

*The* Arts *of*  
Contemplative  
Care

PIONEERING VOICES IN  
BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY  
AND PASTORAL WORK

*Edited by* CHERYL A. GILES  
*and* WILLA B. MILLER

*Foreword by* JUDITH SIMMER-BROWN

*Preface by* PAT ENKYO O'HARA

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Edited by Cheryl A. Giles and Willa B. Miller

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*To my spiritual mentor Dolores, who taught me to be mindful,  
and Norah, the next generation of pioneers.*

*—Cheryl A. Giles*

*To the many pioneers in the field of contemplative care  
that have uplifted and inspired us, past and present.*

*—Willia B. Miller*

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## Preface

*Pat Enkyo O'Hara*

 HIS VOLUME comes at a perfect time. Two streams are converging: a current of recognition that something is missing in the secular, commercial approaches to caretaking, and at the same time, a wave of realization in Buddhist communities that our practices of contemplation, awareness, and presence render us uniquely suited to fill this gap—to provide compassionate caretaking.

What does that kind of care look like? I asked an oncology nurse this question—she smiled and said, “There’s just something about the Buddhist chaplains—simply the way they walk down the hall seems to put people at ease.”

A more ancient image of compassionate care is Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, portrayed as having a thousand hands and eyes, which she uses to respond to the suffering of the world. In one ancient Buddhist tale, a seeker asks, “What exactly does she *do* with all those hands and eyes?” And the answer, simply given, is, “It is like reaching behind you to adjust your pillow at night.” In other words, the way of compassionate care is as natural as your spontaneous gesture while at ease.

When we think of the training and practice required for intelligent contemplative care, we might object to the simplicity of this response. But looking a little more deeply, we can recognize the truth that it points to: effective caretaking originates from a rather ordinary quality that can be quite challenging to acquire—true presence, a grounding in the naturally arising reality of the moment.

Whether it is the anguish of a sickbed, the anger in a correction facility, or the fear beneath the order of a military life, contemplative care originates from a heart/mind that is clear and responsive, grounded in

interdependence. And the healing goes both ways. Practicing contemplative care strengthens the caretaker's own Buddhist practice, offering moment-to-moment opportunities to face the suffering in oneself as well as in others, and to hold it in contemplative space.

I congratulate the editors for bringing together these trailblazing voices. Together, they express a path of practice that is opening for contemporary Buddhists to make a desperately needed difference in today's world.

**Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara**, PhD, is the abbot of the Village Zendo. A Soto Zen priest and certified Zen teacher, she received Dharma transmission in both the Soto and Rinzai lines of Zen Buddhism, through the White Plum Lineage. Roshi currently serves as the guiding spiritual teacher for the New York Center for Contemplative Care. She also serves as co-spiritual director of the Zen Peacemaker Family, a spiritual, study, and social action association.

## Foreword

*Judith Simmer-Brown*

 THE BOOK you hold in your hand is pioneering. It shares the work of courageous contemporary Buddhist practitioners in the West who bring the depth of their meditation practice into direct service and healing in their work as chaplains. Two skilled editors have solicited and selected chapters that illustrate how these chaplains are creating “secular parishes” in the midst of the most painful environments of our changing world, from the hospital to the prison, the military, and hospices. They counsel college students and parents raising Buddhist children, and they address issues of racism, classism, and ageism. For every setting, they describe how to be simply present, to not turn away from suffering, and to generate the heart of compassion in ways that heal.

Each chapter is fresh and immediate, full of experiential insights. We find ourselves beside these chaplains as they speak with patients ravaged by disease, with families who have just lost a child, with soldiers agonizing over the acts they are forced to commit, or with prisoners beset by regret. They share the wit and directness of the dying and the naked honesty of those who have lost everything. Humbly, they tell us of the lessons they themselves have learned. The inherent dignity, wisdom, and bravery of their clients come through on every page, and we can see that kindness is the greatest healing force.

These contributors come from a variety of Buddhist lineages, from Japanese and Korean Zen to Tibetan Vajrayana and Shambhala, to Pure Land, to Theravada vipassana; some are seasoned Buddhist teachers, others are more recent practitioners. A third of the contributors are my colleagues, friends, or sangha brothers and sisters; another third are my former students. Many others I know through reputation and through

the lives of clients they have touched. Still, I learned deeply from this book about what it is actually like to be a Buddhist chaplain on the job.

In most settings, these chaplains are the only Buddhists in a Judeo-Christian or purely secular world. Sometimes they feel isolated or groundless, or fearful and inadequate, when they do not know what to do to help. Most clarify that it is not useful to think of themselves as “Buddhist”—they are interfaith chaplains who do whatever is needed. We can sense them stepping closer to their clients, holding their hands, and supporting them emotionally.

In pragmatic ways, they guide us in how to be chaplains. These chaplains teach the staple Buddhist practices, including loving-kindness meditation, listening skills, and “basic attendance.” They provide slogans for caregivers and speak about “compassionate presence” as the chaplain’s art. Several chapters contextualize this work in the timeless teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the selfless Mahayana path of the bodhisattva. Our chaplains show us how they draw sustenance from this ancient wisdom, finding fresh inspiration from their lineage teachers, from scripture, from meditation instruction.

Many know they are pioneers, and invite many other Buddhist practitioners to join them. What can be done to pave the way for others? They show that it is not enough to only “just sit” to learn to minister to a dying person; it is important to have academic study and professional supervision to develop the theological and pastoral skills to help such people. They speak of additional training they received from Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), hospice, and the military as critical supports for their work. They highlight the importance of ordination, both monastic and lay, and make specific suggestions about how this could be supported by our communities.

For all of them, daily meditation practice is the primary support for the work. They acknowledge that the most important quality that the Buddhist chaplain can bring to any intense environment is clarity of mind, gentleness of heart, and a listening ear. The only way to continually do this, without resorting to formulaic techniques or a “pastoral persona” that masks our burnout or cynicism, is to return again and again to the immediacy of whatever is happening.

I am reminded of a pith teaching from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche:

“The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people, experiencing everything totally without mental reservations or blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes into oneself.” That is the essence of meditation practice and of Buddhist chaplaincy.

**Judith Simmer-Brown**, PhD, has been a professor of religious studies at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, since 1978. She was trained at Cornell College (BA), Florida State University (MA), Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary (ABD), and Walden University (PhD). She teaches Buddhist scripture, ethics, and philosophy, as well as interreligious dialogue, to Naropa’s master of divinity students. She is an *acharya* (senior Dharma teacher) of the Shambhala Buddhist lineage of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and performs *upadhyaya* (Buddhist minister) ordinations for Shambhala. She’s the author of *Dakini’s Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* and *Meditation in the Classroom*.

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## Editors' Preface

 **W**HAT YOU HOLD in your hands is a book that broadly explores an emerging field of contemplative care, from a variety of perspectives. The term “contemplative care” has its roots in the movement of Buddhist chaplains, care providers, and ministers that are beginning to turn their passion for Buddhist practice and view into a meaningful living. It is a close cousin to the term “spiritual care” which is now in wide use in the context of hospital and hospice chaplains—and yet we would like to distinguish between “spiritual care” and “contemplative care.”

We understand spiritual care to refer to a wide swath of practitioners who provide emotional and spiritual support in a variety of contexts, both professional and informal. Contemplative care, on the other hand, refers to a kind of care that is informed by rigorous training in a meditative or contemplative tradition. If we were to hazard a definition of contemplative care, it might be:

Contemplative care is the art of providing spiritual, emotional, and pastoral support, in a way that is informed by a personal, consistent contemplative or meditation practice.

Contemplative care therefore requires that the care provider is a practitioner of meditation. In most cases, the care provider is connected to a contemplative tradition or lineage, such as Buddhism. While contemplative care is not necessarily Buddhist care, in this book we are focusing on contemplative care as it is practiced and understood by Buddhists.

The contributors to this volume do not always use the term “contemplative care” but rather draw on a number of interesting terms and

provide us with many definitions that are very useful as we explore the parameters of this field. For example, we find this definition in Jennifer Block's chapter in this volume: "Buddhist spiritual care means helping people access the stillness, clarity, and love existing within our hearts." We hope definitions such as this one will spark a conversation and add to our understanding of how the many practitioners in these fields understand their work. We also hope that these definitions will be held lightly, as this field deepens and grows.

We understand the term contemplative care as encompassing several subfields, including Buddhist chaplaincy, Buddhist ministry, and Buddhist pastoral care. While pairing the word *Buddhist* with *chaplaincy*, *pastoral care*, and other terms with Christian roots is a fairly new endeavor, the spirit of engaged Buddhist service of the ministry and chaplaincy ilk is quite ancient. For thousands of years, Buddhist religious specialists have offered services to their communities that include practical forms of outreach, such as tending the sick and educating children. Yet most convert Buddhists in the West were introduced to Buddhism not as a form of pastoral work, but as a form of personal practice. We turned to it as a tradition that offered a promise of enlightenment, greater wisdom, and greater peace for the individual practitioner. Buddhism was not, initially, introduced to many of us as a form of practical *service* to a wide and diverse sphere of people needing spiritual care.

In this light, the pioneering nature of the work of the people contributing to this volume becomes all the more manifest and bold. Their work is at once "mainstream" and revolutionary, naturally compassionate, occasionally difficult, and constantly trailblazing, in the spirit of manifesting *upaya*. These voices inspire us to imagine a meditation practice that takes meditation off the cushion and into the world, out of our temples and into the halls of mainstream institutions.

Exploring this field, care is taken to distinguish the difference between the terms *chaplaincy* and *ministry*. Chaplains provide spiritual, pastoral, and emotional care to patients, their families, and staff, and they are often employed by an organization, such as a hospital. He or she may well identify with a particular faith and draw from the tools of that faith, but he or she puts the patient's or client's spiritual needs front and center, regardless of that person's tradition. Ministers, on the other hand, tend to

the religious needs of a particular faith group, or sangha. Both chaplains and ministers engage in various forms of “pastoral work.” While there is certainly overlap in the roles and duties of chaplains and ministers, we find it useful to distinguish these two forms of pastoral work.

Nevertheless, chaplains, ministers, and other kinds of pastoral care providers also share much in common. Buddhist chaplaincy, ministry, and pastoral work are each practices of presence. We show up to be with those who are suffering, dying, or in need of care. We show up to listen, to be attentive, and to “come alongside” others. In the process, those dedicated to the practice of care grow and evolve spiritually. It is not all about the patient, or student, or the one who is cared for. It is about relationship and interbeing. And as you’ll see in this volume, these caring relationships take many unique forms.

The seeds of this book were planted when we (the two coeditors of this volume) met in the summer of 2006 in the context of working within Harvard’s nascent Buddhist ministry program. The more we talked, the more realized we had a lot in common, and we began working together, coteaching classes around the themes of chaplaincy, hospice, prison work, and various other kinds of pastoral work, from a Buddhist perspective.

In our conversations with each other and with students, certain types of questions arose often: How can we integrate our practice into engaged contexts related to spiritual care? How does one formulate a *Buddhist* ministry, when conversing with others who are involved in other types of ministry? How does one enter into the world of chaplaincy with a Buddhist background? What does it mean to talk about a Buddhist theology? What is the Buddhist equivalent of a “sermon,” of “chaplaincy,” of “ministry,” of “liberation theology,” of “social justice,” of “medical ethics,” of “congregation,” and even of “clergy”? How do we guide students through the maze of becoming Buddhist ministers and chaplains? What does it mean to be a *vocational Buddhist*?

In seeking to address these questions, we struck up conversations with some of the pioneers in this book and sought books and articles that expressed the groundswell of interest in spiritual care we heard coming from our students. As we worked together, and reached out to people in this world of “engaged care” or whatever we might want to call it, it became clear that we are in the middle of a revolution. Buddhists are

making inroads into institutions and their voices and actions are starting to transform those institutions—and transform what it means to us to be “Buddhist.” In the process, some creative forms of theological reflection and application are taking place. These revolutionaries are reimagining practice along interpersonal lines and taking Buddhist practice into places where it has simply never been—at least in the West.

At the end of the compilation of this book, we realize we have just scratched the surface of this burgeoning field. We were only able to include a fraction of the people who could have been included here. Nonetheless, it is our hope that this book inspires the many people doing this work to put their work into writing and get it out into the world.

We continue to be fascinated and inspired by all those who follow this new path and blaze new trails in the field, as they skillfully use the powerful tool of language to find their place and “translate” their Buddhist practice into terms that others can understand. This book is also for them: to connect them to each other—to those of their generation, and to the generation that came before them.

This book organized itself on the basis of the submissions into six parts. *Part I—The Roots of Contemplative Care: Foundations of a Discipline* explores the definition, parameters, key issues, and educational foundations of contemplative care, from a number of perspectives. In this section, we find Jennifer Block’s exploration of the definition of Buddhist chaplaincy, Daijaku Judith Kinst’s consideration of issues of pedagogy in the training of chaplains and pastoral care providers, Wakoh Shannon Hickey’s call for the training provided by Divinity Schools, Lew Richmond and Grace Schireson’s description of their SPOT training for Zen Buddhist ministers, and Cheryl Giles’ exploration of the role of race in spiritual care.

*Part II—Serving the Sick: The Art of Hospital Chaplaincy* explores the role, challenges, and experiences of Buddhist chaplains, as they navigate the institution of the modern American hospital and beyond. In this section, we discover how hospital chaplains are applying their practices of meditation and compassion to the caregiving context. We hear the story of Chodo Campbell’s moving pastoral visit to another pastor with end-stage stomach cancer in Zimbabwe. We hear Mark Power describe,

with deep honesty, his personal journey to adapt his Buddhist training to a Christian context. We see how Buddhist hospital chaplains, such as Trudi Jinpu Hirsch and Koshin Paley Ellison, are adapting ancient scriptures to inform the framework of their own caregiving.

*Part III—Dharma Behind Bars: The Art of Prison Ministry* describes the migration of the teaching of Buddhism into the deepest reaches of prison life. Here we find Dean Sluyter's inspiring story of Gary, a maximum-security inmate who pulls through twenty-eight years of prison to a life he never dreamed of. We find Penny Alsop's moving account of Mother's Day in a women's prison. We hear Richard Torres' story of Kosal, a survivor of the Pol Pat regime, who discovers a deep freedom in his understanding of interdependence.

*Part IV—Wielding Manjushri's Sword: The Arts of College and Military Chaplaincy* explores the life of chaplains in institutions of higher learning and the military. In this section, Danny Fisher and Ji Hyang Padma explore the unique challenges of offering pastoral support to students in their college years. We also walk beside Thomas Dyer as he forges a path as the US military's first Army chaplain.

*Part V—Living with Dying: The Art of End-of-Life Care* explores the pioneering work of Buddhists in end-of-life care. Here we find Joan Halifax's reflections on the importance of community as a means of support at the time of death. We find Randy Sunday's description of a "social model" hospice in Southern California. We look over the shoulder of Carlyle Coash as he finds the internal strength to sit with a patient with devastating jaw cancer as he learns to meditate.

The final section, *Arts of Ministry: The Pastoral Role of the Dharma Teacher*, explores the emerging discourse on the various aspects of providing pastoral care within a sangha. Here we find Lin Jensen's reflection on the role of "right speech" in the pastoral care context. We find Rebecca Johnson's reflections on Buddhist ministry in the inner city context next to Steve Ruhl's reflections on a rural Zen Buddhist ministry. And we hear Sumi Loundon Kim's description of the intergenerational challenges of a Buddhist ministry focused on children and families.

We have found every one of these chapters deeply inspiring and moving. And we hope you will find the material in this book as inspiring

as we have. More importantly, we hope this book starts a conversation about the range of work that is becoming vocational Buddhism and acts as a resource for individuals seeking to become educated and to train in these areas. And finally, we hope it will act as a spark for people who have yet to know what their calling is, who might draw on the visions of the bodhisattva's work that we see reflected here in these accounts and reflections.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many wonderful friends and colleagues have contributed to making this volume possible. We are deeply grateful to Josh Bartok, our editor at Wisdom, for his hard work on behalf of this project and for understanding the vision of this book. We also would to thank Janet Gyatso, whose presence at Harvard sparked our early conversations about this topic. This volume also would not have been possible without the loving support of our partners Jewel and Mike. Finally, we would like to offer a deep bow of respect and the gratitude to the many pioneers in the field of contemplative care who inspired this volume.

PART I

The Roots of Contemplative Care:  
Foundations of a Discipline

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## Toward a Definition of Buddhist Chaplaincy

*Jennifer Block*

 UDDHIST CHAPLAINCY is in the formative stage as a modern-day discipline and profession at the intersection between Buddhism, chaplaincy, and suffering. Buddhist chaplains join chaplains from other faith traditions in institutional settings such as hospitals, hospices, and prisons. In this essay I propose to sketch, in broad brushstrokes, what it means to me to be a Buddhist chaplain.

The seeds of Buddhist chaplaincy as a vocation begin, of course, with the Buddha. The three most common causes of people needing health-care in our day—old age, sickness, and dying—were the very same that inspired the Buddha to reach beyond the familiar into greater truth and happiness. In doing so, he eventually found a path to peace in the midst of all that is difficult, uncomfortable, and confounding. Reaching out to the men and women in his community who were seeking ways to alleviate their pain, the Buddha offered care through careful guidance and a myriad of teachings. In essence, the Buddha was a chaplain, or rather, Buddhist chaplains who comfort others are walking in the footsteps of the Buddha. For 2,500 years, Buddhists have contemplated sickness, old age, and death to find an end to suffering. Buddhist chaplains continue

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**Reverend Jennifer Block** is an ordained interfaith minister and Buddhist chaplain. Since 2004, she has served as education director and chaplain for the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, California, creating curriculum, teaching workshops, offering spiritual care, and providing community outreach. Jennifer also serves as adjunct faculty for the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in Redwood City, California, and the Chaplaincy Institute for Arts and Interfaith Ministries in Berkeley. Jennifer has an undergraduate degree in communications from Boston University and a theology degree from Naropa University.

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this practice in hospitals, hospices, prisons, and other facilities, helping people to reduce their pain and skillfully deal with what is happening to them, in the moment.

In a classically Buddhist sense, there is not a lot of emphasis on hope or intercession from an outside source or deity, but more on how to use one's intelligence and basic goodness to be skillful and more at ease right in the middle of what is difficult. Yet everyone needs encouragement, assistance, and direction on their life's journey; the role of a Buddhist chaplain is to accompany individuals as their awakening and freedom from suffering unfolds. This may mean simply being a good listener, an encouraging companion, an intelligent guide, or a piercing truth-teller. Overall, the purpose of a Buddhist chaplain is to alleviate suffering in its many forms: physical pain, difficult emotions, and confusing or disturbing thoughts, more commonly known as agony, fear, anger, guilt, depression, loneliness, grief, and so on.

All of the teachings of the Buddha can be summed up by the following phrase: Nothing whatsoever should be clung to as "me" or "mine." Interventions of chaplains exist to serve this goal, to aid in this realization, by either describing the situation or providing a skillful means for someone to perceive it. "To cling to nothing" is a guide to the proper relationship to experience, as well as a statement of the ways things are when the goal is reached. All difficult situations can be improved by applying intelligent perspective and loosening one's tight grasp on how things have always been, or should be right now. This means any of us can work internally with our suffering to change it for the better, even if what is happening outside of us does not change.

According to Buddhist tradition, in the latter part of the sixth century BCE, Siddhartha Gautama wandered through northern India. Local villagers became curious about his uniquely radiant character, and asked, "Are you a celestial being or a God? Are you a man?" To these questions he replied, "I am none of these. I am awake." He then became known as the Buddha, which literally means "the Awakened One." What does it mean to be awake? In the Buddhist tradition, it is taught that the answer to this question is found through deep insight into the interdependent nature of the world as we experience it. When we look at the world, we do not actually see things as they are, but rather we see through the lens

of our individual hopes, fears, and dreams. The Buddha pointed to this lens as the root of suffering and taught that we each have the potential to awaken from what is imaginary to what is real.

The connecting theme of this approach as a chaplain is the possibility of awakening, as understood from Buddhist teaching. Our deepest desire is to have a sense of belonging, and when we are able to recognize ourselves in “others,” we can then care for them in a fundamentally different way. The function of the various approaches and interventions is to offer tools that will enable people to open their hearts and minds so that they may develop greater awareness of their true nature and, from that awakening, truly heal and transform.

Although the Buddha neither taught about higher powers nor denied their existence, many Buddhists acknowledge a universal life force. Human beings are both unique selves and part of this great universal life force—but if we overidentify with who we are or what we believe, we suffer. Our tendency is to embrace one thing as right/pleasing and its opposite as wrong/unsatisfactory. Making such dualistic distinctions is natural to the human mind, and it serves people on many practical levels. However, clinging or aversion toward dualistic categories causes more suffering than benefit. A middle path between dualistic opposites offers peace and freedom; the Buddha called this the Middle Way.

According to Buddhist teaching, suffering arises from our ignorance of interconnectedness and change and our bondage to dualistic thinking. Every aspect of creation is a process of becoming, of moving into new, transformed states. Things fall apart and come together, fall apart again and come together again. If we clearly and deeply see that all objects and mind states are impermanent and without selfhood, we see that there is nothing worth clinging to, and when we stop clinging to (or averting from) things as they are, we experience liberation from suffering. Our very perceptions can change and everything can appear in a new and fresh light, leading to a more wakeful and skillful way of life.

With time, reflection, and compassion, Buddhist chaplains help people realize that there is beauty and safety in change. We can learn to dwell peacefully in “things as they are” and develop an unconditional openness to whatever arises, is born, and/or dies—within the self, others, and all of creation. We become increasingly aware of our True

Nature: wisdom and compassion. Realizing compassion and wisdom in our lives is awakening; a change of perception, like suddenly seeing a three-dimensional object, where previously one could only see it as flat. Wisdom means seeing creation and ourselves as they are through the practice of mindful, nonjudgmental attention to ordinary experience. Thich Nhat Hanh describes this wisdom as “awareness of the interbeing nature of all that one observes—seeing the one in the many, all the manifestations of birth and death, coming and going, and so on—without being caught in ignorance.” Compassion can be defined as liberation from the illusion of separateness. A heart can be broken open to compassion through suffering, as well as through love. One experiences compassion as a great affection for creation as manifest in the self, others, and the nonhuman world. This is experienced as an urge to embrace the world. Nhat Hanh says, “with compassion in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle.” Compassion enhances our appreciation for things and assures us that we are embraced by a wider community, not forsaken as isolated individuals.

This healing process is not something mysterious. Awakening to our true nature is available anywhere and everywhere, at all times. It exists within all phenomena, right here and now. It is a matter of removing the layers of our own projections that obscure the pure vision of reality. However, to wake up is not necessarily easy. We must first realize that we are asleep. Next, we need to identify what keeps us asleep, start to take it apart, and keep working at dismantling it until it no longer functions. The good news is that as soon as we make an effort to wake up, we begin to open up to how things actually are. We experience what we have suppressed or avoided and what we have ignored or overlooked.

Over time, one can develop an unconditional openness to whatever happens, arises, is born, and/or dies within oneself, others, and all of life. Buddhist chaplains are motivated by loving-kindness, an opening of the heart through spiritual practice, and are characterized by love for, compassion toward, equanimity among, and sympathetic joy for others. As Buddhist chaplains we do not serve as intermediaries or authorities per se, but as capable, steady companions who have investigated suffering through our own life experiences. So from our spiritual practice, we

learn to lend patients our spirit and stability of mind for the possibility for their own healing, awakening, and transformation. Specifically, spiritual support from a Buddhist perspective can be defined as:

- ▶ Willingness to bear witness
- ▶ Willingness to help others discover their own truth
- ▶ Willingness to sit and listen to stories that have meaning and value
- ▶ Helping another to face life directly
- ▶ Welcoming paradox and ambiguity into care—and trusting that these will emerge into some degree of awakening
- ▶ Creating opportunities for the people to awaken to their True Nature

As a Buddhist chaplain, I serve others in realizing that most of life's events are not solely within human control. Simple yet profound, life-changing universal truths are discovered or remembered to help people experience the deepest, authentic peace and satisfaction—a heart and mind relaxed and open to what is. Buddhist spiritual care means helping people access the stillness, clarity, and love existing within our hearts. I have a sense of accomplishment or success when a patient begins letting there be room for all of everything to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy. Gone is the sense of separation, of internal nothingness, or of not being quite present. This is what I call the mystery of spirituality and healing.

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## Cultivating an Appropriate Response:

### EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR BUDDHIST CHAPLAINS AND PASTORAL CARE PROVIDERS

*Daijaku Judith Kinst*

What is the teaching of the Buddha's entire life?

An appropriate response.

—ZEN MASTER YUNMEN

*A four-year-old boy dies suddenly and inexplicably on a sunny Sunday afternoon. In a hospital emergency room his father, pushed beyond endurance, rages at the staff, the world, God. His mother sits stunned and silent, holding his hand. Their world is undone. I enter this scene with nothing but my own being. No formulas or stock phrases can possibly meet such a time.*

*What is an appropriate response? How does one meet such profound suffering?*

 HIS QUESTION lies at the heart of the effective training of chaplains and pastoral care providers. It is a question I have pondered as I consider the elements that best

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support the education and training of Buddhist chaplains and pastoral care providers.

I believe that this rests on three essential elements: (1) living a life guided by and deeply engaged with Buddhist teachings, (2) academic study, and (3) supervised direct service in Buddhist and interfaith contexts. In this essay I will discuss one aspect of this tripartite training—academic study—how it shapes, supports, and sustains Buddhist chaplaincy and pastoral care, and how it relates to the other two.

Let's look at some aspects of each of these in turn.

### BUDDHIST STUDY

The study of central Buddhist teachings is essential in Buddhist pastoral care education for several reasons. It provides a theological foundation for Buddhist chaplaincy, the basis from which the chaplain responds to others, and it sustains the chaplain in his or her work. Study can also clarify, for the chaplain, how these same teachings can be challenged and transformed in face-to-face meetings with another suffering being. Over time, study and reflection on the teachings strengthens the student's confidence that he or she has the Buddhist theological foundation from which to serve, and to act, in whatever way is required with openness, compassion, and flexibility. This in turn supports the ability to be simply and fully present and responsive, our greatest gift to a suffering other.

Based on my experience, central topics for study and reflection include, but are not limited to, Buddhist teachings on suffering, its cause and its alleviation; emptiness and interdependence; mind, perception, identity, and self experience; karma; wisdom and compassion and their relationship; the ethics of awakening manifest in such forms as the bodhisattva vow; and a familiarity with major schools and traditions. A sound knowledge of these areas provides a language and a conceptual base for considering questions of how these teachings are relevant to spiritual care. Such questions might include the following: How do we understand suffering and how is it relieved in the lives of ordinary humans? How do we understand the self and its relation to others in loss and death? How do we draw limits and set boundaries based in an understanding

of wisdom and compassion? How do we interact with the diversity of human life with equanimity?

Bringing these topics closer to the day-to-day life of a chaplain, and their own experience, students investigate how the study of perception, identity, and clinging impacts their experience of listening to another. How does the teaching of dependent coarising apply to their experience of self, culture, society, family relationships? The Four Noble Truths are alive in each interaction for a chaplain. Suffering, its cause, and its alleviation are real to each person the chaplain meets—including, if he or she is paying attention, the chaplain. How do these teachings inform and shape these meetings? Depending on the circumstance and the needs of the person, such Buddhist teachings may be overtly present in a chaplaincy relationship, for example with a Buddhist patient in a hospital, or they may provide the basis for the Buddhist chaplain's effective response to a person from a very different faith tradition.

Training in and knowledge of ritual in multiple Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions is also important. When meeting with Buddhists, it is vital for the Buddhist chaplain to have training in the role of services, rituals, liturgy, the use of written teachings, and other meaningful aspects of Buddhist traditions including, for example, the use of chants, beads, and Buddhist images. Knowledge of rituals commonly used in other faiths is equally important.

Assisting with ethical questions and dilemmas is common in the work of a chaplain. Therefore, developing skill in this area through substantial study of, and reflection on, Buddhist ethics is essential. For example, decisions about end-of-life care, pregnancy termination, organ donation, and professional responsibility are situations routinely faced by a hospital chaplain. Each of these circumstances, and many more, must be met with empathy and skill. In studying Buddhist ethics, our intention is not to find specific answers to each dilemma. However, such study greatly enriches our understanding of the process by which decisions, often painful decisions, are reached. The ability to be fully present with another at such a time, to listen to a person or a family in often confusing, conflicting, and deeply distressing circumstances, and to help clarify, with them, how a decision reflects their deepest values, increases the likelihood that the decision will be accompanied by a measure of peace. Respectful

discussion and dialogue about ethical dilemmas in a classroom setting prepare the ground for this quality of companionship.

A sound Buddhist chaplaincy education should lead to effective functioning in an interfaith setting. A good working knowledge of other faiths and traditions is important—general knowledge as well as an understanding of specifics. However, what is most important is the quality of the chaplain's presence in an interfaith setting. The development of a respectful and easy stance when working with persons affiliated with other faiths or a Buddhist tradition other than his or her own is key.

The Buddha taught that all phenomena lack inherent existence and are dependently coarisen, including our own tradition and various points of view; nothing is absolute. If we align ourselves with these teachings, it is possible to stand comfortably in one's own experience (in this case one's tradition) while at the same time welcoming, respecting, learning from, and listening deeply to another. Grounded in these teachings, it is possible to stand with full confidence in the teachings of the Buddha and meet a person of any faith or tradition with curiosity and without defensiveness. Such an atmosphere creates openness and the possibility of genuine dialogue with colleagues across religious traditions. Also, and not insignificantly, this can contribute to a deeper understanding of the Buddhist chaplain's own tradition. The study of Buddhist teachings, therefore, supports the open and flexible stance with relation to others that is central to building viable interfaith, interdenominational, and culturally competent chaplaincy.

Within this environment questions such as whether or how to provide rituals from other faiths, for example Christian baptism, can arise with curiosity and openness and Buddhist chaplains can articulate a Buddhist interfaith perspective that does not presuppose that the Buddhist perspective is equivalent to no religious affiliation. It also allows for dialogue between Buddhist chaplains which, in turn, can enhance our understanding and appreciation of the field.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING

Simplicity and depth of presence, the capacity to be still, to listen wholeheartedly and intelligently, and to respond appropriately, are the essence

of the practical application of the Buddha's teaching. The ability to meet even the unthinkable with a fundamental sense of stability, kindness, and equanimity may be built from sustained Buddhist practice but it is also the area in which the study of contemporary Western psychology can make a fruitful contribution. Buddhist chaplaincy education and training is enhanced, through the development of basic counseling skills, an understanding of relevant Western psychological principles, and a sustained engagement in self-reflection.

The first step in any care or counseling relationship is being less anxious than the person one is serving. Learning to listen deeply, to attend compassionately and intelligently to another, is fundamental. Learning to notice what one noticed in an interaction and what one did not, and receiving direct feedback on the quality of one's presence, is invaluable. Practicing basic counseling skills in classroom and training situations develops these skills, promotes greater ease, reduces anxiety, and builds greater confidence and effectiveness.

A conceptual understanding of the psychological aspect of pastoral care relationships deepens and broadens the resources available to the chaplain. An understanding of transference, countertransference, and the impact of trauma, grief, depression, and patterns in family and relationships is helpful for the chaplain's work. A chaplain must be competent in assessing the psychological tone and needs of a circumstance quickly and with an open mind to engage complex interpersonal systems with a measure of calm. Pastoral counseling literature is particularly relevant in developing this understanding as are writings on clinical psychology.

For example Pamela Cooper-White, in her book *Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, provides a history and contemporary definition of transference and countertransference as well as a very useful model for understanding the difference between pastoral care and pastoral counseling and psychotherapy. The work of Harvey Aronson and Jeremy Safran and many others provide not only relevant psychological principles but also include a discussion of the interface of Buddhism and psychotherapy. Griffith and Griffith, in *Encountering the Sacred*, give a nuanced and well-informed discussion of the interface of psychotherapy and spirituality.

Knowing when and how to refer to and develop professional resources is essential for any chaplain. Developing an understanding of child and

elder abuse, domestic violence, and suicidality, being able to identify indications that it may be occurring, and being familiar with the legal and ethical guidelines and requirements for responding are all also critical.

Education and training in applied psychology and counseling is not limited to the development of a theoretical understanding of the material. Even the development of counseling skills and empathic listening, though important, can leave untouched an unexamined anxiety about the human condition that can undo efforts to be of service. Theory must take root in the person to bear fruit in the work.

Amid all this, sustained engagement in Buddhist practice is of course essential. Equally important, though, is the necessity for a commitment to clear-eyed and compassionate self-reflection and an understanding of how it is accomplished. Undertaking an honest, kind, and intelligent investigation of characteristic personal and interpersonal patterns allows the training chaplain to develop a familiarity with his or her strengths, vulnerabilities, and habitual tendencies as well as an ability to track useful and distorting inner responses that may impact the care of the person in need.

For the most part this process occurs when the training chaplain enters a supervised training site such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). However a foundation for effective self-reflection can be established in graduate education through the study of relevant psychological literature and an emphasis on the development of self-knowledge. This foundation is also supported by including, in the curriculum, training programs such as the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in Redwood City, California, which, over the course of one year, provides the enrolled cohort with a structure and a community in which self-reflection and interpersonal awareness can grow, as well as training in a wide variety of pastoral skills.

#### PASTORAL CARE LITERATURE

The practice of pastoral care has been extensively explored in non-Buddhist traditions. Topics such as the identity and role of the chaplain, the range of circumstances in which pastoral care occurs, the needs of specific populations, interfacing with the community, and models of spiritual and pastoral care have been fruitfully explored in the pastoral care

literature. For example Duane Bidwell, in his book *Short-term Spiritual Direction*, considers the needs and opportunities of brief encounters and details concrete, specific guidance in bringing meaning and depth to such encounters. Margaret Guenther's classic text *Holy Listening* provides a discussion of listening and responding to the spiritual needs of another that is practical, grounded, and deeply caring.

There is also much to be found in this literature about the importance and impact of racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, and other societal ills. Understanding the profound impact these and other factors have is crucial, and non-Buddhist pastoral care literature makes a significant contribution to this understanding. Such literature also covers many other topics such as what is often called "compassion fatigue," the exhaustion experienced by caregiving professionals who focus on others at the expense of their own self-care. Chaplaincy is taxing; understanding self-care and knowing how to intelligently address one's needs are integral parts of the successful chaplain's life.

The study of pastoral care literature also provides an opportunity to develop uniquely Buddhist understandings of the topics covered, to find points of contact and difference, to deepen the ability to provide competent interfaith care, and to simply learn from those who have been providing such care for many years. With adequate intellectual care, Buddhist textual sources can be adapted to pastoral applications and non-Buddhist pastoral care literature can be integrated in a Buddhist context. Including literature that is based in a Buddhist tradition, such as Seigen Yamaoka's account and discussion of pastoral care as a Jodo Shin Shu minister, *The Transmission of Shin Buddhism in the West*, is of particular value.

## THE GROUND OF PRACTICE

Without an ongoing and committed engagement with Buddhist teachings and practices, as well as a vital relationship with a Buddhist teacher, minister, or guide, Buddhist chaplaincy training will not have the foundation it requires, nor will it be sustainable. Simple, compassionate awareness is an activity that, I believe, can be shared by Buddhists of all traditions and is a central element in the work of a Buddhist chaplain. Beyond that, the specifics of further practice commitments would depend

upon the tradition and needs of the student and would be worked out in dialogue with his or her teacher, minister, or guide, ideally in the context of a sangha. A Zen practitioner will create supportive activities that will likely vary, perhaps greatly, from those of a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, and those could be markedly different from a follower of Jodo Shin teachings. What is key is that these activities exist, that there is a commitment to them, and that they are carried out in dialogue with a trusted elder of that community.

Although there may be classes introducing a variety of Buddhist practices, teaching in an academic setting is not well suited to providing this type of relationship. The relationship between a Buddhist minister, teacher, or guide and a practitioner is deeply personal and takes place in a different atmosphere and according to different models than the academic teacher-student relationship. In order for this relationship to function fully, in my opinion, it is best kept separate from the academic system. Academic teachers may be fully authorized to teach in their tradition, and they will naturally share their understanding; however, thoughtfully considered boundaries create an environment in which the student can engage deeply with a variety of teachings in an accepting and inclusive classroom setting.

As the field of Buddhist pastoral care and chaplaincy develops, ongoing conversations among those providing education and training in academic settings, nonacademic training centers, and practicum sites, will result in a greater understanding of the field. From these conversations, questions will emerge that will deepen our ability to respond to the evolving field of Buddhist chaplaincy and pastoral care and make valuable contributions to our understanding of Buddhist studies, the general field of chaplaincy and pastoral care, and contemporary psychological, psychotherapeutic, and counseling theory and practice.

With such a foundation of education and training, a Buddhist chaplain, meeting the parents of a four-year-old who has died unexpectedly and inexplicably, will have the intellectual, personal, ethical, emotional, ritual, and spiritual resources needed to be present for those parents, to hear, absorb, and embrace with deep compassion their fear, anger, grief, and great suffering—and in that and many other ways to make an appropriate response.

## Meditation Is Not Enough

Wakoh Shannon Hickey

**M**Y PAGER goes off in the middle of the night, and I am called to the neonatal intensive care unit. A stillborn child has been delivered. The parents, Roman Catholics who speak no English, want the baby baptized. Catholic priests are not permitted to baptize dead bodies, but the priests of the local parish understand parents' emotional need for the rite, so they do not object to hospital chaplains performing the rite. I'm the chaplain on call, so the task falls to me. Reading a liturgy in Spanish, I lead family members in a traditional Catholic rite of emergency baptism, sprinkling holy water on the lifeless forehead of a tiny girl. *Yo te bautizo en el nombre de el Padre, y el Hijo, y el Espiritu Santo.* It's not my first time. The parents invariably ask: "Why did God do this? Is He punishing me?" How does a Buddhist chaplain answer that?

On another call, a lifelong Jehovah's Witness is bleeding out in the emergency room. Surgery involving blood transfusions would be necessary to

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repair his aneurism and save his life, but the doctrine of his church forbids transfusions from donors, because they are believed to violate the Biblical prohibition against consuming blood. If he were at a hospital near his home, he could use “banked” units of his own blood, but he and his wife are far from home. The wife is in denial. My job is to help her say goodbye in the minutes remaining, help him die with some measure of calm, and find someone at the local Kingdom Hall who can accompany the wife as she arranges to have her husband’s body transported home. She asks me to pray, but in my zendo, we never do extemporaneous prayer. From somewhere beyond me, a prayer to Jehovah emerges from my lips. The moment I stop speaking, the man flatlines.

A Mormon woman is suicidal over her siblings’ insistence that she participate in a Temple ritual that will seal her to her family for eternity. She isn’t ready. The psychiatrist has no idea how to help her deal with this, so he calls me. Down the hall, a psychotic woman is certain that Jesus wants her to starve herself to death because she is such a terrible sinner. How does the Dharma help me to help these women?

I’m a Soto Zen priest who has worked as a chaplain in both hospital and university settings. Now I teach undergraduates in a rural village in western New York. I have been trained in American Zen temples and in the academy. I have given a lot of thought to what these institutions do—and what they don’t do—to help prepare people for religious leadership and service. I’d like to share some of the conclusions I have drawn so far.

Years of zazen practice certainly helped me to approach the situations I describe above—and countless more—with some measure of calm and clarity. I found my way in each case, and each time I learned something new about the Buddha’s teaching of no separate self. But zazen alone was not enough to help me navigate through the theological issues that each case presented, and zazen alone could not help me respond to the agonized questions that people asked me.

These are the kinds of situations chaplains deal with every day. They were not contemplated by the Buddha 2,500 years ago, when he and his disciples wandered across north India, begging for alms. Nor were they contemplated by Dogen, the thirteenth-century founder of my Zen lineage, when he established his monastery in the mountains of Japan.

The work of ministers, priests, and chaplains—Buddhist or otherwise—is always interpretive: we must continually make ancient traditions and teachings relevant to new cultural and historical contexts. In the religiously pluralistic situation of twenty-first-century North America, we must also collaborate with and serve people whose religious perspectives differ hugely from our own. While I believe meditation training is essential to the preparation of Buddhist chaplains, it is not enough. Additional tools are needed for the job.

During my own preparation for ordination as a priest, and my training as a chaplain, I spent six years in seminary, earning a master's degree in Buddhist and Christian studies and a master of divinity degree. (I also spent six months in cloistered monastic training.) Academic training was not a requirement for ordination in the Zen lineage with which I was affiliated at the time, but I believed that if I were to take on the responsibilities and authority of priesthood, I needed training that American Zen communities are not fully equipped to provide. I had practiced Soto Zen for nearly fifteen years, in both residential and nonresidential settings, before I entered graduate school, and had observed that the training of American Zen priests consisted of meditation, participation in rituals, and informal (i.e., nonacademic) study of Buddhist texts and history. I had also witnessed a number of scandals involving clergy misconduct, both in my own lineage and in other Buddhist organizations. I wanted to study both Buddhism and Christianity academically, and I wanted professional training to help me avoid some of the pitfalls of religious leadership.

I entered graduate school in 1997, and in the years since then, I have seen huge shifts in seminary education. The mainstream model of clergy education—a three-year, residential master of divinity program—dates to the nineteenth century, and does not work as well as it once did. Seminarians these days are older; many are second-career professionals with families who have more difficulty relocating for graduate school than young, single people do. Mainstream Protestant denominations are also shrinking, and have less money to support seminarians, while the cost of graduate education has dramatically increased. Schools find it very costly to maintain aging buildings, upgrade libraries, incorporate new research and classroom technologies, offer competitive salaries, etc. In response

to such changes, seminaries are developing new models of education, as will be discussed below.

Everything is changing, as the Buddha taught. And to use a modern metaphor, we must either learn to surf the waves of change, or sink.

My master's thesis—which was longer than my doctoral dissertation—examined a number of issues in the training of American Zen clergy. I studied the functions priests perform, and the ways they are trained, in three American Zen lineages, which ranged along a spectrum from highly monastic to nonmonastic. I compared the training in these communities to the typical training path of Soto Zen priests in Japan and to seminary education in the American Protestant mainstream. I considered the differing roles of Japanese and American Zen priests: in Japan, they are best known for performing culturally prescribed funeral and memorial services. In the American organizations I studied, three of the largest Zen communities in the United States, priests were typically called upon to do four things, which are normal expectations for mainstream Christian clergy as well. First, their religious communities expected them to be exemplars: that is, representative practitioners of their Zen traditions. (Clergy have feet of clay, of course, but in general we are expected to uphold the ideals of the traditions we practice, in a public way.) Second, they were ritual leaders: they performed various rites of passage and the regular liturgies of their traditions and improvised other ceremonies as circumstances required. Third, they were religious educators and public theologians, teaching the texts, stories, and disciplines of their traditions and reinterpreting them for new circumstances. Finally, they provided what Christians call pastoral care: they helped people grapple with questions of meaning during times of struggle and offered spiritual and ethical guidance. However, I found significant gaps between these role expectations and the formal training of American Zen priests and lay teachers. In all three organizations, training tended to focus on meditation and ritual, and frequently left leaders underprepared for the roles of religious educator, public theologian, or pastoral counselor.

Since my seminary days, as I have watched Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish colleagues move into various forms of professional ministry, I have come to realize that they also do many more things than I had considered in my master's thesis. They manage staff, budgets, and volunteers

in the nonprofit organizations they serve. They work with boards of directors and government agencies. They do fundraising, publicity, and community organizing. And many operate in an American religious culture that blurs the line between clergy and laity. Although chaplaincy is a unique form of ministry, because it is explicitly ecumenical and interfaith, and because it takes place in institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and schools, chaplains are nevertheless called upon to perform many of these complex and demanding tasks as well.

For some years, I have participated in discussions about clergy training within the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA), a fledgling professional organization for American Zen clergy. I also have participated in many conversations, in person and online, with Buddhist chaplains and aspiring chaplains. It seems to me that participants in these Buddhist discussions fall into two broad camps.

Many—perhaps a majority—are what I would call monastically oriented, even if they live as laypeople. They believe that training for religious leadership and service should be centered in the meditation hall. Many argue that Zen training should consist primarily of daily meditation, liturgy, and temple work, particularly in traditional, ninety-day periods of intensive practice called *ango*. Some monastically oriented people express suspicion or disdain for academic training and professional certification, arguing that it can hinder religious insight, while others are much more supportive of formal study, in academic or temple settings, even as they stress the primacy of temple practice and long apprenticeship with one's Zen teacher.

Folks approaching the issue of chaplaincy training from the other side, including the organizations that certify professional chaplains, advocate a professional model of training. This includes a master of divinity degree or its equivalent. At the seminary I attended, that meant at least two years of coursework and a year of internship. In coursework, students learned to interpret scriptures critically, think theoretically and theologically, preach sermons, analyze congregational systems, do historical and ethnographic research, grapple with legal and ethical problems, and so forth.

Many of these academic and theological skills are essential for professional chaplains. In 2006 the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), the largest and most influential certifying body for professional

chaplains, decided that Buddhists seeking to become board certified chaplains—the highest level of professional certification, and necessary for employment in many settings—would be required to hold a bachelor’s degree from an institution accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and to document the equivalent of 72 units (7,200 hours) of graduate-level training in each of nine areas: sacred literature, theology/philosophy, ritual/liturgy, religious history, comparative religions, religious education, institutional organization and administration, pastoral care and counseling, and spiritual formation. Up to 1,500 hours of meditation and/or chanting experience could apply to the 7,200-hour total, but only if it involved documented supervision, an educational component, and evaluation to determine whether educational objectives were being met.

In addition, all candidates for APC Board Certification must complete four units (1,600 hours) of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at an accredited training site; be ordained or otherwise commissioned for ministry involving pastoral care; be endorsed as a chaplain by “a recognized religious faith group”; and have 2,000 hours of work experience as a chaplain, after completing CPE. These are rigorous standards, which I believe are appropriate for people serving vulnerable populations such as hospital patients, students, and inmates.

Both monastic and professional training are designed to instill certain ways of thinking, to shape character and identity, and to teach particular skills. I am a product of both kinds of education, and I can see the merits of both. I can also see some limitations of both.

One advantage of Zen monastic training is that one learns Dharma with the whole body. One moves, sits, chants as a member of the group body, dropping the self and harmonizing with others. This (ideally) helps to cultivate both character and religious insight. The rituals of Soto Zen *are* its primary pedagogical method. Long hours of meditation also teach one to be present with suffering, without trying to escape it, or justify it, or “fix” it, or explain it away. This quality, which chaplains call “non-anxious presence,” is what suffering people need: someone who can be with them compassionately in the midst of their suffering. The only way to be fully present with anyone else’s suffering, without squirming, is to practice being present with one’s own. This ability to be fully present in

the moment is one of the great gifts that Buddhist chaplains offer. It is not a skill typically taught in seminaries.

I think this kind of monastic formation is at the heart of the famous aphorism attributed to Bodhidharma: Zen is “a special transmission outside the sutras, not dependent upon words and letters, a direct pointing to the human mind, seeing one’s true nature and becoming Buddha.” There is no way to learn it but to do it, in year after year of patient practice. In this, I agree with monastically oriented Zen Buddhists.

At the same time, Dogen, the founder of my own Zen lineage, called this aphorism a “fallacy” and fiercely criticized those who used it to argue that Zen training need not entail rigorous study. In a treatise called “Buddha’s Teaching” (*Bukkyo*), Dogen wrote:

Fellows like this, even hundreds or thousands of years ago, were proclaiming themselves to be leading authorities; but we should know that, if they had such talk as this, they neither clarified nor penetrated the Buddha’s Dharma and the Buddha’s truth.

For Dogen, absolutely everything is Buddha and preaches the Dharma—so to call scholarly study “outside” the Buddha’s teaching is to fundamentally misunderstand the central Mahayana doctrine of nonduality.

Furthermore, throughout Buddhist history, monks and nuns have been responsible for writing, preserving, and commenting upon Buddhist teachings. Educated monks and nuns composed the *nikayas*, *agamas*, and *vinayas*, the philosophical and psychological treatises, and the transmission stories unique to Zen known as koans. Until recently, meditation was the specialty of a few monks and nuns. Even in modern Japanese Soto Zen, formal education can and does substitute for some monastic training. The more academic training one has in Buddhist studies, the less time one is required to spend in a recognized training monastery (*senmon sodo*) in order to move through the ordination ranks. Clergy receive both monastic ranks (novice priest, head trainee, full priest, abbot or abbess of a temple) and academic ranks, which determine what and where a priest can teach other priests or laypeople.

I think the American Zen emphasis on personal religious experience

and intuition, “heart” over “mind,” is not so much a product of ancient Zen as it is a product of *American* religious history—specifically, of evangelical Protestantism since the early nineteenth century. Evangelicalism shifted religious authority away from clergy who gave learned expositions of scripture toward those who could testify to powerful, personal religious experiences (e.g., being “born again”)—including those who were not formally ordained. Likewise, German Romanticism, which influenced Transcendentalists and other early promoters of Buddhism among white Americans, stressed intuition rather than rationalism. Although mainstream American denominations do require academic training for clergy, American religious culture has been shaped decisively by what John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, called “the religion of the heart.”

In order to reinterpret religious traditions of the past, to keep them relevant for present realities, we must understand where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are headed. Our historical and cultural situation is vastly different from those of our spiritual ancestors, at home and abroad. Different circumstances call for different skills. Professional seminary training is no panacea, but it does offer some useful training for our time.

For example, seminaries teach people to read sacred literature critically, and to interpret it for new circumstances. Even Biblical studies can help Buddhists understand a key source of religious authority for a majority of Americans and can help us learn to read any scriptures, including Buddhist ones, more thoughtfully. In some ways, modern Biblical studies are far ahead of Buddhist studies, particularly in English. For Biblical studies, a broad range of exegetical tools are available in English: myriad translations, commentaries from a wide range of perspectives, concordances, etc. Few such tools are available to English-speaking Buddhists, and only a fraction of the vast corpus of Buddhist literature has yet been translated from Asian languages into English (although the Pali Canon has been available in English since the 1920s). Biblical scholars have developed a wide variety of hermeneutical methods for analyzing scriptures from multiple angles as well: historical, literary, cultural, rhetorical, feminist/womanist/*mujerista*, and so forth, which Buddhist scholars can (and some do) employ.

Furthermore, many of the people Buddhist chaplains encounter in their work have been wounded by the toxic theologies of fundamentalists who read the Bible selectively and superficially. These theologies can worsen the suffering of people who are ill, grieving, or incarcerated, and countering them requires theological training and skill.

In addition, professional education can guide chaplains in dealing with legal and ethical problems that arise in counseling situations, and in making appropriate referrals to agencies dealing with problems such as domestic violence, addiction, sexual abuse, or suicide. Such skills are essential for chaplains and other religious professionals.

Another valuable aspect of formal theological education is that it obliges one to discuss one's own religious assumptions with people who do not share them. Exposure to people of different religious and cultural backgrounds can help one clarify where one stands and relate more empathetically to those who stand elsewhere. This combination of personal clarity and openness to difference is an essential pastoral skill.

But seminary education is expensive, for both students and schools. Many people who would like to be ministers or chaplains cannot afford to relocate for three years of graduate school, then enter jobs paying moderately at best in a very limited market. Given the relationship between race and economic class, these problems are especially acute for people of color.

Similar problems apply to extended monastic training—a complaint my American Zen peers repeatedly raise. Most Zen clergy must support themselves financially, and it is difficult to leave one's job and home for several months of *ango* training. Even in Japan, monastic training is increasingly problematic, because the medieval monastic ideal is not well adapted to the needs of modern, urban temple families or the parishioners they serve. Both monastic and professional modes of training also pluck people out of the contexts of their ministry and reinforce a split between theory and practice, clergy and laity, that may no longer serve. We must adapt to these realities.

These problems are pushing some seminaries to experiment with new models of education. Some are partnering with secular institutions to teach skills such as nonprofit management, in addition to the traditional subjects of theology, scripture, religious history, ethics, pastoral care,

and preaching. Some are pooling resources and collaborating with other seminaries instead of competing. Increasingly, seminaries are offering nondegree certificate programs, and combinations of online teaching, distance education, and short-term residential intensives. These methods can also serve Buddhists well, and a few organizations are beginning to experiment with them. We just have to be willing to engage in the necessary conversations: between scholars and practitioners, among Buddhists of different types, and across religious lines.

This is how we cultivate *upaya paramita*, the perfection of skillful means.

*Upaya* means discerning what a particular person or situation requires and responding appropriately, so that we can all move together along the path to awakening. I cannot think of a better description of what a Zen priest or a chaplain does.

## SPOT: A Training Program for Buddhists in America

*Lew Richmond and Grace Schireson*

HUNRYU SUZUKI, founder of San Francisco Zen Center and Tassajara monastery, once wrote, “Here in America we cannot define Buddhists the same way we do in Japan. American students are not exactly priests and not exactly laypeople . . . [so] I think we must establish an American way of Zen life.”

What did he mean by this? Who and what did he hope we might become?

Suzuki Roshi had a vision for America—a courageous and creative call for a universal Buddhism based on tradition, but not limited by it. From the time he arrived here in the late 1950s, Suzuki realized that

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for Zen to truly take root in America, it could not just be an imitation or extension of the Japanese style of practice in which he himself was trained, but it would have to be transformed by his American successors into something indigenous to our country and culture. It's been fifty years since Suzuki Roshi's arrival, so we might ask: What is the state of this vision? Does it hold relevance for other Buddhist traditions in the West? Are we truly making the Asian traditions our own, or are we still imitating Asian ways?

### A MEETING OF ZEN MINDS

Several years ago, a group of about fifteen American Zen teachers in the Suzuki Roshi lineage came together to take up this and other questions. We had a lot in common. We had been trained in one or more of the residential practice places of the San Francisco Zen Center; we wore the priest robes of Soto Zen; we had received Dharma transmission, giving us authorization to teach; and we had struck out on our own to start our own Zen sitting groups just as Suzuki Roshi had done. Yet we were still wondering about Suzuki Roshi's vision and were brimming with questions.

What were we actually teaching our students? What new ways had we found to teach Zen meditation to Americans raised in a Judeo-Christian society with an individualistic Western mind set? In practicing outside of formal centers or temples, how had we changed the Asian forms of practice in which we were trained, and what were the implications of those changes? How were we leading our emerging practice communities, and helping them deal with conflict and difficulty? How were we addressing, for ourselves and for our sangha members, the questions that deeply mattered to all of us—questions about emotions, relationships, psychological problems, life crises, money, health, family, and children? How well were we taking care of our own emotional, psychological, and physical needs? What was inspiring our sangha members to practice Zen and keep at it? Were we actually creating that “American Zen way of life” that Suzuki Roshi spoke of? We each seemed to be inching our way along by feeling and intuition, but without, as yet, a shared systematic approach.

As we continued meeting, we agreed that all of our years of Zen

training—leading a regimented life, keeping a strenuous meditation schedule, ringing bells, and bowing at altars—had given us understanding of Dharma, and improved our focus, concentration, and sense of Buddhist ritual, but it did not seem to have prepared us very well for what we were actually doing as American Zen teachers training Western laypeople to meditate and to appreciate the Buddhist view. We were not in a monastery or retreat center any more but were helping ordinary people with jobs and families live their lives more richly and productively. Were we increasing their own sense of liberation through meditation and the mindful practices and helping them to enrich the lives of others? What was the connection between our own training and this emerging vocation to share Buddhist practice with our lay sanghas?

These early peer group sessions were the first time that most of us had ever given public voice to these concerns. Each of us had gone off on our own to teach Zen—the first generation of graduates from the training centers that Suzuki Roshi had founded—and now, coming together after so long on our own, it was comforting and a bit surprising to find ourselves all in the same boat. We began to think about how we could develop a shared compass, standards and goals for teaching in settings outside of Zen centers. We wanted to teach students what they needed to know to practice and share Buddhism in their own lives rather than teaching them the skills necessary for sustaining a large Zen center. Teaching students to recognize their blind spots, to develop their teaching and speaking skills, and to learn how to guide others in study and practice describes training that develops the individual. Our own training in learning how to ring bells, wear robes, and follow Zen rituals was useful in furthering and continuing the institution, but it did not address our specific developmental needs. The former is a teaching that meets each person where s/he is, the latter, the teaching curriculum developed to insure the smooth functioning of schedule and ritual at a large training center.

As our discussions evolved, we realized that perhaps it was unrealistic to think that our own training—based on Asian models of practice and pedagogy—could actually have prepared us fully for the work we were now doing. On reflection, our residential training at Zen Center and Tassajara were not really representative of the many ways that Zen priests

in Japan receive training. First of all, every Japanese person is reared and nurtured in a society and family that is deeply infused with Buddhist imagery, attitudes, and values. In that way the training of a priest-to-be in Japan—particularly in the realm of feelings and emotions—begins at birth. Second, the monastic training of Japanese Zen priests is not the whole of it. Most of them also continue a long apprenticeship with their primary teacher, assisting in the care of the home temple and performing the myriad tasks of a temple priest. And last, most Japanese Zen priests attend a Buddhist university, and receive an academic degree.

In the light of all this, why should we have assumed that we had received the whole package? Suzuki Roshi only had time during his twelve years in America to give us the essentials of Zen practice; the rest, as he exhorted, was up to us.

#### THE BIRTH OF SPOT

These very discussions became the next step in our teacher training, and the next chapter in Suzuki Roshi's invitation to "establish an American Zen way of life." We also recognized our dialogue as having a more compelling and immediate purpose—training the next generation of priests and teachers. Not only were we training lay practitioners, but many of us were already preparing to ordain our own priest disciples, who would take vows to make Buddhist practice the center of their lives. What were we going to teach them about keeping these vows in the midst of family and work? How were we going to train them to transfer their settled mind from the silence of the meditation hall to the bustle of life in the world? Here was a chance to figure that out together.

Until these discussions, we had not given a whole lot of thought to disciple training, except to assume that it would be much like our own. But in most cases that was not really practical. We had done our residential training while relatively young and unencumbered in the rebellious and seeking cauldron of the '60s. In contrast, our own students were older—with partners, families, professions or careers, and the economic situation they faced was nothing like the abundance many of us had enjoyed fifty years ago. Long residential training at a Buddhist monastery like Tassajara was impractical for them. In most cases, their aspiration was to be like us,

out in the world as hospice workers and chaplains, meditation teachers and sangha leaders, while still maintaining the ability to support their families and nurture their relationships. They needed focused and comprehensive preparation aimed at helping them teach Buddhism without the enhancements of Zen centers, altars, priest's robes, and residential schedules. In short, they needed to know how to do the work of a Buddhist priest without depending on the trappings of formal practice.

From these peer group meetings, the S.P.O.T. training program was born in 2007, as a three-year program of residential training weekends. S.P.O.T. originally stood for Shogaku Priest Ongoing Training (Shogaku is one of Suzuki Roshi's Buddhist names), although today not everyone in the SPOT program are priests, and the term "SPOT" has come to stand on its own as the program title. By the time we began in Fall 2007, our program had six faculty and thirty trainees. At our first SPOT meeting in 2007, one of the trainees, recently ordained, began to tell of his new life as a priest. "As soon as people found out I was a priest, they began to share all their troubles with me. They began to ask me all sorts of questions. They poured their hearts out to me. I was overwhelmed. I didn't know what to say." Recounting his exposure and bewilderment in the company of his peers, he began to cry. We were all moved by his story, and we found it sobering to realize what we had all taken on. That emotional moment was, in a way, the birth cry of the baby SPOT. Now, as we write in 2011, SPOT has graduated thirty trainees and has started a second three-year program. Today most trainees are still priests or priests-to-be, but some are lay teachers.

#### ADDRESSING MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CHALLENGES

Early on in our curriculum planning, SPOT faculty honed in on three common distortions of Zen practice in America: idealization of the exotic, imitation of Asian models, and repression of emotions. While some of these distortions may apply equally to other Buddhist traditions evolving in the West, we were keenly aware of how we had begun to idealize Japanese culture as superior, and to even imitate the understated way that Suzuki Roshi expressed himself as if this is what it meant to be "a Zen person."

“Idealization of the exotic” means the assumption that Asian teachers are naturally spiritually superior to us and that their mere otherness makes them wiser. In fact, Zen practitioners in America often have considerably more experience of meditation than Zen priests in Japan. Suzuki Roshi did not encourage our idealized notions of Japan, or even of him. Once when asked what honorific title we should call him after his death, he responded forcefully, “No! It is not a question of what I should be called, but what *you* should be called. You are the ones! Give me five or ten more years and you will be strong teachers yourselves!” Sadly, he made this remark only a year before his death.

In the last few decades we have learned—sometimes painfully—that Asian teachers come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of realization, just like human beings everywhere. Our idealized sense of their superiority may be partly due to our own lack of confidence and partly to a need for an idealized parent or authority figure in whom we can invest our trust. The best Asian teachers, like Suzuki Roshi, avoided taking on our unrealistic projections. He kept insisting on his own ordinariness. Actually, we try to model this role for our students; while we have some authority in teaching how to practice Zen, we don’t know everything. And while the teacher-student relationship is important, the student must ultimately rely on his/her own relationship to the Dharma. As Dharma teachers, we are only a temporary but necessary bridge. We want our students to begin to learn to express their own Dharma.

“Imitation of Asian models” can be found frequently at Zen and other Buddhist practice centers. The robes, the rituals, the special way people move and hold their bodies—even the way they talk—can often convey a distorted picture of the essence of practice and of what really matters. We must remind ourselves that Buddhism and Zen are not just Japanese, Chinese, or Indian, for example, but universally human pursuits to relieve suffering. Of course, we need to honor the forms and rituals of our tradition, which have deep practice meaning. But we must stop believing that simply imitating the Asian way will automatically produce deep understanding. The essence of Buddhist practice will not come through imitating Asians but by finding our own way and truly becoming our Western selves.

“Repression of the emotions” means that Western practitioners can

sometimes use the meditation experience to override their own emotional perceptions and needs. Meditation and practice can be used to calm turbulent emotions, but it can also be used to repress negative emotions and unwanted cravings. While we are taught not to cling to experience, we need explicit instruction in how *not* to avert unpleasant thoughts, sensations, and impulses. While we need peace and quiet to settle the mind, this settled concentration needs to be applied to studying difficult feelings and relationships. Too often, meditators believe that with enough meditation their problems should disappear. Instead we need more explicit teaching on working with emotions. In the absence of familiar interpersonal cues, the environment of the meditation hall—no eye contact, no talking, a constant effort to remain focused on our own inner state—can be used to create a sense of emotional disconnection. This can lead to repressed emotions in meditation and elsewhere in practice. The actual process of Buddhist meditation is the opposite of repression; true meditation is totally exposed, completely in touch with the arising moment and connected to the here and now. Indeed, we often joke that there should be a warning label attached to Buddhist practice: “Living and practicing in a Buddhist community could be harmful to your emotional health if improperly used. Avoid repression and mind-numbing.”

#### THE SPOT METHODOLOGY

In explaining all of this to our trainees, we found it helpful to speak of three levels of training—personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal. Meditation experience opens us to the transpersonal core of Buddhism—the realization of the empty nature of our ego-selves and all phenomena. But the personal and interpersonal realm of relationships, afflictive emotions, group dynamics, projection, and idealization that arise in the authority role of priest, sangha leader, or teacher cannot be ignored. Belonging to a spiritual community, we cannot bypass or skip over our reactivity, the pain that arises in sangha relationships, and our longing for the teacher’s approval. In other words, we have to reach the stage of a mature adult in the personal and interpersonal realm before we can fully internalize and integrate the transpersonal level of emptiness-awareness realization.

We took heart in the similar efforts being made at Spirit Rock in the Insight Meditation community. Jack Kornfield, Spirit Rock’s founder, has pioneered a teacher training program that in the last twenty years has produced over a hundred vipassana teachers and practice leaders. Once, when asked what kind of people his training program was designed to produce, Jack answered, “Mature adults!” He meant “mature” in all senses of the word—emotionally, psychologically, and socially as well as spiritually. Author John Welwood has coined the term “spiritual bypassing” to describe the way meditators try to achieve spiritual maturity while ignoring, or “bypassing,” their personal and emotional problems, because like all suffering beings, they want to leave the pain behind and get to the good part.

Welwood and Kornfield are saying much the same thing. Real spiritual maturity cannot happen on the superhighway of spiritual bypassing. Rather, it must wend its way through all the local roads of emotion and ego, transforming each obstacle as it goes. We cannot skip pain or conflict by spiritual workarounds that bump us to a higher plane while repressing or bypassing our human condition. We must instead use our carefully honed attention to honestly encounter our vulnerability and suffering, one breath at a time. Our liberation is grounded in accepting our suffering and remaining connected to it. We need to tenderly hold the suffering in clear awareness, a skill developed on the cushion, while we engage in the activities of our lives.

So we designed the curriculum of the SPOT training to address Westerners’ tendencies to try to escape suffering by wrapping themselves in the exotic, imitating their naïve impressions of the Asian way, or repressing feelings through spiritual bypassing. Our curriculum and training methodologies continued to evolve as we completed the first three-year program and began the second course. Basically, rather than just sitting silently, we have designed exercises that gradually challenge the students’ emotional reactivity in real time, and then we talk about how their reactivity might have tricked them—then we do some more meditation.

#### THE SPOT CURRICULUM: WHERE EAST MEETS WEST

Rather than refine the core skills of meditation and ritual (which trainees already study with their own teacher and within their sangha or residen-

tial community), SPOT focuses on the trainable and measurable skills that a Zen priest or teacher needs to minister to his/her group—the skills Western seminaries usually term “pastoral.” These skills include: providing spiritual counseling in one-to-one situations; learning to give a Dharma talk or sermon that teaches laypeople the benefits of Zen practice in everyday life; and group leadership skills that enable priests or teachers-in-training to guide their sangha or group to become a cohesive whole. We use the SPOT group and its emotional challenges as the “test” sangha, so students can experience how to develop a cohesive group and how to navigate the inevitable emotional bumps in the life of a practice community. In addition, we include knowing how to prepare and lead effective Zen rituals and offer spiritual solace in times of human need, how to take care of our own emotional and physical needs in intimate relationships, and to share and teach those self-care skills to sangha members. This is particularly effective when we have the opportunity to face the SPOT community’s losses as they arise. We are not just studying the suffering in the abstract, but we are living and practicing with the real thing.

The most basic skill of all is how to talk and listen to another human being; during SPOT training this is practiced in dyads to create the actual experience of the intimacy and tenderness that arises between two people. There is a saying in Zen: “You cannot eat a painted rice cake.” To fully appreciate the vulnerability of being with another human being, balancing wisdom and compassion, we need to actually be present in the doing of it. The SPOT faculty aims to model this willingness to be present through frank discussions and interactions with each other—much of which is shared openly with trainees.

In teaching how to prepare and deliver a Dharma talk, we emphasize the importance of knowing the needs of an audience in a variety of settings, including prisons, hospitals, schools, and retreats for beginners—in other words, how to match a talk to the needs of an audience, and how to rely on one’s own unique experience of practice as the basis for a talk.

Zen master Yunmen was once asked: “What is the teaching of the Buddha’s entire lifetime?”

Yunmen answered “An appropriate response.”

The Buddha himself always tried to offer the best medicine to his followers, discerning what was needed in each particular moment. We

teach that effective Zen talks do not need to be inscrutable, clever, or full of Zen-speak. Zen talks most of all need to be helpful. Each SPOT teacher goes into some detail about how he/she prepares for a talk, and each trainee is required to give his/her own talk. Trainee Dharma talks are followed by audience participation and then by teacher feedback. It is a powerful experience for each trainee to hear feedback from his or her peers and then from each faculty member. Style, organization, delivery, and Dharma relevance are all grist for the mill in the feedback process, but most important is whether the student came across authentically teaching from his/her own understanding and life.

Perhaps the most complex task SPOT addresses is understanding the interpersonal, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the priest's role. We especially concentrate on issues of power, transference, projection, idealization, and conflict. Suzuki Roshi taught that sangha in and of itself is the full expression of Buddha nature, and in working with our own sanghas, we have found this to be so. Within the intimacy of sangha, our understanding or lack of it is fully exposed. Sangha relationships have the potential to reveal to us what we have aimed for, what the results have actually been, and everything in between. We can get caught up in our self-centered dream even as we struggle to articulate the Buddha Way. We note our preferences and aversions and trace them back to self-centeredness. We confront what we are afraid of, and what we are attached to. All of these things are clearly revealed in the healthy functioning of sangha. Our relationships in our sanghas may reveal our tendencies and habits so we can address old patterns from family of origin. When we belong to a group, our core issues surface. In our SPOT trainings, we bring this understanding of group dynamics into the center of the training and work on it explicitly.

For example, the lead-up to the graduation ritual of the SPOT 2007 class brought into focus our need to examine attachment and fear as a basis for our teaching and practice. In the last SPOT weekend before graduation, the faculty asked the trainees to design their own graduation ceremony, and as part of that process, challenged the students to select from their number a valedictorian to speak on behalf of the group. The faculty did this knowing full well that the Zen students had become bonded as a cohesive group, but the shadow of competition had not yet

been exposed. This challenge, not unexpectedly, gave rise to significant conflict and disturbance among the trainees. The notion of a singular spokesperson—even one selected by the group—struck some trainees as somehow contrary to the “spirit” of SPOT. Of course each one secretly wanted to be the best, to be selected, but some of the students could not face their own desire to exceed their “beloved” peers. Facing competitiveness and fear of failure are a hallmark of the mature adult, and we did not wish to graduate students without encouraging them to face their own insecurity. Some students understood the exercise and found it to be the most fun of the whole three-year program. Others secretly campaigned for insurrection. The weekend was marked by controversy about the challenge, and about the selection process—should it be by majority vote, consensus, lot, or some combination? In the end the group decided to select not one but three valedictorians, thus defying the faculty’s actual request. Issues of power, status, hierarchy, and competition all rose up and roiled the group. From the faculty’s point of view, the valedictorian exercise ended up being one of the deepest trainings and the kind of difficulty that actual teachers would face in actual practice communities.

SPOT training is not a substitute for the one-on-one relationship of teacher and disciple. All participants must have their teacher’s permission to join, and that relationship is honored. It is also not a replacement for monastic experience; trainees who can manage a training period are encouraged to do so. Instead, our intention is to supplement and support those traditional training methods with new ones that embody Suzuki Roshi’s vision for our practice in our own Western style.

#### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A TYPICAL DAY OF SPOT TRAINING

During a recent day-long SPOT training, our theme was working with conflict in the sangha. Trainees had previously read a lecture by Suzuki Roshi in which he portrayed the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as different aspects of one truth. Sangha, he said, was not just a group of people practicing together, it was itself an expression of ultimate reality—as much as zazen, sutras, and rituals. The thrust of the

day's work was to connect our Western understanding of the power of group dynamics with this teaching of Suzuki Roshi's.

While Buddhism doesn't explicitly describe how groups work, Western specialists in group dynamics do. We believe that understanding group dynamics in Western terms is essential for sangha leaders so we created an exercise to allow trainees to feel the pull of the group in the context of conflict.

We constituted groups of six or seven trainees as a "practice committee" of a fictitious sangha. The committee's job was to deal with the following conflict: Most members of the sangha, including its teacher, wanted to start formal chanting practice (e.g. the Heart Sutra), but one member (who claimed to represent a constituency in the sangha) felt that chanting was too sectarian and would exclude potential new sangha members. The practice committee was to take up this issue and deal with it however they could.

Each trainee received a preassigned role; in most cases the role was secret. One was to be the dissenter, the member most resistant to the chanting idea. Another was to be someone who personally disliked the dissenter yet agreed with the dissenter's position about chanting. Another was to be someone who personally *liked* the dissenter but disagreed with the dissenter's position. One trainee was to play the public role of sangha president and meeting facilitator. A SPOT faculty member played the role of sangha teacher—though he/she was not to be involved in resolving the conflict. If the group members were faithful to their roles, it would be difficult to resolve the conflict without hurt feelings. The trainees' task was to concentrate mostly on what their feelings and body sensations were in the midst of conflict, rather than to resolve it.

Groups alternated between time "in role," acting out the conflict, and time "out of role," where they could reflect on their experience. In role, people got upset at each other, offended each other, and became impatient with one another. Out of role, people expressed surprise at how much their nervous systems had become engaged and reactive, even though the situation was "pretend." In the plenary session that followed, we discussed this at length. What is real, what is pretend?

The poet John Ashbery entitled one of his books, "Was that a real poem or did you just make it up?" Is our personality a real identity or is

it just another role? Is there a difference? What is the difference? What is the relationship to that question and that experience to the core teaching of the Buddha about *anatman*—no abiding, continuously existing self? Who are we really? Who is the other person really? What is our role and responsibility as vow-takers and priest professionals to enact and express the Dharma in each circumstance? It is one thing to read Buddhist scripture on the topic of no fixed self; it's quite another to experience it in such a potent role-playing exercise. Our purpose in constructing the exercise was to make a vivid connection between the Buddhist teaching of no fixed self and our actual experience in the moment—in our emotions, in our bodies.

We believe that coming together as SPOT, we are on the way to embodying Suzuki Roshi's vision for Zen in America. But it is not just for Suzuki Roshi that we fulfill this vision—his vision is in fact what the Buddha had in mind for his teaching. Suzuki Roshi insisted we were not the Zen school, but just people who were following the Buddha's Way. The Buddha encouraged practitioners not to cling to his words, but to translate his teachings into their own native language, to illuminate their own lives. We need to remember this as our primary practice and not get caught in just following a formula or a recipe. Understanding ourselves intimately, we must become familiar with all of the ingredients and the intricacies of our specific kitchen, and then we must cook from our whole heart.