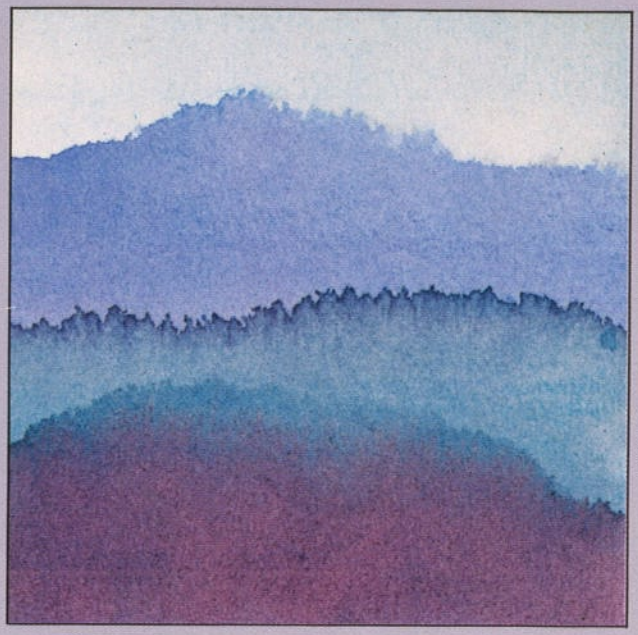
Speaking of Silence



Christians and Buddhists
on the Contemplative Way

Edited by SUSAN WALKER

Starting in 1981 Christians and Buddhists have been meeting informally in Boulder, Colorado to share their experiences of the spiritual way. Several dozen spiritual teachers, both men and women, representing many varieties of Buddhism and Christianity, have explored together the value of prayer and contemplation, attitudes toward God and emptiness, and practical topics such as silence, virtue, compassion, sin, suffering, the self and the ego.

This book assembles the most fruitful exchanges sponsored by the Naropa Institute in Boulder. It combines talks, conversations, poetry and rituals shared by participants at the annual meetings. What emerges from these pages is a sense of shared vision on the most profound level, transcending all cultural and historical differences. It will speak to Christians, Buddhists and all people who feel drawn in the course of their lives to encounter the transcendent.

Paulist Press
0-8091-2880-2

$12.95

Cover Design: Barbara Bash

tality of "this" and "that," "I" and "other." It is an experience of bursting into an openness which is rich, rather than a sense of throwing everything out until all that is left is a blank kind of nothing. So shunyata includes rather than excludes. It is an opening to vastness rather than a withdrawal from reality.

When You Meet the Buddha, Kill the Buddha

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Reginald Ray
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi
Thomas Hopko
H. E. the Tai Situpa Rinpoche

BROTHER DAVID: Recently Father Keating said that for too long religions have disagreed about nothing. I would now add that the nothing about which religions have disagreed is God. (Laughter and applause.) In the strictest sense of the word, God is nothing. The only possible alternative would be that God is *some*thing and certainly that is not the case: God is nothing. We live in a world of things and no-things. These are the two exhaustive possibilities, and I would like to suggest that of these two, the one that is by far the more important to every one of us—and I am now appealing to your experience—is nothing. (Laughter.) We can do without this thing or that thing, but as human beings we cannot do without *meaning*. We live in a world which is made up of things and meaning, and meaning is nothing. I would feel much more comfortable if I didn't have to use this word "God" at all, because it is a word that is so easily misunderstood today. But if I do have to use it, I would say that God is the direction in which we go in our quest for meaning.

All philosophical abstractions and scholarly definitions of the meaning of life are simply elaborations on the experience

of belonging. Those peak moments of one's life break down the illusion of duality, the illusion of isolation. Even though we don't often allow ourselves to remember those times of communion with ultimate reality because they are so shattering to our little egos, still, we have all had them. So meaning is not somewhere "out there," toward which we move; it is more an experience of something reaching out to us. Actually, nothing is reaching out to us. Nothing is happening to us, you see. (Laughter.)

As Mother Tessa was saying earlier, the spiritual experience begins not with us, but with God. God loves us first. In that moment in which we are overwhelmed by reality, we know that ultimate reality comes toward us, reaches out to us, and speaks to us. The Biblical tradition says that everything in the spiritual life hinges on the reality that God *speaks* to us. In Buddhism, the emphasis seems to be much more on the silence. In Christianity and Judaism the emphasis is on the word which comes out of the silence and which leads us back into the silence, or back into what we could call the "emptiness of God." "Word" and "silence" are the terms Christians use to speak of the polarity within God. And specifically as Christians, we know that ultimate reality is reaching out to us because of Christ, who reached out to us in such an unprecedented way. Those who first encountered Jesus the Christ discovered, in a unique way, what God is like, and the world is still reverberating from their experiences. And so the Christian path is to come to know God, who is the silence and who cannot be seen, except through his icon. We can listen to the silence of God through his word and we can find that word crystallized in Christ. Where does this path lead us? According to Dionysius the Areopagite, in the end of all our knowing we shall come to know God as the unknown. Now this is totally different from saying that no matter how much we know, we shall never know God. We shall know God, but we shall know him as the unknown. It is the same in human terms: the more you come to know a person, the more you know that you don't know that person at all.

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REGGIE RAY: Thank you, Brother David. Roshi, would you like to say something on this topic?

EIDO ROSHI: The moment the word "God" is uttered it becomes a concept, I'm afraid. And the moment we say "emptiness" it is no longer empty. And yet, if I don't say anything you may become confused. But if I do say something you could become equally confused. (Laughter.) This is the dilemma. At this point I think a Zen story could help us a lot. This story, like most Zen stories, takes place in China. It is about a verse which we chant almost every day, which goes something like this: *Buddha-nature pervades the whole universe, revealing right here now.* It is a beautiful concept. (Laughter.) Once, on a very hot summer day, the Chinese Zen master Mayoku was fanning himself like this . . . (Roshi sits back and fans himself). Watching this, his student thought, "We often say that buddha-nature pervades the whole universe, revealing right here now. We also say that buddha-nature is cool and lucid. Why, if that is the case, does my master need to use a fan?" So he thought that this was a good chance for a dharma argument. So he said, "Master, you often say that cool, lucid buddha-nature pervades the whole universe, revealing right here right now. Why then do you have to use your fan to cool yourself?" The master Mayoku smiled and said, "You understand the concept of buddha-nature, but you don't understand the vital buddha-nature itself." He continued to fan himself. The student watched his master and repeated to himself what he had been told. All of a sudden, for some reason, this young Chinese monk understood what his master meant.

Although it is true, from an enlightened vista, that buddha-nature pervades the whole universe, revealing right here and now unless something is done—in this case . . . (fans air across the microphone) . . . buddha-nature or God or emptiness remain as concepts. For this reason we do meditation. For this reason we do bowing practices, we do chanting, and we do many other things. Doing something is so important. I have more to say, especially to Father Hopko, but

I will give him a chance to talk first. Later we can discuss "when you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha." (Laughter.)

FATHER HOPKO: I think by a miracle I can be brief. (Laughter.) According to the tradition of Eastern Christianity, God is inconceivable and any concept, word, or idea is inadequate to the reality of God. Every time we gather to worship God in the eucharistic liturgy of the Eastern church, we pray with these words, attributed to Saint John Chrysostom:

> Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy holy Spirit. . . . for Thou, O God, are ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing, and eternally the same.

If you equate God with a concept, you have an idol and not God. The scriptures say that there are many gods and many lords. But there is also the one God of all gods. He is the true God, the living God, the holy God. According to the Bible, the real problem is not *no God;* the problem is the *false god.* And I think you could say that, in fact, everyone has gods. There is no such thing, using modern language, as a true atheist. Whatever one adores, loves, lives by, and considers to be essential in life is one's god or idol. According to the tradition, physical and carnal idols are relatively harmless—
much more treacherous are those we create in the realm of the spirit, when we try to create our own God. But that which falsely claims ultimacy, reality, is not God; it is the enemy of God.

When you encounter the true God, you encounter an absolute that is other than anything you know. You are dumb and cannot speak. All of your concepts are smashed as so many idols. In the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Job all bore witness, in the mystical contemplation of their experiences, that God cannot be seen. If we do have to speak about God, I think we could even go beyond saying that God is ineffable, inconceivable, invisible,

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and incomprehensible. The sixth-century work called *Mystical Theology,* attributed to Dionysius the Aeropagite, begins with a prayer addressing God: "O Thou who art beyond being supra-substantial, supra-essential! O Thou art beyond goodness! O Thou art beyond God!" Divinity comes from the one who is even beyond divinity. The supra-unknowable has made his supra-unknowableness known through supra-unknowing. These are words of Saint Maximus. In other words, God has shown himself. Relative to emptiness, this means that there is something. The Ultimate Reality, the God who is even "beyond divinity," radiates and shines forth with what is known in our tradition as the "divine energies": divine activities, divine words, divine expressions, divine epiphanies, and divine manifestations. Therefore we have access to him; we know the supra-unknowable God. In the fourteenth century, Gregory Palamas had a theological dispute with the Western Christians about this. Western theology claimed that God has no real relationship with the world and cannot be experienced beyond our ideas and concepts about him, which are always limited and therefore ultimately false. But Gregory Palamas said that God not only *can* be experienced, he *must* be known, because that is what our life is all about.

In the Eastern tradition we describe the ineffable experience of God as "luminous darkness," "sober inebriation," "drunken sobriety," "wise foolishness," "foolish wisdom"—and probably we should now coin two new phrases: "full emptiness" and "empty fullness." For example, God told Moses on top of the mountain, "You can only see my glory." Moses had to hide in the cleft of the rock and cover his face as the splendor of the Lord passed by. Gregory of Nyssa, in his mystical treatise *The Life of Moses,* interprets this story to mean that we can come into communion with God in his manifesting actions toward us, but God as he is in himself is hidden from us. He is always eternally hidden from us and is not known by any creature—not because God has not revealed himself, but because God cannot be directly seen. Otherwise God would not be God.

In a sense, therefore, we can't really talk about knowing or not-knowing; our experience is even beyond not not-knowing.

We not only have to jettison our positive concepts; we must jettison our negative concepts as well. We just have to shut up in the end. (Laughter.)

If someone asks you, "Does God exist?" you can say, "Well, if you mean, 'Is there emptiness, or God, or ultimate reality?' the answer is 'Yes.' But if you mean, 'Does God exist like everything else exists?' he does not exist." And in fact, you had better say that he does not not-exist, and he does not even not not-not-exist . . . if you have to keep talking. So, it's better not to keep talking and to just enjoy—and endure—the encounter. Right? (Laughter and applause.)

REGGIE RAY: Thank you. I'd like to invite the speakers to engage each other on this topic. Does anyone have any comments or questions?

FATHER HOPKO: Roshi wants to talk about killing the Buddha. (Laughter.)

EIDO ROSHI: You have a fabulous memory. Until this afternoon I had almost completely forgotten about this subject, "when you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha," which I talked about last year. So, this afternoon you gave me this answer: when you meet the Christ, let the Christ kill you. Now . . . (laughter) . . . actually it is impossible for you to meet Jesus Christ. You may meet various people on the street, all kinds of people, especially in Boulder, (laughter) but one of the people who it is absolutely impossible for you to meet is Jesus Christ. Right?

FATHER HOPKO: No. (Laughter.) No, it's not true.

EIDO ROSHI: Well, anyway, you can explain later. Let me say what I had in my mind. (Laughter.) In the same way, strictly speaking, it is impossible to meet the Buddha—if we mean Shakyamuni Buddha—on the street in Boulder. It is impossible. There is only one person who you can always meet, wherever you go, and who in fact you cannot separate yourself from, and that is you, yourself. You are the one who constantly carries concepts.

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And so when you meet the Buddha—when you meet your concept of the Buddha—crush that concept. When you carry the concept of Christ or God, or the concept of shunyata, then kill those concepts. But it is impossible for Jesus Christ to kill you. Right?

FATHER HOPKO: Well . . . (Eido Roshi laughs) . . . if we meet the concept of God or the concept of Christ, it must be killed. I would agree with that, absolutely. But something bothers me about "when you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha." In my understanding, I am not the only one with whom I can have a relationship. In fact, the hardest relationship to have is with one's own self, because we don't seem to really have a self, except the mask in the mirror. So when we are in a relationship with ourselves, we're usually in big trouble. But the other who comes to me is the Christ. The one whom I meet mystically in the church, in the eucharist, and in my heart is the same one whose face is the face of everyone I meet. The only true image of God is the human person. That is why, according to the Orthodox tradition, there are no icons until the incarnation of God's son and word as Jesus Christ, and it is also why there have to be icons after the incarnation. Paul said that Jesus is the *eikon tou aoratou Theou,* "the icon of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), and Irineus said, "The only glory of God we encounter is man full-grown." God has revealed himself.

I'll just end with a story about Saint Pachomius, who is considered to be the founder of the first Christian monastic community. One day a man came to the cenobium and said, "I'd like to join this community." When Pachomius asked him why, the fellow said, "I'd like to see God."

"You're coming here because you want to see God?"

"Yes. What do I have to do? How many prostrations, how many Psalms, how many prayers, how much fasting . . . ?"

Pachomius answered, "Listen, if you want to see God, you don't have to pray and fast. You don't even have to join the community. Just come along with me, and I will show you God." Pachomius took him inside and, indicating the meanest, lowliest, dirtiest, most demented of the brethren, said to him,

"Look. There is God."

The visitor said indignantly, "You mean to tell me that's God?"

Pachomius answered, "If you don't come to see God in him, you will see God nowhere."

God is formless, imageless, and the only vision of God we have is in the one made in his icon and according to his likeness, by grace. That refers to each one of us. God's eternal icon has come in human form as Jesus Christ, the one through whom God is now definitively and fully revealed. No man has seen God, but the only begotten son who dwells in the loins of the Father has come and made him known (John 1:18). Christ is identified with everyone, and therefore, when I encounter anyone I must let that person slay the ego in me. And that is what I meant when I said "if I meet the Christ, may the Christ kill me," because that is the only way of coming alive. (Applause.)

BROTHER DAVID: The Eastern tradition of Christianity is well-known for its doctrine of icons, which is quite unfamiliar to us in the West. Tibetan Buddhism, however, also has a rich tradition of iconography, and since I've always been especially intrigued by the iconocraphy of Tibetan Buddhism, I would like to ask Situ Rinpoche if he would tell us a little bit about the meaning of deities depicted in statues and thangkas, particularly in the context of discussing representations of God or the divine reality.

SITU RINPOCHE: The purpose is to signify the essence of one's own physical body and the essence of one's own mind. The essence of each of us, as Roshi said, is buddha-nature. Buddha-nature isn't something separate from us, or something we have lost and have to get back by practicing meditation. No. It is already there, but we have to awaken it. I think the meaning of "kill the Buddha" or "may Christ kill you" comes in here because that which prevents you from realizing buddhahood, or which makes you different from Christ, is duality. It is a mistake to think that you are the subject and Christ or Buddha is the

object. Duality makes you unable to communicate, unable to realize. So what you kill is duality. Then you are able to realize the ultimate essence of yourself as the ultimate essence of Buddha, or, in Christian terms, of God.

In the example of Vajradhara (indicates painting hanging above Buddhist shrine), his essence, which is the same as our essence, has three aspects: nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya. His outer appearance, or nirmanakaya, is like that of Buddha Shakyamuni: he has the eighty lesser marks and thirty-two greater marks of a buddha's physical body. These signify the ultimate nature of one's own physical body. Vajradhara's ornaments, such as his crown, earrings, and so on, represent the higher levels of realization and manifestation of the Buddha, as well as his activity in the world. This is the sambhogakaya aspect. Then, the blue color of Vajradhara's skin represents the Buddha's mind and the ultimate essence of our minds, which is the dharmakaya. Blue is the color of space and the color of emptiness. The nature of dharmakaya is limitless, endless, and beyond any concept of "I realize this or that." It is free from subtle duality. So Vajradhara not only signifies the ultimate nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, and dharmakaya of Buddha Shakyamuni, and of all the buddhas of the past and the future: it is also the essential nature of each one of us.

REGGIE RAY: This evening we've been discussing God and emptiness in a relatively sophisticated way. I get the feeling that there is no fundamental incompatibility in our different perspectives. And yet, earlier today when I was participating in the Christian liturgy, I was going along and really enjoying the whole thing until at one point I suddenly realized that I felt as though I was praying to someone. And then my next thought was, well, who is that someone? Now was that a misunderstanding on my part? (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: Many people feel uncomfortable with the idea of a personal God because of the widespread Christian misunderstanding of God as a person who sits somewhere "up

VAJRADHARA[3]

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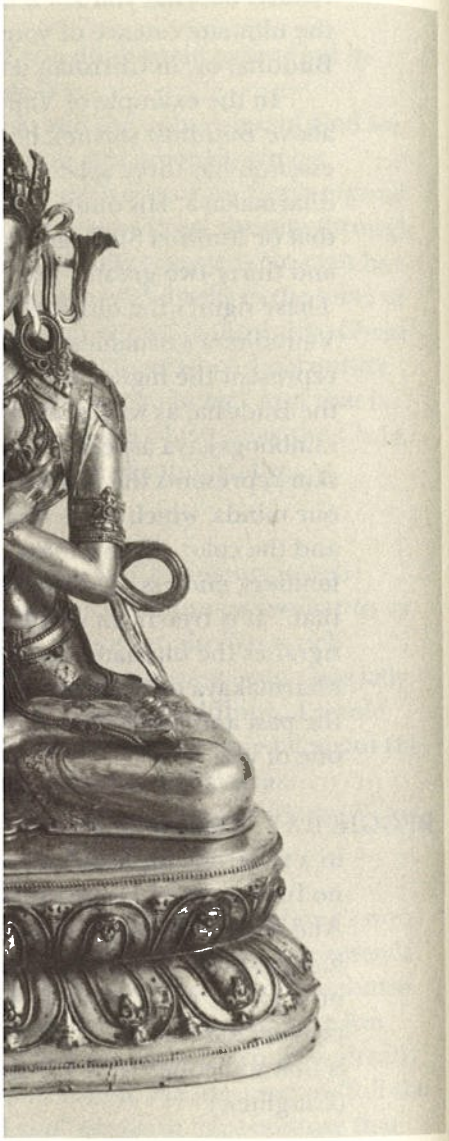

DHARA[3]

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there." On the other hand, ultimate reality must include the perfection of personhood, so it can't be totally impersonal. We might as well think of the ultimate reality as a person to begin with; this is much better than thinking of it as some sort of a cosmic pudding, which would be our alternative. So we ought to remember that the ultimate reality has all the perfection of personhood, but none of its limitations. We can address ourselves to God as we slide into prayer, just as we did this afternoon. We can also experience compassion reaching out to us. But we must also go beyond this personal quality, whether we are Christians or Buddhists, or anything else.

EIDO ROSHI: The word "emptiness," generally speaking, creates misunderstandings. But at the same time, "emptiness" has the positive meaning of *emptying* our concepts—concepts of God, concepts of dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya. Even the concept of emptiness can be emptied. That is an accidental benefit of saying "emptiness" instead of "shunyata." It prevents the over-personalization of God.

REGGIE RAY: Rinpoche, could you say something about why emptiness isn't a nihilistic notion? I think that is difficult for many people to understand.

SITU RINPOCHE: Yes. If we just say "emptiness," it seems to be only empty. That is why I explain emptiness as three levels: there is relative interdependence, or appearance; ultimate emptiness; and the union of interdependence and the ultimate. There is no contradiction among these three. The essence of all relative appearance *is* the ultimate, which is emptiness. I agree, Roshi, that "emptiness" can create misunderstanding. I have difficulty using the word "emptiness." I used to use the word "voidness," but my English is not very good. Maybe that is also not a correct translation.

EIDO ROSHI: Sometimes I use "as-it-isness." (Laughter.)

SITU RINPOCHE: Yes, that is a good term.

EIDO ROSHI: But it has a fatalistic implication.

SITU RINPOCHE: Yes, sometimes people have that misunderstanding.

EIDO ROSHI: After all, "shunyata" is the best.

SITU RINPOCHE: Yes. (Laughter.)

REGGIE RAY: Perhaps we could open up the discussion. Are there any questions?

QUESTION (from audience): For a long time I have had a sense of relationship to a *personal* God from whom I can learn, in the way Brother David speaks of the sign or word of God which is present in phenomenal reality. In the Buddhist sense, I understand the experience of shunyata as something like having the ground pulled out from under you, of suddenly being lost without anything to hold onto. Is there also an experience of shunyata that includes relationship?

EIDO ROSHI: Before I say something about the probability or capability or even the possibility of having a relationship with shunyata, let me say a little more about shunyata. You are shunyata. Do you understand this? I am shunyata. And relationship is also shunyata. (Pause.) Got it?

QUESTION (cont.): Right. (Laughter.)

FATHER KEATING: But could we not at least say that our experience of shunyata is one of incredible tenderness and compassion—that it is one of the most profound analogues of human love that could be articulated?

EIDO ROSHI: I accept that. But yet, may I add that even *that* is shunyata.

SITU RINPOCHE: I think we somehow have to relate with people's development. At the relative level, we have faith, devotion, and

trust in the ultimate truth, so that we achieve realization of the ultimate gradually, step by step. Then we see that relative appearance and emptiness are not two.

QUESTION: We've been talking about an experience, and we've called it "shunyata" and also "God." When I listen to both the Buddhists and the Christians I hear that basically there is no difference; there is no conflict. But very little has been said about the actual path or process that allows us to have this experience. And it seems unclear to me how, as Christians, a dualistic relationship to God leads us to the experience of shunyata.

FATHER HOPKO: First of all, I personally would not try to say at this point where there are differences or no differences. I am just trying to hear what is being said. I do know that what Situ Rinpoche said about relative and ultimate rang a thousand bells in me. God is at one and the same time totally other, totally beyond, beyond even apophaticism;[4] and yet he is also related to me. And both are divine. For the record, many Western Christians think we Eastern Orthodox are heretics on that point. (Laughter.) Still, I think we should be very careful about coming to final conclusions about what is the same or not the same in Christianity and Buddhism.

The other thing I want to say is that I'm frankly sick of the word "relationship." I forbid my students to use it. (Laughter.) People these days are so interested in relationships: their relationships to themselves, to their spouse, to God, and so on. They are so involved in these issues that they can never see the other clearly enough to really experience the fact that duality is a myth. It's very interesting that in Greek theology, the term persona, which means "person," was specifically and consciously not used. Persona was considered to be only a kind of mask or a way of acting. And when you go as far as *persona est relatio* (i.e. person is relation), then everyone becomes neurotic. (Laughter and applause.)

BROTHER DAVID: I would just like to add that in any tradition we are referring to the common experience of being human. We

then interpret and live out that experience in vastly different ways. And in my mind there cannot be conceived two ways that are lived out more differently than Buddhism and Christianity, because one is the way of word and the other is the way of silence. What greater disparity can you imagine! But they come from the same experience and, by very different routes, lead to the same experience. The proof is that when you get masters of both spiritual traditions together, such as we have here, you see that they get along wonderfully, and they're so similar you can hardly tell them apart! (Much laughter.)

Not Just Empty

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
H. E. the Tai Situpa Rinpoche
Thomas Hopko
Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.

BROTHER DAVID: Rinpoche, one of the difficulties I've had in our previous discussions concerns the idea that, in order to attain ultimate wisdom, awareness as we know it must be overcome. To me, wisdom without awareness is unimaginable.

SITU RINPOCHE: Wisdom is the union of clarity and emptiness, or we could say, awareness and emptiness. The essence of both is nonduality; that is the ultimate aspect. If you only have the empty quality of wisdom, without clarity, that is nihilism. And if you only have clarity without the empty quality, that is eternalism. But the inseparable union of the two, that is the ultimate. And when we say "ultimate" we don't mean the opposite of relative. The real ultimate isn't the opposite of relative: there is the ultimate aspect of the ultimate, and there is the ultimate aspect of the relative. That is the real ultimate.

FATHER HOPKO: In the Eastern Christian tradition, this union would be called "Palamite awareness."

SITU RINPOCHE: I see, I see. Is this Latin?

FATHER HOPKO: No, it is named after Saint Gregory Palamas, who developed the conception that, in the ultimate reality, there is always an eternal and unchanging expression which can be called relative in some sense. The greatest mystery is the union of the ultimate reality and its expression. Without that expression God would just be a monadic nothing.

SITU RINPOCHE: I see.

FATHER KEATING: Rinpoche, I have a question, which is of extreme interest to me, concerning the Vajrayana tradition. I know little of this tradition, though I wish to learn more. I understand that Vajrayana teachings enable the practitioner to experience the qualities of emptiness that are not just empty. In other words, there is a certain richness or luminosity—or perhaps we could call it the quality of love—that starts to emerge in one's practice. I'm not quite sure if I have the correct understanding here. And although we, as Christians, appreciated your presentation of Tibetan Buddhism very much, from your description we were left with some feeling that your tradition is lacking in a certain warmth—a certain quality of relationship or love—which would add a little enthusiasm to the search, you might say. (Laughter.) But your actual presence, and also what you were just describing to us, gives me the growing conviction that this emptiness is not just empty. As you said, there is a relative quality that is expressing itself there. I have the feeling that this teaching is very, very rich, and yet I also get the feeling that you keep hiding it in your back pocket someplace. I think that we Christians would be much more at home in the Buddhist presentation if we had more of an inkling of what lies, experientially, within emptiness.

SITU RINPOCHE: I think you already said it. In Tibetan we say *tong tang nyingje sungjuk*, which means "the union of emptiness and compassion," or you could say, "the inseparability of emptiness and compassion."

FATHER HOPKO: We say "union without confusion."

SITU RINPOCHE: It isn't that we are bringing two separate things into union. Union is there already. We just awaken it.

FATHER HOPKO: In the fifth century, the Council of Chalcedon used four negative adverbs to describe the union of the human, or created, with the divine in the person of Christ: without division, without separation, without fusion, and without change. That is how we try to conceptualize the great problem of simultaneous union and distinction. If you don't hold both, then either I am annihilated or God is, or we end up with something we know nothing about—a freak of some sort.

BROTHER DAVID: Christians speak about an active reaching-out of God. Before I can be compassionate, I receive compassion. In that sense, Christians say that God loved us first. Rinpoche, I'm wondering how you would describe the process by which practitioners realize the ultimate, or shunyata.

SITU RINPOCHE: I don't think we could say it comes to us. Even when we say that we "achieve" realization or "reach" certain levels on the path, it doesn't mean that we are actually going anywhere or reaching anything. And something isn't coming toward us and shaking our hand. It is simply an awakening. In Tibetan, the word for "buddha" is *sanggye*. *Sang* means "awaken" and *gye* means "total flourishing" or "total blossoming."

FATHER KEATING: I think that is a good explanation of the way Christians could also understand the spiritual journey. Thank you for your explanation, Rinpoche.

5

Views of Self and Ego

Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, "Who in the world am I?" Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!

LEWIS CARROLL

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.

PAUL THE APOSTLE

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Experiences of Self

Loppon Lodrö Dorje
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Joseph Goldstein
George Timko

LODRÖ DORJE: Ego is a central issue in the teachings of Buddhism. Basically it is described as the process of needing confirmation or security, which then manifests as the many different forms of neurosis or delusion. The entity we habitually refer to as "I" or "me" is ego. We have the notion that there is always a central experiencer: someone thinks my thoughts, someone comes up with my ideas, someone feels my pain and my pleasure. And we identify that someone as being continuous: "I" refers equally to who I am now and who I was when I was five years old. Ego is that which feels enriched by material possessions and experiences and which takes pride when it is congratulated. It is also the entity that feels defensive when it is accused or threatened. "I" am threatened when my family, company, or country is attacked. Ego is the creator of territory; it is that which tries to construct a personal kingdom. This notion of entity or self is technically known as the "ego of personality." What the Buddha taught, and what a lot of other contemplative traditions teach as well, is that the personality is actually a compositing process. The narrow version of self-identity doesn't really exist. But the Buddha also said that the higher self, or the spiritual, purified self, also doesn't exist, and this was a revolutionary statement. For instance, the Vedantic tradition in India at the time agreed that the empirical self is obviously fictional: obviously you are not just your attachments, your physical body, or the flow of your sense perceptions. But what you really are, they concluded, is Brahman. The teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha stated that Brahman is also a false identity.

Self and what the self projects are interdependent. In

other words, self as experiencer and the world which the self experiences are mutually dependent creations which confirm each other, constantly. To the extent that we regard the world we project as a solid, independently-existing truth, that is also regarded as ego process and is technically known as the "ego of phenomena." Beyond recognizing ego of self and ego of phenomena as empty of inherent reality, there is a further perspective, associated with the Vajrayana tradition, which is that ego is a perversion of primordial intelligence. Ego is seen as a deliberate ignorance or hypocrisy, or as a perverse twist of the basic awareness which is naturally and continually taking place. In other words, ego is not just a naive mistake: it is an expression of stubbornness.

The ego process gives rise to confused emotions. In order to continually recreate a sense of personal territory, we grasp what we like and develop aggression toward what we dislike. Ego is also a distorting factor. It fundamentally obscures one's relationship with the world. We have deluded and imprecise relationships with people and phenomena, and we lose touch with the basic sacredness of reality. Whether we are appreciating mountain scenery, eating breakfast, or making love, there is a tendency to bring all sense perceptions back to a reference point of "me," the perceiver. There is also a tendency to constantly refer to oneself and one's particular territory. We have definite ideas about what is meaningful, what is not meaningful; what is good, what is bad; what is religious, what is secular; whether one should smoke or drink or not; what one should eat; and so on. Generally, all these thoughts and opinions are based on deeply-ingrained habitual reactions of all kinds, which we call karma. The Buddhist path is therefore primarily concerned with the question of how to see through ego, how to tame it, and how to let it go. And corollary with the idea of egolessness is the assertion that there is no external savior. The spiritual journey is a personal process of unravelling confusion. At the same time, we also place a lot of emphasis on the value of working with a group of people. And in the higher levels, there is emphasis on the need for devotion to a spiritual master. In fact in the Vajrayana tradition, the

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higher realization is only available by virtue of receiving the blessing of the spiritual lineage. This presupposes, however, that one has already gone through the process of surrendering ego.

BROTHER DAVID: It is a good idea to distinguish between our "individuality," which separates us from others, and our "personhood," which relates us to others. I am born as an individual, and I grow toward becoming a person. One becomes more and more personal by developing wider and deeper relationships. By becoming truly a person, we become truly ourselves, not in isolation from others, but in interrelatedness with others. This true self is not our little individual ego. When we are fully related to all, we have found our true self.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I'd like to ask about the Christian understanding of experience that is beyond the reference point of the individual. Would Christianity say that awareness itself is always conditioned by self? Or can there be an experience of God that completely transcends individual identity and the realm of conditioned reality?

FATHER TIMKO: If "I" am there, such an experience of transcendence will never happen. It would be a projection. I like to use the analogy of a sugar cube, which is an individualized and separate thing. When you put it into a cup of tea or coffee, the sugar dissolves, and yet it is still there. It is there in a completely different way, in a different dimension: it is no longer there as a cube. So, as Gregory of Nyssa would say, "We have to be dissolved and to be in Christ." You are no longer there as an "I," as an individualized center or self. There is no "you." You are dead, as Saint Paul experienced. You are dissolved in something else, and now there is a completely different reality.

BROTHER DAVID: Yes. However I appeal to your experience that when we most lose ourselves—when the cube is the most

completely dissolved—we become more truly ourselves than we are at any other time. Because really being myself does not at all have the feeling of being dissolved and not being there. Now I am really there! I think we have to do justice to the actual experience.

FATHER TIMKO: But I think that too is a projection. We just simply don't want to completely let go of that self, so we say, my true self is there. There is no such thing as a true self or a false self. There is only the self or the no-self. And, as Saint John Chrysostom said, "He alone truly knows himself, who knows himself as nothing." Let us just be what we actually are—*nothing!*

BROTHER DAVID: No, no. You see, we experience degrees of letting go. We are not talking about the ultimate yet, and who knows what the ultimate is anyway. But we all experience degrees of letting go and we know that to the extent we lose ourselves, we are ourselves. And therefore we can extrapolate that when we completely lose ourselves, we will completely become it.

FATHER TIMKO: When you use terms such as "becoming" I am wary. The Fathers talk about these experiences in terms of coming to a state of being, just being. Saint Maximus the Confessor says, "Creatures endowed with mind and intelligence participate in God through their very being, through their capacity for well-being, which is the being of goodness and wisdom, and through the grace that gives them eternal being." These days everyone has an identity crisis: "I have to be me." Why? Why can't I just be?

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: In the dissolution of the sugar cube, is there something in the Christian teachings that describes the moment of the last grain dissolving?

FATHER TIMKO: Gregory of Nyssa talks about standing on the edge of a tremendous precipice. You have to go ahead and make that final step and fall into nothingness. It is like dreaming that

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you are falling through space. There is no identity. You are just floating and falling, without any relationship to anything. In that moment there is nothing around that you can recognize, nothing that you can anchor to or cling to. You have become totally detached into a different dimension of being.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: In at least some of the Buddhist traditions, that experience of dissolution is outlined according to different levels and stages. One very important level is what you just described: letting go without any reference point at all. There is just the changing phenomena. Then there is the level of dissolution which goes into a moment of unconditioned non-being, or the unmanifest. That is a different level, although it is still in the same direction.

FATHER TIMKO: Yes. That would be the following stage. You are letting go of the conditioned right there. Some Fathers describe a movement into a state of non-being. They stay there for a period of time, and then they come out of it.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: How is that transformation described? What takes place, having come back from that experience? What is the effect in one's life?

FATHER TIMKO: One sees the transience of everything. One's value system changes, and the awareness and perception of reality changes. There is a new mindfulness of oneness. There is one consciousness, one love, one goodness, one truth, one intelligence. It isn't my intelligence and my goodness, or yours. There is just one ultimate being and wholeness or God, in the true meaning of that word. And one sees the sanctity and beauty of everything—the sacredness and sensitivity. All categories break down: cultural conditioning, nationalism, male and female. The new quality of being transcends all of that. My guess is that that transformation is probably the same in the Buddhist tradition, or in any tradition which comes to that state of experiential being.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I think that within spiritual traditions there are two descriptions of coming to oneness, and the two seem quite different to me. The first is as a process of expanding one's sense of self to include everything, so experientially it is like becoming a very big self. And the other kind of oneness comes out of the experience of being zero. The path moves in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of expanding to include everything we let go of being anything. Out of the zero comes a oneness not referring to anyone, a totally impersonal oneness.

FATHER TIMKO: And that second one is the true way, the only way.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I think so.

FATHER TIMKO: The other is simply the inflation of ego—ego blowing itself up.

BROTHER DAVID: I would challenge your experience—not your intellectual categories, but your experience—by proposing that both occur at the same time. I could speak about the inflation of my ego until it pops, or I could speak about it being absolutely zero. And both would be faithful to the actual experience.

LODRÖ DORJE: Perhaps I could address this issue from the point of view of the Mahayana tradition. Mahayana methods and teachings are meant to stretch you out, in terms of expanding your concerns to include every sentient being in the universe, and at the same time the other thrust is to dissolve ego. So the path works on you from both ends of the stick, so to speak.

This brings up another topic, which is the relationship between relative and absolute perspectives of ego. The relative perspective is that, as individuals, we aren't just isolated, but we are interrelated with everyone and everything else. Therefore, by letting go of self-concern we discover a natural empathy and compassion for others. Then there is an absolute aspect to experience, which is that neither self nor other actually exists to

begin with. This is fundamental egolessness, and it is an experience which is inexpressible.

BROTHER DAVID: Lodrö, what did you mean earlier when you described the "purified self" as an expression of ego?

LODRÖ DORJE: From the Buddhist point of view, there is a lot of concern about the potential for recreating the ego process through spiritual experience. The point isn't to just create a big, fantastic experience and then to live off that as continual security. Nor is it to create a purified or spiritual version of oneself. The spiritual journey obviously has to be more dynamic than that.

BROTHER DAVID: I am interested in Abraham Maslow's description of what he terms the "peak-experience." I think his perspective could be a useful reference point in our discussion here, because he universalizes this experience. There is a tremendous tendency in every religious tradition for elitism in this area. Maslow shows that there is a common human experience that cannot be fundamentally distinguished from the descriptions of the realization of the mystics. This puts religion and mysticism on a totally different level in our time. I would like to quote one passage here, where he describes perception during the peak experience:

> Perception in the peak-experiences can be relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish. It can come closer to being unmotivated, impersonal, desireless, detached, not needing or wishing. Which is to say, that it becomes more object-centered than ego-centered.[1]

FATHER TIMKO: I don't want to give the impression that I don't see anything of value there, but Maslow's whole thrust is the process of self-actualization, rather than being in line with the Christian thrust, which is self-denial. Actualizing the self in

transcendence simply reinforces the self and creates a different quality of self. But self-negation crucifies the self. The self is put to death.

BROTHER DAVID: Yes, I hear you. But I'm not selling Maslow; I'm selling the peak experience. This passage comes from the results of his experimental research. He does one thing with those findings, and I do something else; many other people like to do yet something else. I personally never talk about self-realization. I would still say, though, that the idea that each one of us naturally has this peak-experience has important implications.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I think we all agree with that.

FATHER TIMKO: Yes. The spiritual Fathers also say that this experience of the unconditioned is universal, although it is usually partial and fleeting in our lives. Sometimes it comes to us at the moment of death. I have talked to many people who have had it. It is a very peaceful, renewing, transforming experience.

BROTHER DAVID: Father Timko, where have you found this understanding? I don't think this is something one tends to learn in the seminaries these days—though I think this is unfortunate.

FATHER TIMKO: It came out of my experience of meditation and prayer, of watchfulness and stillness. It was also nurtured by reading the spiritual Fathers of the *Philokalia.* But no one really gave it to me. It just sort of awakened through an insight that unfolded and evolved. I feel that this confirmation of spiritual experience in ordinary human life is the way of real religion. Sometimes people in my parish ask, "Can we understand and do these things, living and working in the world?" And I say, "Oh yes." And so we have ongoing spiritual renewal groups, and we read passages from *Unseen Warfare* and from the writings of the Fathers, and we discuss these ideas. Over the

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years people have had some experience, and they are affected by it. They become more aware of their interior life, and that awareness has brought them to a different state of spiritual being.

LODRÖ DORJE: I would like to address the peak experience issue, by way of saying something in support of the conditioned experience—which makes up most of our experience. In fact, many of the spiritual experiences we have along the path are conditioned experiences. These are the path. They are the means by which we can begin to realize the unconditioned. At the same time, the question remains: how is the relative world transcended? In the Vajrayana tradition, there are three steps, crudely speaking. First is the dissolution of personal pride and the letting go of the reference point of personal ego. Then there is the notion of letting go of any conditioned experience whatsoever. Finally there is the level where you reappreciate the relative experience; in other words, the relative world is re-entered or brought back. This last stage corresponds to the notion of living in sacredness, or of transforming relative experience. So there is a process of going in—to union or dissolution—and then there is a coming out. Beyond that there is also the idea that relative and absolute reality are together already, from the beginning.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: To add to that, I could play the Zen role here a little bit, and ask whether it really is a question of dissolving anything, or whether it is just that in a moment we see that the self never was. I think we could speak from both perspectives. Really there is nothing to dissolve, because the self was never there in the first place.

FATHER TIMKO: Right. Ego is an imaginary projection.

BROTHER DAVID: But how so many Christians have been stuck in this imaginary projection! How they have clung tenaciously, thinking that the Christian way is based on promoting the ego

from the level on which it is now, to some super-level in heaven!

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: Well, it is an appealing idea, Brother David! (Laughter.)

Be Yourself

William McNamara O.C.S.O.

Some people tend to think that once the final breakthrough takes place, it is finished. As soon as you think it's finished, it is finished. You are finished. But you never are. The journey goes on and on and on. If Saint Francis of Assisi had lived twenty-five years longer, he would have become that much more Franciscan. Saint Thomas Aquinas would have become that much more Thomistic. Each one of us has got to become more and more distinctively, authentically, exquisitely human. That is why it is always appropriate to say to another human being, "Be yourself." No one ever becomes sufficiently himself or herself.

I personally don't think that, for most of us, it's time yet to be talking about no-self. First we have to become real, authentic selves. First we have to become humanized, in touch and in tune with the totality of being, with all of reality: the reality we see and the reality we don't see, the words we hear and the words we cannot hear. The great challenge is, after all, to become more and more personal, more and more human, in order to let life shape us.

If someone were to ask me how to become a saint, I would say, let life do it. If you try to sanctify yourself, you're going to queer the whole process. You're going to become solipsistic, narcissistic, and a mess. No one can sanctify himself or herself. All the cleverness in the world won't do it. All the practices and projects in the world won't do it. Ultimately one is sanctified by life. And to live is to love, and to love is to give and to give and to give, until one's life is spent. In that process something unheard of, and something we know nothing about, happens: the emer-

Narrow is the Way

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

The people who wrote the gospels and letters of the New Testament saw that the glory they recognized in Jesus was not the opposite of suffering; it was the fruit of his suffering. We should realize the truth of this, because the way of the cross doesn't just belong to the life of Jesus. If we live the kind of life that Jesus lived—the contemplative life of keeping the eyes continuously on the vision and of then translating that vision into everyday action—we will inevitably end up on the cross. We may be reluctant to accept this, but in fact there is no bypass. This is just a basic law of life.

In an essay entitled "The Joy in the Thought that it is not the Way which is Narrow, but the Narrowness which is the Way,"[4] the nineteenth-century Christian existentialist Soren Kierkegaard argues that the spiritual journey is not separate from the way it is traveled. The way doesn't exist in the same sense that a road exists, regardless of whether anyone is traveling on it or not, but it is the "how" of the traveling that makes it the path. When we speak of life as a way, the real question is, how am I to walk on that way; how am I to live my life? Kierkegaard quotes Jesus: "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life . . . " (Matt. 7:14). Again, "narrow" is not an adjective describing the path; narrow *is* the path. The name of the path is narrow. Therefore, when life is narrow, we know it is the path. An alternative term frequently used in the Bible is "tribulation," which literally means "threshing the grain." The chaff flies away, and the grain falls through. We can't avoid tribulation; we can't avoid narrowness. It is a joy to know this, because then we know what we must do: we must suffer. And according to Kierkegaard, as we go along, we suffer more and more.

I would now like to quote a passage from the Prologue of *The Rule of Saint Benedict* which may at first seem to contradict Kierkegaard. Saint Benedict writes:

> Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults

> and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.[5]

Is the way only narrow at the entrance, or does it become increasingly more difficult, as Kierkegaard suggests? I believe this contradiction is a superficial one, because once we discover that narrowness is the way, we participate in the joy of understanding that it is so, which is also the "inexpressible delight" referred to by Saint Benedict. Life is a gift. We haven't bought it or earned it. Therefore we have a choice of two attitudes, both of which are painful: we can either feel anxiety because we don't trust that life is a good gift, or we can exchange that anxiety for a positive kind of suffering, which is a growing pain. This second choice is the suffering of compassion, which is the joyful suffering of going with the grain, of realizing that it is narrowness that leads to life.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited the United States in 1981, someone asked him, in a small audience, how it was that Buddhists have developed such a wonderful path for overcoming suffering, while Christians have been wallowing in their suffering for almost 2,000 years. The Dalai Lama responded by saying, "It is not as easy as all that. Suffering is not overcome by leaving pain behind; suffering is overcome by bearing pain for others." And that is one of those answers that is as Christian as it is Buddhist. It is the basic statement that comes out of the fact that narrowness *is* the path.

The Essence of Ethics

Jack Engler
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

JACK ENGLER: In American society, many students bring to the contemplative life the peculiar idea that one's personal behavior, or ethical conduct, isn't all that important. Many feel

it is enough to simply be mindful and do the sitting practice. It is as though we could come to the meditation hall, practice our contemplative disciplines, and then go back home and be angry with our spouse or cheat on our income tax. Perhaps we don't like to talk about morality because we are still rebelling against the Judeo-Christian moral code, which many of us have worked so hard to get away from. "Conscience" and "ethics" have become unsavory words which conjure up images of oppression and rigidity. It is true that without some kind of contemplative practice, ethics can be reduced to a set of legalistic do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs, and we may need to rediscover morality in a way that is different from how we learned it as children. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that impeccability in our thoughts, our speech, and our actions is the very basis of our own growth and development. In traditional Buddhist cultures, moral training is considered to be the foundation of the spiritual path. There must be impeccable conduct—first, last, and always. Otherwise the contemplative practices will dry up, because there will be nothing to sustain them. They will just produce altered states of consciousness, without meaning.

In the Buddhist tradition, the instructions on morality start with five precepts. The practitioner vows to refrain from taking life, from taking what has not been given, from saying what is not true, from sexual misconduct, and from partaking of anything that causes mindlessness, such as alcohol and drugs. Each precept is a vow to abstain from a certain class of potentially harmful behaviors. For example, when taking the first precept, the practitioner asserts that he or she will refrain from taking life. It is not phrased "thou shalt not," but is simply stated as an intentionality. In fact, the expectation, at least in the beginning, is that one will not be able to completely live up to that intention. What does it mean, after all, to refrain from taking life? Does it simply mean to not kill other people or animals? Does it also mean that I ought to become a vegetarian? And when I'm walking down the street in the summertime, does it mean that I ought to take care not to trample willy-nilly on all the little creatures beneath my feet

who also have a right to their space on this earth? That one precept can be practiced at many different levels. On face value, it may seem to be an obviously simple prescriptive rule, but by trying to follow it faithfully in all situations, it leads one into very deep waters. It begins to expose all of the root motives that usually push and pull us: the deeper greeds and aversions and the various concepts and fantasies that we unconsciously live by. A precept brings these hidden impulses to the surface, where they can be seen for what they are and worked with. It is not that if one doesn't live up to the precept in a particular situation, one has sinned. The precepts are presented as a challenge to be more mindful and more responsible for one's actions.

BROTHER DAVID: I would like to ask you to be more specific about sexual misconduct. For us in the Christian tradition, this is a highly problematic issue because there has been so much social influence on the religious tradition. Often we find a definition of sexual misconduct that has nothing to do with Christian morality, but has everything to do with the values of the society we live in. In this case, I'm wondering whether the Buddhist definition primarily speaks out of Japanese, Chinese, or Indian social values, or whether it is somewhat independent of social context.

JACK ENGLER: That is the same question, Brother David, that every student asks when they first hear about the precepts. Sexual misconduct is the one they most want to know about! I think you would find that different cultural traditions have each approached it a little differently. The root meaning of sexual misconduct refers to any exploitive sexual relations. In concrete terms, the precepts are situation-specific. They are deliberately phrased in an open-ended way because their application will vary according to differing circumstances. As we apply it in our sangha, refraining from sexual misconduct in a retreat environment means sexual abstinence. There won't be any sexual activity for the duration of the retreat. At other times, whenever one person takes advantage of another by

using sexuality to gratify his or her own needs, without real care, attentiveness, concern, and respect for the other, then that is exploitive, and it is a violation of the precept. What that means in terms of specific conduct is left up to the individual to determine. That is the challenge of the precepts. If we were to translate them into an absolute, literal meaning that applied under all conditions, we would be treating them in a dead way.

BROTHER DAVID: Thank you very much. I think this is a really important contribution to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, because this is also the root of the Christian idea of sexual misconduct. This is clear when we see the little which the Bible has to say about sexual sins as compared to the great number of warnings against exploiting others by taking advantage of them. Unfortunately, the popularized versions of Christian teachings have reversed this proportion. Exploitation is the real offense. But society has cast that meaning into particular laws, until the laws have become more important than the root meaning, and it ends up seeming that as long as you don't get into conflict with the laws, you can exploit others as much as you want. So I think there is a deep agreement between Christians and Buddhists on this level. But I wonder how well the Buddhists actually live that way. We haven't done so very well.

JACK ENGLER: I think we're probably batting about the same average!

Guilt

Rev. Sister Benedetta C.S.C.
Jack Engler

SISTER BENEDETTA: I think it is important that we learn to distinguish between two types of guilt. One is the genuine guilt

which we're meant to feel and meant to use in a responsible way, and the other is neurotic guilt. For all of us there are times when our words or actions are such that we need to feel a sense of guilt, so that we can assume ownership for what we have done, and then express the necessary sorrow or regret and ask for forgiveness. That is always a difficult thing to do, but I think it is also essential. In that case, guilt arises out of conscience; it is real and needs to be deliberately faced. Neurotic guilt, on the other hand, is something we unnecessarily create for ourselves. It arises out of the superego: the voice that dictates to us what our behavior should be, based on the conditioning process that began in childhood. This voice comes from an external value system or authority figure that we met somewhere in our lives, and it can create unending feelings of inadequacy and guilt. So I would say that, to begin with, it is crucial that we learn to distinguish between true conscience and the superego.

JACK ENGLER: I would agree with you, Sister, that there is a healthy kind of guilt which allows us to acknowledge responsibility for our actions. The capacity to experience guilt is actually an extraordinary human development. If the patients I work with in my psychiatric clinic could experience real guilt, they probably wouldn't need to be in the clinic at all. As children, each of us had to develop the ability to experience that we could hurt the very people we loved. That is one of the most important attainments of early childhood. Out of that grows a sense of responsibility to one another.

I think that the Buddhist traditions tend to talk more about the neurotic kind of guilt—how to overcome the regret that binds us to the past with constant rumination. We go over the same things again and again, wishing that things had happened differently. Such fixations tether us to past events, so that we are never able to get beyond them, and we find ourselves constantly reliving the past. In Buddhist psychology, that kind of guilt is one of the "unskillful" or unwholesome qualities of mind, and it is part of the repetition and

ely, intellectually chosen, or that has
e I often use is, "Blessed be Jesus in
tar," which comes from our ritual
ome to me lately is a line from Francis
Heaven": "Naked I await Thy love's
ls over and over until they take over,
lifted stroke. Other meditations are
e of Christ or a scriptural scene. One
ooking fish on the beach. Here is the
alization—which might lead us to ex-
ctacle. But what is the experience?
arly morning, cooking fish. That im-
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the image, it never totally leaves me:
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First I read slowly and reflectively,
ı I let go. From then on, there is no

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And there are times, especially if I am

out of sight, when I dance like David before the Ark of the Covenant. Sometimes I may be so full of joy that I can't contain myself, and I find myself squirming around. Or there might be another kind of restlessness, where I pace the floor, wring my hands, and bury my face in my hands. I might argue with God like Job, or struggle with him like Jacob. The Bible says that Jacob came out maimed; I have not yet come out maimed, but I have often come out exhausted. Christian prayer is not always relaxing and refreshing. It is sometimes a crucifixion, an agony.

Sometimes prayer can best be described as a slow, interior bleeding: an awed, stunned silence, with no words, no images. That silence can be a full, mysterious presence; at other times it can be a terrifying absence, the experience of abandonment. In the New Testament Jesus cries out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). That, too, is Christian prayer.

It is important that we appreciate all these possible variations and dimensions, as we move in and out of the rhythms and seasons of our prayer life. As Nikos Kazantzakis said, "Blowing through heaven and earth, in our hearts, and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath, a great Cry—which we call God." And the only way to respond to the great Cry which we call God is by the cry of the heart which we call prayer.

Letting Go of Thought

Joseph Goldstein
Loppön Lodrö Dorje
Judith Lief
Tessa Bielecki
George Timko
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Reginald Ray

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: In the Buddhist traditions there are two main streams of meditation practice. One is the development of what could be called concentration, and the other is the development of insight. After listening to Mother Tessa's description of prayer, I would suggest that Buddhist concentration practices parallel what is called meditation in Catholicism, and insight

practices parallel contemplation.

In Buddhism, concentration is achieved through focusing the mind on a particular object, such as a light, mantra, or visualization. Usually that concentration of mind is then applied to insight meditation. In Theravada vipassana meditation, for example, you sit with awareness of the process of mind as it unfolds, without trying to create or focus on anything and without leading the mind anywhere. It is a settling-back into the moment and allowing the dharma, or reality, to unfold. This practice brings about an ever-increasing refinement of perception, which penetrates the solidity of experience. Usually we tend to view ourselves as something solid and real. By settling back into the moment and observing the flow of phenomena, perception becomes so refined and so strong that it penetrates the apparent solidity of ego. As insight develops, there are stages of perspectives that one goes through. It is an ordered path, which finally leads to an opening to the unconditioned.

LODRÖ DORJE: In the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition, we find a similar description. I would just elaborate by saying that the element of exertion is important in distinguishing the two stages or types of practice. When concentrating or settling the mind, there is a definite sense of exertion. Then at a certain stage of the meditative process, you let go of any deliberate effort. By letting go, the quality of insight or awareness comes to you; it is not manufactured.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I'm sure it must also be true in the Christian tradition, or in any spiritual tradition for that matter, that an understanding of right effort is crucial. Effort is the foundation of practice, and yet it can so easily be transformed into a hindrance. The Buddha gave many teachings on the meaning and importance of right effort.

JUDY LIEF: It is interesting to me that letting go of effort doesn't necessarily correspond to a decrease in the formal or structured aspect of practice. For example, in our community

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the student first works with the simple, relatively formless meditation of attending to the breath. At this stage a great deal of deliberate effort is necessary. Working diligently with the thought process in that way allows the mind to settle. Then after some time, when greater relaxation is possible, he or she enters into liturgical practices and begins working with the imagery of visualization.

MOTHER TESSA: And how does someone decide when to move from one stage to the other and what imagery to use?

JUDY LIEF: First, the student requests the teacher to transmit the next practice. The teacher agrees to transmit the practice appropriate to the student when he or she is ready. Each practice has its own built-in form and structure.

MOTHER TESSA: It would never be that precise in Christianity. Prayer is much more spontaneous and fluid. You might not necessarily know in a given moment what you will do next. I may go to the chapel thinking I am going to meditate on a certain scripture, and I may never get to it. Or I may end up working with it for twice as long as I had expected. There is a tremendous open-endedness to it.

JUDY LIEF: Would it be correct to say that prayer begins in reference to an external God, as some sort of visualization or projection of one's mind, and then moves on beyond that initial dualism? Would that describe the movement from meditation to contemplation in Christianity?

FATHER TIMKO: The Christian begins with the perception of something other than oneself: something that transcends who we are according to our usual understanding. But even there we have to be careful. The transcendent reality is within the realm of our inner being. As Christ said, "The Kingdom of God does not come with observable signs; you can't say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For the Kingdom of God is within

you" (Luke 17:20-21). Though the reality of God is Other, it is not an external thing.

BROTHER DAVID: And it isn't a *being*. I don't think there is one Christian denomination where you couldn't walk into church and hear someone speaking from the pulpit about God as a being. But that's totally unorthodox; it's just simply wrong. God is not *a* being. God is the Source of Being.

FATHER TIMKO: From a Christian point of view the understanding of God is crucial here. The Eastern Fathers see our relationship to God primarily in terms of God-likeness. Many of the Fathers say that if God appears to you in some external form or image or visible light, you can be sure it is an illusion and not God. Saint John of the Ladder says, "God appears to the mind in the heart, at first as a purifying fire and then as a light that illumines the mind and makes it God-like." He also says that when we speak of love we must be very careful in what we say because we are speaking of God. God is love. God is truth. God is good. God is holy. The person who abides in any of these qualities of God-likeness abides in God and God abides in him. In other words, if the quality of love is operating in you as a state of being, then that is the reality of God manifest. In most instances, the image of God refers to the actual manifestation of the divine quality of life and being within us. The inner appeal, the movement of the mind and heart in prayer, is not to some external agency. It is to that reality which is potentially present within us.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I would say, not even within us, but which *is* us.

FATHER TIMKO: Yes, all right; but only in the sense that it is actualized and manifest in us. In that sense Evagrius says that "a soul pure in God is God" and "a pure mind is the throne of God." Anyway, it is something within the realm of one's potential state of being; it is not something to be arrived at somewhere "out there." Sometimes I like to use the analogy of

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our electronic medium when I talk about this. When you turn on your TV you tune into certain signals out in the atmosphere. Where are they coming from? Evidently there is a source. They are not only "out there"; they are also "right here." All you need is a receiver that is functioning properly and you can tune into the transmission. You can't know the reality at the source. The reality, or picture, communicated is only actualized and known in the receiver where you are. In the same way, we can say that the reality of God cannot be perceived "up there" or "out there," or anywhere else in particular, but only here within me when my psyche is tuned in.

BROTHER DAVID: Much of our educational approach to teaching children how to pray has been misleading in that respect.

FATHER TIMKO: I think it has been horrendous. Some years ago my Church School teachers showed me an instructional book they had received, and in its centerfold was a picture of two telephones hooked up together. This was supposed to be an illustration of prayer. What does this communicate? Here you are at this end, and God is up there at the other end, waiting for your call? Just call him up! It's such a simplistic idea! It is a distorted view of prayer that deludes the youngest child as well as the oldest adult.

BROTHER DAVID: One thing I've noticed about descriptions of Buddhist practice is that the dissolution of the ego is much more directly in focus than it is in the Catholic tradition. I'm wondering, Father George, whether there is anything parallel to that in Orthodoxy.

FATHER TIMKO: Yes and no. By that I mean that there is not a direct focus so much as an indirect focus. In our tradition the term "meditation" isn't alluded to all that much, and when it is, it is used in the sense of pondering or reflecting on something. But there is a lot of emphasis on theoria, which is usually translated as "contemplation." Theoria is watching, observing,

simply looking. It is an interior looking of the mind, of paying attention without any expectations. If you look with some intent you will see what you want to see. But the Fathers say you shouldn't look with some projected ideas. Just watch yourself, from moment to moment, and you will have enough to contend with. And they're right. When I recollect my mind, stop looking outside myself and just watch myself—my relationship to my wife, my children, my money, my possessions—there is a whole world of self-knowledge to be found there. And they say that you cannot actually commune with God until you know yourself, exactly as you are. Otherwise, you won't be able to distinguish what you are projecting and what your senses are bringing to you from what is spiritual. Therefore, the consciousness, the mind, has to let go of thought. That's the critical thing. Evagrius refers to prayer as "letting go of all thought." He says that "prayer is a movement of the mind to God. Prayer is the continual communion of the mind with God. Undistracted prayer is the highest activity of the mind. But if you wish to behold God and commune with Him who is beyond all sense perception and beyond all conception, you must free your mind from every impassioned thought. The mind that is a slave to passion cannot come to the realm of pure spiritual prayer. For such a mind is dragged about by passionate thoughts, and it cannot remain still and quiet. You cannot attain pure prayer while your mind is occupied with thoughts of material things and cares. For prayer means the letting-go of all thoughts and being with God."[7] Christianity became trapped at some point by thinking that prayer is verbalization and asking. That's a wrong understanding of prayer. The Greek word *prosevkomai* means to move into a condition or state of being in which there is no thought, no imaging, no desiring. It means to simply be still and silent and quiet in a mindful state of awareness. In such a state the self is dissolved. Only by being in that state can one truly commune with that Transcendent Reality. Nonverbalized prayer is central in the tradition of the Fathers, who say prayer is "directing the mind and heart."

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JUDY LIEF: Is such contemplation practice part of the Orthodox service?

FATHER TIMKO: It is essentially a private practice. But even though the services verbalize, the liturgy has a contemplative aspect to it. The interior being is always called to being watchful and attentive to everything that is being said and done. Hesychius of Jerusalem says, "Attention is the silence of the mind, free of all thought." There are also places in the liturgy where you are called to lay aside all thoughts that pertain to this life. Saint John Chrysostom says that if your mind is wandering about in the marketplace, and you are thinking about business, then you aren't at the liturgy. There are moments of total silence. This happens at the beginning of the offertory, when the gifts are offered, and then in the communion. At those times there is no singing or verbalizing, but simply the inner awareness and focusing on communion. There are also times when we say, "Let us lift up our hearts." The heart is the inner being in which the mind should be centered and stilled; it is the interior nature of our consciousness. In the Orthodox tradition, we say that the mind should always be in the heart, which means that the intelligible, perceiving nature should be within the feeling, intuitive nature. When the mind is so recollected and stilled within the heart, it exists in a state of pure mindfulness.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: In many Asian languages, there is one word which includes both heart and mind. And I think that's very much the Buddhist sense: those two are not separate.

LODRÖ DORJE: I wanted to say something about this idea of prayer as asking. In the Vajrayana tradition we have a liturgy form which we call supplication. It has the important element of transcending personal desire; in other words, one is not particularly supplicating for a Cadillac. We supplicate as a way of uplifting our state of being and increasing our sense of commitment and devotion. We might supplicate to have greater renunciation, or to develop unshakable faith in

impermanence and karmic cause and effect, or to be able to connect with the realization of the lineage. So we say, for example, "Grant your blessings so that my mind may be one with the dharma," or "Let me mix my mind with the state of being of the realized ones." At the same time the foundation of mindfulness-awareness training is considered important. The practice of supplication usually isn't formally introduced to practitioners right at the beginning; it's considered to be an advanced practice. This is once again connected again with the principle of first training your awareness through applying some effort, in order to dissolve the heaviness of your projections. Then you could be available to what is beyond your projections. Also, liturgical practices are always alternated with some kind of formless meditation. You begin a session with a period of formless meditation, then there is a liturgical supplication and a visualization practice of some kind, and then you conclude the session by dissolving any constructed element of the meditation: you dissolve the form and just let your awareness open. So it's actually quite characteristic in our tradition to have a form aspect alternating with a formless or letting-go aspect during any one practice session.

FATHER TIMKO: We have to be able to let thought go, because thought is responsible for the self, for the ego. In that state of being or awareness in which thought is not operating, we can relate to things, to each other, or to whatever we're doing, without thoughts and images and forms intruding. We can just be there, receiving and seeing in a nonjudgmental way.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I would just like to add that I don't think it is a matter of *not* thinking. It is more a matter of not entering into dialogue with thought. In other words, it is possible to be aware of thought in the same way that one might be aware of a sound during meditation: there is no identification with it; it is just a mind bubble. Seeing thought in that way, it is no longer a hindrance or a problem. It is just another phenomenon. That simplifies the whole process, because then there is not the extra effort to stop thinking.

FATHER TIMKO: Yes. The way to deal with thought is to watch the mind. It is just like watching a child who is about to put his hand into the cookie jar. If you are watching the mind, it can't fool you. It can't con you into something. But you can't really stop it. When the mind is restless and jumps all over the place, the tendency is to try and trap it with some technique. But then what happens when you stop the technique? Mind just starts jumping again. But by contemplating, by simply watching, the mind naturally becomes quiet and stills itself.

REGGIE RAY: Father George, is this practice of watching the mind dominant in the Orthodox church? I haven't heard Christian contemplation described this way before.

FATHER TIMKO: Well, I don't really know how to answer that. It is dominant in the writings of the Fathers and the tradition of the Church. You can find it in great detail in the *Philokalia*. But it isn't a dominant practice in our current religious life. These days most people say that really practicing and experiencing these things is for the monks in the monasteries, and for everyone else spirituality just involves going to liturgy. Somehow I discovered it isn't necessary to leave the world in order to practice the exercises of spiritual training devised by the ascetics, to acquire a certain degree of dispassion, and to achieve a certain state of inner spiritual growth and being and transformation of the psyche.

REGGIE RAY: Have you had support from your church?

FATHER TIMKO: Well, I have had to reassure some of the authorities from time to time. They assumed that if you began working too much with the mind and the interior life you'd end up being Buddhist. When I began doing hatha yoga, just for health reasons, some became very uncomfortable. I had to explain that it had nothing to do with any religious beliefs, that I wasn't bowing down before a statue of the Buddha or worshipping some Hindu divinity. All the teachings I have described which deal with the important work of the mind are

in the original tradition of the Fathers, and they provide the key to spiritual guidance for the interior life. For example, Saint Maximus the Confessor says, "How do you know when you're greedy? It's very simple. If you are asked to give money, and you find resentment awakening in your inner being, in your heart and your thoughts, then you're greedy!" If you're watchful and aware, you will actually see the process of greed in operation within you. So by relying on the writings of the Fathers and being nurtured by their insights and being guided by their spiritual directives, I have learned to be watchful and know myself and to have a deeper experience of that holy and blessed Divine Presence.

DOING Nothing

Tessa Bielecki
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

QUESTION (from audience): I think a lot of people could get the impression from listening to these presentations that the main point of contemplative practices is to attain some special state of mind—that by meditating or praying, something very extraordinary is going to happen. But I would suggest that you can find contemplative states of mind in people's most common experiences. For example, I enjoy watching the sun set. As soon as the sun touches the horizon, my mind becomes quiet. That is a natural kind of prayer which everyone does. You can just relax and watch the sun set, and you will find yourself becoming aware of your breath and so on. So meditation doesn't have to be anything so special or different.

MOTHER TESSA: I sympathize completely with what you're saying. I've always had difficulty talking about spiritual practices as those specific things we do when we walk into a chapel or

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meditation hall. I personally feel that it's much broader than that. Certainly in my community, a lot of our prayer is practiced out of doors—up in a tree, out in a canoe, on a mountaintop, in the garden. We refer to this kind of prayer as "earthy mysticism," or "incarnational contemplation." I think that this, as well as the more formal option, is important. We need to make a special effort to remind ourselves of the ordinariness of prayer, especially in a context such as this discussion. I'm glad you raised that point.

EIDO ROSHI: There is this saying in the Zen tradition: "However wonderful something may be, it is not as good as doing nothing." But it is important how we place the emphasis. It is not "doing *nothing*;" it is "*doing* nothing." (Laughter.) These are two different things. Just as Christianity originated with the crucifixion and resurrection, Buddhism started with Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment experience. In other words, it started with meditation practice. As long as we are Buddhists, we cannot forget that. If we did, and we just watched the sun rise, sun set, that would be a good excuse not to sit.

BROTHER DAVID: There is a beautiful parallel to this, Roshi, which is a Christian blessing we give to someone who is leaving on a journey. We say, "May nothing happen to you." Actually, one doesn't wish that nothing may happen, but one wishes that many good things will happen. And yet we say, "May nothing happen to you" because, when nothing really happens, that nothing which is God, then that is truly the greatest thing that can ever happen to anyone.

heart, we are able to have a good time, and we are able to identify with others' pain and pleasure.

We need to learn how to be decent human beings. That is the basis for what we call "religion." A decent human society brings about spirituality. It brings about blessings and what could be called the gift of God. This is an extremely simple-minded approach. I'm sorry if I disappoint you, but it is as simple as that. We have to be just as we are. This is not necessarily a Buddhist message; for that matter it is not even a particularly spiritual message. Compassion is simply a matter of experiencing reality properly.

Mother's Love

Eido Tai Shimano Roshi
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.

QUESTION (from audience): Roshi, how do you understand the Christian statement "God is love"?

EIDO ROSHI: I think it is a fabulous, excellent expression. (Laughter.)

QUESTION (cont.): And what is your interpretation of the word "love"?

EIDO ROSHI: How do I define "love" in Christian terms? (Laughter.)

QUESTION (cont.): No, how do Buddhists understand what love is?

EIDO ROSHI: Years ago, Brother David and I had this kind of discussion. Buddhism translates karuna as "compassion." We had a discussion about the difference between love and compassion. It went on and on and on and on and on.

QUESTION (cont.): I see. Perhaps I'll sit down. (Laughter.)

EIDO ROSHI: But this time I'll just say that, to me, this word "love" has romantic implications. Of course sometimes I feel warmth, gentleness, harmony, peace, etcetera, etcetera. But nevertheless I prefer the term "compassion." This is just my personal preference.

BROTHER DAVID: I think it is important to add that you also have to take the emphasis off the romantic notion before you can come to a true understanding of what the Christian tradition means when it speaks of the "love of God": both God's love for us and our love for God. It is interesting in this context that God's loving-kindness, as it is described in the Old Testament, is a *mother's* love. The term used is *rachamim*, which is the abstract form of *rechem*, which means "womb." So the masculine notion of God, which has been so overemphasized in the Christian tradition, is very much balanced by remembering that God also loves us with a mother's love. I think that image comes much closer to the Buddhist definition of compassion than it does to the usual Western notion of romantic love.

Where the Clouds Crop Up

Tenshin Reb Anderson Roshi

All the buddhas and ancestors are sitting at the heart of suffering. By sitting at the heart of suffering they develop their unshakable vow to drop body and mind and save all sentient beings.

Depending on how we conduct our lives, we find ourselves in one of a variety of forms of existence. The varieties are endless, but there are six major categories, called the "six worlds." These worlds, which we create for ourselves, have nicknames: the human realm; the realm of divine bliss; the hell realm of extreme torment and isolation; the insatiable realm of the hungry ghosts; the animal realm of fear; and the realm of the fighting gods. The human realm is the center of gravity of the other five. As human beings we tend to return here. And at the very heart of

ourselves for being involved, for not being indifferent. But we might as well face the reality of what we really can do, and then try to carry that out to the best of our ability. Otherwise we end up either feeling righteous about our grand schemes to help everyone in the world or feeling guilty because we haven't yet managed to do so. Buddhism presents a realistic approach. We work with the immediate situation, with what we can do effectively, and at the same time, through our practice we continually undermine the aggression which is at the root of all suffering.

Well-Balanced I

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi

BROTHER DAVID: Roshi, is there some particular aspect of zazen practice that helps you to cope with this world we live in, this world which finds itself not only in a state of crisis—we have had many thousands of crises in our history—but which is actually on the brink of self-annihilation? What can be acquired through zazen that will help people to deal with this situation effectively?

EIDO ROSHI: Very few people are able to do something, realistically speaking. Some people may have the desire, but then the situation does not allow them to take action. We all need to have good faith that when we are doing our spiritual practice—even though we might be sitting alone, deep in the mountains—we are radiating a kind of spiritual vibration. I am not saying this with an arrogant attitude, but it is important for us to have faith that if one person sits, the whole universe goes into great samadhi.

BROTHER DAVID: Yes, this is a strong belief in our tradition, as well;

it is usually called "praying for the world," or "suffering for the world." But from knowing you personally, I think you would agree that there is something else we can also do. I am recalling, for example, that we participated together in one of the early Vietnam war protests, in 1965. What little weight we had, as one Buddhist and one Christian monk, we were throwing around even then. Of course, there can be a problem if someone is only an activist and he or she is too busy to spend time in contemplation. But it seems that some people are so intent on sitting that perhaps they overlook opportunities to respond in a helpful way to this present situation of crisis.

EIDO ROSHI: Well, I think we need different kinds of people: some people need to sit, some people need to act. This will make a good balance.

BROTHER DAVID: And what about the people who sometimes sit and sometimes act?

EIDO ROSHI: That is another balance.

BROTHER DAVID: Then you are saying that the solution is to find out where we belong.

EIDO ROSHI: Well, actually, the world itself is well-balanced from the very beginning. (Pause.) Don't you think so? (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: From the beginning, yes. I'm more concerned about the end. (Laughter.)

EIDO ROSHI: It really is my conviction that the world is well-balanced: from the beginningless beginning to the endless end. It is always well-balanced.

BROTHER DAVID: Yes, I really believe that too. This is what we call "trusting in God." But there is a way of understanding this that is superficial, so that something else that is also important is bypassed, namely, our sense of responsibility. Even though the

world is well-balanced on one level, on another level we need to rise to the responsibility of keeping it in balance. We have the ability to act, and also to fail to act, in ways that will affect the world's state of balance.

EIDO ROSHI: But whether we sit or not, the world is well-balanced. Remember a few years ago, we had an oil shortage, and the world was shocked. Today, everyone just continues on. Right?

BROTHER DAVID: Well, that is just because we can afford to pay more, but that may not always be the case. . . .

EIDO ROSHI: Brother David, if you start to think that way, you have to worry endlessly.

BROTHER DAVID: Well, there is a way of thinking about it that is not worrying. But there is a way of not thinking about it that is irresponsible.

EIDO ROSHI: No, I really think we are responsible to realize that the world is well-balanced from the beginningless beginning to the endless end. That is our responsibility.

BROTHER DAVID: Yes, I believe that . . . (laughter) . . . but I also realize that, because we are spending more money for oil and gasoline, farmers in the Third World who cannot afford to do so are dying by the score and by the thousand. Every day 50,000 people die of starvation. That is a tragically large number, especially when you consider that these people are dying because we have channeled funds and resources in a way that is not well-balanced in terms of the entire human family. All of us here belong to the small percentage that uses most of the world's resources, so we have a certain responsibility. I don't think we should worry, but I do think we should be deeply disturbed. If we are part of a family where something terribly unjust is taking place, we have to do something about it or we are not living up to our practice.

EIDO ROSHI: I feel the same way, and at the same time I feel powerless. No matter how much I think and I do, I alone cannot do anything for those 50,000 people. And suppose 50,000 people did *not* die every day: there would be other kinds of population problems. I am saying, fundamentally, that I am very much aware of this problem, but it is more important to be aware of the nature of the universe, so that we are able to accept, as Walter Cronkite often said, that "that's the way it is." (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: But I often see a reckless kind of trust in God's power, a reckless presumption that God will make everything come out alright, because God "knows best."

EIDO ROSHI: Do you think that by doing something, a solution can be found?

BROTHER DAVID: Yes, I do.

EIDO ROSHI: Oh . . . oh. . . . (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: But what to do is the great question. I would say that the answer is: Do whatever it is time to do. For some people that may be very little. But if we really do trust in the balance of the world from beginning to end, and at the same time we are aware of our responsibility, we will do the little thing that we can do, and that will be our contribution. No more is asked of us.

EIDO ROSHI: But don't you think that contemplative practice is one of these deeds?

BROTHER DAVID: Yes. And in exceptional cases it may be the only thing that is asked of someone. But I think that contemplative practice usually alerts us to the other things that are also being asked of us.

EIDO ROSHI: (sucking in breath loudly) You know, Brother David, I

have known you for so many years, and you are so romantic. (Laughter and whoops from the audience) Whether in front of the public or just between the two of us, our conversation has been this way for the past twenty years. I am not a pessimist. I think I am a realist. Perhaps you are a realist too, but with romantic inclinations. (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: Well, don't you think there must be a way for a realist with romantic inclinations to do the right thing in the world today? (Laughter.) What would you say it is?

EIDO ROSHI: Well, for myself, somehow I am karmically engaged with the practice of intensive zazen meditation. I can do without consulting others, making telephone calls, writing letters: I just shut up and sit down. This is what I have been doing, and through this I came to a spiritual conversion, and I realized the fact that I don't need to worry, because the world is well-balanced from the very beginning. And that is why I can talk to you, or to these other intelligent people, with great confidence. Perhaps you have different attitudes or ways or answers, but this is certainly one way. It may sound inactive, but zazen is a very active job.

BROTHER DAVID: And I know you well enough to respect that this is your contribution. But it is not the only one. For others there may be other contributions.

EIDO ROSHI: Oh, yes. If all the people in this city were practicing intensive zazen, that could be a problem. The airplanes wouldn't fly; the stores would be closed, and so on. That is exactly what I mean: the world is well-balanced. (Laughter and applause.)

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KALLISTOS WARE

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OSEL TENDZIN

Obedience

Ven. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche
Reginald Ray
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.
Tessa Bielecki
Judith Lief
Joseph Goldstein
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: It seems that the main point of having a teacher is that we need to develop a sense of humbleness. Usually we hold onto our egotism as a way of displaying our strength, beauty, knowledge, or wealth. Such egotism is a kind of blockage: we don't hear other people's messages, and we become deaf and dumb. We only hear and see what we want to, rather than opening ourselves. On the spiritual journey, it is important to overcome this deaf and dumb quality. We need to develop a connection with the world, the world other than ourselves. Therefore, devotion is very important.

When I was a child I used to think I was an important person, a specially-chosen lama. That particular blockage was slowly and thoroughly broken down by my teacher. Sometimes he criticized me, and sometimes he joked with me. Humor is actually one of the most powerful aspects of such a relationship. I think whether we are in a Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu tradition, it is necessary for us to have a spiritual teacher we can talk to: someone who will relate to us directly. Otherwise there is no chance of a real journey taking place. Sometimes you might feel you want to run away from such a person, and sometimes you feel great love for him or her. Nonetheless, such a relationship based on devotion is always important.

Devotion to a spiritual teacher is different from relating to your college professor. You are not simply trying to snatch whatever he or she knows for yourself, with the hope that you will become better than your teacher some day. In this case, you become continually more humble. The teacher represents the whole lineage of spiritual teachers of whichever tradition

you belong to. Once you begin to be devoted to such a teacher, a sense of grace or blessings descends on you, so that you become softer and softer. You become a more decent person. In fact, you become much happier, because you don't have to hold on to yourself so tightly. There is less strain involved, and you can afford to relax. Then you begin to grow beautiful flowers of wisdom in your heart.

REGGIE RAY: Thank you, Rinpoche. Brother David, would you like to address us from a Christian perspective?

BROTHER DAVID: In terms of the Christian tradition, I think the image that best describes the historical Jesus is that of someone who gave spiritual direction to a small group of people. We could also say that the spiritual direction of the early Fathers, during the first centuries of the Christian tradition, closely parallels what we hear about the guru-disciple relationships of Buddhism. We can read many stories about the novice or monk going to one of the Desert Fathers in order to confide in him and seek advice. Many people don't realize that the form of confession now practiced in the Roman Catholic Church is a relatively late development, which grew out of the relationship between monks and their spiritual guides. In our own time there is once again a great upsurge of interest in spiritual direction—not only in monastic circles, but among lay people as well. We can see this interest reflected in the recent proliferation of books, workshops, and audio tapes offering spiritual direction.

As a more personal confession on this issue, I have to tell you that I speak as someone who has not been particularly successful either in receiving or giving spiritual direction. I'm an expert at what *not* to do, and that might also be a helpful perspective. In the monastery I live in, every monk has a spiritual guide, which, according to the Benedictine tradition, is the abbot. I was privileged during the first twenty years of my spiritual life to have had a great spiritual master as my abbot. I totally entered into this relationship with him, to the best of my ability, but for some reason it just never really worked. It must

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have had some effect on me, but in a roundabout way that I was never really able to assess. Our relationship took place within a framework that was already set up for us, and we both tried, as abbot and monk, to fulfill what this framework demanded of us. Humanly speaking, however, it only sporadically felt warm and supportive. I'm not talking about the difficulties and challenges one should, of course, expect from one's teacher; the relationship itself just never seemed to get off the ground. Whenever a real crisis occurred in my life, the guidance would always come from somewhere, but it never came from the quarters I expected it to come from.

For my part, I personally do not give spiritual direction to anyone, in spite of the fact that I constantly receive letters from people seeking spiritual guidance. But the most important ingredient of spiritual direction is continuity, and these days I have so many commitments outside the monastery that even my cactus die between the time I leave and when I come back home. So if I can't take care of a cactus . . . (laughter) . . . how can I possibly take care of anyone else? So from my perspective, the important question is, how does one manage without spiritual direction? I think the majority of people will never find it. Even Mahatma Gandhi living in India, which I've heard is teeming with gurus, said in his autobiography that although he was looking for a guru all his life, he was never able to find one. Now, if Ghandi, who was surely ripe for such a relationship, wasn't able to find a teacher in all of India, what can we expect, living in the United States? (Laughter.)

In the Christian context, the primary insight is that God speaks. He speaks not only through a guru, but through everything: every situation, every person. We have to take this to heart. If I start a car and I don't listen to the noises it makes, I am not being obedient to this car. But if I do listen, the car will teach me something. And God speaks very loudly to me through cars, because I have such a hard time with them. (Laughter.) God also speaks to me through animals. I like to feed the birds, for example, and God has taught me an awful lot through them. He also teaches me through children—even more so than through adults. In general, if we haven't learned

to listen, nothing and no one will speak to us. If we have, God will speak to us through everything. So, at least that's how I console myself, and maybe this will console some of you. (Laughter and applause.)

FATHER KEATING: I'm happy to see that Brother David is renewing the ancient tradition of the wandering monk! (Laughter.) Of course, if any of us wander as much as Brother David says he does, it is true that we will not be in a position either to give or receive spiritual direction. However, I think in this discussion we could try to define what, if we do find a spiritual director, such a relationship should be like. It is my opinion that, in whichever tradition one follows, the more the practice is directed toward the surrender of the false self and the release of what is in the unconscious, the more important it is to have spiritual guidance. Certainly, some meditative practices require an expert teacher; otherwise we should not do them. And even when guidance is not absolutely necessary, the great advantage of having such a relationship is that it gives us the opportunity to express ourselves to someone who holds a sacred place in our lives, and who has an objective judgement about what is going on in us—which is something a friend can never quite do. We may go to a friend looking for sympathy when what we really need is a good kick in the behind. Or sometimes our thoughts and feelings build up such an incredible energy and importance that we become enslaved by them. As soon as we reveal these in the context of a sacred relationship, by which I mean a relationship of faith, then a spirit of openness enters in and we can be freed from the fascination of our thoughts and passions.

A sacred relationship doesn't work unless we totally commit ourselves to obeying our teacher. In the monastic experience, obedience is an essential element in establishing a deep foundation for one's spiritual growth. It is a concrete way of giving up one's own will and judgement. However, for many people in this culture, "obedience" is a difficult word. No one wants to do anything unless he or she can see the reason for doing it. But if you see the reason to obey, the sacred

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relationship ceases to do its subtle work. In the long run, it is more important to be detached from our own judgement than to know that what we are told to do is "right." We need to be free of the interior dialogue that is constantly judging our interior states, and especially our prayer.

When I was a young monk at Saint Joseph's Abbey, I was eager to follow all the ascetical practices. One day, out of the blue, my abbot conceived the idea that I was too thin. He said that if I was going to persevere in the Trappist life, I needed to put on some weight. He told me to drink one glass of cream and to eat three Hershey bars between meals. (Laughter.) The problem I then faced was how to do this without my peers seeing: I was supposed to be an ascetic, after all. But there is no way of hiding anything from anyone in the common life. And so for six weeks I sheepishly stuffed myself with cream and Hershey bars. I can't remember whether I gained any weight, but I do know that I experienced a tremendous grace of interior freedom. My abbot had perceived that not only did I need to put on weight, but that I needed to be dislodged from my ascetical self-image. It was his idea, not mine, and I had the grace and insight to throw myself—as I then saw myself—away.

Saint Benedict gives monks this succinct advice: "Obey without delay." In other words, don't reflect on the command; just do it. Nobody is asking you to decide whether it is a good idea, whether the superiors are wise or foolish, or whether the orders should be changed around to suit your ideas. Just do it, and keep doing it. That frees you to be present to what you are doing, which is one of the great ways of liberation. There is a greater freedom available in obeying one's spiritual director than in any kind of independence. The ability to obey a human voice is also an apprenticeship, in which we learn to obey the more delicate movements and inspirations that are interior and come from the Spirit of God. Obedience is ultimately a way of training and refining our own conscience.

MOTHER TESSA: Father Thomas, I agree with everything you say, but I think that for many Christians discussions such as this can be extremely frustrating. The theory is magnificent, but there

are so few spiritual directors around. It might be more realistic to look at what we can do if we don't have a living master. I certainly agree with Brother David that everyone and everything around us can teach us. Also a somewhat derivative but nevertheless effective source of spiritual direction can be found in books. Thomas Merton is a spiritual teacher for a great many people, and so is John of the Cross. And obviously Christ himself is our teacher. As Christians we should always be looking to him. I could also say something specifically to the Catholics, which is that confession can be a tremendously positive situation of spiritual direction. As Father William is often telling us, confession is not a "sin bin" but a "grace place." Rather than unloading something bad, the major value of the sacrament of confession is spiritual counseling. Now again, if it's hard to find good spiritual directors, it is also hard to find good confessors. Still, a bad confession experience, or even a bad spiritual direction experience, can be a powerful teaching. It is often said that Teresa of Avila suffered many years from very poor spiritual direction, and yet that difficulty was in itself spiritual direction for her.

I could also add that, from my own experience, the humiliation which is often the byproduct of spiritual direction can be fun. It's especially fun for other people. (Laughter.) In my community, Father William is a genius at entertaining us through the penances he gives. One person's penance, for example, was to dance an Irish jig on Saint Patrick's Day, at the very moment we were all filing out of the chapel. Another had to stand on the roof and shout Psalm 51, which is the main penitential psalm, at the top of his lungs. The best penance I ever received was when he instructed me that the next time I went down to the lake for a canoe ride, I had to get into the canoe backwards, hold the paddle upside-down, and then try to paddle. For awhile I deliberately stayed away from the lake when I saw anyone else around, so that I would not have to make a fool out of myself. But then one morning I woke up to such a magnificent sunrise that I couldn't resist; I dashed down to the lake and hopped into the canoe. Suddenly I remembered my penance, but it was too late. I looked around

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and—fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your perspective—there were all kinds of people around. And so I proceeded to try to paddle, sitting backwards in the canoe and holding the paddle upside-down. If you've ever tried such a thing, you know that it gets you absolutely nowhere. (Laughter.)

REGGIE RAY: Thank you, Mother Tessa. Judy, would you like to add anything?

JUDY LIEF: In this discussion I seem to be representing the students who try to manage *with* a teacher. In my case, I was going blithely along with no intention at all of looking for a teacher, when, through some quirk of chance, I happened to run into a genuine teacher, years ago in New York City. Now I am in the further unlikely situation of having to talk about that relationship in his presence. (She looks at Trungpa Rinpoche, who looks back over his glasses.) I suppose this is my Buddhist penance. (Laughter.)

As any typical American, I was always suspicious of any kind of hierarchical relationship, whether it involved my parents, teachers, or anyone else in a position of authority. During the 1960's and 1970's there were many spiritual teachers in this country who were presenting all kinds of spiritual teachings and offering many varieties of promises. In the midst of all that, I happened to run into Trungpa Rinpoche, who didn't offer any promises at all. Somehow that intrigued me. So I became his student and decided to follow the basic instruction, which was to practice meditation. I don't think I realized at the time how extremely fortunate I was to have encountered such an uncompromisingly genuine teacher. All I knew was that I suddenly had a new element of discomfort in my life.

In my practice, and in my relationship with my teacher generally, I have found that I am continually thrown back on myself. Often when I would ask a question, it would simply resonate hollowly in space. I'd be left hanging there, waiting for the clarifying response. As I went on, I found that my

questions became more and more intensified and constant. I was becoming enlivened, in fact. On the one hand I experienced the discomfort of contrast: the more I perceived my teacher's wisdom, the strength of his tradition, and the depth of his understanding, the more I felt stupid, awkward, lacking in understanding, and totally hopeless as a student. And yet, on the other hand, I also felt tremendous inspiration. His world wasn't really alien to me, but was actual proof that it is possible to achieve realization; it is possible to manifest gentleness, compassion, and enlightenment.

My relationship to my teacher is simultaneous pain and pleasure: the pain of contrast and the delight of discovering that there is something real to spiritual traditions, that it is possible to become a genuine human being. I suppose that is the combination of qualities which forms the basis of real trust—it is a trust that is by no means based on blindness. In fact, I personally feel that the mark of a true teacher is that the student's inquisitiveness and interest in the world is heightened, rather than satisfied. At the same time, to be a student means simply that one follows the teacher's instructions. If he or she tells you to go on retreat and meditate for a month, you do it. And then you find out the reasons for yourself.

BROTHER DAVID: If I may, I would like to ask Trungpa Rinpoche a question. There is presently a great deal of discussion in the Roman Catholic Church as to whether a spiritual director is responsible for expanding people's political horizons in relation to the spiritual life. In a world in which every day as many men, women, and children die of hunger as if a city of 50,000 inhabitants had been wiped off the map, it seems a little strange to be preoccupied with whether you are eating a little more than you should, or fasting as much as you should. And although it is of course important to be kind to people and to help them, that attitude may or may not naturally extend to a concern about the arms race. So my question is, to what extent do you think the spiritual director is responsible for these political dimensions of the disciples' development?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: I think he or she is very responsible, very much so. Nevertheless, relating to a spiritual teacher is a matter of personal discipline to begin with, rather than just being a way of jumping into a social club. Preparation of oneself through contemplative practice is important. Then you begin to see clearly, and you start to become helpful, so that at least *you* don't have to be helped.

REGGIE RAY: Rinpoche, I have a question that concerns the apparent discrepancy between the situation in Tibet, where anyone entering the spiritual life would have a teacher and work with him closely over many years, and the situation in the West, where there are probably tens of thousands of people who would love to find a good teacher and who would benefit greatly by that, but who are unable to do so. In terms of your situation now, you have the responsibility of being a spiritual director for over 3,000 students. I wonder if you could say something about how you have extended your role of teacher so that you, personally, don't have to see every student every week, but yet the same process of teaching is still maintained.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: That is an interesting question. The teacher is not just in the role of behaving like a mother with her baby: changing diapers and bottle-feeding. The teacher creates a whole world. In the Christian tradition, you have churches and cathedrals. As soon as you go inside, you begin to feel the presence of God. Someone doesn't have to stand at the door and whisper to each person who enters, "There is God up there." (Laughter.) It is a question of creating the general environment, and then that environment teaches a lot to whoever enters. Also, in our sangha older students sometimes act as teachers. It is not that they are necessarily empowered or regarded as enlightened, but teaching others is considered part of their training. In that way a whole society can gradually be created. It is not just a matter of one man working hard all the time. So I think that is an important point here.

REGGIE RAY: Father Thomas, is there also an understanding in the

Christian tradition that the spiritual community, such as the monastery, is an extension of the teacher, so that the openness and learning you experience in that relationship extends into other situations? Do you have that expanded idea of what the teacher actually embodies?

FATHER KEATING: Oh yes. As Rinpoche said, spiritual direction isn't just a matter of bottle-feeding. The teacher tries to awaken the student's own capacity to hear the will of God. The abbot is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery. As that faith grows, it extends to other situations, because God is not only in the abbot; he is also in everything else, as Brother David said earlier.

JUDY LIEF: Once again from the perspective of a student, it seems that part of the teacher's role is to transmit an understanding of how to hear teachings altogether. I think many of us start out with a fixed and narrow sense of what teachings are, and we tend to be focused on the literal words. Over time, the teacher expands what our ears are able to pick up, and what our eyes are able to see. We begin to perceive his display of teachings through all the sense organs. Then we are also able to go back and rediscover what we thought we learned years ago. Because of having heard one teaching clearly, all the other teachings begin to shimmer and glow.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: This brings another dimension into this discussion, which may be especially appropriate for the many people who do not have a spiritual guide. Without even realizing it, very often in our search for a teacher we are looking for a personality that seems compatible with our own. Sometimes it may be more possible to initially connect with a particular set of teachings than with a teacher. That was very much my own experience. When I first went to India looking for a master, I met Munindra-ji, and what inspired me from the very first moment was the quality of his teachings. This was what motivated me to continue the practice. Out of that, I later developed a relationship to him as a teacher.

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m as a teacher.

REGGIE RAY: Roshi, earlier today you said that the main difference between Japanese Zen students and American Zen students is in their attitude toward obedience. I wonder if you would say a little more about that intriguing comment.

EIDO ROSHI: Actually, that was what one of my students said to me. When my teacher, Soen Roshi,[3] was visiting me in New York, my students watched me serving him, and they saw the loving kind of relationship we had. After a few weeks, one of my students said to me, "Roshi, I must say that, watching you and Soen Roshi together, and then seeing ourselves and you together in America, there are a lot of similarities, but there is one big difference. The difference is that, in our case, there is a basic deficiency of obedience." (Laughter.) In Japan, obedience is not spoken about very much, but it has been performed by students for centuries. I, myself, had two teachers. My first teacher I tried my best with, like Brother David, but there was some kind of chemical reaction: somehow it didn't work out. It wasn't a deficiency of obedience in that case, but a chemical reaction. When I met my second teacher, Soen Roshi, for the first time, I felt a great congeniality, and this feeling silently conveyed to me that I could be happily obedient. He has been my teacher for about thirty years now. So, it is my own feeling that, if there is a deficiency of obedience between myself and my students, perhaps there is a difficult chemical reaction between us. (Roshi laughs, laughter.)

FATHER KEATING: Frankly, Roshi, I don't think it is just a chemical reaction. I think Americans generally prefer not to obey if they can possibly get away with it. (Laughter.) In particular, they like to get rid of abbots from time to time. (Laughter.) It doesn't mean Americans aren't great people; but, in this democratic society of ours, they like a change of administration once in a while!

QUESTION (from audience): I also have a feeling that many people in America are turning to therapists for the kind of relationship they haven't been able to establish with spiritual leaders. I am

personally concerned about this, and see it as a potential perversion of psychotherapy. Rinpoche, at what point would you say therapist should refer his or her clients to a guru?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: I think that, in the therapeutic world, color and individuality can become very important. One is often listening not so much to the message as to the therapist's colorfulness and congeniality—which is problematic. Therapy often becomes a personality cult. In working with a spiritual teacher, it is not the teacher himself who you are following, but the teachings. And I think the point at which you should leave therapy for spiritual practice is when you are more or less together: you are capable of looking after yourself, roughly speaking. (Laughter.) Then you should go to a spiritual teacher and begin to practice. At first you may find that you are almost regressing. You are going back to the previous state. You may find that the practice is not easy, and the general conditions may not seem helpful. Nonetheless you should go on. At a certain point that situation will become at least congenial, and you will begin to realize that your ego has been playing a game on you. When you realize that, then the kind of personality worship you had for your therapist begins to fall apart. You realize how much you have been trying, very badly trying, to take care of yourself. We always feel we need help and comfort, and we are horrified by discomfort. But when we practice, and we begin to be more reasonable, discomfort isn't seen as all that bad—or pleasure as all that great—and we begin to find our way.

QUESTION: Father Keating, wouldn't you say that your interpretation of obedience is particularly Cistercian? I am a Catholic nun, and I very much treasure the monastic tradition within our church. But I would also like to say that in the context of the present renewal within the Roman Catholic Church, we are discovering that there are other ways to interpret obedience and to respond to that movement of the Spirit we all feel. I have had many spiritual fathers in my life, but I am grateful that I have not had *too* many. Otherwise I may not have looked

as much to the resources of my own spirit, my own being. By relying on our own experiences, and also by reaching back into our tradition, we can find different kinds of resources than we might be accustomed to. For instance, the Way of Friendship, which is actually part of our tradition, is a way to God. We have recently rediscovered such riches *because* we have lacked the direct relationship to a teacher that has been enjoyed in the Buddhist tradition.

FATHER KEATING: Sister, you have touched upon a controversy that is important within the Roman Catholic community at present. The description of obedience that I gave belongs primarily to a monastic context, and might be called "ascetical obedience." I heartily agree that the concept of obedience has at times been confused with relationships that do not provide the proper context for it, such as obedience to superiors who reside far away and do not know you. Ascetical obedience has to be practiced in the right context, and with the ultimate goal of assuming more and more responsibility for oneself. If you cannot find the right milieu for ascetical obedience, then I agree that it would be a matter of cultivating obedience to the Spirit, and of being faithful to your own conscience.

REGGIE RAY: Would anyone like to offer some final comments?

BROTHER DAVID: Well, it's not so much a comment, but an image we can take away. Actually I have two images, and I think we have to make a choice between these two when we go in search of spiritual direction. The first is of a model airplane. As we are soaring along on our spiritual flights, we entrust the master with a remote control. He pushes little buttons to make the airplane fly, and to give it direction. The other image is that of a homing pigeon. All the spiritual director has to do—although this is also quite a challenge—is to let the pigeon out of its cage, and it will find its own way home. And I personally prefer the second image. (Applause.)

REGGIE RAY: Rinpoche?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Well, I think the whole thing boils down to a question of needing discipline and some sense of joy, and also of having a true and real spiritual friend who will speak to you and help you. Sometimes he will encourage you, and sometimes he will punish you. Such a guru or teacher is always necessary. That seems to be the contemplative tradition altogether. Without that, we are completely lost. However clever we may be, however devoted we may be, still we are lost. Thank you.

Trust

Loppön Lodrö Dorje
Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Joseph Goldstein
Reginald Ray
Judith Lief

QUESTION (from audience): One of the difficulties I encounter on the path is that I am unable to trust in the reality of spiritual transformation. How does one develop confidence that there is such a reality? How do you know that the teacher or the path is valid, and that it is right to trust?

LODRÖ DORJE: In Buddhism, trust always begins with trusting in oneself and one's experience. When we come to the path, our initial experience is of personal pain, discomfort, insecurity, anxiety, alienation, and so on. In other words, we start with the experience of suffering. The teacher responds to that with the instruction to practice meditation and to acknowledge and accept one's experience for what it is. On that basis, we quite possibly begin to feel that it is worthwhile to practice, which then leads us to develop trust in the teacher and the tradition that suggested it was a good idea. And then the relationship goes on from there.

FATHER KEATING: Yes, I would agree that it takes time to develop

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trust. It is a help to know one's tradition well enough to realize that the difficulties one is going through are also everyone's difficulties. They are nothing new. And in a monastery, it is a great help to see that someone in his eighties is still toddling around. He has made it through the discipline and is still there. Entering a monastery is like entering upon an apprenticeship. No one can learn to be a cabinetmaker overnight. In the course of two or three years you may feel many times that you are never going to make it; it is hopeless. But your teacher, your elders, your guide, and the community that supports you tell you to wait a little while and keep trying. Little by little, your experience begins to yield to the fact that you do get through certain tough spots. Thus you develop confidence. Also in the Christian tradition we put our confidence in Christ; what we don't have he can give us. So the dimension of prayer is also extremely important for developing trust.

BROTHER DAVID: Of course, the kind of trust we must give one another, including our teachers, is not a trust *in* this and that, but an unconditional trust. When our trust is based on the condition that the other person will do this or that, then we are already on the wrong track. When we trust unconditionally, we trust in the seed within the other person. We don't know yet how it will manifest, but we trust that it is a good seed.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: I think there is often a fundamental misunderstanding about trust. As an experiment, I would like to ask you to feel yourself sitting on your chair—just feel that sensation. Is there any lack of trust in that experience? It is so simple. The person who doubts or has a lack of basic trust is actually lost in thought, lost in concept. As soon as we drop down to the level of actual experience, we discover that the trust is already there. It is not an exotic or metaphysical experience. It is not even something that has to be developed. Instead, it is something accessible to all of us, which can be remembered in each moment.

REGGIE RAY: Another side of this issue is the question of how we can

create social or political institutions that encourage people to have their own integrity and sense of trust, so that they can find their own way. Both Judy Lief and I have been working on the development of Naropa Institute as a place that provides such an educational environment. Judy, could you say something about trust in an institutional context?

JUDY LIEF: Well, lately I've been thinking a lot about how important it is *not* to trust, because so often people naively place their trust in leaders or traditions and get badly burned in the process. Then they become cynical and hardened. So I think the starting point is distrust, by which I mean constant questioning. Otherwise trust that is based on an external object can reinforce a feeling of duality.

I feel that a good educational system provokes the spirit of inquiry, which gives rise to a level of trust that is real and simple and quite different from our need for feedback or for confirmation of our experience. I think a lot of people can't and shouldn't be trusted; in fact, we can't even trust our own thoughts and perceptions, because they are so colored by hopes and fears and desires. So I would like to suggest that distrust is the foundation for real trust.

Chapter 9: Notes

1. Epigraph: *The Orthodox Way*, p. 128.
2. Epigraph: *Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand*, p. 89.
3. Soen Nakagawa Roshi died March 11, 1984.

Called into Solitude

Reginald Ray
William McNamara O.C.D
David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
Thomas Keating O.C.S.O.
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi

REGGIE RAY: Father William, how would you assess the overall health of the monastic element in the Catholic tradition? Is monasticism on the rise or on the decline?

FATHER MCNAMARA: There is presently an effort to renew the monastic tradition of the Western Church. I personally see the life of the whole Church, and of society itself, depending to a very large extent, as it did in the Dark Ages, on whether or not monasticism is indeed profoundly renewed. I must say that I do not think it is presently being profoundly renewed. I feel the changes to date have been rather superficial adaptations and accommodations which have come about as survival measures. There are of course some refreshing exceptions to this general trend of mediocrity, and hopefully there are enough exceptions to indicate that more positive developments will happen in the future, so that we will be able to pass through this new Dark Age with the great assistance of monasticism, as we did in the past.

I find it difficult to imagine a renewal of the spiritual life of the laity without a healthy monastic tradition. Monasticism is a symbol which lay people need. It is a wonderful sign of God exerting his sovereign claim on human beings. Here are men and women who so carefully regulate their lives that they are always watching. Here are people who are God-filled, God-intoxicated, and whose lives make no sense except for God. The laity needs to know that those monks are always there; then they can go about their business in the fray and in the marketplace buoyed up by the knowledge that those monks are willing to waste their lives and be fools. (Laughter.)

BROTHER DAVID: To hear you speaking about wasting time reminds me of a talk Suzuki Roshi once gave to the Tassajara community. He said, "You ought to waste time . . . " and of course everyone was very surprised at this, until he added, " . . . conscientiously." I think that's the kind of "waste" you had in mind, too.

FATHER MCNAMARA: Conscientiously and creatively.

QUESTION (from audience): I can't help thinking that in the West monasteries are so cut off from the rest of society that whatever inspiration the monks and nuns might generate through their contemplative practices never reaches the rest of us. Although I think a life spent in retreat and solitude is valid, I don't really see, if the monks and nuns never come out, how monasticism is playing such a critical role in society at large.

FATHER MCNAMARA: Some of the people who convey the most truth, the most love, and the freshest dimensions of being never come out. Look at the effect Thomas Merton had on the whole of American society before he ever physically came out. And even when he finally visited the East, he came to the conclusion that he didn't need to go, after all. I would say that a lot depends on personal vocation. Some will come out in order to speak; some will stay, but will write about their understanding; and some will be held by God in silence. For those who stay, the monastic life is in itself proof that God is real, and that there are deep interior values to life. The newness of one's life can be so fresh and so unparalleled that it is the greatest kind of witness.

Whenever a Christian monk is genuinely called into solitude, that monk goes into deeper silence *not* in order to achieve some satisfaction, however pious or holy. He or she goes in because such a monk has been called, summoned. And who can resist the divine, infinite calling? A genuine monk is convinced that the deeper one goes into solitude the more he or she is in redemptive touch with all people, with all creatures, with all the universe.

QUESTION: Father William, what do you see to be the responsibility of the laity? What can the laity bring to the monastery?

FATHER MCNAMARA: There's a great dance going on between monks and lay people. The monk makes a specific kind of contribution to lay life, and lay people come to the monastery with their viewpoint in order to challenge, provoke, feed, and inspire the monks. So it's a give-and-take relationship. One without the other wouldn't provide as nourishing or as inspiring a situation.

FATHER KEATING: As a monk who has been a member of one of the stricter monastic traditions in Christianity, and who has been on this journey for about forty years, I would just like to focus on a specific issue here, if I may. There is no question that the monastic witness and environment is of transcendent importance to society: the question is whether the structures of monastic life as they now exist in the Christian tradition are the right ones for our time. I see a great need for another kind of monastic commitment, one which would be open-ended and temporary, while still being truly monastic in the quality of its practice. It seems to me that there are presently many Christians who would resonate to the kind of monastic life that is expressed in Zen and Tibetan monasticism. Without denigrating the great value of solitude, I would suggest that an alternation between solitude and social action could be a beneficial rhythm. Incidentally, there are some representatives of the Protestant tradition in our midst, and perhaps after listening to all this talk about monasteries, they will be inspired to start one! If you do, may I suggest that you consider some of the Eastern models, rather than those that have developed and solidified in the West. Our monasteries have great value, but at the same time I think they tend to be stuck in a mind-set that comes from a different time than the one we are now in. (Applause.)

REGGIE RAY: Father Thomas, are you objecting to the idea of a cloistered community in general, or to the notion of a

lifetime commitment? You don't object to periods of strict solitude, do you?

FATHER KEATING: Oh no! By no means. Indeed, retreat! (Laughter.) All I'm saying is that perpetual enclosure could be replaced by a system that would make it possible for someone, at a certain period of his or her life, to serve outside the cloister for a time, or even permanently. And I don't wish to imply that the already-existing orders must change; they have their life and they should be allowed to keep it. But I am suggesting that in the Christian religion there needs to be a new kind of structure existing alongside the old ones.

REGGIE RAY: Roshi, I'm wondering how the Zen tradition has traditionally dealt with this issue.

EIDO ROSHI: The Japanese Zen monasteries, especially the Rinzai Zen monasteries, are communities of monks. However, unlike the Christian monasteries, Zen monks are not expected to stay in the monastery the rest of their lives. In fact, there is a sort of unwritten rule that says if a Zen Buddhist monk stays in a monastery more than ten years, either he will become an abbot or something is wrong with him. So, during his training in the monastery, his connection with society is rather limited, so that he can concentrate on his spiritual training. But he is not bound to the monastery for life; rather, he is encouraged to deepen his insight to prepare him to relate to the larger world. Every since Zen Buddhism began coming to this country, and especially during the past twenty or thirty years, we have been trying out what Father Keating has described: a kind of lay monastery. However, as far as I am concerned, a lay monastery should not be a commune. It is still, after all, a monastery consisting of monks and lay dharma brothers and sisters. My monastery, Dai Bosatsu Zendo in upstate New York, is struggling to establish such a monastic community, to meet the spiritual needs of twentieth-century America.

Celibacy I

David Steindl-Rast O.S.B.
William McNamara O.C.D.

BROTHER DAVID: Father William, I understand that in your community there are men and women living together while following a celibate life. Now, that's such a wonderful and unique example to have in the Christian Church today. I think you are the only community doing such a thing. So I would like to hear, first of all, how you got permission to do it . . . (laughter) . . . and secondly, how it's working out.

FATHER MCNAMARA: Yes, I do agree with you, Brother, that this is a most significant aspect of our lives as a community, and I think it may be our most important contribution to the church. When I first spoke to Pope John about it, as I recall I was rather oblique. (Laughter and applause.) I remained that way until the whole thing got going. It was difficult in the beginning. We all proceeded very carefully, because we didn't have any models to go by. We wanted to make sure that our idea would not be spoiled early in our career, but would have a chance to develop into a real and living example. We've now been living this way for twenty-five years, and most of the difficulties are over. As for how it's worked out, well, living with women . . . there are a lot of things I could say. (Laughter.) It's wonderful. I think nothing can take its place. A woman evokes from a man, and a man from a woman, something that is not otherwise evoked. I think it is important that we develop within the monastic tradition this idea of celibate lovers—that we learn how to be highly sexed, and to have warm, intimate, passionate relationships, and yet to be willing to deliberately renounce the genital privileges and pleasures of spousal love. That is the religious celibate expression of love.

BROTHER DAVID: As for the first part of your answer, it has been said that it is much easier in the Roman Catholic Church to get absolution than it is to get permission (laughter), so I think you

went about it the right way. But I would like to ask you to explore the second part of your answer a little further. I'm not quite clear why, in your vision, your community renounces genital activities. Is it because you see sexual contact as being basically undesirable, or is it that you want to clearly separate your community from involvement with the householder way of life?

FATHER MCNAMARA: I don't think that a celibate, mixed community would have a chance of survival if it did not adhere strictly to both renunciation of genital privileges as well as renunciation of the conjugal home life. Renunciation really is a deprivation, because both privileges are in themselves quite wonderful, I think. It is a mortification and it is a discipline. But there are wonderful fruits and byproducts that come from that kind of free, deliberate renunciation.

BROTHER DAVID: Could you articulate specifically how these privileges would be detrimental?

FATHER MCNAMARA: In our eremetical lifestyle, although there is a great deal of silence and solitude, there is also a great deal of community life. A genital expression of love would inevitably lead to the kind of possessiveness that rips a community apart with jealousy and rivalry. It has been my experience of humankind, and it is also the revelation of the Bible, that the central sin is jealousy. Right from the beginning, people have either been jealous of God or jealous of one another.

QUESTION (from audience): According to Rumi and other mystical poets, the visual contact between lovers who are spiritually sensitive can supercede and excel all the delights of genital contact. Now, in that case are we really talking about celibacy as renunciation? It is certainly convenient in a monastic situation not to have to have genital contact, but is that really a virtue when people are living and sharing powerful emotional and spiritual lives? Isn't abstinence really a simple accommodation to the realities of monastic life?

FATHER MCNAMARA: In the case of every member of our community, it is a virtue—a heroic virtue, I can assure you. (Laughter.) Granted, in the case of many religious, celibacy has become a convenience and an accommodation, so in that case it wouldn't necessarily be a virtue.

QUESTION: Can you conceive of a monastic model that included married couples and their families? Would that also pose a problem for the core of your community?

FATHER MCNAMARA: No, I don't see that as a problem. In fact, one family has been closely associated with us for a number of years now, and that has been a happy, fruitful arrangement. I hope that more families will also join us. The Celtic monastic life, which is my favorite historical instance of monasticism, took this form. I would like to see our community grow in that direction as well.

QUESTION: Given that married people could also have the monastic experience, do you feel that celibacy is in any way inherently advantageous as an alternative to marriage?

FATHER MCNAMARA: Well, they are different experiences. I wouldn't say that one is better than the other, but each is qualitatively different. One who is celibate does have more independence and more solitude, which creates a certain atmosphere. I suppose I would say that celibacy provides a particular freedom that is not otherwise achieved.

Celibacy II

Tessa Bielecki

Those of us who are celibate have made a choice, and I can say that I not only like being celibate, I love it. Eros is the greatest gift that God

him at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. With the death of the sixteenth Karmapa, and in anticipation of the seventeenth Karmapa's arrival and empowerment, Situ Rinpoche has assumed temporary responsibility, along with three other appointed regents, for the spiritual leadership of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. He has also been active in developing community projects to assist Tibetan refugees in India; in teaching Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism to both Tibetan and Western students; and in establishing Maitreya Institute, a series of Western-based educational centers for East-West studies. In 1976, he re-established the seat of the Situpas at Sherab Ling in northern India, where he now resides. He is the author of *Way to Go: Sowing the Seed of Buddha.*

David Steindl-Rast

Born in Vienna, Austria, Brother David was raised in the Catholic tradition. As he was coming into his teens, the Nazis occupied Austria and began persecuting the church. As a result, the adolescent rebelliousness that is often directed against the established religious and cultural values was in this case directed against Nazi ideology. The Catholic priests, who were often heroic in their resistance and courage, became role models and drove young idealists such as David deeper into the Christian faith. In college, he studied art, anthropology, and psychology. He earned degrees from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and the Psychological Institute and received a Ph.D. degree in experimental psychology from the University of Vienna. David was attracted to the monastic life through the Rule of Saint Benedict, which to him embodied spirituality in its least diluted form. He spent a number of years searching for a monastic community that lived according to the Rule, until 1953, when he joined the newly-founded Benedictine Monastery of Mount Savior in the Finger Lakes region of New York. After twelve years of monastic training, he received permission to explore Zen Buddhism, which he then did under the guidance of Hakuun Yasutani Roshi, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, Soen Nakagawa Roshi, and Eido Shimano Roshi. In 1968, he cofounded the Center for Spiritual Studies, which brought together members of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Christian faiths. He has lectured worldwide on the topics of contemplative renewal, interreligious dialogue, and world peace. During the present period of his life, Brother David spends about three

months each year traveling and teaching; the remaining time he spends in hiding in a monastic hermitage. He is the author of *A Listening Heart* and *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer.*

George Timko

Father Timko was raised in the Slavonic tradition of the Orthodox Church of America. As a young man, he was an active participant in the church; however, since he was English-speaking, the gospel and liturgy, which were entirely in the Slavonic language, were inaccessible to him. At age twenty-five, he experienced an awakening through reading the gospel and felt a strong inner pull to go to seminary. He attended St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York, where Father George Florovsky introduced him to the *Philokalia,* a compilation of writings of the early Fathers. He was ordained into the priesthood when he was thirty years old. His first parish assignments were in Marblehead, Ohio and Whitestone, Long Island. He developed a rigorous personal discipline based on the instructions of the early Fathers. Often when he spoke out of that experience, he was accused of having "Buddhist tendencies." This provoked his curiosity, and he turned to Buddhist texts to find out what was "Buddhist" about his experience and understanding of how the mind works. He also began practicing hatha yoga, first for health reasons, and later as a way to complement Christian prayer and meditation with a self-awareness discipline. Through yoga, he learned that it was possible to let the effort and struggle of the will relax through non-effort. Father Timko is now a member of the interreligious Snowmass Group founded by Father Thomas Keating in 1984. He is married, has five children and four grandchildren, and is currently a parish priest in Buffalo, New York.

Chögyam Trungpa

The Venerable Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche was born in eastern Tibet in 1939. He was recognized at infancy, through a vision by His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa, to be the eleventh incarnation in the line of Trungpas, who traditionally oversaw the Kagyu monasteries in the district of Surmang. He began his spiritual training when he was five years old and was ordained as a novice monk when he was eight. Through his root guru, Jamgon Kongtrul of Sechen, and also through the teachings