



# INSIDE THE DOOR

THE NEWSLETTER OF EISHOJI

*ISSUE TWO: NATURE, NON-DUALITY, AND WALL  
STREET*

Welcome to second issue of the newsletter of the Northwest Zen Community and Eishoji, a Sōtō Zen training temple in the metropolitan Seattle area in Washington State.

Please see our website:

<http://nwzencommunity.org/index.html>

This is the second of a regular series of Zen meditations by members of Eishoji, reflecting on Zen, the Dharma, the teachings of Dōgen Zenji, and the myriad other matters that arise in the negotiation of life's Way. All meditations are written by practicing members of Eishoji and offered to all who would receive them in hopes of a more peaceful community of sentient beings. It is dedicated to fostering a "Oneness Community" among all beings.

Our second issue inquires into some of the pressing issues of our day (the hegemony of Wall Street, the ecological crisis) as well as some of the classical issues of the Buddha Dharma (non-duality, the relationship between Zen and Shorinji Kempo, figuring out

how and when to launch one's Zen practice). We enthusiastically welcome your comments through our website.

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All thoughts of a turtle are turtle.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

*What We've Been Practicing For*

In times of crisis, we often feel we don't have the time or energy to practice, but those are precisely the times when the practice is most necessary. This is what we've been practicing for: the situations where the practice doesn't come easily. When the winds of change reach hurricane force, our inner refuge of mindfulness, concentration, and discernment is the only thing that will keep us from getting blown away.

—Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "What We've Been Practicing For"

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***Waking Up from the Nightmare:  
Buddhist Reflections on Occupy Wall Street***

David R. Loy

In a Buddhist blog about Occupy Wall Street, Michael Stone quotes the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who spoke to the New York Occupiers at Zuccotti Park on October 9:

They tell you we are dreamers. The true dreamers are those who think things can go on indefinitely the way they are. We are not dreamers. We are awakening from a dream which is turning into a nightmare. We are not destroying anything. We are only witnessing how the system is destroying itself. We all know the classic scenes from cartoons. The cat reaches a precipice. But it goes on walking. Ignoring the fact that there is nothing beneath. Only when it looks down and notices it, it falls down. This is what we are doing here. We are telling the guys there on Wall Street – Hey, look down!

As Slavoj and Michael emphasize, we are beginning to awaken from that dream. That's an interesting way to put it, because the Buddha also woke up from a dream: *the Buddha* means "the awakened one." What dream did he wake up from? Is it related to the nightmare we are awakening from now?

From the beginning, Occupiers have been criticized for the vagueness of their demands: although clearly *against* the present system, it wasn't clear what they were *for*. Since then more focus has developed: many protesters are calling for higher taxes on the wealthy, a "Robin Hood" (Tobin) tax on trades, and banking reform to separate commercial and investment banking. These are worthy aims, yet it would be a mistake to think that such measures will by themselves resolve the basic problem. We should appreciate the general,

unfocused dissatisfaction that so many people feel, because it reflects a general, unfocused realization that the roots of the crisis are very deep and require a more radical (literally, “going to the root”) transformation.

Wall Street is the most concentrated and visible part of a much larger nightmare: the collective delusion that our present economic system—globalizing, consumerist, corporate capitalism—is not only the best possible system but the only viable one. As Margaret Thatcher famously put it, “There is no alternative.” The events of the last few years have undermined that confidence. The events of the past few weeks are a response to the widespread realization that our economic system is rigged to benefit the wealthy (the “1%”) at the expense of the middle class (shrinking fast) and the poor (increasing fast). And, of course, at the expense of many ecosystems, which will have enormous consequences for the lives of our grandchildren and their children. What we are waking up to is the fact that this unfair system is breaking down, and that it *should* break down, in order for better alternatives to develop.

It is not only the economy that needs to be transformed, because there is no longer any real separation between our economic and political systems. With the “Citizens United” Supreme Court decision last year—removing limits on corporate spending to influence elections—corporate power seems to have taken control of all the top levels of federal and state government, including the presidency. (Obama has received more campaign contributions from Wall Street than any other president since 1991, which helps explain his disappointing choice of economic advisors.) Today the elite move back and forth easily—from CEO to cabinet position, and vice-versa—because both sides share the same entrenched worldview: the solution to all problems is unfettered economic growth. Of course, they are also the ones who benefit most from this blinkered vision, which means the challenge for the rest of us is that the people who control this economic/political system have the least motivation to make the fundamental changes necessary.

Although the Democrats have not become as loony as the Republicans, on this basic level there’s really not much difference between them. Dan Hamburg, a Democratic congressman from California, concluded from his years in the U.S. Congress that “the real government of our country is economic, dominated by large corporations that charter the state to do their bidding. Fostering a secure environment in which corporations and their investors can flourish is the paramount objective of both [political] parties.” We still have the best Congress money can buy, as Will Rogers noticed way back in the 1920s.

From a Buddhist perspective, the point is that this integrated system is incompatible with Buddhist teachings, because it encourages greed and delusion—the root causes of our *dukkha* “suffering.” At the heart of the present crisis is the economic, political, and social role of the largest (usually transnational) corporations, which have taken on a life of their own and pursue their own agenda. Despite all the advertising and public relations propaganda we are exposed to, their best interests are quite different from what is best for the rest of us. We sometimes hear about “enlightened corporations” but that metaphor is deceptive—and the difference between such “enlightenment” and Buddhist enlightenment is instructive.

The burgeoning power of corporations became institutionalized in 1886, when the Supreme Court ruled that a private corporation is a “natural person” under the U.S. Constitution and thus entitled to all the protections of the Bill of Rights, including free speech. Ironically, this highlights the problem: as many Occupy Wall Street posters declare, corporations are *not* people, because they are social constructs. Obviously, incorporation (from the Latin *corpus, corporis* “body”) does not mean gaining a physical body. Corporations are legal fictions created by government charter, which means they are inherently indifferent to the responsibilities that people experience. A corporation cannot laugh or cry. It cannot enjoy the world or suffer with it. It is unable to feel sorry for what it has done (it may occasionally apologize, but that is public relations).

Most important, a corporation cannot love. Love is realizing our interconnectedness with others and living our concern for their well-being. Love is not an emotion but an engagement with others that includes responsibility for them, a responsibility that transcends our individual self-interest. Corporations cannot experience such love or act according to it. Any CEOs who try to subordinate their company’s profitability to their love for the world will lose their position, for they are not fulfilling their primary—that is, financial—responsibility to its owners, the shareholders.

Buddhist enlightenment includes realizing that my sense of being a self separate from the world is a delusion that causes suffering on both sides. To realize that I *am* the world—that “I” am one of the many ways the world manifests—is the cognitive side of the love that an awakened person feels for the world and its creatures. The realization (wisdom) and the love (compassion) are two sides of the same coin, which is why Buddhist teachers so often emphasize that genuine awakening is accompanied by spontaneous concern for all other sentient beings.

Corporations are “fuelled” by, and reinforce, a very different human trait. Our corporate-dominated economy requires greed in at least two ways: a desire for never-enough profit is the engine of the economic process, and in order to keep the economy growing consumers must be conditioned into always wanting more.

The problem with greed becomes much worse when institutionalized in the form of a legal construct that takes on privileges of its own quite independently of the personal values and motivations of the people employed by it. Consider the stock market, for example. On the one side, investors want increasing returns in the form of dividends and higher stock prices. On the other side, this anonymous expectation translates into an impersonal but constant pressure for profitability and growth, preferably in the short run. Everything else, including the environment, employment, and the quality of life, becomes an “externality,” subordinated to this anonymous demand, a goal-that-can-never-be-satisfied. We all participate in this process, as workers, employers, consumers, and investors, yet normally with little or no personal sense of moral responsibility for what happens, because such awareness is lost in the impersonality of the system.

One might argue, in reply, that some corporations (usually family-owned or small) take good care of their employees, are concerned about effects on the environment, and so forth. The

same argument could be made for slavery: there were a few good slave owners who took care of their slaves, etc. This does not refute the fact that the institution of slavery is intolerable. It is just as intolerable today that our collective well-being, including the way the earth's limited "resources" are shared, is determined by what is profitable for large corporations.

In short, we are waking up to the fact that although transnational corporations may be profitable economically, they are structured in a way that makes them defective socially. We cannot solve the problems they keep creating by addressing the conduct of this or that particular example (Morgan Stanley, Bank of America), because it is the institution itself that is the problem. Given their enormous power over the political process, it won't be easy to challenge their role, but they have an umbilical cord: corporate charters can be rewritten to require social and ecological responsibility. Groups such as the Network of Spiritual Progressives have been calling for an Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment (ESRA) to the U.S. Constitution which would mandate that. If our destiny is to remain in corporate hands, corporations must become accountable most of all not to anonymous investors but to the communities they function in. Perhaps Occupy Wall Street is the beginning of a movement which will accomplish that.

If so, it won't be enough. There's something else at stake, even more basic: the worldview that encourages and rationalizes the kind of economic nightmare that we are beginning to awaken from. In Buddhist terms, the problem isn't only greed, it's also ignorance. The theory most often used to justify capitalism is Adam Smith's "invisible hand": pursuing our own self-interest actually works to benefit society as a whole. I suspect, however, that CEOs are more often motivated by something less benign. It's no coincidence that corporate influence grew at the same time as the popularity of social Darwinism, the ideology that misapplied Darwin's theory of evolution to social and economic life: it's a jungle out there, and only the strongest survive. If you don't take advantage of others, they will take advantage of you. Darwinian evolution eliminated the need for a Creator and therefore the need to follow his commandments: now it's every man for himself...

Social Darwinism created a feedback loop: the more people believed in it and acted according to it, the more society became a social Darwinist jungle. It's a classic example of how we collectively co-create the world we live in. And this may be where Buddhism has the most to contribute, because Buddhism offers an alternative view of the world, based on a more sophisticated understanding of human nature that explains why we are unhappy and how to become happier. Recent psychological and economic studies confirm the destructive role of greed and the importance of healthy social relationships, which is consistent with Buddhist emphasis on generosity and interdependence.

In other words, the problem isn't only our defective economic and political system, it's also a faulty world view that encourages selfishness and competition rather than community and harmony. The modern West is split between a theism that's become hard to believe in, and a dog-eat-dog ideology that makes life worse for all of us. Fortunately, now there are other options.

Buddhism also has something important to learn from Occupy Wall Street: that it's not enough to focus on waking from our own individual dream. Today we are called upon to awaken together from what has become a collective nightmare. Is it time to bring our spiritual practice out into the streets?

If we continue abusing the earth this way, there is no doubt that our civilization will be destroyed. This turnaround takes enlightenment, awakening. The Buddha attained individual awakening. Now we need a collective enlightenment to stop this course of destruction. Civilization is going to end if we continue to drown in the competition for power, fame, sex, and profit. (Thich Nhat Hahn)

### *The Law of Mother Earth*

Carl Kakuzen Mountain

Recently the indigenous population of Bolivia pushed to pass the world's first laws granting all nature basic rights, a distinction usually reserved for humans. "The Law of Mother Earth" redefines the country's rich mineral deposits as "blessings" and is expected to lead to radical new conservation and social measures to reduce pollution and control industry.

As Buddhists, dedicated to the precepts of 'not killing,' 'not taking that which is not freely given to us' and all of the precepts that we normally consider to be moral actions governing the interactions between human beings, we are challenged to consider that this new legal approach shines a light on our need to consider everything, especially the Earth, as a living being with the right to live.

The realization that all things are interdependent and sustained by mutual relationships means that we cannot continue to ignore the life right in front of us: Mother Earth. This primary life giver and life sustainer, which grants all beings the capacity for life, should be afforded the same rights and protections that we continually attempt to extend to more and more of the sentient beings all around us.

The draft of the new law states: "She is sacred, fertile and the source of life that feeds and cares for all living beings in her womb. She is in permanent balance, harmony and communication with the cosmos. She is comprised of all ecosystems and living beings, and their self-organization."

Concentrating on oneness, being informed about social and ecological causes, and supporting proposed legislation that will help protect the Earth are as vital and important a practice as adhering to the precepts that we accepted in Jukai. This is all part of how we cultivate mindfulness.

## *Living and Dying in Zazen*

Jason Tetsuzen Wirth

In his breathtaking fascicle *Shōji (Of Life and Death)*, Dōgen writes: “Should you seek for Buddha outside of living and dying, you are like the one who pointed his cart north and drove off to the country of Etsu in the south, or like someone who faces south, hoping to see the North Star. It would be your piling up more and more causes of life and death while missing the path to liberation. Simply put: living and dying is what nirvana is, for there is nothing to despise in living and dying, nor anything to be wished for in nirvana . . . This living and dying is precisely what the treasured life of a Buddha is. If we hate life and want to throw it away, that is just our attempt to throw away the treasured life of Buddha. And if we go no farther than this and clutch onto life and death, this too is our throwing away the treasured life of Buddha by limiting ourselves to the superficial appearance of Buddha” (Shasta Abbey translation).

How is living and dying the treasured life of a Buddha such that to seek the Buddha outside of living and dying, outside of our lives and our world, is like running around looking for our head or looking south to find the North Star? What does it mean not to hate living and dying but to treasure them as the refuge of the three treasures? How do we embrace the Buddha in neither hatefully rejecting our lives nor in greedily clinging to them?

These are critical questions, but perhaps we can begin to explore them by asking how living and dying as subject neither to rejection nor to attachment reveals the treasured life of a Buddha as the life that somehow we already had, although we could not see it (just as we already have our heads, and hence do not need to go around looking for them). I would like to enter into this question indirectly, by reflecting on a related question, which stems from a phenomenon that many of us will find somehow familiar: *Why does the death of another or of many others tend to bring us together?*

We sometimes think with nostalgia of the feeling of unity that permeated through the United States, indeed through the world, after the violence of 9/11. The recent calamitous events in Japan have called the whole world to solidarity with the Japanese people. We want to carry their suffering with them. We want to help them bear such monstrous suffering.

Moreover, this sudden realization of solidarity extends from our oneness with the people of Japan in their time of suffering to our feeling of oneness with all of the people who since then have suffered from natural calamities: the recent tornadoes in the Midwest, the earthquake in Chile, the rushing floodwaters in the Deep South, the record setting great fire in Texas. The list goes on and on. And that list did not start in March with the terrible earthquake and tsunami in Japan. It did not start with the horrible earthquakes in Haiti and Chile or the tsunami in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. We live with and among calamities.

Alas, one might even venture to say that it is too easy to assign the responsibility for catastrophe solely to nature. *Homo homini lupus*. Humans are wolves to their fellow humans. Our capacity for war and violence on a vast scale helps define our species in a singular way. I believe it is also fair to say that this violence does not just extend to our fellow humans, but to the earth as a whole. The Sixth Great Extinction is underway, not because of a natural catastrophe, but because of our species and the vast scale of our environmental degradation. It sometimes seems that we are at war with ourselves and at war with nature. As high prices at the gas pump motivate us to start drilling domestically for oil, we remember the vast suffering—and not just among humans—of last year’s terrible oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. We can also think that spills on such a scale have been an almost routine event in Niger Delta of Nigeria. The proposed Keystone XL pipeline threatens even greater “accidents” and “unintended consequences.”

Yet I return to my question: *Why does the death of another or of many others, or even of life as we know it on earth, tend to bring us together?* One might naively surmise that death and suffering remind us of nobler callings and that it calls out as superficial many of our everyday obsessions. Perhaps that is true. But more deeply: *Does it bring us together or does it remind us that we were already together?* Does it not show us yet again the community that we repress and forget when we imagine that we, in our singularity, are first and foremost individuals? We cannot be singular individuals. (Individuals are first themselves and then secondarily in communities. Singularity, on the other hand, expresses an underlying shared plural being.) Just as no two drops of the ocean are exactly the same, our singularity as persons is the gift of our solitude and our personality. But there are no drops of the ocean without the ocean itself. The great ocean of the Dharma, the ocean that receives all drops, all tributaries, all rivers, all things, is the ocean of our original oneness, the face we had before we were born, our original Buddha nature, which gives us the gift of our singularity.

Let us take question of nature. Are we not one with the earth? Are we not able to live because of its oxygen, its water, its leaves and grains? How could we be ourselves all by ourselves?

And let us take our fellow humans. Do we give birth to ourselves? Do we raise ourselves? Do we invent the languages that we speak? Do we all build the houses in which we live? Do we teach the teachers who teach us, who point us towards the books and ideas that transform our lives? Do we personally build our own temples and churches and Zendos and mosques and other places of practice and worship? Even if we do some of these things some of the time, it is the exception that proves the rule. Do we first enlighten those who will enlighten us?

When teachers teach their students, they remember their own teachers. When students teach their teachers, they remember that they are also students. When teachers learn to teach, they remember that teaching is also the continuing practice of taught. Teachers who always remain students and students who also have things to teach also teach us

something about friendship with each other and with our earth (the Great Teacher, the Best Student, our Greatest Friend).

Dōgen taught us in the *Genjō Kōan* that to study the Buddha way is to study the self, but to study the self is to forget the self and to be confirmed by all other beings. It is to remember in good times and bad times the great and vast ocean that is the generosity of our original shared being. It is to remember and to activate the Dharma womb that is the shared possibility of our singularity.

## *Zen and Shorinji Kempo*

Taigaku Kizen  
Shorinji Kempo Junhanshi 6<sup>th</sup> Dan

Zen practice demands that one repeat the same steps again and again—Enlightenment does not suddenly emerge from out of the blue. One approaches one's training as if one were going up stairs: one takes it one step at a time, repeating the same motion again and again. One takes a similar approach to the martial arts. (Shorinji Kempo is a Japanese martial art.) This approach takes the form of *Shu-Ha-Ri*.

One can find the phrase *Shu-Ha-Ri* in the ancient Noh drama, *Fushi Kaden*. During the Samurai Warring States period, Noh drama was not a practice of passive art appreciation but rather an active practice for samurai in the way that the tea ceremony was. From my own practice of the martial arts, I understand the meaning of *Shu-Ha-Ri* as follows.

- *Shu*: Just follow exactly what your master teaches and practice the basic forms.
- *Ha*: Master the basic forms and then your own personal stamp or style to these basic forms.
- *Ri*: Live in complete accord with *Bu* [stop fighting] without needing to consciously apply martial arts techniques.

During the *Shu* stage, training can be very uncomfortable as one breaks the body and mind's bad habits. During this stage, one can make no excuses. One must rather develop a gentle and supple mind in order to make progress toward the next stage, namely, *Ha*. You must first empty your mind. What does this mean? Emptying can be understood in two ways, a conventional way and the way Shorinji Kempo and Zen. Using the example of emptying a cup of water, the conventional way is to just toss out the water in a cup and then be ready to fill it up again with new water. Unless you first empty the cup, there is a limit to how much you can fill it up again or mix it with something else. In the sense of Shorinji Kempo and Zen, emptying your cup does not mean to pour out the water, but you drink the water. You do not need to give up what you have learned. After emptying one's mind, one offers thanks to everything and be wholly accepting. This is the starting point of *Shu*.

In the *Ha* stage, one smoothes the rough edges of one's practice, making it rounder. It is the movement from □ to ○. Note that one has to smooth these edges for oneself. The master cannot do this for the practitioner. You may find that it is you, not anybody else to change yourself as it is said in the practice of Shorinji Kempo: *Within myself, my self finds recourse. Neglect myself, and to whom can I turn?* Until you reach this stage, you will be beholden to your master.

*Ri* is paradoxically no longer a stage, but a state of mind. In the past, I thought that only a genius could reach this stage and in so doing create and establish his own style. But I have a different understanding now. *Ri* is the stage in which one completely accords with *Bu* (武), which means "Stop fighting." The kanji for *Bu* itself consists of three kanji characters: two (二), arms (戈), and stop (止). It is the harmonious path in which one can get along with everyone without needing recourse to any martial arts techniques. In so doing, one contributes significantly to the creation of a more peaceful society. This is the goal of the martial arts.

Does this not resonate well with Zen practice? You start by practicing a basic type: Zazen. In the end you enter into Zen which is not separate from you, but which is the essence of your life. At the moment of enlightenment, you take action. Failure to do so reminds us that the opposite of success is not a failure but inaction. Success in Zen depends on acting without giving up along the way. This is what makes both Zen and Shorinji Kempo a practice in which one takes up the same forms again and again.

### ***How to Start a Sitting Practice***

Ray Jiyu Hayes

As human beings, our brains run constantly from the moment we take that first breath until the final exhale. Every moment of every day, even when we're sleeping, all our senses gather and process information at a rate that computer engineers can only dream of attaining with silicon chips. All of that processing power comes with an amazing set of filters and rules. Some are just there. Some our parents and caregivers build into us and some we build into ourselves. Add into that emotions, drives, fears, lusts, etc. and in many ways it's amazing that there aren't more incidents of spontaneous combustion.

We take all of this and we bring it to the simple act of Zazen or sitting. All of the great and wonderful powers of our brains don't shut down while we sit. To the contrary, we bring everything that we bring to our daily lives right to our zafu. If we have grown accustomed to having life run to a constant soundtrack, all the silence can be maddening. Sometimes the silence is so difficult that we cannot sit. If we are competitive, then we will look for rules to gauge whether we are doing everything right and binge on books and talks about Zazen and Buddhism to make sure we have got it right. Sometimes the inability to "win" at Zazen means that we cannot sit. Sometimes we just cannot force ourselves to sit.

It is in the last sentence with the word “force” where we need to see what we’re doing to ourselves. When we sit, we bring our entire selves to the cushion. We cannot simply leave the parts that cannot deal with silence behind. Nor can we leave behind the parts that want to do it “right” or the parts that would prefer to be resting in bed. So if we want to sit we have to just deal with ourselves. If life is so crazy that our mind cannot abide sitting, then perhaps now is not the ideal time to sit. The right thing to do now may be to pull all the loose ends together that are clamoring for attention and then once they’re under control, give ourselves room in our lives to sit. The not taking on of more and the making room is how we treat ourselves with compassion and caring. We don’t need to force our knees to a full lotus. We don’t need to force ourselves to do Zazen. To awaken in the morning and put our full attention to each task, whether it is making a cup of tea or getting the kids to school, is already to do Zazen.

Slowly we bring our Zazen to our cushion when the time is right.

## ***Zen and the Not Two***

Jason Giannetti

The Western philosophical tradition has long been known for its reliance on dualistic distinctions. From the time that Aristotle articulated the Principle of Non-contradiction as the fundamental principle of thought, Western philosophy has been rigorous in its pursuit of discovering Truth through the instrument of logic and its dualistic structure. This structure has pervaded Western thought to such a great degree that it is the building-block of artificial intelligence and computerized models of the mind, as exemplified by the 0/1 foundation of binary code. This deeply ingrained “programming” could be why many Westerners find Buddhism in general and Zen Buddhism in particular so mysterious and confusing. But in this brief account I would like to demonstrate the strange logic of Zen and the critique it offers of more traditional Western forms of logic.

In *Zen and Western Thought*, Masao Abe lays out a three-stage formula of Zen understanding. Simply stated it is: 1) *samsara*; 2) negation of *samsara*; 3) *satori*. The Sanskrit term “*samsara*” could be understood as everyday-mind, or the mind of a novice or non-initiate. This is the mind that is caught up in the experience and phenomena of day-to-day existence and the formidable questions of life and death. After some training in Zen, one begins to see that things as they seem are not as they really are, and thus one moves to the transitional stage of negation. But finally, upon “awakening” or “enlightenment” (also known as “*satori*” in Japanese, or *nirvana* in Sanskrit), one is able to re-affirm the original position.

Abe uses a passage from the Chinese Zen master Ch’ing-yüan Wei-hsin who says:

Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, ‘Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.’

After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, 'Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters.'

But now, having attained the abode of final rest, I say, 'Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters.' (*Zen and Western Thought*, 4)

Malcolm David Eckel also examines this three-step process in his study of the Mādhyamaka philosopher Bhavaviveka. There Eckel says:

It is customary in Mādhyamaka studies to speak of this way of thinking as a dialectic, for obvious reasons. The assumption of conventional distinctions seems to function as a thesis, the denial of distinctions seems to function as an antithesis, and the reappropriation of distinctions seems to resolve the two antithetical positions in a new synthesis. (*To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*, 44).

Eckel rejects this Hegelian understanding of what is happening in passages such as the one about the mountains and the waters above. However, to explain this, a little must be said about the fundamental Mādhyamaka position.

According to the Mādhyamaka tradition, especially as articulated by such great Indian Buddhist philosophers as Nāgārjuna and Bhavaviveka, but having its origin in some of the earliest texts in Buddhist literature, nothing is permanent, nothing is fixed, nothing has persistent identity, selfhood, or essence. This is impermanence (*anitya*). All, ultimately, is empty of *atman* (self). This is the ultimate insight of *satori*, the insight that the Buddha was granted when he attained enlightenment. Thus everything resolves into Emptiness. However, saying this posits some kind of permanent position, a point of resolution akin to a ground with its own essence—the essence of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Thus, as Eckel says:

From the point of view of Emptiness, none of the normal distinctions between things applies [for they are all empty]. But emptiness itself is a distinct position, too, and when it is analyzed from the point of view of Emptiness, it also has to be empty. So the 'intelligent' readers who have followed the argument faithfully through all of its [distinct] stages finally see the last distinction, the distinction between distinction and no-distinctions, vanish before their eyes. At the end they are left where they began. It is not that they can plunge into the distinctions of ordinary consciousness with the same naïveté as before, but they are aware that Emptiness ultimately is not different from the process of distinction-making with which they began . . . Without denying the distinction between distinction and no-distinction, the concept of Emptiness would be essentially sterile. It would leave the philosopher trapped in a world of Emptiness *as opposed to* something else. But with the emptiness of Emptiness, the argument not only pushes the concept of Emptiness to its final limit; it also forces the transition from the stage of denial to

the stage of reappropriation, the transition that returns the argument to the world of distinctions out of which it came. (Eckel, 43)

To illustrate this terminology, we can return to the saying of Ch'ing-yüan Wei-hsin. In the first stage he was caught up in the everyday-mind of distinctions whereby mountains are distinguished from waters and each has its own essence. This is called "conventional truth" or "conventional perspective." In the second stage, after some Zen training, he begins to realize that everything is ultimately empty. Thus, this stage, from the perspective of "ultimate truth," is negative and denies the conventional truth of the first stage. Hence, mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters. But in the third stage, where Emptiness "itself" is understood as empty, thus negating the negation of distinctions, the conventional distinctions can again be affirmed.

This *strange* "logic" can perhaps be better illustrated if, instead of mountains and waters, one uses the concepts of true and false—the foundational dyad of all Western logic. According to conventional truth, statements are either true or false. But, according to the Mādhyamaka, the ultimate truth is that all conventional truth is empty. That would include conventional terms such as "true" and "false." Hence there is no distinction between "true" and "false." Both are empty. Both resolve into Emptiness, for Emptiness alone is. . . is what?—True, of course. But, based upon the truth of Emptiness, we just declared that there is no distinction between true and false, thus the claim that Emptiness is true is itself an empty claim. This would seem to undermine the whole argument, and from the point of view of conventional truth (or from Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction) the argument would fail as self-contradictory. But rather than admit defeat, the Mādhyamaka *insist* on the fact that the claim that Emptiness is true is itself an empty claim. The emptiness of Emptiness thus allows all the conventional claims and distinctions to stand as they are.

According to Eckle, the Mādhyamaka argument

holds the perspectives of the two truths [conventional and ultimate] together simultaneously in a kind of double vision or, as Jacques Derrida would say, in a double register that permits no synthesis. The Mādhyamaka critique 'deconstructs' in the sense that it brings to the surface the contradictions that lurk within particular systems of thought. [Or, one could say, all systems of thought.] It does not resolve the differences in a higher synthesis but unmasks the differences for what they are. Instead of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* [sublimation] that negates a previous position and conserves it by 'lifting it up' to a higher level, there is a *différance* that "differs" and defers" the contradiction without leading it to a higher synthesis. (Eckel , 44-45)

Hence, we must recall what we said earlier, and now claim that *there is no* "fundamental Mādhyamaka position," for any and all systemizing philosophy is, according to the fundamental Mādhyamaka position, deficient, for all discursive thought and language are dependent upon conventional truth. Ironically, however, it is only by means of an

explication of “the fundamental Mādhyamaka position” that we discover its impossibility and that Mādhyamaka cannot be reduced to any system.

Thus we find in the great collection of Zen stories, *The Gateless Gate*, it said that “Daibai asked Baso: ‘What is Buddha?’ [Or, ‘What is Enlightenment?'] Baso said: ‘This mind is Buddha.’ [Or, ‘Everyday-mind is Enlightenment.’]” (*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, Shambhala Press, Boston, 1994, 210). And then, separated by just two stories, we find, “A monk asked Baso: ‘What is Buddha?’ Baso answered: ‘This mind is not Buddha’” (Reps, 214). Or, as Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Ch’an (Chinese for “Zen”) Buddhism, said:

If, in questioning you, someone asks about being, answer with non-being. If he asks about non-being, answer with being. If he asks about the ordinary man, answer in terms of the sage. If he asks about the sage, answer in terms of the ordinary man. By this method of opposites mutually related there arises an understanding of the Middle Way. For every question that you are asked, respond in terms of its opposite. (Quoted in: Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen*, Vintage, New York, 1985, 94)

In other words, if one speaks about what is profane, reply in terms of things profound, and if one speaks about what is profound, reply in terms of what is profane. Thus we find snippets of dialogue such as:

A monk asked Tozan when he was weighing some flax: ‘What is Buddha?’  
Tozan said: ‘This flax weighs three pounds.’ (Reps, 192)

And:

A monk told Joshu: ‘I have just entered the monastery. Please teach me.’  
Joshu asked: ‘Have you eaten your rice porridge?’  
The monk replied: ‘I have eaten.’  
Joshu said: ‘Then you had better wash your bowl.’  
At that moment the monk was enlightened. (Reps, 175)

Or, as an example of taking a mundane statement and responding from the perspective of the ultimate:

As the Layman [P’ang] and Sung-shan were walking together one day they saw a group of monks picking greens.  
‘The yellow leaves are discarded, the green leaves are kept,’ said Sung-shan.  
‘How about not falling into green or yellow?’ [replied the Layman]. (*A Man of Zen: The Recorded Sayings of Layman P’ang*, trans. Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Yoshitaka Iriya, and Dana Fraser, Weatherhill, New York, 1992, 83)

And finally, an almost shocking transposition of profound and profane:

A monk asked Ummon: ‘What is Buddha?’ Ummon answered him: ‘Dried dung.’  
(Reps, 195)

Of course, if one takes the statement of Hui-neng as a prescription and applies it formulaically, one has completely misapplied the statement. For, as Alan Watts has pointed out, such usage can become an “institutionalized technique, and therefore lends itself to affectation and artificiality . . . This, too, can become a fetish” (Watts, 169). And what is a fetish but an attachment? And whether we subscribe to the complex and difficult philosophical discourses on Buddhist metaphysics and logic, or we look no further than the clarity and simplicity of the Four Noble Truths, the maxim is: The cause of suffering is attachment. Thus, the crux of Buddhism is giving up our attachments and that means, paradoxically, even our attachments to Buddhist logical systems, truths, and maxims. Hence, if you’ve followed me thus far, I congratulate you, but it is now high time to throw away the proverbial ladder and see the mountains and the waters.

*Inside the Door: The Eishoji Newsletter* is edited by Jason  
Tetsuzen Wirth. We welcome your comments.

<http://nwzencommunity.org/index.html>

*Our next issue will be devoted to the question of religious  
oneness and interfaith dialogue*