

Spiritual Discipline in Zen and Comparative Perspective

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TO THE HONOR that has been accorded me in the invitation to deliver the opening paper in this important symposium I shall add a liberty. Though the symposium is on Zen Buddhism, in exploring the subject of spiritual discipline I shall not restrict myself to Zen's mode of spiritual training. This is partly because I am a comparativist rather than a Buddhologist or specialist on Japan, but the decision was also prompted by the thought that before we center down on Zen proper it might be useful to consider it in the context of man's religious venturings as a whole.

To launch me on that project, let me invoke a wry comment the American novelist John Updike once made. "A lot of people are looking at maps," he said; "few seem to be going anywhere." This is a useful opening because it shows us at once why spiritual disciplines are important. An oasis is of no avail while it is distant, and the same holds for reality; for it to empower us we must be joined to it. But we are normally not so well joined, as the myths of exile and fall, of sleepwalking and forgetting, persistently remind us. Something must be done to effect the needed union, and discipline is a name for that doing. It is the journeying that carries us from exile to our spiritual home.

* This paper was presented at the International Symposium for Religious Philosophy (Kyoto Zen Symposium) held by the Kyoto Seminar for Religious Philosophy under the auspices of The Institute for Zen Studies, Hanazono College, Kyoto, on March 26-30, 1983. A shorter version of this paper which does not have its Zen emphasis is being simultaneously published under the title, "In Defense of Spiritual Discipline," in James Duerlinger (ed.), *Ultimate Reality and Spiritual Discipline* (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1983).

I. *Discipline as Requisite*

To say that this journeying is always in order is an understatement; it is needed, for never for long are we exactly where we should be. There are intervals when we *seem* to be where we should be; these are the “times of inherent excellence” Wallace Stevens speaks of,

As when the cock crows on the left and all
Is well, incalculable balances,
At which a kind of Swiss perfection comes . . . ¹

Such times do indeed come, and when they do we do not know whether the happiness they bring is the rarest or the commonest thing on earth, for in all earthly things we find it, give it, and receive it. But we cannot hold onto that happiness. This hardly needs arguing, but two giants can be quoted to drive the point home. “Whoever thinks that in this mortal life a man may so disperse the mists of bodily and carnal imaginings as to possess the unclouded light of changeless truth, and to cleave to it with the *unswerving* constancy of a spirit wholly estranged from the common ways of life,” St. Augustine wrote, “he understands neither what he seeks, nor who he is who seeks it” (*italics added*). St. Teresa’s formulation of the same point is as follows: “If anyone told me that after reaching this state [of union] he had enjoyed *continual* rest and joy, I should say that he had not reached it at all” (*again, italics added*). There seems to be no permanent abode this side of Eden. Even Jesus prayed, and the Buddha continued to sit after his enlightenment.

This initial point is important enough to repeat, exchanging the metaphors of travel, oases, and home for the actual object of the spiritual quest, which is knowledge. No desire is more deeply embedded in us than the desire to know; to see things as clearly and completely as is possible. Buddhism recognizes this by asking us “to see things in their suchness,” while a *hadith* of Muhammad runs, “O Lord, show me all things as they truly are.”² In our present state, though, as St. Paul admits, “we see in a

¹ *Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 786.

² Sayyid Haydar Amuli, *Jamehal-Asrar wa Manbuh al-Anwar* (pp. 17, 89); *Rasa'il-e Shah Nimatullah* (Vol. I, p. 209; Vol. 4, p. 23). Shabistari’s gloss on this *hadith* reads:

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mirror dimly” (I Cor. 13: 13). As a boy growing up in China, that was a vivid image for me, for quicksilver mirrors had only recently arrived and the reflections afforded by the traditional mirrors of burnished bronze were murky at best. To “see face to face” is not our present lot, but we can polish our mirrors, or (in Blake’s alternative wording) cleanse the doors of our perceptions. If we take seriously our human opportunity (which the Indian tradition never tires of reminding us is “hard to come by”) we may wonder whether anything unrelated to this cleansing is worthwhile.

Light cannot penetrate a stone, and is barely reflected from a black surface. For truth’s light to enter us, our petrified selves must be turned into crystal; correlatively but in altered imagery, if our lives are to reflect truth’s light, black bogs must be changed into fields of snow. Such alchemical changes require doing. In the language of our title, they require discipline.

II. *Objections to Discipline*

Those who have urged the importance of spiritual disciplines—be they the Buddha’s Eightfold Path, Patanjali’s Raj or Astanga Yoga, Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification), Saint Ignatius’ spiritual exercises, or John Wesley’s Method-ism, to name but a representative sample—have had to face a number of objections, three of which are recurrent.

1. The first of these is the charge that such regimens preempt for man the credit for change that belongs to God. Approaching salvation as if it were a condition to be achieved rather than a gift to be received, they shift the accent from grace, where it belongs, to self-effort.

A number of rejoinders are in order here, and I will proceed from the most obvious to ones that are less so.

To begin with, not all disciplines have subjective change as their aim. When the Qur’an enjoins the Muslim to “hymn the praise of thy Lord when

Leave behind both worlds and reside
on the highest peak of His threshold.
God will bestow upon you whatever you want
and show you all things as they truly are.

Quoted in Javad Nurbakhsh, *Traditions of the Prophet* (New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1981), pp. 32–33.

thou uprisest, and in the night-time also hymn His praise, and at the setting of the stars” (LII: 48–49), it foreshadows what is probably the most widely-practiced spiritual discipline on our planet today—the canonical prayers of Islam. These prayers unquestionably have an effect on those who offer them, but that effect is not their direct intent which is, rather, to honor Allah with the adoration that is his due. A cynic could of course claim that though that is the right reason for prayer, thereal (in the sense of operative) reason is the celebrant’s wish to get to heaven. To this the answer is: Doubtless this is so for some, but motives for praying cover a wide spectrum, reaching to the prayer of the Sufi saint Rabi’a, which has become classic:

O God! if I worship Thee in fear of Hell,
burn me in Hell;
And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise,
exclude me from Paradise;
But if I worship Thee for Thine own sake,
withhold not Thine everlasting beauty!

Proceeding to the more subtle point, even when discipline does include self-transformation in its object, it does not follow that the program excludes grace or even tips the scales away from it.

The model in this second instance is the athlete. No one supposes that an Olympic contender can stay in the running unless he works out regularly. Are we to suppose that spiritual attainment is less demanding; that it does not require its “spiritual exercises,” to invoke Ignatius’ phrase which fits perfectly here? Both cases call for effort, but athletes are not normally concerned with the relation of that effort to empowerment from other sources,³ whereas “spiritual athletes” have to give thought to that question because “relation to reality” is their central concern. Where do they come down on the question? What *is* the relation between grace and self-effort?

It is easiest to state the conclusion negatively. The relation is not a disjunctive one, such that the more you have of one the less you have of the other. It’s closer to the opposite: not either/or, but both/and.

³ I say “not normally concerned,” but actually such concern may be more common than we suppose. Michael Murphy has made a study of star athletes which shows that a large number of them were seriously occupied with forces beyond themselves which they felt worked in their behalf at crucial junctures.

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Given a space that is finite, say, an empty hat box, the more black marbles it contains the less room there will be for white ones, and vice versa. But for the way human activity is related to God's, this model won't work: a different logic is required. To begin with, there is no human action which is not divinely empowered, which makes every human act in some way God's act as well. This initial point is simple, but it opens quickly onto paradoxes and then mysteries. There is no hope of fathoming these here, if indeed the rational mind can ever dissolve the mysteries that are involved. What it can do, to repeat, is see clearly that either/or logic in this domain is "pre-Riemannian." With Ramakrishna's "the winds of God's grace are always blowing, but you must raise your sail" and St. Paul's "in His service is perfect freedom" we approach paradox, but if we keep going we are confronted with what, to the rational mind, must look like absolute contradictions. Spinoza's equation of freedom with determinism is one of these; Pauline theology another. I once heard a New Testament scholar compress the latter into a sentence that was vivid, though earthy: "You have to work like hell because it's all been done for you."

In an important essay that originally appeared in 1968 but has recently been republished,⁴ Marco Pallis details the reciprocal relationship between grace and self-effort as they interact in Buddhism. Early Theravada Buddhism provides a good test case on this issue, for a perspective that does not include the idea of a personal God seems at first glance to leave little room for the idea of grace as well. Can merciful action from above, defined as an unsolicited gift that is extended to human beings independent of their own effort, be reconciled with the workings of karma as the inexorable law of moral cause and effect? Pallis shows that it can be. For as the Buddha said: "There is, O monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded," without which there would be "no escape from the born, the become, the made." This "uncompounded" on which the Buddhist quest is founded and to which it leads, stands prior to all human doings as something that is simply given to us. Our discernment of this uncompounded sunyata initiates our spiritual quest, but again we must ask into the anatomy of this discernment. When we gaze on the Grand Canyon, how much of what we see is of our own doing? We make the journey to see it, we can say; but would we have done so had we not heard reports of it

⁴ "Is There Room for Grace in Buddhism?" in Marco Pallis, *A Buddhist Spectrum* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

and been endowed with sensibilities to respond to those reports? Above all, would we have journeyed and responded had it not been *there*? In the case of enlightenment, were it totally beyond our reach we could no more respond to its summons than an ox can feel drawn to astronomy, which shows that the capacity for enlightenment has been given us as a gift. Meister Eckhart put this matter in perspective when he wrote that “in the course of nature it is really the higher which is ever more ready to pour out its power into the lower than the lower is ready to receive it”; for as he goes on to say, “there is no dearth of God with us; what dearth there is is wholly ours who make not ready to receive his grace.” Eventually this point finds Buddhist statement in the assertion that the Buddha-nature is with us from the start.

All of the Buddha’s emphasis on self-effort and exertion—“be ye lamps unto yourselves”; “work out your salvation with diligence”—should be seen in the context of a gracious matrix that inspires the religious quest and assures its fulfillment. There is not space here to go into Pallis’s discussion of the ancillary “means of grace” in Buddhism; the *upayas* (skillful means) that range from the compelling example of the Buddha’s own life, through the sutras and other scriptures, to art (notably the sublime iconography of the Buddha himself) which can put us ahead of ourselves by relaying to our dispositions the beauty that impacts our senses. Even if we do not include the Bodhisattvas who are grace personified, these gifts are strewn about almost carelessly in Buddhist civilizations, free for the taking. But though I must pass over these proximate supports, I do want to note before completing this Buddhist excursion that Marco Pallis’s analysis was in important ways foreshadowed by D. T. Suzuki’s study of Shin Buddhism. As a development that stresses other-power (*tariki*), Shin had from the first to argue that it is truly Buddhist, for original Buddhism (as we have seen) *seemed* to lean heavily towards self-power (*jiriki*). Suzuki argues Shin’s case historically by saying that in our preoccupation with the Buddha’s teaching we should not overlook his example which leaned heavily towards helping others. From the moment of his enlightenment, he was occupied with his mission: what he could do for others and the benefits that could accrue to them from that doing. But beyond this historical point, Suzuki argues the logical point we have seen Pallis making: self-power and other-power, self-effort and grace, prove under inspection to be reciprocal; each entails the other in principle. Other-power *must* be received, while self-power rides on a supporting context that *is* received inasmuch as the self

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did not create it. Moreover, it is possible to advance to the point where each component is recognized as its opposite. The Shin believer pronounces the *nembutsu* (formula that saves him), yet he doesn't; Amida, the saving Buddha, pronounces it using the believer's lips while being simultaneously the faith/compassion that rises in the believer's breast.⁵ Meanwhile the Zen Buddhist, whose strenuous *zazen* places him at the opposite end of the grace/self-effort spectrum, is brought to the same point the Shinnist reaches. He urges self-effort, but what happens to self when it discovers that it is nothing less than the Buddha-nature in phenomenal guise?⁶

I have spent what may seem like disproportionate space on the interplay of discipline and grace because, respecting the topic at hand, this is the point at which theological confusion is most likely to arise. In four steps, let me summarize the argument I have used Suzuki and Pallis to set before us:

a. We begin with segments of experience suffused with feelings of effort or ease that can stand in sharp contrast. There are times when it seems that if anything is to come our way it will have to be through our own initiative, and there are times when we simply sit back and ride the Glory Train—Shinran's image is taking a boat ride; it is so easy and pleasant.

b. These episodes do not last, however. Effort eases, but then that ease too crumbles like something in a fairy tale when the clock strikes twelve. Nothing in life can be understood without introducing the element of time, and time brings rhythms and oscillations. We wake to work; later we lie down to sleep. We stretch our legs and then relax them.

c. But even apart from these pendulum swings which show both reception and exertion to be parts of life's story, we can see, if we look closely, that self- and other-power entail each other in principle. Even benefits that are transmitted to us through other-power (*tariki ekō*) must, we have seen, be received; and self-power presupposes a supportive context which the self did not create.

d. The culminating stage is reached when each of the two components

⁵ The Islamic version of this is contained in the *hadith*, "I have known my Lord by my Lord," which is anticipated by the Qur'anic verse, "He turned to them that they might turn" (IX: 119). "For," as Abu Bakr al-Kalabdhī explains in commenting on that verse, "the cause of everything is God."

⁶ Suzuki's full analysis of the *jiriki/tariki* relationship is summarized on pages 142–47 of my "Four Theological Negotiables: Gleanings from Daisetz Suzuki's Posthumous Volumes on Shin Buddhism," *Eastern Buddhist* X, 2 (October 1977).

is actually experienced as being also its opposite. Whereas the preceding point was that Amida's saving power requires the *nembutsu*, now the point is that in pronouncing that formula the Shinnist realizes that Amida is pronouncing it through him. Comparably with the Zennist. It is not just that his *zazen* presupposes a supporting context. The line between his sitting and what cushions that sitting, we might say, disappears.

2. Disciplines have been subject to a second criticism; namely, that they are prompted in the end by a subtle form of willfulness.

A natural tendency of the ego is its wish to have things differ from the way they are. The West is inclined to see this as a problem because we want things to differ in *our* way, not God's way, but there is a view that holds that the problem lies deeper. According to this second view, the ultimate cause of the human problem is our wish to have things differ in *any* way from the way they are. Buddhism argues this most explicitly with its claim that the source of *dukkha* (suffering) is *tanha* (desire or craving), but we can find the point in every tradition if we look carefully enough. Eckhart's teaching that we should not even wish that we had not sinned is readily misunderstood, but in the context of his complete theology its function is to take the final step in closing the ought/is divide. Beginning by acknowledging God's omnipotence—recognizing that in last analysis he is the author of everything—it goes on to affirm that that omnipotence is perfect. Islam, for its part, compresses the logic in question into its very name. Unique among the world's faiths in being named by a common noun, that noun designates (as we know) a spiritual attitude: submission. Uncapitalized, *islam* simply means submission; capitalized it designates the company of those who have dedicated their lives *to* submission.⁷ Run-of-the-mill understandings of submission ride on master/servant imagery, but metaphysically submission calls for aligning the human heart with the way things are. The test of this alignment is total affirmation; not passive acceptance, but the active affirmation to everything, exactly as it is and will be.

The bearing of all this on discipline is not far to seek. To the extent that spiritual exercises aim at self-change, this second criticism argues, they exacerbate the ought/is divide rather than ameliorating it. That the posited "ought" is in this instance a noble one—self-improvement and eventually liberation—only camouflages the trap it overlays: the ego has a deep-

⁷ Arabic has no capitals. I have converted the case into English.

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rooted tendency to co-opt and appropriate even the process of liberation; it thrives on such appropriations and we have here a clear instance. In Buddhist terms, the desire to be desireless is itself a desire and therefore contradictory. The Sufi Hasan Esh-Shadhili makes the same point in theistic idiom when he writes: “The desire for union with God is one of the things most surely separates from him.”⁸

As in the first charge against disciplines, there is much in this second charge that is true—everything, in fact, save its presumed conclusion: that spiritual disciplines are misguided. “To desire to be desireless” may sound contradictory, but until we *have* transcended desires⁹—while we continue to dangle from their puppet strings—it is crucial to discriminate among them. Some desires—the Bodhisattva’s vow to save all sentient beings, and yes, the desire to reach enlightenment oneself—are better than others; they are, as the Buddhists say, “wholesome states.” To overlook this simple fact is to betray one’s ignorance, the deadliest form of which is to think that one has completed the spiritual journey when one is still a traveller on its way.

As for the Sufi version of the warning-against-desire that was quoted above, is it true that desire for union with God actually separates us from him? The answer depends on the nature of the union anticipated. If it focuses on a finite ego which is destined to be flooded with rapture and who knows what other good things when the beatific vision dawns, desire for a union that places this grandiose ego stage center does indeed separate. Disguised egoism, it is simply another variant of Chogyam Trungpa’s “spiritual materialism.” But if eyes are kept steadfastly on God, allowing his presence to expand until, filling the horizon, it leaves no room for the self that inherits the view, it is difficult to see how this second mode of desire, radical to the point of seeking the ego’s extinction (*fana*), could backfire.

⁸ Quoted in Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* (London: Perennial Books, 1969), p. 162. It will not have been lost on the reader that in introducing examples to illustrate the points of this paper I often match East with West, in keeping with the dictum: “And to God belong the East and the West. Wheresoe’er ye turn, there is the Face of God” (Qur’an, II: 109).

⁹ The word “transcended” is important because it is also possible to sink to a condition that is *below* desire’s reach. Both cases involve a levelling process, but in the second a dead level is reached, the psyche having lost its capacity to respond to anything. The difference is the absolute one between finding God everywhere and finding him nowhere.

Though it was cast in different terms, the dispute between the Northern and Southern Schools of Ch'an Buddhism in the T'ang dynasty was over issues that are very close to ones we are involved with in this second objection to method. When Hui-neng countered Shen-hsiu's admonition to keep the mirrors of our minds brightly polished, he seemed to be challenging the importance of method, which challenge was to prompt burlesques of zazen as tile-polishing and sitting like Sengai's frog. But these challenges were not categorical. The issue is as subtle as any that can be posed, and a look at the way it was handled in the "gradual versus sudden" controversy can help with the problem we are working on.

The Southern School is said to differ from the Northern School in advocating sudden rather than gradual enlightenment; as *The Platform Sutra* puts the point, "Why not from your own natures make the original nature of true reality suddenly appear?" We can translate this temporal (gradual versus sudden) distinction into spatial imagery and think of gradual enlightenment as the horizontal dimension of Zen, and sudden enlightenment as its vertical dimension. Roshis use a homey illustration to bring out the difference.

I break a bowl. On the one hand I can say that I should have been more careful and can resolve to be more careful in the future. On the horizontal, linear plane where past and future figure, this is all as it should be. Nevertheless—here the vertical dimension enters—at the moment the bowl was breaking, bowl-breaking was all there was. Self-nature (the Buddha-nature, *sunyata*, *pratitya-samutpada*, whatever term we wish to use) was manifesting itself in just that way. Enlightenment is to see that. Such seeing can occur whenever and wherever. And when it does occur, it occurs in an instant, which is why the philosophy that stresses this point came to be known as the sudden school. The point for this paper on spiritual exercises, though, is that the defenders of sudden enlightenment do not repudiate gradualism. Hui-neng continued to sit and practice other austerities, and I should never give up trying to be careful not to break more bowls. But no amount of caution will ever guarantee that my fingers will never again slip. This is simply a concrete way of saying that I will never become perfect. In Buddhist terms, no amount of practice—gradualism—will make me a Buddha; no amount of zazen will carry me to enlightenment. If the Buddha is to arrive he must do so not at the end of my life, as the terminus of my horizontal, linear effort. He must arrive vertically, where I am right now, in the midst of my imperfections. He (or it) must arrive in an instant, in a

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sudden flashing insight that cuts through the distinctions between present and future and collapses the distinction between practice and what practice seeks.

3. A third charge against disciplines is that they foster spiritual pride. This is indeed a danger; spiritual pride is pride's subtlest form. But the religions have known this, while adding that this final adversary is best countered with a light touch. When William Law proposed some measures for deepening the contemplative life a clergyman responded with an angry sermon "On the Wickedness and Presumption of Attempting to be Righteous Overmuch." Law replied, "Perhaps, Sir, if you try to be a saint, you may succeed in being a gentleman."

To summarize this central section of my paper: If the reproaches that have been directed against disciplines are read as warnings they can be useful. It would be a mistake, though, to see them as proscriptions. The alternative to discipline and the effort it requires is "quietism," a technical term in the vocabulary of mysticism for a state that comes perilously close to doing nothing. Even Taoism, whose concept of *wu wei* skirts the brink of that state, recognizes that the state itself is disastrous.

III. *The Common Thrust of Spiritual Techniques*

Having devoted most of my space to answering objections to spiritual disciplines, I can only touch on four other points, beginning with the sense in which such disciplines point in the same general direction.

To broach the prospect of unity in the world's religions is to raise the spectre of syncretism, but guidelines are available for avoiding its pitfalls.¹⁰ Syncretism plays upon universal yearnings for brotherhood and understanding to reduce the "strong meat" of divine revelation to innocuous pabulum; it levels the great traditions to their lowest common denominator, as if there were nothing more to God's (in ways terrible) word than the Golden Rule and vague belief in "a something or other" that is greater than ourselves. In important ways the historical religions are *not* alike, and to insist prematurely on their resemblances is to play down these

¹⁰ See S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), Chapter Nine.

“importances” in favor of resemblances that are secondary and derivative. The most vocal champions of ecumenism often turn out to be persons who, having lost faith in the revealed character of traditions *per se*, their own included, have retreated to commonsense values—brotherhood and understanding—which are secure in that no one could possibly take exception to them. Thanks to its advocates of this stripe, ecumenism (for all its lofty ideals) often spreads relativism and strengthens secularism’s already heavy hand.

Still, it seems most unlikely that there is not some important sense in which the great religions are one; in theistic terms, would God have permitted them to endure for millennia, nourishing the lives of untold millions, if they were not in some sense vehicles of his all-including will? The way to acknowledge this authentic unity while avoiding the pitfalls of syncretism is to locate the unity in a transcendent realm, beyond the kataphatic, positive (as in *via positiva*), articulated theologies whose differences should be honored while being kept sharply edged.¹¹ Heinrich Ott has made a parallel move by suggesting that interfaith dialogue be anchored in the notion of mystery.¹² If, as Noam Chomsky and his fellow transformational grammarians are arguing, human languages with their

¹¹ To speak of transcendence is to suggest a hierarchical view of reality, and some will see this as relativizing the Schuon/Nasr solution (to which I also subscribe), inasmuch as it will be acceptable only to those who buy into its ontological premise. But speaking from inside that perspective, I see things differently because I do not see how it is possible to deal philosophically with spiritual matters without a hierarchical ontology. Whether it is possible to have a religion without a philosophy is a separate but equally important question. In the emphasis it places on Bodhidharma’s “direct transmission outside the scriptures” and the Noble Silence of the Buddha himself, Zen may come closer than any other historical religion to claiming that religion without philosophy is possible, but I do not see even Zen pushing that claim to the limit. On the issue of hierarchy (which this footnote introduces), there are, in Buddhism, *ontologically*, the doctrine of the Three Kayas, and *psychologically*, the levels of consciousness—phenomenal, *mano-vijnana*, *alaya-vijnana*, and a fourth that goes beyond these three—which the Yogacara or Vijnaptimatrata (Consciousness-Only) Schools developed. The latter, in particular, was important for Zen. See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), Essay Two, Part II.

¹² Heinrich Ott, “Does The Notion of ‘Mystery’—As Another Name for God—Provide a Basis for a Dialogical Encounter Between the Religions?” in Frederick Sontag & M. Darrol Bryant (eds.), *God: The Contemporary Discussion* (Barrytown, NY: The Unification Theological Seminary, 1982).

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surface variations derive through the application of unconscious rules or “transformations” from a deep linguistic structure that is common to the human species—programmed into its members, one might say—might there be a comparable universal religious “grammar” which the great religions illustrate as different languages?¹³

This is not the place to explore that question, and in any case I have already argued my (affirmative) answer in a book-length study, *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (Harper & Row, 1976). I shall note only that, as respecting the question of disciplines, a common direction in which they point seems clearly discernible; it comes to view when we attend to the virtues they all seek to cultivate. Asia, characteristically, describes these negatively by way of the vices that stand in their way; in Buddhist terms these are the Three Poisons: greed, hatred, and ignorance. The West is less reticent about invoking the virtues directly; they are humility, charity, and veracity, and it is easy to see that they are simply direct expressions of the virtues Buddhism approaches indirectly. Selfishness or greed is the opposite of humility which has nothing to do with low self-esteem but is rather the capacity to distance oneself from one’s private, separate ego—to realize *anatta*, we might say—to the point where one can see oneself objectively and therefore accurately, as counting for one, but not more than one. Obviously love (*metta* or *karuna*) is the opposite of hatred, and veracity or truth the opposite of ignorance.

IV. *Variations on the Universal Theme*

Several times I have acknowledged that not all disciplines aim at self-change. The belief that pious observances, regularly performed, are “the food of the gods” is widespread, and in disciplines thus outwardly directed the accent is on the objective, cosmic consequences of our acts, not their subjective deliveries.¹⁴ But discipline tends to suggest self-discipline, and

¹³ Irene Lawrence has recently pressed this possibility in her *Linguistics and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Association, 1980).

¹⁴ Some lines by Aldous Huxley, quoted in the Summer 1982 issue of *Parabola*, will remind us, if reminder is needed, that this view is not naïve: “Intense faith and devotion, coupled with perseverance by many persons in the same forms of worship or spiritual exercise, have a tendency to objectify the idea or memory which is their content and so to create, in some sort, a numinous real presence, which worshippers

admittedly it is this side of praxis that this paper has primarily in mind. When the Surah of the Rock tells us to “worship God till certainty comes to thee,” an important reflexive consequence of worship, balancing its objective, “food of the gods” intent, is brought squarely to view.

The preceding section called attention to the uniform direction in which spiritual disciplines point, but the invariance of that direction does not preclude significant differences in the multiple paths that honor it. These paths can be identified as the world’s great religions; as they differ from one another in ways that are isomorphic with the differences in the civilizations they serve,¹⁵ we are not surprised to find that each has its own distinctive *marga*, or path, as well. Thus orthodox Judaism centers in a discipline which, in its call for observance down to the Torah’s minutest details, conforms the self to a holy mold which prayers *keep* holy. Christianity, by contrast, foregoes a good part of that Law to focus on an inward spirit which, through love and devoted service, it seeks to open to Christ’s incursion. Buddhism takes yet another tack; the distinctiveness of its discipline emerges in its attention, not to what the mind believes, but to how it works. If we could understand this working, not just theoretically but experientially, we would see how we bring our unhappiness on ourselves and would be released from our self-imposed sentence. Islam’s distinctive mode is anchored in its Five Pillars. The *shahadah’s* twofold testimony fixes the Absolute in its place and, through its Messenger, anchors the relative world in that Absolute. Prayer marks the submission of the relative to the Absolute. Fast is detachment with regard to desires and so with regard to the ego. Almsgiving is detachment with regard to things, and so with regard to the world. Finally, pilgrimage is return to the Center, to the Heart, to the Self.

A different typology emerges if we attend, not to differences between religions as integral wholes, but to different spiritual personality types that surface in varying ratios everywhere. With her theory of the Four Yogas,

actually find ‘out there’ no less, and in quite another way, than ‘in here.’ Insofar as this is the case, the ritualist is perfectly correct in attributing to his hallowed acts and words a power which, in another context, would be called magical. The *mantram* works, the sacrifice really does something, the sacrament confers grace *ex opere operato*: these are, or rather may be, matters of direct experience, facts which anyone who chooses to fulfill the necessary conditions can verify empirically for himself.”

¹⁵ The isomorphism is not surprising, given the fact that the religions spawned their respective civilizations.

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India has taken the lead in this way of “slicing the pie.” *Jnana yoga* is for those who want most to know God, *bhakti yoga* for those who want to love him, *karma* for those who want to serve him, and *raj* for those who want to experience him directly through psycho-physical exercises; in this classification, Zen is a version of *raj yoga*. My colleague Agehananda Bharati insists that this tidy scheme goes back no further than to Swami Vivekananda, but the fundamental division, between *bhakti* and *jnana*, can be traced at least to the Upanishads.

Returning for a moment from diversity to oneness, the universality of invocation is too conspicuous to forego mention: the *mantram* in Hinduism, Islam’s *dhikr*, and the “Jesus Prayer” of Christianity; in Buddhism, does the *mu* koan qualify alongside the *nembutsu* and *Om mani padme hum*? “There is a means of polishing everything, and of removing rust; what polishes the heart is invocation. . . .” “The invocation of Allah,” that *hadith* concludes, but each tradition could provide its own appropriate ending.

V. *Stages on the Path*

If an intentional or disciplined life, taken as one that places itself under a rule involving prescribed acts in some kind of time frame, is likened to a journey with a destination of some sort in view, a question suggests itself. Does the journey admit of stages? Does the scenery change in predictable ways? Are there landmarks that show how far one has come and how far one has yet to go?

Of the several facets of our topic that I have touched on in this paper, this is the one I am least clear about. One reads of demarcations, beginning with the traditional Hindu claim that the *varnas* (castes) themselves show how far one has progressed on life’s total odyssey. If for present purposes we pass over that reincarnational claim and content ourselves with the present life, we can begin by noting the sequences in Patanjali’s *raj yoga*, the final steps of which are roughly paralleled by Buddhism’s higher *jhanas*, most clearly delineated perhaps by Buddhaghosa. Beginning with unwavering attention to a single object, one proceeds in this program to eliminate first the subjective awareness of oneself as the meditator who is experiencing the object being attended to, and then that object itself, whereupon the “intentionality” of Brentano and his phenomenological succes-

sors collapses and one is left with a state that Franklin Merrell-Wolff analyzes in his *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object* (New York: Julian Press, 1973). In Christian spirituality we encounter the stages of vocal prayer, mental prayer, affective prayer (prayer of the will), and the prayer of simplicity wherein words are silenced and images foregone. Covering not prayer only but the aspirant's life as a whole are the stages of purgation, proficiency, and union. The Sufi counterpart of these is more complex, but its subdivisions fall into two categories: stages (*magamat*) and states (*ahwal*). The former of these are the stages through which the wayfarer must pass in his strivings after perfection and in his efforts to dispose himself for the flooding of mystical graces. Being moral and spiritual purifications and realignments that can and must be effected by the disciple's own efforts, they are said to be "acquired" rather than "infused," and are subject to slippage. In these respects they differ from the states which are mystical graces: sheer gifts of divine grace and generosity to a soul which has stripped itself of all self-seeking and self-regard. Henceforth it is not so much the earnest striving and pressing forward of the pilgrim himself that is in the foreground; it is the victorious and irresistible attraction of the divine beloved, sweeping the traveller off his/her feet and carrying him along in states that are not easy to describe. The clearest account of these stages and states that I have encountered is in *The Persian Sufis* by Cyprian Rice (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964) where the stages are listed as seven¹⁶ and the states as ten,¹⁷ but there are many variations.

In Zen's depictions of the stages of the journey, we have the famous division between the times when mountains and rivers are, then are not, and finally again are mountains and rivers; the Oxherding Pictures further divide these three stages into (most popularly) ten. Hakuin staked out stages in Rinzaï Zen practice that move through five kinds of koans:

1. *hosshin*, which introduce us to the undifferentiated realm of the Dharmakaya and help us familiarize ourselves with it as our original home;

¹⁶ Repentance or conversion, fear of the Lord, detachment, poverty, patience, trust or self-surrender, and contentment.

¹⁷ Watching one's consciousness, realization of the nearness of God, love, fear, hope, longing or yearning, loving familiarity with God, security and serene dependence, contemplation, and certainty.

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2. *kikan*, which help us to understand the differentiated world and its complex interlockings;
3. *gonsen*, which are concerned with the meaning of words and thereby help us to understand the subtlest insights in the patriarchs' utterances;
4. *nantō*, which are the most difficult because they ask us to replicate not just the patriarchs' understandings, but their experiences; and
5. *goi*, which relate to the Five Ranks of the Apparent and the Real: the apparent within the real, the real within the apparent, the coming from within the real, the arrival at mutual integration, and unity attained.¹⁸

To try to coordinate the milestones on the spiritual path that have been established by the leading traditions is an undertaking that is beyond my capabilities. I do not have a firm grip on this matter of progression. Being very much a novice on the path myself, reports of its further reaches lack immediacy; they sound stylized and abstract. And when they are not "archetypal" in this way, the idiosyncratic biography and imagery of the reporter so colors his or her account that I have difficulty pegging it on a universal scale. Finally, my own odyssey has been so filled with ups and downs and the unforeseen, including sharp reversals at times, that it seems presumptuous to try to delineate the stages of pilgrimage in any but a very general way.

¹⁸ Isshu Miura & Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), Part Two.