

This is true not only with Japanese gardens but also with most traditional Japanese disciplines in which the view of truth in terms of "as-it-is-ness" is consistent. However, this view of truth includes the danger of falling into mere anti-rationalism, shallow intuitionism, or sheer behaviourism. At least, it does not intellectually analyse, synthesize, and reconstruct objects. This is the reason rationalistic philosophy, experimental natural science, and technology by which man can overcome nature did not develop in Japan until after the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Intuitionism excluding rationality is poor, whereas rationalism excluding intuition is abstract. By overcoming the dangers inherent in it, the Japanese view of truth in terms of *makoto* and "as-it-is-ness" must be developed and deepened to include Western forms of rationalism, which have produced science, logic, law, technology and the like. This is a future task for Japanese and may be their contribution to the coming one world, the establishment of which will necessitate a synthesis of East and West.

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ZAZENLESS ZEN? THE POSITION OF ZAZEN IN INSTITUTIONAL ZEN BUDDHISM

When I came to Japan I, like many other visitors, had a great interest in Zen Buddhism, particularly in the practice of Zen meditation, zazen. It did not take long for me to discover that my pre-conceptions of how Zen Buddhism functioned, at least institutionally, were rather different from the reality: most Zen Buddhist temples seemed no different from temples of any other sect, dealing with funerals and ancestrally related rites and bound up with social conventions and aspects of Japanese folk belief, rather than with the enlightenment directed austerities that are, at least in the popular image, associated with Zen. I noted, for instance, that very few Zen priests I met practiced zazen and that zazen did not occupy a place in the activities of the large majority of Zen temples.

Many people I have met who have come to Japan intent on the practice of Zen have shared such feelings. It is not at all uncommon for them to react quite negatively to what they find, since it is so contrary to what they had assumed, from their reading of Zen related works in Western languages, they would find. This is, of course, partially our own fault: by idealising Zen as a thought/practice system that focuses on enlightenment, we are disregarding the whole socio-historical context in which it has grown and developed in Japan and are neglecting the general role and function of institutional Buddhism in Japan. A danger of such a lack of understanding is that there exists the potential for friction between those who come seeking Zen and those

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who institutionally represent it, with the former frequently convinced that the latter have neglected what they believe to be Zen's essence and the latter frustrated at the former's failure to understand the overall position in which they exist. This situation is not, however, only a result of misconceptions on one side: rather, as this article will make clear, I consider that there are many areas in which institutional Zen Buddhism and its representatives in Japan could, and should, be criticised for the ways they have dealt with such fundamental aspects of Zen as zazen.

In a previous article in this journal I outlined some of the factors which have caused the Sôtô Zen sect, the largest Zen Buddhist organisation in Japan, to, throughout its history, continually modify and adjust its teachings in tune with changing times and social conditions, while adhering to some basic, unchanging principles that are considered to be the ultimate truths of the sect. I indicated that the practice of zazen was not necessarily a widely followed or publicised practice in the sect, despite being considered to be a basic truth upon which the sect is based.¹ My purpose in this article is to examine the position of zazen as it occurs in contemporary Sôtô Zen Buddhism in the hope that this will, at the very least, enable those who are interested in Zen to develop a fuller understanding of the situation they see in Japan at present. It is further hoped that such an examination will contribute to the continuing search for a clearer understanding of the nature and situation of contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

ZAZEN IN SÔTÔ ZEN BUDDHISM IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE

Zazen occupies a key position in Zen Buddhism: one of its most fundamental images is that of Siddhartha Gautama sitting in meditation and becoming enlightened, the Buddha. Zen terms this meditation

1. I. Reader 'Transformations and Changes in the Teachings of the Sôtô Zen Buddhist Sect' in *Japanese Religions* Vol. 14, No. 1, 1985, pp. 28-48.

zazen, the seated meditation usually in the half or full lotus posture practiced in Zen temples, and views it as the basis of all Buddhism. The Sôtô academic Kurebayashi, for instance, states that outside zazen there is no true Buddhism, that "Buddhism's source is zazen; all Buddhism was born from the Buddha's meditation (zazen)".² The first treatise Dôgen wrote on his return from China in 1227, the *Fukanza-zengi*, concerned the practice of zazen and affirmed its centrality in Buddhism, while later he was to write, in *Shôbôgenzô Zazengi*, that the correct gate to Buddhism was sitting correctly in zazen. Dôgen viewed the practice of zazen as not just the gateway to enlightenment, but as enlightenment itself, the essence of all Buddhism. To Dôgen, pure and single-minded sitting in zazen, which he termed *shikantaza*, was indivisible from enlightenment; in zazen, not only the whole path of Buddhism but its realisation were simultaneously manifested. The sect, in its constitution, emphasises single-minded zazen (*shikantaza*) as the actualisation of enlightenment, the true essence of Buddhism transmitted by the Buddha through a succession of Zen masters to Dôgen and, through him, to the Sôtô sect, and holds it as a basic and essential tenet of belief.³

Yet, despite this theoretical emphasis on zazen, one finds very little mention of the practice in the general literature that Sôtô prepares and publishes for its members. Most of such publications focus on institutional aspects of Buddhism, such as mortuary rites, that form the major link between the sect and the majority of its members.⁴ It is widely believed in the sect that zazen is difficult to popularise, that it is not something that most members of temples would willingly participate in. Hattori Shôsai, for example, in a major work examining possible

2. Kurebayashi Kôdô (1978) *Fukazazengi o Tataeru Sôtôshûshûmûchô* (hereafter referred to as SSSMC), Tokyo 1978, p. 13. 仏教の源泉は座禅であり、全仏教は釈尊の禅定（座禅）から産まれたもの。
3. Article Three of this sets out the tenets (*shûshi* 宗旨) of the sect, the first of which is an affirmation of the position of *shikantaza*.
4. Reader op. cit., pp. 28-29 and 39-46.

means by which Sôtô could expand its membership and deepen its commitment, remarks on the comparative difficulties of doing this by focusing on zazen rather than other practices such as worship and prayer.⁵ Hattori's attitude is quite common amongst Sôtô priests I have spoken to and the general lack of emphasis on zazen in its publications appears to bear out the feelings of the sect on this point.

One major problem for the sect is that, in common with all Buddhism in Japan, its temples occupy a formal place in the consciousness of Japanese people as places where household related ceremonies focusing on ancestors are conducted. While many Japanese regard themselves as members of temples and, through these temples, of Buddhist organisations, such affiliations are largely formal, centred on ancestral practices and demanding little or no commitment to any particular teachings or practices. This formal affiliation has to a very large degree defined the whole area of relationships between sects and members, most of whom are so due to an historical connection between their household and a particular temple. Temple members are wont to see their relationship to a sect through the medium of such a relationship which is of a rather functional type, concerned with rituals and ceremonial practices which demand no real religious commitment or action.

A brief look at the general attitudes of people affiliated to Sôtô temples to such practices as zazen will illustrate this point clearly. My own experiences at Sôtô temples indicate that people from households affiliated to sect temples rarely, if ever, take part in zazen. A Sôtô temple at which I lived for five months, in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, in 1981-2, had a period of zazen every morning. Anyone who so wished was able to take part, with no obligation or prior arrangement. The temple had over 500 affiliated households in the area yet, while a small number of people did attend during the time I was there, not one of

5. Hattori Shôsai *Jôgu to Geke* SSSMC Tokyo 1977. p. 58.

them was actually from a household affiliated to the temple.⁶ Conversations with priests at many Sôtô temples have made it clear to me that not only do affiliated members rarely take part in zazen meditation at their temples, but also that most priests consider that it is hardly worth emphasising such aspects of sect teaching as zazen because they do not appeal to the average household temple member.

This attitude came across clearly in a discussion I had with officials at Sôtô's Tôhoku regional office in Sendai. One official, in explaining why there was so little emphasis on zazen in the sect's publications, stated that few people practiced zazen; it was a demanding and difficult practice that did not appeal to the general member. To illustrate his point he cited the temple mentioned above as one of the few temples in the area that held regular zazen sittings; the fact that not one person from the several hundred households affiliated to it came to meditate was proof, he felt, of zazen's general lack of appeal. In consequence, he considered, the sect tended to concentrate, in its broader activities and publications, on other Buddhist and household related aspects that might appeal to a wide audience, rather than on zazen.⁷

Recently the sect carried out a comprehensive survey in order to determine the religious attitudes and needs of its membership and of the general public with regard to institutional Buddhism. The survey spells out comprehensively in figures the degree to which the above views are justified.⁸ In all, a total of 1848 people of all ages from eight different regions, from cities to villages, were interviewed. Approximately two-thirds were affiliated to Sôtô temples. In an overall assess-

6. These observations are based on my stay at Daimanji, a Soto temple, between October 1981 and March 1982. During the period April 1981-April 1982 I stayed at a number of temples of the sect and talked with a large number of priests and temple members: my general observations in this article are based on these experiences.

7. Personal communication, Sendai, Jan. 12th 1982.

8. The survey results, along with a comprehensive analysis of them, have been published by the sect in *Sôtôshû Shûseichōsa Iinkai* (ed.) (hereafter referred

ment of the survey, Sasaki states that five major points emerged:

1) Regardless of where people lived, ancestrally-related practices and ceremonies were seen as the most important elements of activity and belief with regard to temples,

2) The basic tenets of Buddhism as taught by Sôtô have not penetrated through to its membership,

3) Temple priests were not regarded as religious teachers but rather as ritualists whose role was to carry out ceremonies related to the death process,

4) It was extremely difficult to spread the practice of zazen widely,

5) The general understanding of the sect's affiliated members was extremely shallow.⁹

For most people surveyed, the role of the temple was connected to mortuary processes: 77% responded that their reasons for visiting temples were connected with funerals and death, while only 7% did so for what they termed spiritual reasons. Under half those surveyed knew what sect their temple was affiliated to, while less than 10% of Sôtô members appeared to know who had established the sect's head temples and only 13% knew that the Buddha was the principle image of worship (*honzon*) in the sect.¹⁰

The survey showed that zazen hardly occupied a place in the general consciousness. Only 15.5% had ever done zazen, with there being very little difference between those affiliated to Sôtô and those not. More men than women had done zazen, and more young than

to as SSI(ed.) *Shūkyōshūdan no Ashita e no Kadai* SSSMC, Tokyo 1984. The survey itself and the responses to it are set out in a 40 page appendix at the back of the book, while the main text of the book consists of a number of articles by sect academics and priests commenting on specific aspects of the survey.

9. Sasaki Kōkan 'Kaisetsu - shuyō na mondai o megutte' in SSI(ed.) op. cit., p. 365.
10. SSI(ed.), op. cit., Appendix, pp. 1-40.

old, with the highest percentage being amongst those who had graduated from or were at university (31% for universities and 36% for junior colleges). However one breaks down those surveyed into categories, with the exception of those who have attended university, no percentage goes above the low twenties and most are lower.¹¹

Not only does the survey show that the numbers who have done zazen are low; it shows that there is very little real wish to practice it. A related question asked whether people wished to try doing zazen and was answered by all, including those who already had zazen experience. 22% overall replied that they would like to do zazen, 55% did not want to and the remainder were undecided. Overall, the figure hardly changes between those affiliated to the sect and those not, though in the Tōhoku region those outside the sect appear to be keener to do zazen than those inside (26% as opposed to 14%). The wish to do zazen was by far the strongest among the young, especially young women in their late teens and early twenties. A graph of those who would like to do zazen shows a gradual decline from 39% of teenagers and 33% of those in their twenties down to 3% of those over seventy. Those who expressed a wish to do zazen were, for the most part, those who lived in cities and towns: those in rural areas were far less inclined to do so.¹²

These figures show a general feeling that zazen is not really of much concern for the laity: Itō, commenting on the survey, feels that the overall perception of zazen is that it is a practice for monks, which makes him consider that it would be difficult to make more widely popular, although the increased interest among young urban dwellers offers a potential area for improvement.¹³ Most priests whom I have talked to who run *zazenkai* (Zen meditation groups) at their temples state that the majority of participants are young, and not necessarily

11. *ibid.*, Appendix pp. 19-20. Itō Shungen 'Danshinto no Shūkyōishiki no Gaiyō' pp. 177-183 in this book analyses the responses on zazen in detail.
12. Itō, op. cit., pp. 181-182.
13. *ibid.* p. 183.

affiliated to the sect, an observation I have gained from taking part in and talking to members of numerous such groups since first coming to Japan. Quite simply, *zazen* hardly enters the consciousness of the vast majority of older people who have some relationship to the sect, though it might be of some interest to the young.

It is not only the laity who have this reluctance: priests themselves are not always interested in *zazen*. As the major activities of most temples are connected with death related ceremonials, priests tend to spend their time carrying these out. Even if *zazen* is affirmed, in its constitution, as a basic tenet of the sect, there is no injunction that states that members or priests have to do it. It is purely up to the priest whether he runs a meditation society or not, or whether he himself does *zazen* or not. The large majority of temples do not run *zazenkai* and a large number of priests I have spoken to have stated that they do not themselves practice *zazen*.

Those who become Sôtô priests have to undergo a training period at one of its recognised training temples such as Eiheiji and Sôjiji, the two head temples of the sect, during which time they have to practice *zazen* and take part in the monastic schedule of the temple concerned. Eiheiji in particular has a reputation for conducting strict training. Yet it is my general impression that, while many priests I have spoken to look back to their training period at Eiheiji with some form of nostalgia, they tend to view that period, when they did *zazen*, as belonging to the past. *Zazen* appears to be seen, to a great degree, as something done in youth, an experience to be undergone but not to be continued after the training period. When I stayed at Chôkokuji, a temple at Matsushiro in Nagano Prefecture, there were six young monks training for the priesthood. As part of their training they all had to follow the temple routine which included doing *zazen* twice a day. However, all of them informed me that, once their training period was completed and they had left this temple to return to their family temples, they would all cease doing *zazen*. They stated quite frankly that none of them liked it: they were only doing it because they had

to. To them it appeared to be something related to their training period, not a necessary component of their lives as priests.¹⁴

It might at first glance appear ironical that the priests of a sect whose basic tenets include *zazen* should be so reluctant to practice it and should regard it as something to be endured as part of their training and no more. When one looks at the background in which priests function, however, things become clearer. Ever since the early years of the Meiji era priests in the sect have married and had children. As a rule temples have become hereditary, with fathers bringing up sons to succeed them. Nowadays, the very large majority of priests in Sôtô inherit their position due to family connections. A result of this hereditary system is that many who become priests do not necessarily wish to do so but are obliged to by family obligations and pressures. The trainees I spoke to in Nagano were no exception to this: all stated that the prime reason why they were becoming priests was because they were either the first or only son in a temple household and were thus led not by choice but by pressure. Not surprisingly, in such circumstances, they tended to view their becoming priests in the temple run by their fathers as somewhat akin to inheriting the family business, a function rather than a vocation.

Because temples depend economically on the performance of funerals and related activities, and because the demand for such practices is a component part of the whole socio-religious system in Japan, temples as a rule can function – at least in an economic sense – merely by dealing with this area. It is, after all, what the vast majority of those with any connection to temples appear to want. In the Sôtô survey, when asked at what time they would visit a priest, 61% of all respondents said when they wanted to ask for services related to ancestors and funerals. The next highest category, 17%, would not visit at all, while only 3.6% would do so in order to seek

14. These feelings were expressed to me at this temple by the trainees during two visits there in December 1981 and February 1982.

teachings about Buddhism and less than 2% would go to a priest at a time of personal trouble or crisis.¹⁵

Priests are not, it seems, regarded as teachers or as spiritual advisers, with the result that there is little pressure for them to engage in such activities. Those who provide them with their living and who support temples through the fees paid for funerals and mortuary rites do not expect them to do so. Rather, the relationship is akin to a service industry for the most part, with the priest and temple providing a service, in dealing with the process of death, that is embedded in the Japanese social system, and households for the most part using, for the purposes of dealing with a process that is inevitable, those temples with which they have historical links. One Sôtô writer, commenting on the attitudes towards priests reflected in this survey, remarked that many modern priests acted as if what they were doing were no more than a job, behaving as if they were salarymen or union members, only really prepared to give time to temple members on Sundays and holidays, rather than throughout the week, and more concerned with creature comforts than anything else. In short, while manifesting the external guise of priests, they failed to live as priests.¹⁶

THE PROBLEM OF ZAZEN

All that has been said in the previous section indicates that zazen is something of a problem for Sôtô. It is, on the one hand, an intrinsic part of the sect's belief structure, viewed as the very starting point and basis of Buddhism, yet, on the other, it is not a practice which attracts any great public interest or support. As a result, the sect has tended to speak in dualistic ways about zazen: while Sôtô regards its zazen as an intrinsic part of its legitimacy, both a symbol of the direct essence it

15. SSI(ed.) op. cit., Appendix, p. 23.

16. Tamamuro Bunyū 'Sôtôshū to Dankaseido' in SSI(ed.), op. cit., p. 313-314.

believes has come to it from the Buddha and the direct means of manifesting the enlightenment that is at the heart of Buddhism, it rarely talks about it openly to the general public. For its part, most of those with connections to the sect through household membership of its temples have not seen Buddhism as a way of enlightenment and spiritual release so much as a system for dealing with the problems of death in a socio-religious context, and as a means of conducting the ceremonies believed to be important in this process. This duality on the part of the sect and the divergence between its teachings and the wishes of its members is by no means new, but is a problem that has troubled the sect almost from its beginnings.

Although Dôgen emphasised zazen and made it a central part of the life of the order he founded, after his death his followers felt a need to expand the order so as to propagate Dôgen's teachings more widely. At Dôgen's death the monastic order he founded was small and insecure and, in order to widen its base, his successors began to incorporate various customs and practices, such as funerary rites, that were more closely related to folk beliefs and the wishes and expectations of the general populace than they were to the monastic Zen of Dôgen. In consequence, while Sôtô expanded greatly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it also changed quite drastically in terms of focus. From being firmly rooted in zazen, at the time of Dôgen's death, it became, by the fifteenth century, firmly rooted in funeral practices.¹⁷

It is widely recognised by those in the sect that its expansion was due not to any desire of the general populace to become involved with the spiritual practices of Zen such as meditation but, rather, to the more populist practices incorporated by its monks as they sought to expand the sect's influence. It is probably more accurate to state that its expansion came about despite, rather than because of, zazen. The

17. Tamaru Tokuzen 'Gendai Bukkyôkyôdan no diremma' in SSI(ed.), op. cit., p. 316-318.

result was that Sôtô Zen from the fifteenth century onwards was by no means the monastically and meditatively focused Zen of its Japanese beginnings: zazen, although practiced in sect temples, was not propagated to the general populace, a situation that caused it to be seen as a monkish rather than a general practice, a notion that has never been, as Itô's remarks cited above show, completely eradicated.

With the development of the formal system of temple-household relationships in the Tokugawa era, zazen became even less of an active component of Sôtô practice. Households were made to belong to a particular temple, which was, in turn, compelled to carry out administrative work on their behalf: the relationship never was one of commitment and belief on either side. Temple activities became more and more centred on funerary practices which, with the administrative duties temples were obliged to perform, occupied most of the priests' time and energies.¹⁸ When, after the Meiji Restoration, this system, which had simultaneously provided economic support for temples while denuding them of any real spiritual authority or vitality, was formally abolished, people were no longer obliged to belong to a temple and sect, and the formerly captive membership Buddhism had had was released from its obligations. Because people were henceforth free to leave if they wished, it became necessary for Buddhist sects to make efforts to win the support that had previously been automatically theirs.

In actuality, the household system has withstood and survived the major challenges brought about by its formal abolition, largely because its relationship to the whole ancestral and Japanese socio-religious systems is so deeply rooted, to the extent that it still continues to be the economic mainstay of Buddhism in the present. Nonetheless, in the early Meiji era this was by no means certain and established Buddhist sects such as Sôtô had to seek support from those who were no longer

18. Tamamuro, op. cit., pp. 304–314 gives a good overall review of this system and the tensions that it caused to occur between temples and their members.

obliged to support it and to explain to the public at large just what its beliefs were, in order to persuade people to grant them support. In its attempts to do this Sôtô produced a short text, edited from the writings of Dôgen, which set out the basis of the Sôtô beliefs and teachings upon which it was basing its attempts to proselytise, and which also acted as guideline for priests attempting to explain the standpoint of the sect to the public. This text, the *Shushôgi*, although based on Dôgen's writings, did not mention zazen as its compilers felt that this was not only a practice that would not attract support but also was too specialized, for monks and devoted practitioners rather than the average lay follower.¹⁹

A commitment to zazen does require dedication: Dôgen, in his later writings, tended to emphasise the need to ordain as a monk and frequently stated that one had to train under a true master who had received the Zen transmission while, in his first text on zazen, the *Fukanzazengi*, he said that the practice of zazen demanded both application and time. Sôtô has always realised that commitment is part of zazen but, because of this, it has become more and more convinced, it appears, that this makes the task of propagating zazen too difficult to undertake. There seems to be, inherent in the Sôtô consciousness, something of a feeling that zazen is not just difficult to popularise but also, perhaps, too arduous for all but the very dedicated and, therefore, hardly worth publicising.

There is, in modern Sôtô, a tendency to create the feeling that zazen is, in truth, a limited path for severe practitioners only. The film *Eiheiji, Sôjiji*, made by the sect about its two main temples, for example, focuses, at Eiheiji, almost exclusively on what the film describes as the 'severe' (*kibishii*) aspects of monastic life, such as the practice of zazen. In this film, one sees monks meditating in the early hours of an icy winter morning and being struck forcefully with

19. In Reader, op. cit., pp. 32–39 I have given an account of the process which led to the production of this text and the motives behind it.

the *kyōsaku*, the wooden stick used to awaken meditators who are losing concentration. The film appears to promote the image that **Eihei** is a severe training place and to make one feel that zazen is a **fearful** and austere practice suited for ascetics only.²⁰ Such films certainly help to enhance the image of Eihei and to convince sect members that its priests are really, despite their popular image, austere, but it equally helps to reinforce the general public's perceptions of zazen as a practice that is for monks and not for them.

All this compounds and promotes the feeling prevalent in Sôtō circles for centuries that zazen is not the means by which to lead people into a relationship with the sect's teachings. Perhaps this is true; the general attitudes manifested by the survey and by the lack of interest shown by the majority of temple members to *zazenkai* appear to substantiate this point of view. Yet one is left with the feeling that the sect has never sought to find out if this is really so. It has never, after all, really made a strong and concerted effort to encourage large numbers of people to practice what is, after all, considered by the sect to be the very essence of Buddhism. It appears content, so far at least, to view zazen in an elitist way, fit for a small number of people but not to be widely promoted for the public at large.

This feeling is underlined also by the ways in which popular Sôtō literature deals with zazen, frequently describing it as difficult for most people to do.²¹ The sect has provided an alternative to zazen in the action of making a formal commitment to the Buddhism of the Sôtō sect by taking a lay ordination that involves making a preceptual commitment to Buddhism. This action of taking precepts (*jukai*) was especially elevated by the sect in the Meiji era, forming a major

20. This film was produced by the sect in the late 1970's and is 25 minutes long. It was made to be shown at sect temples to illustrate what life at the head temples was like; I first saw it at Eihei in December 1981.

21. Various publications by the sect contain remarks indicating that zazen is hard for most people to do; see, for example, SSSMC (ed.) *Bukkyō Tokuhon* Vol. 3 SSSMC, Tokyo, 1981. p. 52.

component of the *Shushōgi*. According to the teachings of this text and of Dōgen, the practice of Buddhism and its realisation are one and the same. Thus, the practice of zazen is in itself the realisation of enlightenment: zazen and enlightenment are indivisible. But, according to the principles promoted by the sect since the Meiji era, the formal action of making a commitment to the sect is itself the same as zazen and this principle, that taking the precepts is the same as practicing zazen (*zenkaichinyo*), has become a basic element in sect teaching ever since.²²

Focusing on this concept enables the sect to promote what it views as the essence of Buddhism without needing to persuade people to practice zazen. If, as the sect states, taking the precepts is the same as zazen, which is the essence and beginning of all Buddhism, the actualisation of enlightenment, then it follows that taking the precepts can function in the same way as zazen in the realisation of the Buddhist way. Zazen becomes almost unnecessary. Recognising that the major connections people have with Buddhism are in the realm of the ceremonial, the sect has placed extensive weight on what is, basically, a ceremony (taking the precepts in a ceremony conducted under the auspices of the sect) and equated it to the practice of zazen, which has the image of being austere and a specialist, virtually monastic, way. It almost appears as if zazen is the way for ascetics and monks while the precepts are the path for the general populace. Although the average sect follower or temple member might well not be inclined to practice zazen, it could equally be stated that the sect has done very little to alter this situation. The reverse may be true; by shifting the focus away from zazen in its teachings and by providing alternatives, the sect is virtually encouraging people *not* to do zazen.

22. See Reader, op. cit., pp. 33–39 for a fuller discussion of the ways in which this thought developed. Although the concept that practice and enlightenment is basic to Dōgen's thought, the emphasis on the relationship of the precepts and zazen became particularly important from the Meiji era onwards.

Sôtô has thus dealt with zazen in an exceedingly dualistic way, placing it at the heart of its whole world view while appearing to tell its followers that they need not do it. Possibly as a result of this duality, the sect has never really produced any coordinated approach to zazen. While it has produced pamphlets and books that set out the basic guidelines for the practice of zazen, these tend to concentrate on the formal structure (i.e. the way to sit, the posture involved) rather than providing any coherent advice on the totality of the process. Rarely, for instance, is there even any advice about when or where to do zazen, or for how long or how frequently. This lack of cohesive advice is perhaps due in part to the fact that each temple where there is regular zazen practice has its own traditions and schedules, so that no standard exists. I have attended numerous *zazenkai* and have stayed at a number of Sôtô temples, but have found that schedules vary greatly from place to place. At Chôkokuji, the training temple in Nagano mentioned previously, the monks meditated for 40 minutes in the morning and evening and this is fairly common (at other training temples such as Eiheiji and Daijôji in Kanazawa I found that 40 minutes was the normal duration). It is, however, by no means standard. The temple I stayed at in Sendai had a 30 minute meditation period once a day, while others I have visited have had meditation periods lasting an hour or more.

That there is a lack of cohesion between temples is perhaps understandable given their different traditions, but it appears in other areas too. I have already stated that there is little advice on zazen available in Sôtô publications; often what there is available is contradictory. Takazaki, for instance, in one Sôtô publication, states that zazen is a cure for all the ills of the world, providing good health and mental peace, thus inciting people to do it for the benefits it will bring, while Ikeda, elsewhere, decries the tendency to promote zazen for its therapeutic effects and criticises those who practice for such reasons for, he believes, such zazen, which has a goal and seeks reward, is contrary to the true spirit of Buddhism as a non-seeking way.²³ Such

contradictory interpretations reflect an unclear overall approach: the former utilises a modern tendency to seek peace and counteract neurosis in an increasingly stressful society to promote zazen, while the latter appears to be doing the opposite by decrying some of the major reasons why people might be interested in it.

Ikeda does actually suggest that zazen might be pleasant, a view only rarely brought out in Sôtô writing. He cautions the practitioner against seeking goals in zazen. This, he states, is layman's zazen, as opposed to monk's zazen, which is non-seeking. This does not, however, mean that he is setting up divisions between the ordained and the laity, for he states that one does not need to be a monk to practice monk's zazen; it is an attitude of mind rather than form. Following Dôgen, he views the essence of zazen as a totality, done not for any goal but in the spirit of non-attainment. Such a practice is not limited to monks, for anyone can do it. Ikeda even suggests that, when one enters fully and totally into zazen, it is an enjoyable activity; indeed, the title of his book, *Zazen ni Asobu* means 'to enjoy oneself in zazen'.²⁴

Ikeda also deals, if rather unsatisfactorily, with the issue of pain, especially leg pains, in zazen. Most practitioners of zazen do, either frequently or occasionally, come up against the problem that pains in the legs, usually caused because they are sitting in full or half lotus posture, may occur and that these distract the concentration. This is not necessarily a problem only for Westerners who are not used to the sitting posture, for most Japanese practitioners of zazen I have talked to state that they have such problems. Writings on zazen rarely seem to deal with this, yet it remains a basic issue, if only in as much as the pain sometimes becomes a barrier that may even cause people to give it up. Ikeda's answer to this is that, when there are pains, one is not really

23. Takazaki Jikishô *Zazen o kokorozasu hito e* SSSMC, Tokyo, 1977. pp. 11–14; Ikeda Kôyû *Zazen ni Asobu* SSSMC, Tokyo, 1979. p. 82. Both books are published by the sect yet appear to send out rather different messages.

24. Ikeda, op. cit., p. 82–83.

doing zazen. Pains in the legs are the result of seeking and striving, which are really the antithesis of zazen. All one has to do to eradicate them is to cease striving and to abandon oneself in zazen. In other words, if one feels pain in zazen, one is not doing zazen; to cease such pains, do zazen.²⁵

Such advice does not really attempt to come to grips with the problems that may occur in zazen. My own judgement is that the sect overall provides very little general advice or help for those who seek to become zazen practitioners; even where there is encouragement to meditate — and as I have already shown, this is generally lacking — there is a dearth of real information of practical value concerning such topics as what happens in zazen, how to deal with obstacles and so on. I would suggest that a very great cause of this is that the sect overall has held such a dualistic attitude to zazen for so long that, as a result, there may appear very little need to really explain it in any depth on the grounds that not many will be interested and that those that are will be so committed that they can surmount any difficulties that might arise. The obvious drawback to such ways of thinking is that they are by and large self-fulfilling; by treating zazen as difficult and unappealing, Sôtô has effectively helped to ensure that most people, including its own priests, will not do it.

ZAZEN, THE YOUNG AND THE FUTURE: A NEW MIDDLE WAY?

What, then, is the future of zazen in Sôtô? Although some of the above might suggest a rather bleak outlook, there are signs of hope and life. The survey I have cited did show that, while older members were disinclined to do zazen, the younger generation not only recorded higher percentages of people who had experienced it but also far higher rates of those who wanted to do so. This trend was especially prevalent in urban areas and not limited to those with connections, through

25. *ibid.*, p. 83.

household-temple affiliations, with the sect. Itô considers that the sect should build on the apparent interest in zazen among the young by encouraging more young people to become involved with religious activities, particularly zazen, at Sôtô temples, but in a non-sectarian way.²⁶ Tamaru, assessing the ways in which the sect, in the light of this survey, should move in the future, thinks that there are three possibilities: 1) a return to an experientially based, narrow, elitist sect that focuses almost entirely on strict spiritual practices such as zazen, 2) even greater popularisation with a greater concentration, at the expense of any spiritual practices, on folk based beliefs or 3) an attempt to tread a middle way between the two, developing individual belief and encouraging spiritual practices on the one hand while continuing to uphold the household related ancestral belief system. His view is that the sect should pursue the third path, which is (reminiscent of the beginnings of Buddhism) a middle way between the two extremes, a view reiterated in the summary of the survey by Sakurai.²⁷

Sakurai considers that the sect should expand its teachings on zazen, making them more readily available for those who are interested and, importantly, that the sect should make use of the work done by various psychologists and doctors on the benefits of zazen and of meditation in general in curing and preventing stress and other problems caused by modern living. Also, the sect should make note of the findings of psychologists and medical researchers on the effects and processes of zazen, so as to improve and make its methods of teaching zazen and the advice it gives more effective. While making use of these modern findings, the sect should also draw renewed attention to the teachings of the sect founders, Dôgen and Keizan, on zazen, for these still form both the basic instruction on zazen and provide practical advice on the matter.²⁸

26. Itô, *op. cit.*, 182–183.

27. Tamaru, *op. cit.*, pp. 320–323.

28. Sakurai Shūyū 'Owari ni' in SSI(ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 351–358.

In fact, in the last few years the sect has begun to act in such ways, producing a number of publications that deal with zazen and other spiritual aspects of Zen while refraining from drawing any attention to sectarian bias or affiliation, often in formats that are designed to appeal to the young.²⁹ The sect has, since 1958, run short Zen training sessions every August for young members of the sect in which the offspring of temple members encounter such aspects of Zen life as zazen; this activity has, from small beginnings, been growing yearly. While this has been limited, simply because such meetings are publicised through sect channels and temples, to those with connections to Sôtô, it is likely that more emphasis will be laid on them and that efforts will be made to widen the circle of participation in them. emphasis will be laid on them and that efforts will be made to widen the circle of participation in them.

Naturally the sect would like to induce the young who are interested in zazen to become more involved in other areas of sect belief. While Hattori has said that the sect's aim is to lead its members from ceremonial aspects of Buddhism towards a preceptual commitment and on to zazen, he has also added that those who came into contact with Sôtô through zazen should be led into a deeper commitment to the sect, via the precepts and, ultimately, into participation in ceremonial aspects of Buddhism as well.³⁰ While zazen is a vital aspect of Sôtô Buddhism, it is not the only aspect: one has always to be aware that Sôtô does have a vested interest in preserving and maintaining the ceremonial and household aspects of Buddhism that provide its economic lifeline.

One should not expect any future activity to focus wholly on zazen, for this is clearly not what either the bulk of the membership

29. In Reader, op. cit., pp. 44-45. I have described the format of one such publication; the most salient point, I think, is that publications of this type, although they are written and produced by the sect, tend to make very few overt references to the sect.

30. Hattori, op. cit., pp. 59-63.

nor the priesthood wish. In addition, and vitally, in terms of the social and cultural position in which Sôtô exists in Japan, dealing with the needs of a general public whose main wish is to have certain ritual and ceremonial actions carried out, one cannot expect any great and deep change in the overall context in which most Zen temples function. For the most part one expects them to continue to perform their accepted role. This is perhaps a point that those who come to Japan interested in zazen might bear in mind: while there are many areas in which most Zen temples appear to be out of step with the ideal, one also has to take into consideration the whole nexus of social conditions, historical factors and customs that has brought this about.

Zen Buddhism, like most Buddhism in Japan, has, partially through its own wishes to expand and partially through the workings of the social and political systems, become to a great extent bound by the parameters of expectations and obligations that do not necessarily concur with its founding ideals. It is no exaggeration to say that Zen has, since becoming institutionalised, been very little different from any other aspect of Buddhism in Japan in its focus on funerary and death related customs above all else. As a result of upholding this system, which most people, including its hereditary priesthood, *expect* it to hold, there has been, in Sôtô Zen, a lack of emphasis on such activities as zazen. It is for such reasons that, when one examines the place of zazen within the framework of modern Zen Buddhism in Japan, one finds so many discrepancies between theory and actuality. The findings of the Sôtô Zen sect's survey and its recent activities suggest that there should be an increase in the promotion of zazen, largely of a non-sectarian type focused on urban youth, but one should not expect this to signal a great shift away from the traditional basis of institutional Buddhism in Japan. Rather, one expects zazen to continue occupying a somewhat anomalous position, the fountainhead of all Zen Buddhism which has no place in the consciousness of the majority of those connected with Zen Buddhist temples.

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