

Zen Diary Viewed by a Student of Rinzai Zen

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PAUL Wienpahl, a professor of Philosophy at the University of California at Santa Barbara, engaged in the beginning practice of Rinzai Zen during a six month stay in Japan in the early 1960's. In *Zen Diary* (Harper & Row, 1970) he opens with an account of the philosophical problems which led him to this. Then follows a series of private *sanzen* interviews on the koan "Mu" with the late Zuigan Goto Roshi, interspersed with his ideas about the koan and the meaning of Zen. The last chapter consists of a further reappraisal of these ideas from the author's present standpoint. The book may interest readers who wish to know more about Wienpahl's views of philosophy and his current stage of personal and philosophical development.

As a record of his Zen study, *Zen Diary* contains practically nothing of value to his readers that he has not already published earlier in *The Matter of Zen* (New York University Press, 1964). This earlier work particularly emphasizes the importance of *zazen*, or seated meditation, in Zen practice. It chiefly describes the practices and teachings of Rinzai Zen, as he learned them from Goto Roshi, the late Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Walter Nowick, and other disciples of the Roshi. In all, it is a sympathetic, well-written book with good advice for Rinzai Zen students, a detailed account of a Rinzai monastery *sesshin*, and a report of two lectures which Goto Roshi gave to Wienpahl during the last week before the latter returned to America. Both lectures have been reprinted practically verbatim in *Zen Diary*: in the first lecture (p. 187), Goto Roshi explains the purpose of *sanzen* and assesses Wienpahl's progress in koan study as follows: "Why is there *sanzen*, you ask? By going through contradictions you come to the understanding which goes with *mu* or being nothing. Also, you get to the point where you think that you understand. One who is further along knows that you do not. He discovers this in *sanzen* and can help you. Further, a koan is a way of enabling you to cut

out your ego. Finally, it is impossible for you now to understand the use of the koan in this practice. . .”

Does Wienpahl have the understanding in 1970 that he lacked in 1964? A careful scrutiny of *Zen Diary* shows that he does not. Lacking such understanding, he is not qualified to speak about the meaning of koans in Rinzai Zen, nor about what Zen is. To the extent that he has tried to do this in *Zen Diary*, he has piled further misconceptions on misunderstanding in a pathetic comedy of errors. His present confusion of mind shows also how far he is still from actualizing in his life the great calmness which Goto Roshi had urged him to experience, let alone anything more profound. That the author kept a sanzen diary when he should have been concentrating on his koan no doubt constituted a major hindrance to his progress in koan study under the Roshi.

Rinzai Zen training under a traditional roshi aims at the continuous development and perfection of one's whole being through a comprehensive course involving study of Buddhist sutras, Zen texts, the practice of zazen, koan study, sanzen interviews, discourses by one's roshi, and also the encouragement, support, and good advice of fellow students. Many years are required before the training can be mastered, and the deep religious understanding gained thereby integrated into every facet of the student's life. Its practice is simple, but not easy. It is much easier to talk about Zen than attend to practice, for which reason Rinzai teachers sometimes out of kindness bluntly advise talkative students to keep their mouths closed. Once given a koan, Rinzai students are usually admonished to work on it alone, and not to divulge it or the contents of the sanzen interview to anyone else. In sanzen, a good Rinzai Roshi throws away all the intellectual rubbish a student presents, and urges him to concentrate on his practice. The reading of someone else's sanzen diary is likely to fill a student's head with more rubbish for his teacher to discard, and at the worst may deprive him of the tremendous satisfaction of having learned for himself.

The author's contention (p. 242) that he is justified in "discussing sanzen at length and for a public" (which public?) because his discussion of the koan "is not given for its own sake, but within the context of Western philosophical issues," and because he is "not a member of the Rinzai sect and does not feel bound by its customs," is lame and unconvincing. Had he stayed long enough in Japan to learn those customs and the reasons behind them, it is unlikely that he would have published *Zen Diary* in its present form. He would have known better. As for

technical errors: on p. 157, "Nany Ch'uan" should read Nan Ch'uan, "Étau" should read Etan; on pp. 185-6, "Osho" should read Zuigan Osho.

Professor Wienpahl recommends (p. 243) Philip Kapleau's book *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Harper & Row, 1966) as "the only work a student interested in Zen study should consult before he is well along in his study." For students in the Harada line of Soto Zen, perhaps so. Some of the Harada-style practices, such as group shouting of "Mu," beatings and shouting by the monitor in sesshin, the discussion in dokusan of a student's problems with practice, emphasis on "satori," etc., are not to be found in traditional Rinzai practice. Mr. Kapleau's frequent failure to distinguish such innovations in Harada-style teaching and practice by referring to them as "Zen," when they are not to be found in either traditional Rinzai (or Soto) teaching lines, is one regrettable flaw in this generally excellent book. Likewise, throughout *Zen Diary*, Wienpahl makes hardly any mention of the fact that the "Zen" he is describing is specifically Rinzai Zen, and therefore is different in important ways from other Zen sects. Can it be that Wienpahl is not interested in doing further koan study under a Rinzai Roshi? If he had wanted to recommend a more comprehensive statement of Goto Roshi's teaching than appears on pp. 183-87, and 190-93 of *Zen Diary*, there is the translation of the article by the Roshi entitled "To Encourage the Study of the Orthodox Sect of Rinzai Zen" in *Anthology of Zen* (Ed. William Briggs, Evergreen Original E-289).

Many lay students of Zen like Professor Wienpahl come to Zen study to enhance some aspect of their skill in their profession, which in his case is philosophy. To the extent that they are able through the practice to realize it for themselves, a new dimension is added to their work and their everyday lives. It is regrettable that since he returned to America, Wienpahl does not seem to have been able to integrate the results of his brief practice in Japan with his life there, and to continue to develop it fruitfully. As a record of his Zen study, now past and gone, *Zen Diary* has little to recommend it.