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— THE NEW YORK TIMES

EASTERN WISDOM, MODERN LIFE

COLLECTED TALKS 1960–1969

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CONTENTS

PART THREE: 1965–1967

PART FOUR: 1968–1969

FOREWORD

Eastern Wisdom, Modern Life draws upon works from a pivotal decade in the life and works of Alan Watts, a time in which he pioneered ideas and ways of knowing that helped shape the cultural landscape of the 1960s and beyond. A foremost interpreter of Far Eastern wisdom for the Western world, he explored the frontiers of human knowledge, a place where perception and inquiry become the yin and yang of the essential questions "Who Am I?" "What is the meaning of life?" and "Why are we here?"

A native of England, Alan Watts attended the King's School near Canterbury Cathedral, and at the age of fourteen he became fascinated with the philosophies of the Far East. By sixteen he regularly attended the Buddhist Lodge in London, where he met Zen scholars Christmas Humphries and D. T. Suzuki. As a speaker and contributor to the Lodge's journal, *The Middle Way*, he wrote a series of philosophical commentaries and published his first book on Eastern thought, *The Spirit of Zen*, at age twenty-one.

In the late thirties he moved to New York, and a few years later

he became an Episcopalian priest. In 1942 he moved to Illinois and spent the wartime years as chaplain at Northwestern University.

Then, in 1950, he left the Church, and his life took a turn away from organized religion back toward Eastern ways and expanding horizons. After meeting author and mythologist Joseph Campbell and composer John Cage in New York he headed to California and began teaching at the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. There his popular lectures spilled over into coffeehouse talks and appearances with the well-known beat writers Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg. In late 1953 he began what would become the longest running series of Sunday morning public radio talks, which continue to this day with programs from the Alan Watts tape archives. In 1957 he published the bestselling *The Way of Zen*, beginning a prolific ten-year period in which he wrote *Nature, Man and Woman*; *Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen*; *This Is It*; *Psychotherapy East and West*; *The Two Hands of God*; *The Joyous Cosmology*; and *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are*.

By 1960 Watts's radio series *Way Beyond the West* on Berkeley's KPFA had an avid following on the West Coast, and NET television began national broadcasts of the series *Eastern Wisdom in Modern Life*. The first season, recorded in the studios of KQED, a San Francisco television station, focused on the relevance of Buddhism, and the second, on Zen and the arts. The chapters in part 1 of this book were adapted from the opening programs in the second season, including "Buddha and Buddhism," "Mahayana Buddhism," and "The Discipline of Zen." They were intended to introduce the Buddhist approach to the psychology of religion.

The chapters in part 2 were drawn from some of Watts's engaging public lectures between 1963 and 1965. They include talks he gave at major universities, on "Mysticism and Morality," "The Images of Man," "The Relevance of Oriental Philosophy," and

"Religion and Sexuality." In these talks he delivered powerful and pointed critiques of the role of Western religion in modern society and proposed a broader view of the divine to receptive young audiences.

Part 3 is based on seminars and lectures recorded between 1965 and 1967 and includes deeply considered perspectives on "From Time to Eternity," leading into the "Philosophy of Nature," as he called the philosophy of the Tao, or Way. In "Taoist Ways" and "Swimming Headless," one finds a profound appreciation for the course and current of nature, including our own nature as human beings. Part 3 ends with "Zen Bones," a stirring talk on the Zen methods of intellectual liberation and an introduction to the realm of mystical vision.

The fourth and final part picks up where part 3 leaves off, with "Divine Alchemy," a 1968 talk on the use of sacraments specifically and mystical experience generally. Then, in the final three talks, "Democracy in Heaven," "Not What Should Be, but What Is!" and "What Is Reality?" Watts raises and answers the question "Where do we go from here?" providing suggestions for living "with the Tao" in contemporary society.

Although the following selections are only a handful of the many talks Alan Watts gave in the sixties, they have been selected to represent the whole, and to present the highlights of a career that reflected the philosophical openness of the sixties and paved the way for the flood of interest in the traditions of the Far East that followed.

— Mark Watts

PART ONE

1960

CHAPTER ONE

BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM

IN THIS SERIES OF ARTICLES on Eastern wisdom and modern life, I'm going to be exploring Buddhism and Zen, Zen being a particular form of Buddhism which flourishes in Japan and China.

You may wonder why I am particularly interested in investigating Buddhism as distinct from other forms of Asian philosophy and religion. The reason is that Buddhism is a method of liberation which has emerged as a way of life in Asia, but which is not so closely tied to the different cultures of Asia as such other philosophies or religions as Hinduism or Confucianism or Shinto. Shinto, for example, is the national cult of Japan, and it would be impossible, really, for Shinto to migrate to any other people than the Japanese. In the same way, Confucianism is intimately bound up with Chinese culture. And also Hinduism is tied to the particular culture and social order of India. Although it began in India, Buddhism has migrated to all parts of Asia and has adapted itself to all kinds of different cultures. And so, in this way you might say Buddhism is an intercultural or even international way of life, and

therefore of all the forms of Asian philosophy it is probably of most interest to the West.

However there are certain difficulties in trying to introduce the idea of Buddhism at all because it's ordinarily looked upon as a form of religion. When, for example, we look at studies of comparative religions, Buddhism is grouped together with Christianity, with Judaism, with Islam, with Zoroastrianism, and with Hinduism — as if all these were things of the same kind. But I think if we use the one word *religion* to designate things so astonishingly different as Christianity and Judaism, on the one hand, and Buddhism, on the other, we make the word have such a wide meaning that it really means nothing at all. Now I don't want to lay down the law as to what religion is, but I think I would make myself more intelligible if I let you know the way I understand the word. And I think it's simplest if we confine the word *religion* to such phenomena as Christianity, or Judaism, or Islam. And then we'll have to find another term for things so different as Buddhism.

What is the difference? The word religion comes from the Latin *religare* – to bind — and thus a religion is the following of a rule of life that is believed to be divinely revealed. There is, in other words, a body of doctrine we call the creed, and this is revealed doctrine, which the human being is supposed to believe. Then there is the revealed way of life — the code — the expression of the will of God in terms of law or, as in Christianity, in terms of the personality of Christ. And then, finally, in religion there is the cult; that is to say the worship of God, of the ultimate reality who has revealed Himself in the form of the religion.

Now Buddhism has neither creed, code, nor cult. There is nothing that is binding upon the Buddhist, nothing they are supposed to believe in. There is no authoritative code, and there are no positive doctrines that the believer has to ascend to. It's true that

Buddhists do observe certain precepts of moral and ethical behavior, however they don't regard the observation of them as following a divine will. It's simply a pledge you take to yourself. And, furthermore, Buddhism has no particular cult. That is to say, there are no specific sacraments or forms of worship that are binding upon all Buddhists. You might then say that Buddhism is a form of philosophy, but again this would not be quite correct because what we understand by philosophy in the West is the elaboration of certain ideas, certain theories about the nature of the universe, the nature of man or the nature of knowledge. And Buddhism is not particularly concerned with elaborating ideas.

The nearest thing in our culture to Buddhism, although it isn't exactly the same, is probably psychotherapy. And the reason is that what constitutes the essence of Buddhism is not beliefs, not ideas, not even practices, but a way of experiencing. I could almost call it a way of feeling. Now in psychotherapy, if a person goes to a psychotherapist because they feel miserable, are depressed, anxious, or profoundly worried, the object of the psychotherapist's practice is to change the person's state of consciousness, to change their state of mind. And, in this respect, it is something like Buddhism because Buddhism envisages a transformation, a very radical transformation, of the way in which ordinary people feel themselves and the surrounding world. And so, in this sense, I have coined for Buddhism a special term to contrast it with a religion. I would call it a "way of liberation," a way of liberation from the ordinary way in which most civilized and probably many primitive people feel themselves and the world. That is to say, for example, the feeling that I am a lonely, separate, transient individual locked up inside my skin, and therefore different from, even hostile to and alienated from, everything else.

Now, of course, if I mention the word *Buddha*, I suppose to

many people's minds it refers to the picture of an idol. But the image of a Buddha is a figure of a man, not of a god. Specifically it is a figure of an Indian prince who lived around 560 B.C., and his name was Gautama Siddhartha. This man is called the Buddha, but that's not his proper name. It is a title and it means, approximately, "the man who woke up." Buddha refers to the awakened one, and in saying that Buddhism is something like psychotherapy, it might be correct to say that Gautama, the Buddha, was the world's first great psychotherapist. And it is interesting that the way in which he formulated his method was patterned upon a doctor's prescription. He expressed his treatment in a form called the Four Noble Truths and I'm going to go through these four truths, which are named in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit. They follow the doctor's method of diagnosing and prescribing, because the first thing a doctor is asked, when he's summoned to the bed of a sick man, is to diagnose what it is he suffers from. And so the first of the Buddha's noble truths is the name of the disease from which human beings suffer, and in Sanskrit that is *duhkha*, which means something approximately like anguish, or suffering in a special sense. The cause of the disease he called *trishna*, and the word *trishna*, which is related to our word *thirst*, means clutching or grasping, and it is often translated "desire." The third thing the doctor is asked is whether the disease can be cured, and if so what the cure might be, and to this he responds in Sanskrit *nirvana*, and that means "release." Finally, having stated the cure, he gives the prescription for the cure and here we have the Sanskrit word *marga*. Marga means "path" and it designates the Noble Eightfold Path, the steps to following the Buddhist way of life.

So let's go back to the meaning of each one of these words, and we go back, first of all, to duhkha, the disease from which human beings are suffering according to the Buddha's method.

Now sometimes this word is given just the very general meaning of suffering, but I think it should be given a more specific sense, and I would call it anguish or chronic frustration as a result of trying to do things that are inherently impossible, and that are inherently contradictory. If you try to draw a square circle, you can try to the end of time but you'll never do it because it's a contradiction. And in the same way, there are certain things which human beings are doing which are contradictory and which get them into a state of chronic anguish.

Now in Buddha's method duhkha stems from another factor which is sort of intermediate between suffering, or anguish, and its cause. And he said that clutching, which is the basis of our anguish, is ultimately dependent upon a kind of unconsciousness or ignorance, which in Sanskrit is called *avidya*, literally "not knowing," thus ignorance. And it is really a way of seeing the world in an unrelated way, and thinking of it as consisting simply of so many things, like a rock, a foot, a plant, a man, when, actually, the world is not composed of bits and pieces. Everything that exists exists only in relation to other things. In other words, an egg, for example, looks very separate. It looks like a very definite, particular thing. But you don't find eggs without chickens. And you don't find chickens without the sort of environment in which chickens can live. Likewise, in a similar fashion you don't find fingers lying around without a hand. Although we think of the fingers as separate, they are related to the hand; the hand, in turn, to the arm; the arm to the body; and the body to its whole environment of earth and sky, sunlight and air.

And so, if we think of the world as being made up of separate things rather than related things, we start trying to deal with things as if they were separate. That is to say, take for example pleasure and pain. We say pleasure is distinctly separate from pain. I want

pleasure, but I don't want pain. I would like to have pleasure without pain. And so we set our lives to this task. But actually this is as contradictory as trying to have up without down. Supposing we try to arrange everything around here so that everything was up and there was nothing down, or so that we had all fronts but no backs. We would simply cease to exist. And so, in the same way, to try to wrest or separate pleasure from pain would bring about a state of mind in which we cease to know what pleasure was. There would be no contrast to pleasure and it would become simply boring. And so, in this way, we orient our lives towards impossible ideals and as a result run into frustration.

Another source of frustration arises when we do not see that the world in which we live is fundamentally impermanent. One of the cardinal features of the Buddha's teaching is that all life, however solid it may seem to be, and all things, however separate they may seem to be, are in a state of flux. That is to say that the world we live in doesn't consist so much of things or entities as it consists of process. Everything is in a constant state of flowing pattern. By way of illustration you might say that it's something like the flowing pattern you see when you look at smoke: a dancing, constantly changing arabesque of pattern; flowing, flowing, all the time. Or that the substance of life is something like water, which I can hold in my hand so long as I cup it gently, but if I clutch at the water, I immediately lose it.

And so, in this way, through our failure to see that everything is alive because it flows, we try to possess it, and this is trishna, or grasping. In other words we try to hold on as tight as we can to what we love: to hold on to our own lives, to hold on to the lives of people we cherish. In exactly the same way a mother, who's very fond of a child who's growing up and still wants to keep that baby, and smothers with love that little kid which she adores so much,

and is anxious lest the child while growing up should run into mistakes. So she clings to the child, and she refuses to let the child have the full play of responsibility and risk. But this is no different than refusing to let an egg hatch. All that happens is that the egg will get addled inside its shell if it isn't allowed to grow into the chick, to break free, to change. Or, in the same way, you might love the sound of running water that you hear in a stream passing through somebody's garden. And you think, "Oh yes, I'd love to have that water in my own garden." And you arrive there with a bucket, and you pick the water up, and you take it away. But having caught the water in the bucket, it's dead; it's no longer living running water.

So we are constantly frustrated by grasping and strangling a world that is essentially a changing pattern. Now of course in our ordinary common sense we do think of the world as pattern, but as patterns of something. In other words, we think that underneath all form, all shape, all pattern, there is some solid stuff that we might call substance, and this is based on thinking that the world is made in the same way as a potter makes pots out of clay. And therefore we think it quite natural to ask: "What are stars made of?" "What are mountains made of?" "What are trees made of?" We assume that they were constructed and that they were constructed out of something, like a carpenter makes tables out of wood or the potter makes pots out of clay. But really this is an unnecessary notion because the stuff underlying things, when we inquire into it in our own modern science, turns out to be evermore complex and subtle patterns. If you take something that looks very solid and metallic, like a coin, it has a good hard, dense surface. But look at this same dense, polished surface under an electron microscope and what you see is pattern. Or look at it more deeply, from the standpoint of the nuclear physicist, and it's simply dancing orbits of energy. So, if we have a picture of the world in which we think that beneath all

changing forms there lies solid stuff, then in the same way we come to have an idea of ourselves as a sort of stuff underlying the changing form of our actions. We think of ourselves as doers behind thoughts and words and deed, as experiencers behind experience.

But if we were to realize that we are, as it were, all action, all deed — the doer vanishes, and with it vanishes this sense of man as something separate, something cut off, walled away from the rest of the world by his skin. When that realization comes about; when, in other words, our own separateness disappears, we have what the Buddha called nirvana — release, or the cure. But nirvana is a terribly misunderstood word. A lot of people, when they hear the word *nirvana*, think, "Well, it's sort of a state of being, a place vaguely, dreamily blissful." It's like you might feel on a Sunday afternoon after an enormous dinner. Or they think it means annihilation. Strictly speaking, though, this word in Sanskrit means simply to "blow out," that is, blow out in the sense of "wheeeeew," to breathe a sigh of relief. And this word was chosen because breath is one of the fundamental symbols of life. The word *spirit* is, originally, one's breath, and if I were to think: "I've got to have breath, I need my breath, my breath is my life and therefore I hold my breath," then, like keeping water in the bucket, I begin to lose my breath and turn purple in the face. So instead I have to let go, breathe out, and lose my breath in order to have breath. So you might say that the whole idea of clinging is put in the metaphor of trying to hold on to one's breath, trying to hold on to one's life, refusing to let one's self go. But when that is seen to be impossible, just as it's impossible to have pleasure all the time and no pain, then one lives what you might call "the blown out life" — the life of nirvana.

And finally the Buddha describes marga, the path that leads to awakening. I'm not going to go into all the details, the eight steps,

or the eight folds of the Buddha's marga, or path, instead for now I'll just touch on the spirit of it. Buddha called the path the Middle Way and so you might say this is the path of the middle road. This is often misunderstood as a way of what you might call compromise. In Buddha's time there were many people in India seeking liberation from suffering by extreme forms of asceticism and self-mortification. And naturally on the other hand there were other people trying to escape from suffering by intense pleasure seeking, as we can see today. But Buddha said both these roads were ignoble, both the road of self-mortification, lying on beds of nails and the like, and the road of pleasure seeking, or hedonism.

But the Middle Way does not quite mean a compromise between these two extremes.

It has a somewhat more profound sense than that, and I think the easiest way of understanding what the Buddha meant by "the middle way" would be to call it "the balanced life" — avoiding falling into one extreme or to another extreme. When you ride a bicycle, you do something that is very much like following the Middle Way, because to stay upright as you go along you balance to avoid falling to either side. But the curious thing about riding a bicycle, which is so difficult for beginners to understand, is that when you start falling, say to the right, you have to turn the handlebars and the wheel to the right, to the direction in which you're falling. And as a result of this, surprisingly enough, you come upright. One would ordinarily think, perhaps, that if you start falling to the right you should turn your wheel to the left, but if you do that you'll collapse.

Now if we apply this analogy of riding the bicycle to Buddhism it sounds something like this: supposing we are falling into fear and we resist fear. Then, what happens? If we resist fear, we begin to be afraid of fear and this leads to what we call worry or

anxiety. After all, worry is being afraid of being afraid. And then being afraid because I'm afraid I'm afraid, so it goes on in a vicious circle indefinitely. Now you might say, to use a popular expression, the Middle Way is to "get with it," and "be yourself." Just as the cyclist goes with the direction of his fall and so comes upright again, so the person who suffers from worry, or some interior feeling or mood that bothers them, is advised to "get with it." Now this has a curious effect: it neutralizes the feeling from which you're suffering. This is like what happens if you take a child and put the child in the middle of the room and you say, "Now dear, play." The child is embarrassed. When you are worried, and you say to yourself, "All right, worry. Get with that worry," it neutralizes the worry because you are not worrying about not worrying anymore.

And as a result of this flip, this acceptance of what goes on anyway, the constant conflict which people ordinarily feel between themselves and their feelings, between themselves and their experiences, begins to disappear because they "get with" what they are experiencing, and they don't resist it anymore. And, just as it is a surprise to the beginner on the bicycle to regain control over his machine when he turns in the direction of his fall, so it is an enormous surprise to human beings to find that when they accept themselves instead of fighting themselves they're in much better control of themselves. Somebody who is divided against themselves is like a person trying to ride off in two directions at once, and lives in contradiction. So the ultimate experience of Buddhism is that when we come together with ourselves again, as a result of coming together with ourselves we find that we are together with everything. We are not separate, cutoff beings, but that this whole universe is our self.

CHAPTER TWO

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

IN THE LAST CHAPTER I introduced the teaching of the Buddha, a man who lived in India about six hundred years before Christ, and in this chapter I'll go further into the original doctrine of Buddhism called Mahayana Buddhism. *Maha* means great in Sanskrit, and *yana* means something like vehicle, or a conveyance. Mahayana Buddhism is found traditionally in the northern part of Asia, primarily in Tibet, China, Mongolia, and Japan. It is often contrasted with another form of Buddhism that is properly called Theravada, which means the Way of the Elders or the Doctrine of the Elders, but is impolitely known as Hinayana, or the little vehicle. This form of Buddhism is found in the south of Asia, in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.

The Mahayana school developed in India between approximately 100 B.C. and A.D. 400, which encompasses various periods of its germination, and it is a very profound philosophical elaboration of the Buddha's original teachings. By drawing out certain things that were implicit in those teachings, if not actually stated, it

works on the principle that the original teachings are something like a seed, which — if it has any vitality in it at all — grows into a tree. However sometimes the tree doesn't look very much like its seed, although the tree was of course implicit in the seed from the beginning. This form of the traditional teachings of the Buddha spread from northern India to China, and Tibet, and it is from Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan sources that we have some of the most accessible Buddhist texts.

Now once upon a time there was an old Chinese Buddhist master called Lin Chi, and he used to tell his disciples that he felt his duty toward them was to beat the ghosts out of them. And as I pointed out to you before, Buddhism is in a certain sense an awakening: a waking up, as it were, from a bad dream, and in this sense ghosts are something like a bad dream. They are, as it were, certain fixed ideas or habits of thought which, to use a slang phrase, "hang up" the human mind and confuse us.

One of these habits, which is very carefully investigated in Mahayana Buddhism, is the idea that this world is not really what we would call substantial. There is a theory in Mahayana Buddhism that is called the doctrine of "mind only." It isn't quite like Western ideas that we sometimes call subjective idealism, in other words the idea that the whole world is something that exists only in your own mind, and there isn't any outside world "out there" at all. In the Buddha's original teaching is the idea that the whole of our world of experience is the perception of pure pattern, which is as it were formation or process, without any substantiality in it at all. What we experience is a pattern of form constantly rippling and changing and shifting, and always flowing from one thing to another. So then try and conceive of all the things of the world as form, and nothing but form, and as having no stuff underneath the constantly shifting shapes that change before your eyes. Of course

this is a difficult idea for us to imagine because it's so contrary to our ordinary common sense.

As I explained in the last chapter, we tend to think of our world by analogy with the potter's craft, as a material construct. Just as a potter makes pots out of clay, so we think of all the various things in the world — the mountains, the stars, the trees, people, and so on — as being made out of some stuff. But as we know from modern science, and as the old Buddhist philosophers knew in earlier times, we can perfectly well give an account of this world, describe it, and talk about it in terms of form alone without ever having to introduce the concept of stuff. And that's only a difficult idea for us to understand because we have fixed habits of thought that make it seem strange to us when we try to clarify it.

Now this involves another idea that is common to all schools of Buddhism, which again, for the same reason, is difficult for us to understand, and this is called in Sanskrit the doctrine of *anatman* — which means non-ego. This is to say that the feeling that we have of being "I," a thinker behind thought, an experiencer behind experience, a feeler behind our feelings, and a senser behind our sensations, is understood by all schools of Buddhist thought to be an illusion. But this immediately surprises us because it seems to be one of the most common sense feelings we could have. Not simply that I am I, in the sense that I am my whole physical organism and body, but also the feeling that there is some kind of permanent entity or center of consciousness inside the body receiving all its experiences and being the main director of its actions. This entity is sitting in the body like a chauffeur inside an automobile, as if we had some sort of little man inside our heads. And so it does seem fundamental, a commonsense idea, that we, as ego, as I myself, as the knower, the little man inside the head, am a sort of screen upon which life is constantly writing a pattern. And we develop from this

the fear that the writing of life upon the screen may wear the pattern out in the same way, for example, as if I were to write on a sheet of paper, and begin to trace patterns on it, eventually the page will fill up and turn black, and we have as it were the impression that the constant motion of life is wearing out the conscious knower — the ego — and therefore we develop a kind of resistance to experience.

But now I think we ought to ask the question, Is this really true?

Is experience something that happens to us, something that we "have"?

Or would it be more accurate to say that there is simply a process of experiencing? Again, the Buddhist philosophers of ancient India had realized something, which we can perhaps see even more clearly as a result of our own scientific investigations of just what perception is in terms of neurology. This is not to say that our consciousness or our minds are nothing but a tangle of nerves, because that sounds like a kind of materialism. We can think of our nervous system simply as a pattern, because the important point to realize first is that all that we see in terms of an outside world — color, texture, shape, and so on — is going on inside our heads. For example when we touch something, and feel that it's hard, what we're actually experiencing is not so much the outside thing, although it's true the stimulus is coming from the outside world to our body. But what we actually feel and experience as hardness is a particular activity or process going on inside our nervous system. So we could say all of our experience of the external world is felt directly only as an experience of the nervous system. And even that, in a way, is not quite correct because when I say "an experience of the nervous system," or that "what we are experiencing is a state of our nervous system," this still isn't a simple enough way of

talking about it, because it sounds again as if there were, behind the nervous system itself, a separate "experiencer."

So what we have to try and get clear is that our sensations are processes in the nervous system, and that those processes are us. The self is the actual process of sensation — there isn't a senser behind sensation. When we have a sensation we don't have it, we are it. And so it helps, then, if first of all we could think of the nervous system as being a pure pattern, something like the patterns of a branching tree. Now our nervous system has in it a peculiar capacity, which is illustrated by the tree in that if you look closely you'll notice that the patterns of each leaf reflect an evolution of the pattern of the entire tree. The preceding pattern is represented in the following one, which as it were adapts the former state of the pattern. In other words, the former state of this pattern that we call a leaf was also a tree, and if we turn the whole thing upside down and look at the roots, we will see the same pattern, the same intelligence, reflected in the roots. As we shift from one level of magnification to another, the patterns change, but what we find inside is a subpattern, or subsection of the main pattern, which represents the previous one, and of course it represents the first one as well. And so when we look at the overall structure we find that each level of pattern has its own specialized use of the form, but there is an overall adaptive form that resembles every other form in the tree.

The ability of a pattern to contain elements that represent its former states is what we call memory. In engineering language we would call it feedback, because feedback is the system whereby any system of energy is enabled to record the results of its own action so that based upon that record it can adapt, and as it were make plans for the future. It can, in other words, correct its action. So because human beings have memory, the capacity of the pattern of

the nervous system to record its former states, the human being can make predictions about the future and in general control its activity.

But from this extraordinarily marvelous ability there arises a certain confusing byproduct. And that is this feeling that there is a constant entity, like the screen of a television set. In other words, because a certain element of permanence runs through these changing patterns, this permanent behavior of the pattern, or permanently repeating behavior of the pattern, gives the impression of some substantial mind stuff or mind entity underlying the pattern and upon which the pattern in recorded. It's the same sort of illusion that arises when, for example, I take a flashlight and rotate it in the dark, and you see a continuous circle of light. It appears that the light leaves a track behind it because the moving light leaves a memory upon the retina of the eye, and that is what gives us the illusion of seeing a constant circle of light.

And so a similar illusion arises from the repetitive pattern of the nervous system, and gives us the impression that there is this constant thing, the experiencer, who lasts, and endures like a substance from the past, through the present, and into the future. But at the same time, it has to protect itself against being worn out by experience, and so gradually we come to develop within ourselves a resistance to what we are experiencing. And this comes about not only because we are afraid of being worn out, but also because the problem of control constantly arises. We become anxious as to whether our predictions are going to work out, and therefore we tend to become overly cautious, questioning whether our acts are exactly right or exactly wrong, or whether our thoughts about them are exactly right or exactly wrong.

As a result of this anxiety and expectation our resistance to experience builds up. But what this does is to make the whole system, the whole flowing of the pattern, operate less efficiently

because it becomes "sticky." Supposing when I write I resist my own action of writing. And instead of writing what I am thinking and feeling I begin to question whether I am thinking about the subject correctly. This reflection is good from time to time, but when it becomes constant it interrupts the flow of ideas and feelings. If this loop is amplified it shakes up the system, and in very much the same way we begin to develop the kind of chronic shakiness, which we call anxiety, when we start resisting our own process of feeling too much. And as a result of that resistance we get not only chronic anxiety, but also a chronic feeling of frustration.

Then we begin to feel as though something's got to be done about this too. But what does that lead to? It just leads to more of the same kind of thing. In other words, if we identify ourselves with this permanent and purely illusory ego substance, that really isn't there, we're identifying ourselves with something abstract. We get from this a kind of hunger which is not physical but psychic. And from that we develop a greed for events — for more and more experience; for more and more life. And yet at the same time we know that the more we experience and the longer and harder we live, the more it's going to wear us out. And so this kind of resistance to life leads to further resistance and becomes a vicious circle, which in Buddhist philosophy is called *samsara*, the round of existence. And although samsara is represented in popular Buddhist philosophy as a process of the individual being reincarnated into this world again and again and again and again, so long as one has attraction for it, the real meaning of the circle of reincarnation, of the going round and round, is precisely the same vicious circle which arises through a resistance to life, which builds up into greater and greater frustration.

Now we can demonstrate this in rather an interesting way

because just as this is an attempt to split the human mind apart and turn it back on itself, so we could create a situation in the television circuit whereby we turn the television circuit back onto itself by pointing the camera at the monitor. And the kind of infinite regression of images that we get when we do this is exactly what happens to our minds when we develop excessive self-consciousness, which is to say, an excessive sensation of difference between the experiencer and the experience. And when we try to make the one latch on to the other completely and control it — when the experiencer resists experience — what really happens is that the whole pattern of our consciousness, of our nervous system, gets sticky and begins to jangle. And under such conditions, when for example we are worrying about worrying and worrying about worrying about worrying, life becomes an intolerable burden.

And so then it was for this reason that the original appeal of Buddhism to the human mind was that it offered a way of deliverance from the vicious circle of life. But here we see an important point that is fundamental to the thinking of Mahayana Buddhism — that trying to get out is still working on the assumption that there is a real experiencer to be extracted from experience. But what we've just discovered is that that is the illusion: there is no experiencer to be extracted, no one who can escape from experience. There is simply experiencing, just the moving pattern, and in the symbolism of Mahayana Buddhism the person who is no longer seeking an escape from life, but has realized that it isn't something to be escaped from, is called in Sanskrit a *bodhisattva*. And one of the most famous of the bodhisattvas was Kuan-yin, the bodhisattva of mercy. Bodhisattvas are thought of as ones who have come back into the world of everyday events, and are there to live in it fully and to help all other beings to be delivered.

In other words, the ideal of Mahayana Buddhist wisdom is not

a detached and aloof sort of sage who shuns life, but one who loves life and therefore gets thoroughly involved in it. The bodhisattva is thought of as one who is not afraid to assume any form symbolically, and therefore represents the whole attitude of overcoming life not by escaping from it, but by accepting it completely and profoundly, through and through. There is no one separate from it to do the accepting, and so there is an ancient Buddhist verse which says:

> Suffering alone exists, no one who suffers.
> Deeds alone exist, but no doer;
> The path there is, but no one who treads it.
> Nirvana exists, but no one who attains it.

So you may ask then, Well what is this all about? If there are deeds but no doer, experiencing but no experiencer, then what is reality? What is life? After all, we always thought we knew what pattern was by contrast with stuff, substance with form, but now if the contrast has disappeared, we are left with the deed alone, but no agent; the form alone, but no stuff. So what are we left with? This is what Buddhist philosophy calls *shunyata* — the empty void. It is Void, not because there's nothing there, but because our mind has no idea of it.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DISCIPLINE OF ZEN

IN THE FOLLOWING SESSIONS we will look into the ways of early Chinese Zen masters, because it was through the influence of Chinese life that Mahayana Buddhism took on a particular flavor and style of expression that became Ch'an Buddhism in China, and Zen in Japan. When one looks at a Zen garden in Japan, you might not believe it, but it is a form of religious art: no images, no symbols; just natural rock and raked sand — a form of art which is in a way extraordinarily unlike anything else in the world. This unique expression of natural beauty and simplicity is just as much a manifestation of spirituality as any of the religious art of the West; as the Christs and the Madonnas of Giotto or Fra Angelico. But you will notice that there's no image in Zen art, and no attempt to represent anything but what it is — just rock and sand. And in this way these gardens incomparably express that astonishing form of Buddhism known as Zen.

The earthy style of pottery bowl from which Zen monks drink tea is executed in the same spirit. It's very simple, rather rugged

and unpretentious. The glaze doesn't even cover the whole form, so you see it's quite obviously made of clay. And yet tea bowls are icons, just as much spiritual objects as a cross or a chalice. And they are icons just because they are simple tea bowls. And you might not think there is very much in the way of technique in these bowls, just a rough old bowl looking like rocks and sand from the garden. But you would be mistaken. You can see examples of very obvious technical dexterity throughout Japanese Buddhist art in the sixteenth century, and it's intention is no more than to show us wild landscapes and natural habitats in which one becomes again a part of nature.

However in the Western world we're accustomed very much to thinking of spiritual things as being set apart and distinctly separate from everyday life. We think of the spiritual as being out of this world, or otherworldly, and not of the natural world. Therefore in the West all those art forms, which deal with spiritual things, deal with symbols of the divine, which attempt to transcend everyday materiality. But in the art of Chinese and Japanese Zen Buddhism we see a concentration on everyday life. And even when the great sages of Buddhism are depicted, they're depicted in a secular style, just like very ordinary people, and often like the lowest class of people; wandering idiots and tramps.

And the meaning of this is that their attitude about the relationship of soul to body, or mind to matter, is entirely different from ours. In fact, they don't really consider the spiritual life in those kinds of categories at all. Because we divide the soul from body, and separate spirit from matter, God is experienced as separate from the world. And therefore, as we confront this material world, identifying ourselves with a kind of inner soul, we feel we have a problem. We feel that life must either be conquered, or somehow we must get out of it. But either way we always feel distinct

the present. And you know when you're completely concentrated, you're not really aware of your own existence. It's rather the same as the sense of sight. If you see your eyes, that is to say if you see spots in front of your eyes, or something on the lens of the eye, then you're not seeing properly. To the degree to which you're seeing properly, you're unaware of your eyes. In the same way, if your clothes fit well, you're unaware of them on your body. And if you're completely concentrated on what you're doing, you're unaware of yourself.

And this unawareness of self is called in Chinese *wu shin*, which we will talk about more in the following sessions, but it means literally, "no mind," but not "no mind" in the sense of having no sense and being stupid. The second word, *shin* in Chinese, is approximately what we would mean by the ego, the "I-sense" that I described before: the sense of being somebody standing apart, observing your sensations, thinking your thoughts and feeling your feelings. So wu shin, or in Japanese *mu shin*, means, perhaps more accurately, "no self." This is the state in which one is completely involved in, completely absorbed in, what one's doing — in a state of complete presence of mind or complete concentration.

Now, according to legend, Zen was brought from India to China probably around A.D. 500 by a person called Bodhidharma, who is always depicted as a rather fierce looking fellow with a bushy beard and big, wide awake eyes. He is thoroughly alert, and although he may be a legendary character, there's rather an important story about his interview with his first and only disciple, a Chinese monk by the name of Hui-k'o. Hui-k'o came to Bodhidharma with the usual troubles that afflict us all, and he said, "Master, I have no peace of mind," and the word he used was shin. "Please pacify my mind." In other words he was a man suffering from the perennial human problem of inner anxiety, the sense of a kind of

psychological wobble that is going around here and grinding in most of us much of the time. And he wanted it set at peace. So he said, "Master, I have no peace of mind. Please pacify my mind." And so Bodhidharma, who was a gruff old boy, said, "Bring your mind out here before me. I'll pacify it." And Hui-k'o said, "But when I look for my mind, I can't find it." And Bodhidharma said, "There, it's pacified." Immediately, Hui-k'o had an insight into the meaning of Zen, because when he tried to realize his mind as something actual and concrete and physical, he couldn't find it. It just wasn't there.

The man who is even more responsible for the development of Chinese Zen than Bodhidharma is known as Hui-neng, who lived in the eighth century, and died in 713. Before he was a great Buddhist master, he was a bamboo cutter and when you see pictures of him he is drawn in a very rough, peasantlike, earthy kind of way, which was the style many of those artists favored. As a boy this man somehow came quite naturally to an understanding of Buddhism and sought out one of the greatest masters of his time, who it is said presided over a monastery of more than a thousand Buddhist monks.

However most of those monks seemed to be going about the whole problem of attaining peace of mind in a way that was quite contrary to the real spirit of Buddhism and of Zen. That is to say, they were trying to attain an inner peace by suppressing their thoughts. And you may think, if you've seen figures of the Buddha sitting quietly in meditation with his eyes closed, that that's what he's doing. He's just sitting with his mind blank so that nothing at all bothers him, which happens to be a lot of people's idea of nirvana. But Hui-neng pointed out to those monks that if silence was all that wisdom consists of, and that's what Buddhism is all about, then a piece of rock would be the same as an enlightened Buddha,

present. We have to understand that only the present is real. There is no past. There is no future.

Look at the practical wisdom of this in a great undertaking, like climbing a mountain. You've got a long task ahead of you and if you keep looking up at the top, you'll feel wearier and wearier, and every step becomes like lead. Or, if you're a housewife washing dishes, and you've got a great pile of dishes by the sink, and you begin to think as you wash through them that you've washed dishes for years, and you're probably going to have to wash dishes for the rest of your life, then in your mind's eye you see this prodigious pile of dishes piling up as high as the Empire State Building. This has been your drudgery in the kitchen all your life, and will be for all the years to come, and you are appalled and oppressed. But dispelling this dread isn't a matter of trying to forget about washing dishes, it is realizing that in actual fact you only have one dish to wash, ever: this one; only one step to take, ever: this one. And that is Zen.

That is concentration at its best. So then, our problem is that we feel inside us a constant struggle, or fight, with time — the tension between the present, on the one hand, and the past and the future on the other. We may feel it as a kind of uneasy feeling in the stomach. Or we may feel it as tension in our head, somewhere behind the eyes. There arises a constant sense of having to struggle to beat time, to keep up with it, and actually this doesn't do anything for us at all. It doesn't enable us to perform our work or conduct our business any better. All it does is put us in a conflict with ourselves, which holds everything up.

And therefore, the first thing that is necessary to learn in the study of Zen is to be quiet, but not to be like a log, with nothing in mind. Instead simply to be all here, and that's why in Zen enormous importance is attached to knowing how to sit. Just sit, and

PART TWO

1963–1965

assimilate into our ordinary practical intelligence. It is the overwhelming sense that everything that happens — everything that I or anybody else has ever done — is part of a harmonious design and that there is no error at all.

Now, I am not talking about philosophy; I am not talking about a rationalization or some sort of theory that somebody cooked up in order to explain the world and make it seem a tolerable place in which to live. I am talking about a rather whimsical, unpredictable experience that suddenly hits people — an experience that includes this feeling of the total harmoniousness of everything.

I realize that those words — *the total harmoniousness of everything* — can carry with them a sort of sentimental or Pollyanna feeling. There are various religions in our society today that try to inculcate the belief that everything is harmonious unity. They want, in a sense, to propagandize the belief that everything is harmonious.

To my mind, that is a kind of pseudomysticism. It is an attempt to make the tail wag the dog or to make the effect produce the cause — because the authentic sensation of the true harmony of things is never brought about by insisting that everything is harmonious. When you do that — when you say to yourself, "All things are light, all things are God, all things are beautiful" — you are actually implying that they are not, because you wouldn't be saying it if you really knew it to be true.

So the sensation of universal harmony cannot come to us when it is sought or when we look for it as an escape from the way we actually feel or as compensation for the way we actually feel. It comes out of the blue. And when it does, it is overwhelmingly convincing. It is the foundation for most of mankind's profound philosophical, mystical, metaphysical, and religious ideas. Someone who has experienced this sort of thing cannot restrain himself. He has to get up and tell everybody about it. And, alas, he becomes the


image
not
available

movie, the more the author or actor manages to persuade you that the movie or novel is reality, the more he or she has succeeded as an artist. You may retain a faint recognition in the back of your mind that a play, for instance, is only a play. But when you are sitting on the edge of your seat and you are sweating and your hands are clutching the arms of the chair because the scene grips you, that play is magnificent art.

The Hindus feel that the whole arrangement of the cosmos is exactly like that: When in actual life you are wondering whether your doctor is a competent surgeon or charlatan, or whether your investments are good or bad, the Hindus believe that all those feelings of crisis are exactly the same as the feelings you experience when you are sitting in the theater. As the Hindus would say, that thing in you that is real and that connects you under the surface with every other living being — that thing is the player of all the parts. It is the creator of the illusion. It is the source of the game that has got you so involved. And it is living it up in the same way the actors on the stage are living it up — and for the same reason: to convince you that the game is reality.

Everybody loves to play this game — the game of hide-and-seek, the game of scaring oneself with uncertainty. It is human. It is why we go to the theater or movies and why we read novels. And our so-called real life, seen from the position of the mystic, is a version of the same thing. The mystic is the person who has realized that the game is a game. It is hide-and-seek, and everything associated with the "hide" side of it is connected to those places within us where we as individuals feel lonely, impotent, put down, and so on — the negative side of existence.

I have tried at various times to show that there is really one simple principle that underlies everything: All insides have outsides. You don't know that the inside is an inside unless there is an

shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, he isn't making sense." They won't summon the police. But if you transgress the rules of the highway, or of finances, someone is likely to call the cops. One senses the authority of the state behind those rules.

There are other rules that have behind them the authority of, not the state, but the Lord God Almighty. And if you transgress those rules, you are in danger, not simply of going to jail, but, depending on your religious persuasion, of frying forever in hell. At the very least, you have shown yourself, lamentably, to be nothing better than a real person.

Now, wherever the domains of mysticism and morality come into conflict, there is a problem. Throughout the history of religion, mystics have always been suspect. Religions and their priests have been the upholders of moral rules. They have been the guardians of moral authority in the same way as lexicographers or grammarians have been the guardians of the rules of language. But when the mystical experience appears within the domain of religion, the priests always become very disturbed.

For example, recently in California there has been a strange outbreak within the Episcopal Church. Various congregations have experienced a phenomenon called *glossolalia*, which means "speaking in tongues."

If you turn on your radio on a Sunday night to any African-American revival meeting, you will hear glossolalia. The preacher begins by talking sensibly, but then, as the congregation gets more and more enthusiastic, saying, "Amen, Yes, Lord. Teach on that," the preacher works himself up to the point where he isn't talking sense anymore. He's just wailing, shouting, and celebrating the glorious nonsense of the universe.

In other words, all the dry, theological categories become poetry, as well as something beyond poetry: music. The preacher

has become at that moment as one with the universe, because he is doing exactly what the stars are doing. The stars above and the galaxies are not making sense. They are just pouring out into the sky in a colossal display of fireworks.

Well, in recent months, various congregations of the Episcopal Church have had outbreaks of glossolalia. The Bishop of California, Bishop Pike, wrote an encyclical letter to his pastors that said, in effect, we must not be too dogmatic. We must recognize always that the spirit of God may work in mysterious ways that cannot be foreseen. We should keep an open mind about all these matters. This message was presented in a very complicated way, requiring several pages. But then, despite those sentiments, when it came to the question of the validity of speaking in tongues, the encyclical said, in no uncertain terms, *this must not happen in the Episcopal Church*. There was an iron hand in Bishop Pike's velvet glove.

This has been the characteristic attitude of priests and guardians of law and order throughout the ages. Everything, as they say in the Episcopal Church, should be done decently and in order.

The guardians of this kind of law and order have always been afraid of the spontaneous manifestations of the spirit. Not simply of things like mysticism, but also of things like falling in love. This leads to an absolutely astounding paradox. We know that human love is genuine only when it is felt in the depth of the heart. And we know that this is true whether it be love for another human or love of God. And, of course, we are always looking to receive genuine love. We don't want others to love us because they are forced to. We want them to love us because they really do love us in their hearts.

When you study the history of the Hebrews, which underlies Christianity, you will discover two traditions constantly compensating for one another and playing off each other: the priestly tradition

without an atmosphere far away from a star. That world would not grow bodies. There would be no soil for bodies. There would be no body-producing complexity of environment. Bodies go with a very complicated natural environment. And if the head goes with the body, and the body goes with the environment, then the body is as much an integral part of the environment as the head is part of the body. It is deceptive, of course, because the human being is not rooted to the ground like a tree. A human being moves about, and can therefore shift from one environment to another. However, these shifts are superficial. The basic environment of the planet remains a constant, and if the human being leaves the planet, they have to take with them a canned version of the planetary environment.

We are not really aware of this relationship. On taking thought and due consideration it does occur to us that, yes, indeed, we do need that environment, but ordinarily we do not feel it. That is to say, we do not have a vivid sensation of belonging to our environment in the same way that we have a vivid sensation of being an ego inside a bag of skin, located about halfway between the ears and a little way behind the eyes. Since we feel the ego that way, and that is not the way we really exist, I call the "I" a hallucination. So, today we live with the disastrous results of the ego, which, according to nineteenth-century common sense, feels that it is a fluke in nature and that if it does not fight nature it will not be able to maintain its status as an intelligent fluke. Therefore the geneticists and many others are now saying that man must take the course of his evolution into his own hands. He can no longer trust the wiggly, random, unintelligible processes of nature to develop him any further; he must intercede with his own intelligence and through genetic alterations breed the kind of people who will be viable for future human societies. This, I submit, is a ghastly error, because

human intelligence has a very serious limitation. It is a scanning system of conscious attention that is linear, and it examines the world in lines, rather as you would pass the beam of a flashlight or a spotlight across a room. The reason our education takes so long is that we have to scan miles of lines of print, and we regard that as essential information. However, the universe does not come at us in lines. Instead, it comes at us in a multidimensional continuum in which everything is happening altogether everywhere at once, and it comes at us much too quickly to be translated into lines of print or other information, however fast it may be scanned. That is our limitation, so far as the intellectual and scientific life is concerned. The computer may greatly speed up linear scanning, but it is still linear scanning.

So long as we are stuck with that linear form of wisdom, we cannot deal with more than a few variables at once. Now, what do I mean by that? A variable is any one linear process. Let us take music. When you play a Bach fugue, and there are four parts to it, you have four variables. You have four moving lines, and you can take care of that with two hands. An organist using two feet can put in two more variables and have six going. You may realize, if you have ever tried to play the organ, that it is quite difficult to make six independent motions go at once. The average person cannot do that without training. In fact, the average person cannot deal with more than three variables at once without using a pencil.

When we study physics, we are dealing with processes in which there are millions of variables. However, we handle this problem with statistics, in the same way as insurance companies use actuarial tables to predict when most people will die. However, if the average age of death is sixty-five, this average does not apply to any given individual. Any given individual will live to an individual age, and the range of individual ages at death may be very wide

indeed. But that is all right, because the sixty-five guess works when you are doing large-scale gambling. In a similar way, the physicist is able to predict the behavior of nuclear wavicles. But the practical problems of human life deal with variables in the hundreds of thousands. Here statistical methods are very poor, and reaching accurate conclusions by linear means is impossible.

Now then, with such limited equipment we are proposing to interfere with our genes, and with that equipment we are trying to solve our political, economic, and social problems. Naturally, everybody has a sense of total frustration and asks, "What on earth can I do?" We do not seem to know a way of calling on our brains. This is unfortunate because our brains can handle an enormous number of variables that are not accessible to conscious attention. Your brain and your total nervous system are now handling your blood chemistry, the secretions from your glands, the behavior of millions of cells. It is doing all that without thinking about it, without translating the processes it is handling into consciously reviewed words, symbols, or numbers. When I use the word *thinking*, I mean precisely that process of translating what is going on in nature into words, symbols, or numbers. Of course, both words and numbers are kinds of symbols. Symbols bear the same relation to the real world that money bears to wealth. You cannot quench anybody's thirst with the word *water*, just as you cannot eat a dollar bill and derive nutrition from it. But scanning, using symbols and using conscious intelligence, has proved very useful to us. It has given us such technology as we have; but at the same time, it has proved too much of a good thing. We have become so fascinated with it that we confuse the world as it is with the world as it is thought about, talked about, and figured about — the world as it is described. The difference between these two is vast, and when we are not aware of ourselves except in a symbolic way, we are not

related to ourselves at all, and that is why we all feel psychologically frustrated.

Thus we come back to the question of what we mean by "I." First of all, obviously we mean our symbol of ourselves. Ourselves, in this case, is the whole psychophysical organism, conscious and unconscious, plus its environment. That is your real self. In other words, your real self is the universe as centered on your organism — that is you! Now, allow me to clarify that just a little. What you do is also a doing of your environment. Your behavior is its behavior, as much as its behavior is your behavior. It is mutual. We could say it is transactional. You are not a puppet that your environment pushes around, nor is the environment a puppet that you push around. They go together, and they act together — in the same way, for example, one side of a wheel is going down as the other side of it is going up. When you turn the steering wheel of a car, are you pulling it or are you pushing it? You are doing both, aren't you? When you pull it down one side, you are pushing it up on the other. It is all one, and in the same way there is a push-pull between organism and environment.

We are only rarely aware of this in curious alterations of consciousness that we call mystical experiences or cosmic consciousness, when an individual gets the feeling that everything that is happening is of his own doing. Or it could be the opposite of that feeling, that they are not doing anything, but that all their doings, their decisions and so forth, are happenings of nature. You can feel it either way, and you can describe it in these two completely opposite ways, but you are talking about the same experience. You are talking about experiencing your own activity and the activity of nature as one single process. You can describe it as if you were omnipotent, like God, or as if it were completely deterministic and you hardly existed at all. But remember, both points of view are right, and we will see where that gets us.