, that is the way that movement flows. We can resist it, but no matter how much resistance we offer, there will still be the flow of mercy and compassion.

For Christians, one personification of this same aspect of the universal field is a concrete historical person, Mary of Nazareth. She is the pure, empty womb out of which the perfect form arises. She is the one from whom the perfect child is born by the movement of the spirit. God is like a womb from which everything arises, or

is born. This is ordinary Christian teaching. She is like the cloud—like the air; Mary has no agenda of her own. “Be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). The word is the movement of air into a form arising from a voice which is the Source.

Be Born Again from the Empty Sky Womb

Listen to what Jesus teaches in the third chapter of John: “No one can do these signs without being born from God. Jesus answered, and said to him, ‘Amen.’” Those words indicate he is speaking out of his enlightenment. He is seeing reality. This is the way it is. “I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (John 3:3) You cannot experience yourself, and the divine life in you, the reign of God, unless you are born from the “sky” and experience yourself as such. Nicodemus asked, “How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Jesus answered, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and of the spirit.”

What are clouds made up of? Water and spirit and air. We can use this metaphor to understand this teaching by meditating on it. Jesus simply says that you must be reborn by going back to the womb, the empty sky womb. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of the spirit is spirit. “Do not be amazed that I told you you must be born again. The wind moves, blows where it wills and you can hear the sound it makes but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.” Nicodemus answered, “How can this happen?” Jesus answered, “You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to

what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?" He speaks of the movement of the universal sphere. No one has gone to heaven except the one who has come from heaven, has returned from the empty sky experience, the return to the Source of all things. The very movement that carries you into form is that same movement that carries you again to that empty womb from which new life arises.

Just as Moses lifted the serpent in the desert, so must the son of man be lifted up so that everyone that believes in him might have eternal life. One who believes in this process, entrusts oneself to this process, will have eternal life. Let us learn of this. Our meditation then is nothing but to return to the empty sky womb to be reborn. That is what meditation is.

PART IV

WORDS OUT OF SILENCE

Let these words rise out of silence: “I know only sufficiency. I
experience no want. All I long for is fulfilled in the here and now.
This sitting is all I need and all is perfect.” —Hando

DAWN WISDOM

In the quiet early morning hours, the dimly lit chapel of the Mercy Center has been a place where meditators have silently gathered daily in sacred space to enter into the deep stillness of their hearts. After an opening chant and ringing of the bell, the meditation session begins. At times Hando's voice will be heard gently guiding one's mind even more deeply into the meditative experience through utterances such as these, recorded over the years by a participant in these early morning sittings. As these words emerge out of the silence, we open out to receive the unifying spirit of sitting together with one heart.

- ~ We begin this day at the beginning, at the Source, that divine Source, creating and radiating from within.
- ~ As we gather in the pre-dawn darkness, we nevertheless know that the light of the sun is coming. So, no matter where we are interiorly, whether in darkness or in light, we know that there is always great light coming from within because God is light.
- ~ Meditation is not a retreat from reality, but an escape to reality, a return to the Source, a coming home.
- ~ As we remember St. Francis, let us enter into true poverty of spirit, letting go of everything in the simplicity of attention of the heart.
- ~ When the waters are stilled and quiet, we can see the bottom of the pool. When our minds are stilled we can see within where shines the face of God.

- ~ Whatever form your meditation is taking this morning, let it be the cry of your being right now, with all sincerity and truth.
- ~ Christ Jesus says there is within each of us a stream of life-giving water. In meditation we allow that stream to arise and fructify our lives.
- ~ As our being unfolds, the color, shape, the beauty of each one of us is distinct. At the center of each of us there is the same golden nothingness, no-thing-ness, God.
- ~ As we begin this meditation, outside the darkness is ending and the light is dawning. Within ourselves let all the patterns of darkness go and the light of love and light will arise.
- ~ Meditation is silence, is opening out to God, is the stirring of the heart, is surrender to the heart.
- ~ Meditation is like standing somewhere on the path leading up the mountain, the mountain of trust and love, and hearing the Lord Jesus say, "Come."
- ~ Standing with all the saints, let us recall that to meditate is like standing at the edge of an infinite abyss and hearing Jesus Christ and all who have gone before us say, "Come."
- ~ As the deer longs for running water, so my heart, my soul, longs for thee, oh God.
- ~ Like an arrow moving speedily towards its target, let your heart be undistracted and attentive.
- ~ What we are now doing affects the whole human race, the whole planet, the whole cosmos. The scriptures tell us again

and again that we are all one body. What our body does affects the whole body.

- ~ We never sit alone. Each one is part of the whole body and yet each one is the human race and a little universe. Let the quality of our meditation match our responsibility.
- ~ Time is so short in our meditation. Without spending time in mental speculation, let our meditation be deep within us. Let it be the cry of our very being.
- ~ According to the Gospel, we must decide whether our house, the house of our hearts, will be a “den of thieves,” a den of distraction, or a divine temple.
- ~ The Haiku poet says: “Oh, the greatness of the one who is not enlightened by lightening,” but by the simple act of breathing or by a single word repeated or by simply sitting.
- ~ The poet Thompson says, “I fled him down labyrinthine ways” of my own mind. The pilgrim seeking God, while trapped in the mind, shall never experience the divine presence. Let go of mind work. Let the heart, at the deepest level, take its natural course.
- ~ All our meditation techniques, both interior and exterior, are for the sake of detachment. When clinging ends, the heart wings to find the Infinite in all things.
- ~ If there is a drought in the life of the spirit, it is not because of any lack in the flow of the spirit, but because we are not open. Meditation is ultimately making ourselves open to the spirit.

- ~ We meet death every day. Meditation itself is a kind of dying. Christ Jesus says to each one of us, “I come that you may have life and have it to the full.”
- ~ Just as right now our part of the human family is turned to receive the life-giving light and rays of the sun, so let each of us, no matter what form we are using, let our meditation ultimately be a turning to, a surrender to, the light of Christ.
- ~ In meditation we sit in faith. Faith begins with insight. This leads to entrustment to the flow of the Spirit. This leads to attunement, of at-one-ment with the Christ. Finally there is the integration of all we do in the one flow of the Christ Spirit.
- ~ The power, the wisdom and love of your own true soul, of the soul of humanity, of the soul of the whole universe are pushing to manifest from within. Meditation is surrender to our own true Self.

A CHRISTENING MEDITATION

The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord, as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

Hando tells us that meditation can be a very powerful means of transformation. Trans-formation is an evolutionary process in which we are being formed beyond what we were before. His guided meditation included here comes out of a Buddhist meditation on the bodhisattva of compassion, who is depicted as having

a thousand hands with a thousand eyes with which to see and fulfill the needs of suffering humanity. In this meditation we dedicate ourselves to becoming a “Bodhisattva Christ,” and surrender to the process of the total selfless giving of ourselves for the benefit of all people, of all creation. With the commitment to agape as our basic intention, we will be transformed as our life unfolds according to our intention. We go into the formless Source which is pure potential and actualize the splendor of the Source as we move back into our ordinary form brilliantly manifesting the potential of the Source. Then everything we do becomes life-giving as we are the Source radiating in all we do.

Begin by visualizing yourself in a very quiet little valley, surrounded by hills and all alone. You feel the warmth of the sun, the quiet breeze and hear the sounds of the little stream, the birds and insects. Smell the fragrance of the flowers, the grass and the trees. As you are either lying, sitting, or quietly walking along, ask yourself: “What am I here for? What do I want to give my life to? What is the real desire of my heart?” As you are meditating and hearing the cry from the very depths of your being, you look around at the surrounding hills and see that there is one that is a little higher than the others, standing by itself, and as you see it you feel a powerful attraction. As you are wondering why you feel this irresistible attraction to that mountain, Christ Jesus, or your teacher, appears beside you. You can see him, but above all, you feel the presence, the power. He asks you, “What do you really want? What do you want to give your life to?” After you answer him he says, “I am here to help you to actualize that dedication of your life.” As he says that, he looks up at that mountain and says, “Do you know the name of that mountain you are so attracted to?” When you say “no”

he says, “Some call it Mount Carmel. Others call it Calvary. Can you see the roof of a building on the top of that mountain?” When he says that, you see just a part of a roof and the attraction becomes totally irresistible. And he says, “That is the Temple of Silence on top of the Mountain of Silence. To ascend this mountain is the only way to the actualization, the realization of your deepest desire. Do you want to ascend? When you answer “yes” he smiles and says, “Follow me.”

You start along a path and begin climbing, but before you begin he turns and says, “If you would follow me you must deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.” You acknowledge these words and keeping your eye on the mountain you follow along. You start up through the forest and reach a little meadow where Jesus stops and says in strong words, “Here you must lay aside all your possessions—your home, your car, your food, your medicines, cosmetics, tapes, books, bank account—let it all go. Attached to these things, you cannot climb the mountain.” As you let it all go inter-iorly, his face becomes a radiant smile.

You start walking again further up the winding path into the trees and at the base of a rocky crag he stops you and says, “Here you must put aside all concerns about your body, your health, your strength and your beauty.” Again, in your heart, you give up all that. In a sense, you give it into his hands and you feel lighter. With a much stronger step, you continue to follow him up the mountain. The path winds back upon itself. You climb over a fallen log, and as you follow along you notice that the form of Jesus, which was so clear at the bottom of the hill, is beginning to become unclear. He again stops you and says, “At this place you must let go entirely of your reputation. Forget about what people think of you. Forget all fears about not being accepted, about not being loved. Forget

about all perfectionism that comes from such fears—lose yourself by letting everything go.” You feel lighter and lighter. You also start to feel that your boundaries are less clear as you sense yourself beginning to expand. You follow up the path as it becomes steeper, but you are lighter and are able to follow.

At another place on a ledge, Jesus says, “Here drop your place in society, your nationality, your diplomas, your profession. Put aside even your identity of being a spiritual seeker. Lose all that self-identification.” As you do, you feel diminished and at the same time, expanded. Jesus turns and looks deep into your eyes and you feel his strength and his power, overcoming the fear that this diminishment is causing. You do not know yourself any more, but Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Continuing up the mountain, you look back down at the meadow and Jesus says, “Come. Come into this dark place.” You go through the forest which is now dark, by simply following him and holding his hand. He again stops you at the other side and says, “Here you must give up your family, your membership in the family which gives you a feeling of dependence—your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your spouse. Let them all go. Lose even that self-identity.” By now you feel far more naked with a sense of loss. You continue to hold onto his hand, one of his thousand hands of mercy and love.

He leads you farther up and you again catch sight of the roof of the temple. Whereas it seemed shining from below, somehow it seems dark now. As you come in full sight of the Temple of Silence, Jesus again stops you and says, “Here, let go of all your images of yourself and all your images of God, and of me. You now have nothing to hang onto.”

Everything begins to get darker. It has become night, a dark night. As you approach the temple, which no longer has a clear form, at the door Jesus turns to you and says with great love and power, “Here you must die to your old self. Let go of everything—your body, your mind, your memory, your imagination, your self, and enter the temple.” As you do, the Jesus form disappears and your form also disappears. Everything drops away as you step into the Temple of Silence. Your last words to Jesus are, “I feel like nothing, *no thing*.” And Jesus’ last word to you is, “Yes, let us return to Abba, the Source.”

Remain for awhile in this infinite space. There is no form here, no building, no-thing-ness—a dark night but a warm night, because it is your ultimate home.

Now the darkness begins to become luminous. A beam of light begins to appear and you know that Jesus is present within that beam. Jesus speaks to you and says, “Join me.” You enter the light beam and he says, “Abide in me.” You feel the radiance and bliss of this light beam. The light becomes a stream of life extending to the whole of creation, a river of living water. That is what you are—pure, clear, life-giving spirit—and you say to yourself, “I am movement, the flow, I am spirit.” You feel this stream as your actual being and in this stream you feel your oneness with everybody and everything. That is the bliss of pure love.

As you feel yourself extending out to the whole of creation, Jesus says, “Yes, you and I—we—are the light of the world. Let us return to the world. Your actual home in this world is on the other side of the mountain. Let us descend now, following this stream of emanation, this spirit.” As you feel yourself moving down the mountain, taking form again, Jesus asks, “How do you feel?” You say, “I feel expanded, free, light, strong.” As you continue down

the trail you feel you now have a thousand hands of mercy to assist anyone and everyone and each hand has an eye to see what people need. Jesus asks, “Who are you?” And you say, “I am Christ.” He says, “How do you feel?” You say, “I am risen. Peace is flowing from me like a river. I am born of God. I and Abba are one. My life stream is eternal life.”

As you continue down the mountain the memories flood back again. Jesus’ last words to you are, “I am with you all days.” As you come to the foot of the mountain, you realize you are the same as you were before, but also how changed you are—a new creation! Now every step is a movement of the spirit. Rejoice!

THE DEER’S CRY

A PILGRIM’S POEM

Hando says, “Come with me now to the early morning Rose Room, as we begin a day of a meditation intensive retreat. The sound of the *mokugyo* (wooden drum) has called everyone to their cushions or chairs. The bell has rung and now, to unify and intensify our meditation energy, we begin chanting the ancient Celtic Pilgrim’s Hymn. In the course of this touching chant, three times we sing out, ‘I arise today.’ More and more I realize the truth of this affirmation. This is what life is all about, today and every day—past, present and future. We are made to arise to ever higher and more glorious manifestation of divine life. Being itself is creative and to create means to increase. All beings share in this intrinsic drive to evolve, to spiral out and up to more abundant life-manifestation. We are all pilgrims climbing the sacred mount of creation.”

I arise today . . .
Through the strength of heaven, light of the sun,
Radiance of the moon, splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning, swiftness of wind,
Depth of the sea, stability of earth, firmness of rock.

I arise today . . .
Through God's strength to pilot me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me
From all who shall wish me ill,
Afar and anear, alone and in a multitude,
Against every cruel merciless power
That may oppose my body and soul.

Christ with me.
Christ before me.
Christ behind me.
Christ in me.
Christ beneath me.
Christ above me.

Christ on my right.
Christ on my left.
Christ when I lie down.
Christ when I sit down.
Christ when I arise.
Christ to shield me.

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me.
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me.

I arise today . . .

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