

**The Zen Master in America: Dressing the Donkey with Bells and Scarves**  
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**“It is almost always instructive to look at the actual evidence for what are taken to be ‘established facts’....”<sup>2</sup>**

Modern day Zen masters/roshi,<sup>3</sup> while enjoying the decided advantage of being part of a tradition that imputes to them quasi-divine qualities, suffer the disadvantage of living in an age of widespread information. Thus, while the image of the Zen masters of the past bask in the unquestioned glow of hagiography, modern day Zen masters risk charges of alcoholism, sexual harassment, and the threat of lawsuits, all of which can end up in books, newspapers or on the web.

The accessibility to the lives of modern masters allows us to examine them more accurately than their counterparts, the ancient masters of China, Japan and Korea.<sup>4</sup> Whereas in America, they have knowable lives, capable of being documented, in the ancient Far East, we know almost nothing about them, or if, in fact, they even existed. These masters in America are flesh and blood humans about whom we may discern some very specific facts: how they behave, how they use their power, how they understand their position, etc. In this essay, I will show that, in America, the idealized presentation of the Zen master is frequently, if not always, substantially different from the actual person who fills the position, or, in other words, that the supposed all-wise, all-knowing Zen master is more fiction than fact.

Some of these qualities imputed to the Zen master are simplicity, innocence, and lack of self-interest or desire. The master is said to be a person whose actions flow solely out of compassion for other sentient beings. He<sup>5</sup> is imputed to possess a timeless and trans-cultural wisdom, the ability to see the truth behind appearances and to have the

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<sup>1</sup> I welcome comments from the reader. Please send to slachs@att.net.

<sup>2</sup> Schopen, Gregory, “Monks and the Relic Cult in the Mahāparinibbāsutta: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism,” in From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion, ed. by Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen, Mosaic Press, 1991, p.187.

<sup>3</sup> The terms Zen master and roshi while technically may have different meanings, for the purposes of this paper they will be used interchangeably. Most American Zen students use the terms interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> See Downing, Michael, Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center, Counterpoint, 2001, and Butler, Katy, “Events are the Teacher,” The CoEvolution Quarterly, winter 1983, pp. 112-123 discuss the sexual scandals and other problems associated with Richard Baker roshi of the San Francisco Zen Center while Boucher, Sandy, Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism, Harper and Row, 1988, pp. 225-235 discusses sexual improprieties associated with Soen Sa Nim, leader and founder of the Kwan Um Zen School in Providence, R.I. These are but three examples discussing improprieties with post WWII Zen masters in America. See Victoria, Brian, Zen At War, Weatherhill, 1997 for extending back to the late nineteenth century this closer look at Zen masters in Japan. Importantly, many of the Zen masters Victoria examines were influential in bringing Zen to America. See also papers by the author available on the internet.

<sup>5</sup> Since traditionally most roshi have been male, and since all the roshi I refer to are male, I have kept the pronoun “he” through out this paper. This in no way means women cannot be roshi; in fact, the number of female Zen teachers in western countries has increased dramatically in the last twenty years.

prerogative to speak expertly on all subjects. In fact, he is taken to be last in an unbroken chain of enlightened, unblemished masters reputedly going back 2500 years to the historical Sakyamuni Buddha. But, this portrait can only exist if we ignore the irritating complexity and contradictions of actual lives and real history.

This image of the perfected being in the person of the Zen master was originally popularized in the West by the Zen books of D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, and later, by the bestsellers The Three Pillars of Zen by Phillip Kapleau and Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind<sup>6</sup> by Shunryu Suzuki, each of which sold over one million copies. For those joining a Zen center, this image is further repeated in the talks (J. *teisho*) of the teacher, in the assurances of senior students, in readings in the vast Zen literature, in rituals, and, finally, for those practicing koans,<sup>7</sup> in the practice itself.

This is not to say that Zen practice under a Zen master is without merit. The well-trained Zen roshi may possess admirable personal qualities, a multitude of insights, and the ability to both correct his students' practice and inspire them to practice diligently. But, the image held up in the standard model of Zen<sup>8</sup> more accurately describes Zen mythology and ideology than the way a real person can, and does, actually live.

Now that this myth of quasi-divine qualities and unbroken lineage back to the historical Buddha has landed in modern America, we must scrutinize a much more complex picture. In this picture, I will show that, while modern day masters are imputed to possess the above-mentioned qualities, there is, frequently, an unconscious collusion between the institution, the master and the students to make believe that these qualities actually do exist. Arguably, both teachers and students internalize the Zen rhetoric of enlightened Zen master, Dharma transmission<sup>9</sup>, and unbroken lineage<sup>10</sup> in direct connection to the

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<sup>6</sup> Suzuki, D., T., Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series, Rider & Company, 1949, Kapleau, Philip roshi, The Three Pillars of Zen, Weatherhill, 1965. Suzuki, Shunryu, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Weatherhill, 1970. See page 18 of Zen Mind for perhaps the most idealized description of the Zen roshi in the English language.

<sup>7</sup> Heine, Steven and Wright, Dale S., ed. The Koan, Oxford University Press, 2000. This book has a wonderful collection of articles on many aspects of the history, use, and development of the koan. For concise instructions from the famous Ch'an master Hsu yun, on the actual way to practice with a hua t'ou, (Ch. Word-head) a simplified form of the koan used widely in China, see Luk, Charles Ch'an and Zen Teaching, First Series, Rider and Co., 1969, pp. 37 – 41.

<sup>8</sup> By the standard model of Zen I mean the mythology that Zen lineage is unbroken and began with the mind-to-mind transmission between Sakyamuni Buddha and Mahakasyapa and continued in a unitary lineage through twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs and six Chinese Patriarchs before becoming multi-branched. It is, supposedly, always based on spiritual attainment and became institutionalized through the ritual of Dharma transmission. The master, supposedly, is beyond the understanding of ordinary people because he acts from the enlightened mind. Part of this model is that the Golden Age of Chan was the Tang dynasty along with the history of Zen presented as biography of masters interacting with their students in verbal repartee' using colloquial language and sometimes rough physical contact. This model, however, was fully constructed later, during the Sung dynasty as discussed by many scholars: Foulk, Faure, McCrae, and Cole to name just a few.

<sup>9</sup> Dharma transmission is the formal empowerment by the teacher making his student a new teacher. This places the student in the teacher's mythological unbroken lineage going back to the Buddha.

historical Buddha, Shakyamuni and perhaps beyond, to include the six mythical Buddhas. The students expect the real teacher to be an ideal teacher and look forward to having such an ideal teacher lead and instruct them.<sup>11</sup> The student who enters the practice having read a myth will expect to find the myth and will think they have found the myth. Unfortunately, they have found the myth without recognizing it for what it is. What they really have found, all too often, is another story of ordinary, flawed human behavior.

Students, for their part, develop a desire for the master's aura, recognition, and approval. They also learn to kow-tow to his authority and legitimacy. Further, they learn quickly that their advancement up the institutional ladder is completely dependent upon the master's good graces. Because the Dharma transmitted Zen master acts not in his own name and authority, but rather as the delegate of the institution, with all the authority and power that entails, he also monopolizes the means to salvation. So, we can understand that there might be multiple motives for "not seeing" the master as he really is, whether there be an absence of compassion or wisdom or the presence of sexual improprieties or alcoholism. This is what psychiatrists call "negative hallucination," i.e., keeping unconscious something that we perceive.

It will also help in understanding Zen social functioning to keep in mind Pierre Bourdieu's basic model of religious authority.<sup>12</sup> "Bourdieu argues that the standard setup for religious authority requires three mutually reliant zones: (1) a deep origin of truth or perfection in the form of a past sage, saint, deity, or Being; (2) a means for bringing that truth-perfection forward in time; and (3) a contemporary spokesperson for that primordial truth-perfection who is sanctioned to represent it in the present, and distribute it to the believing public, which delegates to him just this power and legitimacy. Bourdieu sees religious authority always involved in a to-ing and fro-ing, shuttling back and forth between its deep origins and its application in the present. Put otherwise, in any moment of religious authority, there is always an audience focused on the singular priest-figure, who is expected to funnel the totality of truth and being from the past into the group."<sup>13</sup> In Zen, this priest-figure is the Zen Dharma-transmitted master/roshi. In light of Bourdieu's ideas, it is not surprising that around Zen centers the focus is on the ritual of Dharma transmission and who does and does not have it, rather than on the meaning.

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<sup>10</sup> Zen is considered the most prominent form of Chinese Buddhism because it is the most Confucian. Its most eminent clerics and their patrons were from the literati class. They were all familiar with Confucian rituals, "especially those connected to ancestor worship and its corollary, genealogy." Zen's "pseudo-history was stated in terms of genealogy," that is, Dharma transmission and unbroken lineage, when the study of genealogy in China was at its peak. For an in depth look at the Chan/Confucian connection in the T'ang dynasty see, Jorgensen, John, "The 'Imperial' Lineage of Ch'an Buddhism: The Role of Confucian Ritual and Ancestor Worship in Ch'an's Search for Legitimation in the Mid- T'ang Dynasty", *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 35:89-134, (March 1987).

<sup>11</sup> This idea was suggested by Chang, Julia, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, Cambridge University press, 1997, p. 209.

<sup>12</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, "Rites of the Institution," in his *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard University Press, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> This concise statement and interpretation of Bourdieu's model of religious authority is from Alan Cole, "Simplicity for the Sophisticated: Rereading the Daode Jing for the Polemics of Ease and Innocence," *History of Religion*, vol. 46 (2006) 13.

Hence, it is not just the quasi-divine nature of the modern Zen master that needs reexamining. We also need to look at the Zen institution, especially the ritual of Dharma transmission, the engine for moving the original perfect truth and perfection forward in time, to see whether it really means what it has traditionally been assumed to mean.<sup>14</sup>

According to Zen mythology, for the past 2500 years, starting with Sakyamuni Buddha giving mind-to-mind transmission to Mahakasyapa, the master recognizes that his student understands the wordless teaching which has been passed down from the Buddha. This has been institutionalized as Dharma transmission. In the traditional view, this bestows upon the new master the authority one would accord the Buddha.

However, in practice, Dharma transmission is a much more ambiguous and flexible concept than the mythology would have us believe. Historically, it has been given for many reasons besides spiritual insight: for raising money to sustain a monastery, to establish and expand social connections, to spread a lineage and enhance the teacher's prestige by having more Dharma heirs, to maintain the continuity of the lineage, to enhance the authority of a missionary, to acknowledge managerial skill, and so on. We will show examples of this same ambiguousness down into modern times. What's more, though Zen, in general, makes superhuman claims for the master based on his spiritual attainment, in Sōtō Zen, the largest Zen sect in Japan, enlightenment is not at all a prerequisite for receiving Dharma transmission. Rather, only personal initiation between a master and disciple is required. Zen's mythology notwithstanding, Dharma transmission is only an institutional sanctioning of a teacher bestowing membership in a teaching lineage and may be no more than, as Buddhist scholar Holmes Welch said "like [getting] a Flash Gordon pin."<sup>15</sup> It tells us actually nothing of spiritual attainment or character, and it was designed that way from the beginning.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> There is much written on the many ways Dharma transmission has been understood. See Faure, Bernard, Rhetoric of Immediacy, Princeton University press, 1991, pp. 14, 17, 221, 225 for the surprising uses of Dharma transmission. See Welch, Holmes, Buddhism in China: 1900-1950, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 315 for transmission given to someone without ever having met or knowing if he would accept it. See Bodiford, William M., Soto Zen in Medieval Japan, University of Hawaii Press, 1993, p. 215 for Dharma transmission being only dependent on the ritual of personal initiation, rather than whether the disciple realized enlightenment or not. Also see my paper "Means of Authorization: Establishing Hierarchy in Chan/Zen Buddhism in America," a paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion Conference, 1999, pp. 14-18, available on the internet at [http://www.h-net.org/~buddhism/aar-bs/1999/lachs.htm#\\_ftn1](http://www.h-net.org/~buddhism/aar-bs/1999/lachs.htm#_ftn1).

<sup>15</sup> Welch, Holmes, "Dharma Scrolls and the Succession of Abbots in Chinese Monasteries." T'oung Pao International Journal of Chinese Studies, vol.50, 1963, pp. 93 – 149. Dharma transmission and their accompanying dharma scrolls were used in twentieth-century China in such varied ways that it is difficult to make any generalizations about them. Welch describes two types of dharma scrolls: monastery scrolls that belonged to and remained in the monastery and private scrolls that belonged to the individual receiving Dharma transmission.

<sup>16</sup> McCrae, John R., Seeing Through Zen, University of California Press, 2003, p. 10. See pp. 1-21 for a fresh perspective on lineage and Chan Buddhism. McCrae calls pretending to explain Ch'an in terms of lineal succession from one great master to another, the "string of pearls fallacy," where the string of masters are like pearls on a string. He adds, this is a variation on the "great man" fallacy of historical writing. Also see Cole, Alan, "Its All in the Framing", a paper given at U.C. Berkeley, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2002, for an examination of early Chan lineage and truth claims, read from a critical text analysis, rather than

For many people, knowing more about how Dharma transmission has been used historically will impact how they view modern masters. In addition, let us also look at one of the main tenets of the Zen master, i.e., his supposed lack of self interest. Will we also view the master differently if this main tenet of Zen ideology is shown to have flaws in its practical applications? Whether actually stated or merely implied, every student is made to understand that the master has no self-interest, only an interest in saving all sentient beings. That is to say, at a minimum, he is assumed to have only the best interest of the student at heart.

This claim of a lack of self interest is not unique to Zen. Pierre Bourdieu writes that to talk of interests has a “radically disruptive function: it destroys the ideology of disinterest, which is the ideology of clerics of every kind.”<sup>17</sup> One can see that this ideology is instrumental in separating the cleric from the flock, creating an absolute divide, whereas, in reality, there are continuous shades of gray. The cleric who lacks self-interest is viewed as being more capable of judging what is best for his flock, and, so, is more readily obeyed. For example, it is common for Zen students to hear from their master “You have too much ego; you are too concerned about yourself.” Is this always spoken in the best interest of the student? Or is it sometimes spoken, whether consciously or unconsciously, to keep the student off-guard, pliable, or non-questioning?

Because of Zen’s emphasis on no-self, we can argue that Zen places more importance than other religions on their clerics’, in this case the Zen masters’, lack of self interest. I will show, through multiple examples, that this doesn’t mean there is, in fact, a lack of self-interest, only that the self-interests can more easily be disguised beneath the Zen ideals of enlightened mind, selflessness and purity. They are also, traditionally, concealed in interpersonal relations with the master, which are heightened during the intensive week or longer meditation retreats (J. *sesshin*) and, especially so, through private interviews (J. *sanzen/dokusan*) with the master during these retreats.<sup>18</sup> This type of relationship with its inherent quality of domination is referred to by Pierre Bourdieu, as being “concealed beneath the veil of an enchanted relation.”<sup>19</sup>

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reading them “for information about Truth and Practice” or about “historical claims to own truth.” For a finely detailed analysis of early Chan lineage fabrication see Cole’s forthcoming book, Fathering Your Father.

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, Language and Symbolic Power, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 215.

<sup>18</sup> It is hard to overemphasize the importance of private interviews with the master, especially so during intensive meditation retreats. While the master sits in his room in meditation pose, the student enters with three bows and then sits in front of the master. Incense is burning; the room is quiet and dimly lit. It is in the privacy of the master’s room that the student presents his insight/understanding of Zen. It is here that the master will accept the understanding of the student, dismiss him/her almost immediately with a bell, or give some encouragement, admonition, or hint or help on how to proceed. There may be shouts, physical displays, or pushing and hitting. During intensive retreat, there may be up to five meetings a day. For people doing koan study, these meetings have special immediacy and importance. Koan study and moving the student along through the koan curriculum is a rarely discussed topic that needs further study.

<sup>19</sup> Language and Symbolic Power p. 24. The enchanted relationship is a form of symbolic violence, in contrast to overt violence; it is gentle, invisible violence... chosen as much as undergone. See also pp. 51 – 52 where Bourdieu points out that symbolic violence can only be exerted on a person predisposed to feel it. It is dependent on the social conditions that produce the intimidator and the intimidated.

As this mythology collides with Zen, as it is actually practiced in America, we will see how the mythology is taken at face value, though, of course, with consequences. Though Zen claims it cannot be looked at from the outside, Bourdieu's notion of the "habitus"<sup>20</sup> explains much of how the myth is translated into Zen life in America. Through Zen stories, writings, talks of the master, rituals, history (or, in my view, hagiography), and so on, a field is created where the Zen master is understood to be a selfless perfected being, beyond the understanding of normal mortals. All of this encourages a mindset where students and teacher act and react in particular ways. Throughout the paper I will give examples of how Bourdieu's idea of "habitus" manifests itself in Zen.

In the West, the idealized image of the Zen master is accepted by most westerners who become Zen practitioners. This belief in the ideal may serve the purpose of motivating someone to practice. However, imputing qualities and attainments to people that do not really possess them usually has consequences. These consequences, including psychological, financial and sexual exploitation, will likely be heightened when the context is one of extreme hierarchy, as is the case with Zen.<sup>21</sup> It also makes the master into a disingenuous role player, alienated in Peter L. Berger's sense.<sup>22</sup> In viewing how this Zen dynamic plays out in America, please keep in mind that no living Zen master need ever make claims for his own attainment. Rather, this is done by holding up the great attainment of his teacher and his teacher's hallowed line of ancestors. It is never necessary for any particular Zen master to make claims concerning his/her own level of perfection. The Zen institution does it for him by repeating the claim in the form of stories, koans, rituals,... An environment is created that predisposes both students and masters to act in certain ways. In the end, both fall prey to these fantasies.

It is good to keep in mind that the ritual of Dharma transmission produces dramatic effects. It really changes the transmitted person: first it transforms the understanding others have of him and importantly the behavior they adopt towards him, not the least being addressed by a title of great respect, that is, roshi in Japanese groups; and second,

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<sup>20</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, pp. 12-23. Simply put," the habitus is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways." The idea of habitus was introduced to avoid the belief that people only act from conscious deliberations or calculation rather than being predisposed to act in certain ways. See also, Bourdieu, Pierre, In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology, Stanford University press, 1990, p.131. " Habitus implies a 'a sense of one's place' but also a sense of the other's place" has particular meaning in the Zen context where the Zen master is imputed to have unquestioned authority embedded in a hierarchical system imported from East Asia.

<sup>21</sup> Because I have a number of papers available on the internet, I have received many emails from people who feel they were deceived and hurt by Zen teachers. These people, sometimes in extreme distress, often feel confused because they cannot understand how there could be a Zen master and Zen social context that so misled and disempowered them.

<sup>22</sup> Berger, Peter L., The Sacred Canopy, Anchor Books, 1967, pp. 81-101. The section "Religion and Alienation" describes this process well. Berger points out that alienation may become a great source of power as it removes doubts and uncertainties that may cause problems and hesitancy in a non-alienated person.

because it simultaneously changes the understanding the transmitted person has of himself, and the behavior he feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to his new role.

Before proceeding to discuss seven modern Zen masters that reflect this mythologizing, let me briefly mention that it is not my intention to level *ad hominem* attacks or to scandal-monger surrounding these modern teachers. To the contrary, there are a number of roshi I hold in high regard, Suzuki roshi being one of them. My purpose is, rather, to look at how real people, despite their exalted titles, imputed perfection and authority beyond question, behave in the real world. I will also examine a system that makes it nearly impossible for students to see their teacher's flaws, whether mild or egregious. Through this examination, I will show that it is not just these seven teachers who exhibit some "bad apple" qualities. It is the system that makes this kind of behavior virtually inevitable. As to why students have a need to see their teacher as a perfected being is a question not examined here. Nor is the impact of discovering that one's teacher is not all he is "cracked up to be." Of course, this phenomenon is not limited to Zen. All religions face the contradiction of idealization of their leadership with the fact of their real lives.<sup>23</sup>

The modern day Zen master is caught in a clash of cultures where order and hierarchy, treasured Eastern values, run headlong into individual freedom, openness, and equality, treasured Western values. As I discuss these seven roshi, I ask the reader to consider the following: Is the Zen master, presented as a perfected being, extraordinary? Or is he just a man, an ordinary one at that?

### **Richard Baker Roshi**

*Only when you give up everything can you see a true teacher. Even the name of Buddhism is already a dirty spot on our practice. The character and effort of our teachers is our teaching.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Milgram, Stanley, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, Harper Perennial, 1974. Beyond religion, the work of Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist, strongly suggests that a substantial majority of the population will follow an authority figure. Milgram's work shows that even malevolent authority figures will be obeyed by large numbers of "good" people. See pp. 123-134 "Why Obedience?-An Analysis." Milgram states, "Submission to authority is a powerful and prepotent condition in man." He adds, relevant to our discussion, that in humans "structures of authority are mediated by symbols rather than direct contests of physical strength."

<sup>24</sup> Chadwick, David, *The Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki*, Broadway Books, 1999, p. 146. Words in italics following section headings are the words of Suzuki roshi taken from *Crooked Cucumber*. Interestingly, in Suzuki's quote above, the onus for failing to see "a true teacher" falls fully on the student, who is unable to "give up everything." This theme, in one form or another, is often repeated around Zen centers. If there is some trouble between a student and a teacher or a student decides to leave, it is because he can not take the training, bow to the teacher's authority, and so on. It is always some short coming of the student. Can the "true teacher" be less than fully true?

In December, 1971, shortly before his death, Shunryu Suzuki roshi gave Richard Baker Dharma transmission in the Sōtō sect of Zen thus making Baker, for his students and for all future people in his lineage, an authentic link to the historical Buddha.<sup>25</sup> As such, Baker became the official teacher and Abbot<sup>26</sup> of the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) and Shunryu Suzuki's sole western heir. This Dharma transmission set in motion the financial, behavioral, and sexual scandal at the SFZC that culminated in 1983. Unfortunately, this scandal was not unique in American Zen history, for there are few major centers untouched by such scandals.<sup>27</sup> The Baker/ SFZC/ Suzuki case serves well as an example of what can go wrong, exposing some of the underlying causes and, all too often, toxic consequences.

These scandals and their accompanying toxic consequences all too often arise because the Zen master is presented as someone he is not. Zen mythology presents the master as a perfected being with a system of symbols and rituals that enhances his legitimacy. This imputed legitimacy obscures the power relation which, though having an aspect of technical competence, is actually a matter of institutional authority. There is a process of *misrecognition*: “the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are, but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the

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<sup>25</sup> Bodiford, William, “Emptiness and Dust: Zen Dharma Transmission Rituals” in Tantra in Practice, Princeton University Press, ed. by David Gordon White, 2000, pp. 299 – 307. Bodiford discusses a medieval Japanese ritual of Dharma transmission and its most powerful symbol, the genealogical table known as the “blood lineage” chart. In this ritual, the blood comes by cutting the tongue. The blood lineage chart is still used in Dharma transmission rituals, though in a less esoteric and simpler form. See Goldberg, Natalie, Long Quiet Highway: Waking up in America, New York: Bantam, 1994, p. 214. Goldberg's teacher, Katagiri roshi transmitted to eleven of his followers shortly before he died. These eleven Dharma heirs mixed their blood with Katagiri's to make the charts, one for each heir. See also Goldberg, Natalie, The Great Failure: A Bartender, a Monk, and My Unlikely Path to Truth, Harper San Francisco, 2004, pp. 73 – 148 for Katagiri's secret life and breaking the student/teacher boundary.

<sup>26</sup> Bodiford, William, “Dharma Transmission in Theory and Practice” in Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice, Oxford University Press, ed. by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, 2008, pp. 261-279. Bodiford discusses the history of Dharma transmission in the Soto sect and the complex system it is embedded in. Most significant to our discussion is that today in Japan in the Soto sect, “the key authority conferred by Dharma transmission is that it qualifies a priest to manage an ordinary local temple.” “It is listed as a requirement for the very lowest ecclesiastical status, instructor third class (santo kyoshi).” “The relatively low status of Dharma transmission means that in and of itself it does not qualify one to accept students or to train disciples.” It is after receiving Dharma transmission that “one's real development begins.” This is very different from the American understanding and use of Dharma transmission. Bodiford's article is must reading for anyone interested in having some sense of the complexities surrounding the history, meaning and use of Dharma transmission in Soto Zen in Japan.

<sup>27</sup> A partial list of Zen centers in addition to The San Francisco Zen Center that had trouble includes The Zen Studies Society in NYC, Moonspring Hermitage in Surry, Maine, The Los Angeles Zen Center, The Kwan Um School of Zen in Providence RI, The Toronto Zen Center, and The Kanzeon Zen Center in Bar Harbor, Maine. See Hickey, Shannon, “Clergy Training in American Zen”, a paper delivered at the AAR Annual Meeting, 2005, p.1 mentions scandals at American Zen centers including Taizan Maezumi roshi, founder of the Zen Center of L.A. suffering bouts of alcoholism and having extramarital affairs with female students, one being a teenager. Though years earlier he had treatment for alcoholism, in 1995 while in Japan, he drowned in a bath tub at his brother's temple, after a night of drinking. This information was kept secret until years later. Though Maezumi had a checkered ethical history between sexual scandal and alcohol problems, his Dharma heir Daido Looi wrote of Maezumi's deep concern for the precepts.

beholder.”<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu’s remark, “the prophet always preaches to the converted,” has particular relevance throughout this paper.

The scandal at the SFZC involved Baker’s high living,<sup>29</sup> generally arrogant behavior, controlling ways,<sup>30</sup> lying to and bullying his students,<sup>31</sup> as well as a number of extra-marital affairs with women, both students and non-students.

Baker was able to get away with such bad behavior, in part, because of the way he manifested his authority. He gave his followers two choices: obey his words without question or be marginalized. Being marginalized was tantamount to being forced to leave, a choice that was too painful for many people to contemplate. Leaving meant giving up what made life seem most meaningful, leaving close friendships and the joy of community. Therefore, in their need to remain at the Center, members recognized, consciously or unconsciously, a powerful incentive to buy fully into Zen's mythology. This was especially true of some of the older students and of people wanting to climb Zen Center's ladder to positions of authority, power, and prestige, which was totally dependent upon Baker's sanction. As Upton Sinclair said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on not understanding it." Obedience, subservience, and discipline were well rewarded at a large institution like the San Francisco Zen Center. Baker controlled rewards, such as providing a chance to live well at Green Gulch farm and granting positions of authority and respect at Tassajara monastery or the City Center. On the other hand, he dealt severely with people who stood up to him or spoke against him. According to Downing, almost everyone recalls “a pervasive and sometimes punitive atmosphere of silence and secrecy.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, Richard, Pierre Bourdieu, Routledge, 1992, pp. 104.

<sup>29</sup> Butler, Katy, “Events Are The Teachers,” The CoEvolution Quarterly, winter 1983, pp.112-113. In 1982, while the students working at the Center's enterprises were just getting by on minimum wage (\$3.35 at the time), Baker spent more than \$200,000. Much of this was related to his job as abbot, but he also spent money impulsively on art, furniture, and expensive restaurant meals. Zen Center spent \$4,000 for his membership in New York's exclusive Adirondack Club and, despite the governing Board's uneasiness, \$26,000 for his BMW.

<sup>30</sup> Downing, Michael, Shoes Outside the Door, Counterpoint, 2001, p.196. Baker made public what he elicited from people in the privacy of the dokusan room, wanted to be consulted on all of one’s life decisions, and, at least with one student, wanted to know what she told her therapist about their relationship. See p. 197. Another student recalls Baker “messaging around with people’s personal relationships and calling it dokusan. He never said, ‘You don’t deserve her [the student’s wife] and I do, but I knew what he was saying...’” Also see p. 237.

<sup>31</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, p. 51. Bourdieu discusses intimidation as symbolic violence and the social conditions that produce the intimidating person and the intimidated person. This implies looking at the whole social structure. Zen’s defining terms: Dharma transmission, unbroken lineage, and enlightened master are instrumental in creating the social structure that fosters very unequal power relations. These terms lead the student to believe he cannot nor can any other ordinary mortal, understand the master because of the master’s spiritual attainment.

<sup>32</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 243. Also see Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, p. 138-139 for a discussion of censorship. “...it is the structure of the field itself that governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression, and not some legal proceeding....”

A look at the relationship between Baker and Suzuki provides some illumination into how Baker became so powerful. Let us review for a moment, Baker's introduction to Suzuki's edited words in the well-known book, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, and its description of Suzuki as the ideal of a fully realized Zen master.

What the teacher really offers the student is literally living proof that all this talk [of the idealized Zen master] and the seemingly impossible goals [of Zen] can be realized in this lifetime.<sup>33</sup>

Presenting the master as a fully enlightened being is an integral part of creating the Zen habitus, wherein the master is understood to be beyond the understanding of ordinary people and is to be treated as such. Here, too, is an example of enhancing one's own prestige by boasting of the attainment of one's teacher, since Baker knew as early as 1967 that Suzuki wanted him to be his successor.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, from this vantage point, we witness Baker acting with flagrant hypocrisy. He has many extra-marital affairs, yet he scolds his students for flirting. A senior student relates how in 1982 at a Zen Center priest's meeting, that he, Baker launches into a "diatribe about [Eido Shimano roshi] the teacher at the Zen Studies Society in New York, who has for years been involved sexually with his students. Dick ranted how terrible this guy was..."<sup>35</sup> Given Baker's track record with his own students, this is, at best, hypocritical, at worst, it could be taken as evidence of the very delusions a Zen master was supposed to avoid falling prey to. One affair, the one with his best friend's wife, was conducted quite openly at the Center's monastery Tassaraja, during a Peace Conference attended by Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn, Robert Aitken roshi, the poet Gary Snyder and other notables. In fact, it was this affair that led to the meltdown of 1983.

Baker demonstrated little restraint and acknowledged little responsibility for his actions. A senior student relates how Baker "told people that Anna [his best friend's wife] had seduced him, and what was he supposed to do?" Yet, another senior student relates what Anna told the Board of Directors: "She told the Board he came by day after day and gave her cashmere sweaters, and paintings, and statues, and wore her down. She said she'd been more or less happily married."<sup>36</sup> Japanese Zen emphasizes *jiriki*<sup>37</sup>, or self-power,

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<sup>33</sup> Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 242.

<sup>36</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 312.

<sup>37</sup> *Jiriki* is usually used to indicate that a person uses their own power and effort to attain enlightenment as opposed to *tarik* which means other power or the power of the other. The other is usually the Buddha Amitabha. See The Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism, Sutra Translation Committee of the US & Canada, 1997, p. 413.

which is, in part, about taking responsibility for one's actions. Where was the *jiriki* in Baker, Zen roshi of the leading Zen center on the West Coast?

There was an apparent moment of *jiriki* in September of 1983, when Baker sent a letter to the Center, apologizing to his best friend and the other people he may have hurt. He was writing from France while staying at the Center of the world famous Vietnamese Zen master and peace activist, Thich Nhat Hahn. A few weeks later Nhat Hahn wrote a letter to the SFZC exhorting the community to assist and support Richard while “endorsing the sincerity of Richard, whom he considered absolutely trustworthy.”<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Nhat Hahn attended the peace conference at Tassajara where Baker and Anna, according to Gary Snyder, walked around hand in hand, openly displaying their affair.<sup>39</sup> Her husband arrived and, when he realized what was happening, became visibly disturbed. Senior members feared he would harm himself. A week later Baker and Anna together attended a talk of Nhat Hahn's.

Nhat Hahn never wrote to the Board of Directors of the SFZC to ask them about Richard and Anna, to ask what they thought happened, what was their view of the story, if there were other problems, how long things had been troubling people, and so on. Yet, he had just written vouching for Baker's sincerity and trustworthiness. Did Baker and Nhat Hahn recognize in each other, in their role as Zen masters, a special class of the enlightened, sacred beings that did not require asking the other, the “usual people,” for their opinions or views?<sup>40</sup> Did they, thinking of themselves as “enlightened masters” fall prey to their own myths?

Once again, however, Baker's commitment to *jiriki* failed. In 1989, six years after being forced to leave, Baker threatened to take back control of the Center through litigation. This threat cost the Center \$35,000-\$40,000 in legal fees. Baker finally dropped the case, saying he was pressured to push the suit by a lawyer who was a student of his. Baker said, “There was a lawyer who kept bugging me.”<sup>41</sup> It seems that Baker roshi could not accept the most basic Zen idea of being responsible for what you are doing. It follows that if you blame other people you never try to work on yourself.<sup>42</sup> A more fundamental concept could scarcely be imagined in any social system, secular or religious.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.311

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.245

<sup>40</sup> Berger, Peter L., The Sacred Canopy, Anchor Books, 1967, p.95. The internalized socialized identity can be apprehended by the individual as something sacred, grounded in the nature of things, or willed by gods.

<sup>41</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 363.

<sup>42</sup> When Baker was told by a senior student at the last Board meeting that he did not listen well, his reply was, “If I have a problem listening, it is because you haven't taught me.” Another senior student added, “Even that was our fault.” Shoes Outside the Door, p.49.

One wonders if Baker succeeded so long, not because he was a cynical calculator who consciously deceived people, but, rather, because he was someone who, in all good faith, took himself to be something that he was not, the “legitimate imposture.”<sup>43</sup> There are several factors that might have led Baker to believe that he was more than he was: 1) the axiom-like Zen rhetoric of unbroken lineage that connected him to the historical Buddha, 2) the myth about Dharma transmission and the supposed enlightenment of the Zen master, 3) the idolized Suzuki roshi’s emphasizing that Baker’s transmission was “real,”<sup>44</sup> 4) the hundreds of students and visitors bowing to his authority along with the special position granted him during the many rituals that take place in Zen, 5) the large public and solemn ceremony communicating to Baker and all others, his new identity as an enlightened Zen master. One of the mechanisms that allowed all of this to work, in all innocence and with utmost sincerity, was that his interests and the interests of those he represented, his disciples, often coincided. In this way, he could believe and get his disciples to believe that he had no interests outside of theirs.<sup>45</sup>

Baker’s purchase of a new white BMW became a symbol for much of the anger, resentment and pain that Zen Center members came to feel towards him. Baker was impressed that his peers, est founder Werner Erhard and the well known Tibetan teacher Trungpa, had chauffeurs and large Mercedes, so “I thought I should buy a car.”<sup>46</sup> During his interview with Downing, Baker roshi, a husband and father, explains that having girlfriends, eating fancy dinners, and driving a “nice car” were implementing Suzuki roshi’s commitment to lay practice. And then, there are the words of Virginia, Baker’s wife of twenty-one years, to a friend, which add another dimension: “You know, Yvonne, Dick is crazy.”<sup>47</sup>

## **Suzuki Roshi**

*... we must have eyes to see that which is good and that which is not good. This kind of mind will be acquired by practice.*<sup>48</sup>

Suzuki Roshi, the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and its leader until his death in 1971, was an impressive person, sincerely beloved by most all of the Center’s

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<sup>43</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> “Real transmission” in Zen implies both deep spiritual insight (wisdom) and a refined character (compassion). Zen attainment is based on these two completely intertwined aspects: wisdom and compassion. A deficit in one aspect is a reflection of a deficit in the other.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 214-216. See also Bourdieu, Pierre, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 115-116 for a discussion of the notion of interest. To be interested means what happens in the social game matters, that its stakes are important and worth pursuing. Interest is opposed not only to disinterest but also to indifference.

<sup>46</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.233

<sup>48</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p.209.

members. In the introduction to Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind Baker quotes Trudy Dixon's description of Suzuki as the ideal of a fully realized Zen master.

*A roshi is a person who has actualized that perfect freedom which is the potentiality for all human beings. He exists freely in the fullness of his whole being. The flow of his consciousness is not the fixed repetitive patterns of our usual self-centered consciousness, but rather arises spontaneously and naturally from the actual circumstances of the present. The results of this in terms of the quality of his life are extraordinary—buoyancy, vigor, straightforwardness, simplicity, humility, security, joyousness, uncanny perspicacity and unfathomable compassion. His whole being testifies to what it means to live in the reality of the present. Without anything said or done, just the impact of meeting a personality so developed can be enough to change another's whole way of life. But in the end it is not the extraordinariness of the teacher that perplexes, intrigues, and deepens the student, it is the teacher's utter ordinariness.<sup>49</sup>*

Suzuki lived through circumstances that were sometimes ordinary, though sometimes tragic. He was married three times. His first wife contracted tuberculosis and returned to her parents shortly after marriage. His second wife was bludgeoned to death with a hatchet at the age of thirty-nine by an erratic, antisocial monk whom Suzuki failed to dismiss, despite warnings from family, neighbors, and colleagues.

Suzuki's relationship with his children was less than ideal. Despite being thought of as quiet, soft spoken and kind by his Japanese parishioners, at home he often scolded his oldest daughter Yasuko quite harshly.<sup>50</sup> Suzuki's relationship with his son Hoitsu was sometimes difficult. Hoitsu would run from his father, at times frightened by "the fierce look in his eyes."<sup>51</sup> His daughter Omi committed suicide after nine years in a mental hospital. Suzuki, living in America at the time, did not attend her funeral, despite pleas from his son Hoitsu, living in Japan. Suzuki waited six months to tell his other son, who lived across the street from the SFZC, that his sister was dead.

Nor was Suzuki strict about giving Dharma transmission based on spiritual attainment. He gave Hoitsu Dharma transmission, though Hoitsu did not study with him.<sup>52</sup> Hoitsu also inherited Suzuki's temple, according to standard Sōtō Zen procedure. Suzuki also gave, as a favor to a friend, what is sometimes jokingly referred to as "telephone

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<sup>49</sup> Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, p. 18. This is perhaps the most idealistic description of a roshi in print in the English language. Trudy Dixon was the editor of the Windbell, the magazine of the SFZC. Beginning with the phrase "A roshi is..." makes it apply to all roshi when it is questionable whether it applies to even one roshi. Interestingly, by the time Baker penned this, he knew he would be Suzuki's successor, and thereby, become a roshi.

<sup>50</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, pp. 62 – 68. Also see Crooked Cucumber, pp.137-152.

<sup>51</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p.134.

<sup>52</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 68.

transmission,” Dharma transmission to someone with whom he was not personally acquainted.<sup>53</sup>

Suzuki ran a temple virtually under the control of Japan's repressive fascist era government, hardly a government known for promoting exaltation, peacefulness, or kindness. All of the above is the sort of detail which might be useful to both present and future students, but it is absolutely missing from all of the widely propagated standardized biographies of Zen masters throughout the ages.

Suzuki had something of a fixation on the idea of reforming Sōtō Zen in Japan by having his American students go there as living examples of reform. His American students accepted this grandiose notion unquestioningly. However, the first two students he sent to Japan experienced emotional breakdowns and the third, though being the best trained for the task, felt himself totally uninformed and unprepared. “Suzuki-roshi ordained me just prior to leaving [for Japan]. He had not taught me anything about being a priest.”<sup>54</sup> Suzuki, quite amazingly, according to Baker, said “I want you [Baker] also to reform Buddhism in Japan.”<sup>55</sup> Did Suzuki actually believe this, or was he attempting to heighten the importance of Baker’s practice and mission? Still more is missing in this picture, some sense that Suzuki could not grasp the vast cultural divide between his American students and Sōtō Zen in Japan. For example, when Suzuki brought Tatsugami roshi, one of the leading Sōtō Zen training teachers from Japan, to Tassajara, SFZC’s monastery, his American students were so dissatisfied, that he had to “arrange” to send Tatsugami back to Japan after only one training period. Why couldn’t Suzuki get his students to accept this leading Japanese teacher? Further, how could Suzuki not have suspected that his fellow Japanese Sōtō roshi and priests would refuse to accept Americans as examples for the reform of Zen and vice versa? And what reforms did he have in mind? If there were something to reform in Japanese Sōtō Zen, giving Dharma transmission to someone you have never met or giving automatic Dharma transmission for virtually all priests, often between father and son as Suzuki had done with Hoitsu, would, seemingly, be high on the list.<sup>56</sup>

Why should one even think that Suzuki chose Baker as his only American Dharma heir based on his level of "spiritual attainment?" After all, the only two previous Dharma

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.69

<sup>54</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, pp. 59-.60 He added, “It could never have happened in the history of Eiheiiji monastery that anyone showed up as I about what was to happen.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 62. He may have said this to Baker to inspire him to practice. However, it could also have played into Baker’s sense of his grandiosity.

<sup>56</sup> Apparently Suzuki was not the only one to give this kind of Dharma transmission. Welch, Holmes, Buddhism in China: 1900 to 1950, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 315. Welch gives the interesting case of one Chinese monk in the twentieth century who gave Dharma transmission to another Chinese monk then in Burma, "without ever having met him, and indeed, without even finding out whether he would accept the Dharma."

transmissions Suzuki gave, to his son Hoitsu and to Unknown, were not based on attainment at all. A senior SFZC student quoted Suzuki as saying "'Dick's commitment is at another level,' so the rest of us simply were not in a position to criticize him."<sup>57</sup> In other words, Suzuki instructed his students that Baker's behavior was to be taken as above reproach. Interestingly, Suzuki did not mention "spiritual attainment," but, rather, "commitment. This is not surprising if we remember that, in Sōtō Zen, "spiritual attainment" is simply not a criterion for Dharma transmission.<sup>58</sup> We might, however, ask what "commitment" Suzuki was referring to? Was Baker's commitment to Zen practice that much greater than a number of other of Suzuki's close, very committed senior disciples? Or was it that Baker, in addition to his commitment to Zen practice, was more committed to institutional growth than other senior disciples, and most importantly, was the only disciple who possessed the necessary fundraising<sup>59</sup> and organizational skills required to achieve the growth that Suzuki desired and invested in?<sup>60</sup>

Suzuki was hardly naïve about group dynamics or about being calculating for dramatic effect. He did not want Baker to be "one of the guys" around the Zen Center when he made him his Dharma heir. Rather, Suzuki wanted Baker to be in Japan so he could say "He is in Japan." He could then call Baker back in a new role.<sup>61</sup> There is nothing inherently wrong in these calculations by Suzuki. But, it certainly is in contrast to Baker's description above of Suzuki as a perfected being, whose qualities include extraordinary straightforwardness and simplicity. If one looks beyond the hallowed image, made even larger by students of Suzuki since his death, a new level of candid and nuanced inquiry becomes possible.

Granted, the pervasiveness of the problem with Baker did not become obvious until after Suzuki's death, but we are, nevertheless, obliged to look at Suzuki's role in the problems that resulted with his Dharma heir. By stressing that it was "real"

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<sup>57</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 170.

<sup>58</sup> Foulk, T. Griffith, "The Zen Institute in Modern Japan", pp.157-177, Zen, Tradition and Transition, Kenneth Kraft ed., N.Y, Grove Press, 1988. Foulk points out that roughly 95% of Soto priests have Dharma transmission. This is because the Soto sect strives to match the institutional structures of Dogen's time when every temple had to have an abbot and every abbot had to have Dharma transmission.

<sup>59</sup> The importance of having the necessary fund raising skills when appointing a successor and abbot should not be underestimated in Soto Zen, at least in Japan. See Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission in Theory and Practice," pp. 272-273. For an interesting view of material wealth, the role of merchant bankers in Mahayana Sutras, and the spread of the Mahayana from India to China along the Silk Route, see, Ostro, Douglas, "Money, Merchant-Bankers, and the Mahayana," a paper to be delivered at the December 2007, AABS Conference.

<sup>60</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, p. 215. Bourdieu mentions talk of "interests" as serving a radically disruptive function because it destroys the ideology of disinterest, which is the professional ideology of clerics of every kind. . See all of chapter 9, 'Delegation and Political Fetishism,' pp.203 – 219 for a discussion of the "delegate" and delegation which is relevant to Zen with a few word changes.

See also Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic, J. D., An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> Shoes Outside the Door, p. 126.

transmission<sup>62</sup> that he had given Baker, i.e., implying it was based solely on spiritual attainment, Suzuki exhibited a total misunderstanding of Baker's character, a hard nut to swallow since Suzuki spent over fifteen years in close, intimate contact with him. He also, not coincidentally, fueled Baker's already existing predilection for grandiosity. We shall see shortly how impressed Suzuki was by Soen Nakagawa roshi's iconoclasm, expansive Rinzai Zen-like performances, and fame as a haiku poet to the exclusion of any of his faults. Might Suzuki, a seemingly gentle and humble country priest, have also felt some level of inferiority, taken by Baker's grand gestures, apparent ease in dealing with the murky realities of the actual world, his fundraising ability, and access to people of wealth and renown? Did his interest in having the Center grow quickly and in reforming Sōtō Zen in Japan make it easier to "not see" Baker's faults? Lastly, according to the genealogical model of Zen lineage, the Dharma giver is referred to as "father" and the Dharma receiver as "son." One cannot help but wonder if Suzuki's actions, in part, came from his emotional, paternal feelings for his Dharma "son" Baker, a relationship that he did not seem to have with his two birth sons.

We have just raised several possible motivations for Suzuki's having a blind spot about Baker, including his personal feelings about Baker and his desire to have a prominent center in America. But, is there any possible chance that Suzuki was not blind to Baker's character flaws that were so obvious to some of his students? Might Suzuki, in his genuine passion to play a major part in bringing Zen to the West, have simply felt that Richard Baker was the person who could best accomplish this? We, of course, have no way of knowing.

Understandably, Suzuki may not have been able to read across the Japanese-American cultural divide and therefore missed Baker's character flaws that were more than obvious to some of his "unenlightened" American students. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Suzuki, in so many ways an admirable person, yet with an assortment of human shortcomings, especially so around family issues, was in some way responsible for the problems at the SFZC that followed his death. All of this is in the context of Suzuki, the Zen master, being a man whose essential character is described as one of: "buoyancy, vigor, straightforwardness, simplicity, humility, security, joyousness, uncanny perspicacity and unfathomable compassion."<sup>63</sup> This is a person without a defect, showing no self-interest, desire, interior calculation, or a shortcoming. Yet, we all know that no human is like this. Suzuki or any other Zen master only looks this way

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<sup>62</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, See pp.117-126, "Rites of Institutions" for a discussion relevant to institutions defining roles and authority. Bourdieu points out that the distinctions most efficacious socially give the appearance of being based on objective differences, based perhaps on the notion of natural boundary, as in geography. This social magic also produces discontinuity out of continuity. In this case Baker's authority is now guaranteed by the institution and made concrete by his special robes, liturgical instruments and so on. His authority is continually reinforced by being addressed as roshi which is just so many repetitions of the "inaugural act of institution" carried out by the recognized authority, Suzuki roshi.

<sup>63</sup> Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, p. 18.

if we avoid looking at their real life. But that is the way that Suzuki, Baker and all roshi are presented within the tradition, that is, as idealized reflections of the original truth and perfection of the Buddha. And that very presentation is the stock and trade of the Zen institution. It means, "Don't ask, trust me." It is an institutional delusion that needs to be analyzed, using its own description.

### **Suzuki Roshi Meets Soen Nakagawa Roshi**

*In other words, always remain conscious of what you are doing, of what is going on.*<sup>64</sup>

In the autumn of 1970 Suzuki roshi was ill and left Tassajara for what was understood to be his last visit. On the drive back to San Francisco, he and his party stopped at a retreat center near San Juan Bautista where Soen Nakagawa roshi was in the last hours of a weeklong sesshin (meditation retreat). Soen Nakagawa roshi was a prominent Rinzai roshi known in the West for his iconoclasm, theatrical displays, poetry and his connections to a number of teachers who brought Zen to the U.S.A.<sup>65</sup>

Though Suzuki did not feel well the next day, he gave the Saturday lecture at the City Center during which time he described the visit with Soen roshi.

At the end of his sesshin we bowed more than thirty times, calling out many buddhas' names. He called some special names: Sunshine Buddha, Moonlight Buddha, Dead Sea Buddha, and Good Practice Buddha. Many buddhas appeared and bowed and bowed and bowed. That is something beyond our understanding. When he bowed to all those buddhas, the buddhas he bowed to were beyond his own understanding. Again and again he did it.

And he served us matcha [powdered green tea] from a bowl which he made himself. What was he doing, I don't know, and he didn't know. He looked very happy, but that happiness is very different from the happiness we usual people have. Our practice should go to that level, where there is no human problem, no Buddha problem, where there is nothing. To have tea, to have cake, to make a trip from one place to another is his practice. He has no idea of helping people. What he is doing is helping, but he himself has no idea of helping people."<sup>66</sup>

What happened to the heretofore simple and down-to-earth Suzuki roshi? It is one thing to admire a peer, a fellow roshi. It is another to raise the description to an ecstatic level. Was Suzuki, weak and ill, confusing performance with attainment, flamboyance with wisdom? Was he equating a different set of religious rituals with the perfected attainment of a Zen master?

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<sup>64</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p. 312.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Aitken, Philip Kapleau, and Eido Shimano were former students of Soen. Yasutani roshi was a close friend of Soen's, who came to NYC in his place when his mother's illness kept him from visiting. More will be said about Soen in the next section of the paper.

<sup>66</sup> Crooked Cucumber, pp. 386- 387.

Suzuki rhapsodizes over Soen's ability to connect with the "other" world, to call upon many Buddhas by name, so that they "appeared and bowed and bowed and bowed." Suzuki declares that Soen, whom he clearly idealizes, not only expresses his attainment and compassion perfectly and effortlessly in the simple tasks of daily life but also is a conjurer of the "other" world. As portrayed by even the down-to-earth Suzuki roshi, Soen is master over all worlds and situations while remaining perfectly pure, at ease, desireless, and empty. Soen is presented as a sacred being, a living Buddha.

Zen teaches that one must be an enlightened being to recognize another enlightened being. In presenting Soen as a living Buddha to his trusting flock, Suzuki is implicitly claiming the same status for himself. In an act of Zen self-verification, both Suzuki and Soen are seen as living Buddhas. In doing so, Suzuki has brought the original perfection of the Buddha in to the present, as described earlier by Bourdieu's model.

In this portrayal of original perfection, both Suzuki and Soen, in their roles as roshi, appear as the "locale" of the sacred imbued with mysterious power.<sup>67</sup> They "consecrate themselves, monopolize the notions of Truth, Wisdom, and Freedom and thereby draw a boundary between themselves and ordinary people."<sup>68</sup>

We have one, supposedly enlightened Zen master, Suzuki roshi, acting as the grand narrator, describing in idealized terms<sup>69</sup> another, supposedly enlightened Zen master as being above the rest of the world, with happiness different from everyone else's happiness, which is beyond everyone else's ("usual people") understanding. Suzuki describes Soen's practice as just "to have tea, to have cake, to make a trip from one place to another." What he is doing is helping, but "he has no idea of helping people." Suzuki claims to understand these actions, which are beyond the understanding of "usual people." Is not Suzuki too, a "usual person" in his "utter ordinariness"?<sup>70</sup> There are apparently not just different degrees of ordinariness, but different kinds. Suzuki claims Soen's behavior is beyond our understanding, implicitly stating that we are all the same in not understanding it. However, we should not be taken by rhetoric, since statements of sameness only have meaning when coming from some one with the authority to speak. Some one with little social capital saying that we are all the same has little or no weight. In the Zen context, a student speaking this way would be viewed as speaking out of place or above their position or understanding. Statements of sameness come from on high; "it

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<sup>67</sup> The Sacred Canopy, p.95. The mysterious power comes from internalizing the role legitimated by the religion. The socialized identity can then be apprehended by the individual as something sacred.

<sup>68</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, p. 211. They make themselves synonyms of themselves, in effect saying, "I am the Truth."

<sup>69</sup> Language and Symbolic Power, see p. 203-219, "Delegation and Political Fetishism." Suzuki's words have power because he has the mandate of the group. However, in reality it is more or less true to say that it is the spokesperson/the delegate who creates the group. Bourdieu uses the term the "oracle effect" to which the spokesperson gives voice to the group in whose name he speaks.

<sup>70</sup> Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, p. 18 Baker's description of Suzuki and all roshi ("A roshi is...") ends with, "it is not the extraordinariness of the teacher that perplexes, intrigues, and deepens the student, it is the teacher's utter ordinariness."

is top dogs who get to legislate sameness, and, in fact, it is the very declaration of sameness that makes them superior.”<sup>71</sup>

According to this “romantic” view put forth by Suzuki, Soen, besides giving a more than competent performance of a roshi, just does simple things: has tea and cake, is happy beyond our understanding, “no human problem, no Buddha problem,” he goes from place to place and just his very being is helping people of which he is totally unaware. Soen is completely at ease and empty of any notions of self, of interests, of any idea or notions about his surroundings or other people. Suzuki describes Soen as returning to a wonderful simplicity, a perfectly empty being, flawlessly responding to the needs of his surroundings all the while being mystically in touch with countless Buddhas.<sup>72</sup> He is also, supposedly, happy beyond any ordinary human understanding. We must ask: Is such a thing possible? If so, is Soen such a person?

We see how Suzuki describes or shall we say sells or seduces his students with his flawless image of Soen. He does this without any reference to theory, history, or Zen principles, so that the complexity of a real person is replaced by a simple and iconic image. Suzuki is seducing his students with an image of Soen as the perfect Zen master, manifesting effortless power, happiness, and the complete fulfillment of the path.<sup>73</sup> In fact, this false construction can be viewed as an underlying duplicity throughout Zen, which in this case is promulgated by Suzuki, albeit unconsciously. Suzuki can speak rather off the cuff like this because he is describing a world-view that his own students, well socialized into American Zen culture, have fully internalized: the standard model of Zen.<sup>74</sup> They have experienced this repeatedly in Zen teachings, rituals, stories and talks. It is also so easily described and accepted because that is the space in which Zen exists: the ways of talking, ways of moving, ways of doing things, the views and understandings that makes the world have sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s time and energy.<sup>75</sup> Suzuki’s words have particularly strong effects in this setting because he is preaching to the converted. It is just this frequency of repetition that enhances its reality-generating strength. Its strength is also enhanced in this case, because it is coming from the SFZC’s supreme authority figure, Suzuki roshi. He is the group’s legitimate spokesman. He *is* the group personified.<sup>76</sup> He is talking his students through an image of the idealized Zen roshi and making it “real” by giving it a body and name, a time and

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<sup>71</sup> Cole, Alan, *Text as Father*, University of California Press, 2005, p.201.

<sup>72</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, pp.35,36. Berger discusses the unique capacity of religion to “locate” human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference.

<sup>73</sup> The description of effortless and simplicity would resonate well with Suzuki’s students as it contrasted so with their Zen practice. Besides starting the day at 4 A.M. with meditation, many had families and jobs to balance, they also attended week long sitting meditation retreats (J. sesshin) and when possible three month long training periods (J. angu) at the Center’s monastery, Tassaraja. For many, the long meditation periods could be painful. Their lives would hardly be described as effortless and simple.

<sup>74</sup> See footnote 6, page 3.

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 75. According to Bourdieu, daily life can be elucidated without falling into the pitfalls of mechanistic explanations. Deliberate intentions do not account for everything people do. See also Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 126,127.

<sup>76</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 139. The chapter “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” pp.123 - 139 is relevant to the discussion of roshi/Zen masters and their students.

place in the real world. In effect Suzuki is saying, here is your perfected Zen man, Soen Nakagawa roshi, a living Buddha. I recognized him and hence myself as such and bowed and had tea with him yesterday just a few miles down the coast.

### **Soen Nakagawa Roshi and Eido Shimano Roshi**

*Our way is to see what we are doing, moment after moment.*<sup>77</sup>

Like both Baker and Suzuki, Soen Nakagawa was a person whose history and everyday life we know much about, certainly more than we know about the Zen masters of old. I will show that the picture painted of Soen Nakagawa by Suzuki is more fantasy than reality. Soen's prime disciple, Eido Shimano, received Dharma transmission from him in 1972 in a dramatic public ceremony. Eido Shimano had a long history of sexual and financial scandal beginning in Hawaii in the early 1960's while staying with Robert Aitken.<sup>78</sup> Within a couple weeks of each other two women in Aitken's group were hospitalized after experiencing mental breakdowns. Concerned, Aitken consulted with their psychiatrist who suggested he volunteer at their mental health ward. After a time, Aitken asked Shimano to come along. Very soon the psychiatrist called Aitken aside and said the head nurse on the ward had accused Shimano of being at the center of the cases of these two women who claimed to have suffered from Shimano's "depredation."<sup>79</sup> The head nurse also believed that Shimano was volunteering so that he could prey on other women. Aitken was "stunned" but followed through with an investigation.

When he was certain the accusations were true, he flew to Japan to consult with Soen roshi. Soen listened carefully, but Aitken sensed he "did not take the news very seriously." Aitken and Soen then went to tell Yasutani roshi<sup>80</sup> the news but "he was even less concerned." Aitken returned to Hawaii, without having accomplished anything, to find that Shimano knew of his trip. Shortly thereafter, Shimano "felt obliged to move to NYC."<sup>81</sup> A wife was found for him, presumably to absorb his misdirected amorous

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<sup>77</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p. 371.

<sup>78</sup> The information about the Shimano episode in Hawaii is the result of a private correspondence between Aitken roshi and the author. Aitken was given permission to teach in 1974 by Yasutani's heir, Yamada roshi and received Dharma-transmission from him in 1985 making him an independent Zen master. He later broke with Yasutani's Sanbokyodan sect because of what amounts to Japanese chauvinism. See Sharf, Robert, "Sanbokyodan Zen and the Way of New Religions," Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 22 (1995) 450 – 451. Aitken was also disturbed because his Dharma transmitted heirs would need to be examined by Japanese roshi with whom they had no prior relationship, one of whom was junior to him. This raises a number of questions about the meaning and trustworthiness of Dharma transmission.

<sup>79</sup> This is the word that Aitken used in our private correspondence.

<sup>80</sup> Yasutani was founder of the Sanbokyodan sect of Zen. Though small in Japan, it is perhaps the largest Zen sect in the West.

<sup>81</sup> Aitken, Robert, Original Dwelling Place, Counterpoint, 1996, p. 21. See pp. 15 – 22 where Aitken discusses his relationship with Soen and gives more information about Shimano. He mentions that the other

passions. But Soen's simplistic solution was not effective. As Baker referred to in 1982 at a SFZC Board of Trustee meeting, Shimano continued to be sexually involved with his students, which over time led to periodic scandals. One of the worst was in 1976, when a good part of the membership either resigned or was thrown out by Shimano, by then a Zen master, himself. The only possible visible sign that Soen disapproved of Shimano's behavior was his failure to attend the opening of Shimano's new American monastery, Daibosatsu, on Independence Day, July 4, 1976. Like his teacher Soen roshi, Shimano had a flair for the dramatic.

For the next seven years or so scandals surrounding Shimano erupted periodically. Soen again did nothing visible to stem the tide. Then, in 1983, Soen went to NYC where some of Shimano's oldest and most loyal students asked Soen to issue a public statement<sup>82</sup> to qualify Shimano's legitimacy, transmission, and title as roshi and abbot. Soen indicated that he would honor their request, but unfortunately, once again, he did nothing visible. He returned to Japan without a public word mitigating Shimano's authority. Acts of omission can speak as loudly and injuriously as those of commission. Soen's silence does, in fact, speak.

Eido roshi, as Shimano was known by then, though known to have had many sexual affairs with his female students, to have acted with unbridled self-interest, and to have broken apart his *sangha*<sup>83</sup> a number of times, causing much pain to many, will appear in the orthodox Rinzai lineage charts as an unblemished, enlightened Zen master and as an authentic connection to Bodhidharma and the historical Buddha. Soen, in March of 1984, died alone at his home monastery, Ryutaku-ji. Even in his death, Soen lends legitimacy to Shimano as he allowed at least part of his ashes to be buried at Shimano's monastery, Daibosatsu.<sup>84</sup>

Losing face is an extremely important matter in Japanese culture, one to be avoided at all costs. As long as he was in a Zen context, Soen was iconoclastic and performed well in the public role of Rinzai roshi. But, when confronted with a real and difficult, public and embarrassing problem, it would appear that he was as constrained by his cultural background as any other ordinary or "usual" Japanese. He did not make a public statement about his heir Eido roshi, nor did he do anything that led to questioning of his own authority, insight or the ideological system of which he was a prime representative. In a word, he acted like any ordinary, conservative, well-socialized Japanese. In so doing, he did not serve well the American disciples who so worshipped him. He returned to Japan, leaving many of his American followers disappointed while leaving his dharma

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monks at Ryutaku-ji Monastery "seemed to have doubts about Shimano" and that Shimano was not accepted by them. Aitken says that his relationship with Soen fell apart after mentioning Shimano's trouble with women in Hawaii. Aitken felt that Soen blamed him for Shimano's trouble in Hawaii. Aitken also attempts to explain Soen's loyalty to Shimano which was perplexing to westerners. Aitken believes that in his later years Soen felt betrayed by Shimano and that his "life and commitments" were "unfulfilled."

<sup>82</sup> The author has copies of letters circulated among students and ex-students discussing the situation.

<sup>83</sup> *Sangha* historically meant ordained monks and nuns. In American Zen, the term has become democratized and is used to refer to the group of practitioners, both lay and ordained, at a given Zen center. Chinese Zen groups stick to the historic meaning more than Japanese Zen groups.

<sup>84</sup> Buddhadharma, Spring 2006, p. 20.

heir, Eido Shimano, with unquestioned authority and legitimacy.<sup>85</sup> Shimano could rightfully claim that he was the sole heir of Soen Nakagawa living in America. In the process, this Zen roshi, Eido Shimano, tarnished by a number of scandals, was allowed to continue causing trouble for new, unsuspecting Western students.<sup>86</sup>

### **Walter Nowick and Philip Kapleau**

*To live in the realm of the buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment after moment.*<sup>87</sup>

Another aspect of the post WWII movement of Zen to America that deserves mentioning is that of Americans who spent years practicing in Japan and who, upon returning to America, were believed to have “finished” their training and/or to have received Dharma transmission. The point is, as we have seen, that Dharma transmission does not actually insure that a person has any spiritual attainment, but because students believe this to be the case, it has great social currency. The person with Dharma transmission, whether only assumed by his followers or actually so consecrated, concentrates within himself, all the symbolic capital of the Zen rhetoric concerning the unimaginable attainment of the enlightened Zen master. In this category are Walter Nowick, founder of Moonspring Hermitage Zen Center in Surry, Maine<sup>88</sup>, who studied under Zuigan Goto roshi, and Philip Kapleau, founder of the Rochester Zen Center in Rochester N.Y., who studied under Soen roshi and Harada roshi, but primarily under Yasutani roshi, one of Harada’s heirs.

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<sup>85</sup> American students, including Aitken, may have expected Soen to be something he was not. Soen viewed the world through a Japanese cultural lens, something different from the American lens. It may have been unrealistic on the part of Americans to expect Soen to be open about or to question a Dharma heir, much less any aspect of the Zen system he represented. Cultural differences are almost never mentioned in terms of a Zen master. Of course, doing so opens a can of worms: when is the master expressing a cultural view and when is he expressing pure teaching? Though Zen spokespeople like to abstract Zen out of culture, time, and place, in actuality, it is always embedded in and speaks through a culture. Steven Katz has edited three books that discuss, among other ideas, cultural aspects of mysticism. See Mysticism and Language, Oxford University Press, 1992, Mysticism and Religious Experience, Oxford University Press, 1983, and Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>86</sup> On August 9, 1995, Robert Aitken roshi and seven other American Zen teachers wrote a letter to the President of the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society, Shimano’s organization. They mentioned interviewing former students of Shimano over a period of three decades and hearing the “same depressing story” about Shimano’s “sexual misconduct and abuse” and that these relationships are “exploitative and extremely damaging to his victims.” They suggest Shimano either resign or enter a program to “help him with his harmful predilections,” noting that completing a program does not guarantee a cure. The author has a copy of the letter. There is no evidence that Shimano did or did not enter such a program, but we do know that he did not resign.

<sup>87</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p.104.

<sup>88</sup> The author was a member of Moonspring Hermitage from 1970 to 1981. He held many positions of responsibility, including President of the Board of Trustees, leader of the meditation hall (jikijitsu), and instructing new members in meditation and others aspects of life at the Center.

The belief that Nowick had Dharma transmission was rumored as early as 1967 but became widely accepted with the publication of San Francisco Zen Center's fall, 1969 issue of the Windbell, the center's magazine. That issue contained a lineage chart showing the Rinzaï and Harada (Sanbokyodan) lineages in America. It showed Nowick as a Dharma heir of Zuigan Goto roshi, though how this was determined is not clear. Naturally, this was widely believed by his students as well as most of the American Zen community. Nowick neither asserted nor denied the claim. He allowed his students to call him Walter, though a few called him *sensei* (J. teacher). This form of American informality made him appear to have even greater attainment since he did not assume a title or honorific or appear attached to old and foreign religious institutional forms and roles. Though Nowick generously gave his students land on which to build their homes, due in part to his unseemly interference in his student's personal lives and his autocratic and increasingly erratic style of teaching, members started leaving the group. By the early 1980's, his rural group had shrunk from approximately forty-five members to about a dozen. An ex-member contacted Nowick's older Dharma brother in Japan, Soko Morinaga roshi, who supported the disaffected members by coming to America and holding teachings for them, running a weekend retreat, and generously providing financial support to one ex-member in need.<sup>89</sup> He also wrote a letter to Nowick's students saying that though Walter was an outstanding student and widely loved and respected by the Japanese, he did not receive Dharma transmission from Goto roshi.<sup>90</sup> By the late 1980's Nowick had stopped teaching. The fractured group reorganized as Morgan Bay Zendo, a non-sectarian Buddhist meditation center without one specific teacher. It is led by a Board of Directors, some of whom are former students of Nowick. Unfortunately, this reformed group has recently run into trouble. One of its leading members, who was the head of the Board of Trustees, was accused of pedophilia with a number of teenage boys.<sup>91</sup>

Kapleau's case is perhaps more complicated. In the late 1960's the Zen community believed that Kapleau and his teacher of roughly ten years, Yasutani roshi, had a disagreement during what proved to be Yasutani's last visit to Kapleau's Rochester Zen Center. Before leaving Rochester, Yasutani told Kapleau that he was severing their relationship. Upon returning to Japan, he put this in writing in a letter to Kapleau. Kapleau never publicly explained or even discussed the letter or the cause of the break.<sup>92</sup> However, according to Hugh Curran, who was head monk and living at the Rochester

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<sup>89</sup> Morinaga roshi held these teachings at the home of Prof. Martin Colcott of Princeton University. Colcott's wife Akiko is Morinaga's niece. Colcott and Morinaga, now dead, had a long and close relationship. Colcott translated for Morinaga during his second visit to Nowick's group in the early 1970's. Morinaga made two visits to Maine, not only to instruct the group, but to instruct Nowick as well in how he wanted things done. On Morinaga's first visit, Prof. Luis O. Gomez of the University of Michigan translated. I believe Gomez was a student of Morinaga's at the time,

<sup>90</sup> The author has a copy of the letter.

<sup>91</sup> See "Community Concern: Blue Hill group confronts effects of sexual abuse through education, support for victims," Alicia Anstead, Bangor Daily News, March 28, 2007, p.1. A well balanced article available at <http://www.workingwaterfront.com/article.asp?storyID=20070602> .

<sup>92</sup> At the time of the break, there was a rumor that it was caused by Kapleau wanting to chant the Heart Sutra in English, rather than in Japanese. Yasutani, according to this story, was strongly against this change, which led to misspoken words and the break. This explanation, however, was not widely accepted.

Center at the time, Kapleau privately revealed the cause of the break.<sup>93</sup> According to Curran, Yasutani initiated the break mainly because Kapleau was unwilling to attend more retreats in order to receive further Zen training. This was partially related to Kapleau's dislike of Eido Shimano, under whose hand, to some degree, he would be.

Kapleau had studied with Yasutani for many years. Why would Kapleau risk severing his relationship with his teacher, after such a long and arguably arduous period? Could it be that Kapleau and Yasutani were operating under different standards, one Western and one Eastern? Was Kapleau, who was approximately sixty at the time, merely exercising his American sense of individual freedom and equality? Perhaps he felt that he was mature enough and knowledgeable enough that he did not need to be forced to study further under a young man, Eido Shimano, not to mention a young man with a questionable reputation with women. This refusal must have struck the conservative Yasutani<sup>94</sup> as heretical, a denial of a basic concept of Japanese culture—hierarchy and knowing your place in the order. If these suppositions are correct, what a perfect example of a clash of cultures.

In 1971, shortly after Dick Baker became Baker roshi by receiving Dharma transmission from Shunryu Suzuki roshi, his dying teacher and founder of the SFZC, Kapleau let it be known to his students that he, too, wanted to be called roshi. Clearly, this would increase his sanctity and authority. It would also enhance his stature in the free market place of Western Buddhism. So Philip Kapleau, sensei morphed into Kapleau roshi. It was widely believed in the Zen community that Kapleau had finished his training, though he had not received the formal ceremony of Dharma transmission because of the last minute break with Yasutani. In the following years, Kapleau enjoyed all the privileges and authority that go along with the title.

In 1986 David Scates, a disgruntled ex-student of Kapleau's wrote a letter to Yasutani's successor, Yamada roshi, complaining about Kapleau. Yamada roshi, then head of the entire Sanbokyodan sect<sup>95</sup>, knew Kapleau well, as Yamada had translated for him with Yasutani and given him koan interviews in Yasutani's absence.

Though to Yamada, Scates was a complete unknown, Yamada wrote a long letter airing strong grievances that he and his fellow translator Kabuto roshi had not gotten proper credit for their contribution to Kapleau's bestselling book Three Pillars of Zen and, perhaps even more explosive, that Kapleau had only finished

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<sup>93</sup> Hugh Curran, in a private correspondence with the author, described the break and Kapleau's decision to use the honorific "roshi."

<sup>94</sup> Yasutani was extremely conservative and was described as a "fanatical militarist" as was his teacher, Harada roshi. Yasutani was against unions, wanted the universities as they were, "smashed one and all" and blamed world conflicts and wars on Western-style social sciences that enhance the idea of self. See Victoria, Brian, Zen At War, Weatherhill, 1997, pp. 167-168. Also see pp. 190-191.

<sup>95</sup> The Sanbokyodan sect of Zen was founded by Yasutani. Though it is perhaps the largest sect in the West, it is rather small in Japan.

one third of Yasutani's koan curriculum and was, therefore, definitely not a Dharma Heir.

Yamada sent a copy of the letter to Kapleau who wrote back defending his position by claiming that only he and Yatsutani roshi knew that he had completed most of the koan course. However, by this time, with Yastutani dead, this could be not be confirmed. At this time, Kapleau perhaps being cautious, never said exactly what he did and did not finish. Kapleau, though disputing what part of the course he did complete, was in fact admitting that he did not complete the entire koan course. However, if Kapleau had been more open at the time of the break, all of this would have been made clear. Kapleau also attacked the character of the disgruntled ex-student Scates,<sup>96</sup> besides maintaining that Yamada did not do as much work on the Three Pillars of Zen as he had claimed.<sup>97</sup>

The letter exchange is extremely interesting as it shows Yamada holding a strong animosity towards Kapleau for close to thirteen years that, under the slightest instigation from a complete stranger, he let pour out. Kapleau, for his part, kept hidden that he had not completed Yasutani's koan course, though he led people to believe he had. He also took the title roshi upon himself, perhaps to compete with Baker and Eido Shimano, gave Dharma transmission to others, though he did not have it himself, all the while claiming to be following the orthodox Zen way. In fact, Kapleau received only two certificates from Yasutani: one dated August 7, 1958 that "he passed the initial barrier" [Mu koan] and as such, is "granted qualification as a propagator/evangelist of this religious order" and the second, dated June 28, 1964 that he underwent ordination as a Soto monk and, as such, "he acquired the qualification of a Buddhist priest."<sup>98</sup> According to the Sanbokyodan sect, neither of these two certificates has much significance when it comes to being a legitimate teacher of Zen. Yamada offers that Kapleau may be fraudulent in holding out that his precept or kensho certificate is a Dharma transmission document.

In 1997 Ji'un Kubota roshi, Yamada's successor as head of the Sanbokyodan sect, answered an enquiry from a Polish Zen group asking about Kapleau's credentials. He replied that Kapleau did not finish his training, claiming that Kapleau's fame for the Three Pillars of Zen was undeserved because he [Kubota] and Yamada roshi had translated "all" of the work in the book. He added that Kapleau "was not able to read Japanese" and only made their translation "more understandable" to native English readers. He remarked that Kapleau was arrogant and proud and that he treated Yasutani "abusively and impolitely." He then proclaimed, "He [Kapleau] is no more a Zen man. His teaching is no more Buddhist Zen but only his own philosophy."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hugh Curran maintains that Kapleau had a tendency to dismiss criticism by attacking the messenger.

<sup>97</sup> David Scates, the fellow who initiated the letter exchange, gave me copies of the letters. They were meant to be public, so any one interested can email me at [slachs@att.net](mailto:slachs@att.net) for a copy of the exchange.

<sup>98</sup> The author has photo copies of the two documents along with a translation by Brian Victoria, author of Zen At War. Any one interested in a copy can email me at the address in the above footnote.

<sup>99</sup> The author has a photo copy of the letter available to any one interested by emailing me at [slach@att.net](mailto:slach@att.net).

Both Nowick and Kapleau misled their students and the wider Zen community by encouraging them to believe that they had completed their training. Nowick, when confronted by a former student with Morinaga's letter, responded by saying that Morinaga should not have discussed his training. Kapleau, under different circumstances, also claimed that Yamada should not have discussed his training. In fact, what both did not like was having their real position, in terms of their training, made public.

### **Bringing It All Back Home**

*Buddhism is not any special teaching. It's our human way.*<sup>100</sup>

This paper has attempted to point out the yawning disparity between the image of the Zen master, as presented by the standard model of Zen, and how Zen masters in the West have actually functioned as living, breathing beings in complicated life situations. To a lesser extent we have also shown some of the conditions at Zen centers that foster this myth of the Zen roshi.

Further, while the Zen institution would like us to believe, and its followers often do believe, that its leaders have a complete lack of self-interest, we have shown that this is not always the case. For example, once Baker received "real" transmission from Suzuki, all his actions, no matter how obviously self-serving, were seen by his well-socialized disciples as enlightened behavior. Yet, Baker claimed that having girlfriends while being married with a child, eating fancy dinners and driving a "nice car" were implementing Suzuki's commitment to lay practice. Though Eido Shimano led one of the more prominent Zen groups in the Northeast, he had a thirty-year history of sexual improprieties. His behavior was so egregious that, in 1995, six leaders of American Zen groups complained to the President of the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society, the group that Shimano headed, about thirty years "of the same depressing story:" "trust manipulated in the form of his sexual misconduct and abuse."<sup>101</sup> These are but two examples of egregious self-interest.

Yet, self-interest frequently manifests itself in much more subtle ways. No doubt Suzuki, Soen, et al. wanted to spread the Dharma. But surely, we can investigate how other interests and motivations might combine with and/or follow the original one. For example, it is assumed by many that Suzuki gave Baker, and only Baker, Dharma transmission because of Baker's attainment. But could it be any number of other reasons that may have been of interest to Suzuki: Baker's commitment to growth, his ability to

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<sup>100</sup> Crooked Cucumber, p.184.

<sup>101</sup> This letter is an unprecedented event in American Zen. The letter mentions having Shimano resign, or the option of entering a program "designed to help overcome his harmful predilections." Copies of the letter are available from the author by emailing [slachs@att.net](mailto:slachs@att.net). Shimano is still the leader of the Zen Studies Society in NYC with a large monastery, Daibosatsu, in upstate NY.

raise money, his charismatic personality and friendship with famous people, some personal attachment on Suzuki's part, and so on?

Further, according to Suzuki, Soen had no self-interest, no reason to travel around the world aside from eating cookies and drinking green tea, no investment in his performance, no thought or investment in anything he did. What's more, Soen's giving Dharma transmission to Eido Shimano, despite knowing that he had "some trouble" with women, was supposedly based only on spiritual attainment through discipleship. But might not Soen, the iconoclastic poet and roshi, also have liked the idea of having adoring, unquestioning<sup>102</sup> western disciples, his lineage spread around the world, centers in Israel and America and hence adding to his prestige in Japan? Might the fact that his heir Eido Shimano had raised large sums of money from the rich and famous, including the inventor of Xerox and his wife, had established his Center in an upscale NYC neighborhood, had attracted a large following, and was building a new, large country monastery in America have had some influence on the purity of the Dharma transmission? Nowick and Kapleau were no doubt committed to building significant Zen Centers in the Northeast, but didn't they also gain a tremendous amount of prestige and authority along with unquestioned power by letting their followers and the larger Zen community believe that they had more authority and legitimacy than they really had? Since I have shown in this paper that all these Zen roshi have flaws like everyone else, one can only maintain the purity of their motivations by spinning their lives and actions in the most idealistic way.

Not only have we shown how these modern Zen roshi are not completely without self-interest, we have also seen how they have internalized their idealized role as described by the standard model. First, we see Baker presenting Suzuki as the idealized Zen master unlike any living human one has ever met. Then, we see Baker, in turn, being presented by Suzuki as his living heir, the epitome of the Zen person possessing "real" transmission. We see Suzuki presenting Soen Nakagawa roshi as Buddha-like, a living example of the original Buddha, completely at ease and empty of any thoughts, desires, and any self-consciousness, happy beyond "usual" people's understanding. We see Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn assuring members of the SFZC that Richard Baker roshi is "sincere" and "trustworthy," though they had just lived through twelve years or more of his untrustworthiness and insincerity. We see Soen Nakagawa roshi assure his followers in NYC that his Dharma heir Eido Shimano, known for sexual malfeasance, is an authentic living heir in direct connection to the historical Sakyamuni Buddha. In all these examples, there is the "to-ing and fro-ing," mentioned earlier, the shuttling back and forth between Zen's original perfection and its being brought forward in time to the present.

According to Zen, an enlightened being's activity is beyond the judgment, comprehension, and understanding of "usual people." Therefore, it is necessary to have a lineage of enlightened beings, sealed with Dharma transmission, to assure the

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<sup>102</sup> In a Japanese Zen monastery, the roshi has to listen to senior monks who have a large say in how things are to be done. In America, an older Japanese roshi like Soen had unquestioned authority in virtually all matters.

unenlightened of the Zen roshi's pedigree and his insight and enlightened actions. Yet, in each one of these cases all the prestige, purported wisdom and profound insight of the Dharma transmitted Zen roshi failed to guarantee Zen followers the unquestionable truth and certainty of their judgments. The validating roshi misperceived matters with which they were in intimate contact. More importantly, what they saw and told their followers was what the standard model of Zen, along with the social space they lived in, instructed them to see and say. Any suggestion of improper behavior, imbalanced power relations, limited authority, cultural differences or undue prestige was nowhere to be heard or seen. Rather, the Dharma heir was presented in such a way, so that, in the eyes of the beholder, all his authority and prestige was legitimated, as was the Zen institution.<sup>103</sup>

Is my entire argument based simply on coming up with a few cases of flawed behavior? To the contrary, the problem is embedded in the very definitions of Zen institutions and its legitimating literature and rituals. The terms and ideas that give undeserved power, prestige, and authority to the Zen master/roshi need to be re-examined in order to change the conditions that impute qualities and attainments to people who do not have them. Teachers can be a great help whether to learn the hula-hoop or to practice Zen. When we treat teachers as idealized people who match a mythological role and impute qualities to them that they do not possess, we invite trouble. Students pay by having their critical faculties undermined, by putting their common sense to sleep with the expectation of a greater reward in the future, and by, quite often, being kept in childlike dependency, afraid to question or ask "Why?" Commonly, too many "whys" and the student is viewed as problematic, and will be coerced to keep quiet or to leave. The roshi pays by becoming a role player, where one part of his consciousness is set against the rest. A part of the self becomes objectified, not just to others, but to itself, as a social role. This social role is in conflict with, and imposed upon, the rest of his non-social self-consciousness. The student views the roshi as empty of any selfish intentions, possessor of unmediated truth, and so forth, all the while the roshi's internal desires and thoughts are running their course as with all human beings. A strange dynamic is set in motion, whereby the roshi may become alienated.<sup>104</sup> We know that power has a corrupting influence and, as we have seen with Zen in America, imputing undeserved and largely unquestioned power to the Zen master/roshi has led to sexual, financial and other scandals which have been harmful to all concerned.

It is time for us in the West to take a good hard look at the reality of Zen mythology. The purpose of religious practice is to bring people into intense relationship with life.<sup>105</sup> This

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<sup>103</sup> Jenkins, Pierre Bourdieu, p. 104. See pp. 104 – 110 for a relevant discussion of Bourdieu's ideas on symbolic violence.

<sup>104</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, pp. 81-101. The section "Religion and Alienation" describes this process well. Berger points out that alienation may become a great source of power as it removes doubts and uncertainties that may cause problems and hesitancy in a non-alienated person.

<sup>105</sup> Brazier, David, The New Buddhism, London: Robinson, 1988. Though I question some of Braziers thoughts, I think the book is important as it examines many key aspects of Buddhism: varieties of enlightenment, lineage, teacher –disciple relationship, relationship to political ideas and so on.

requires looking clearly at that which is in front of us, not by taking unexamined comfort in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultural ideas and forms from earlier ages. After all, the practice can never be more or less than this. The earliest examples of the Zen master *qua* Buddha equivalent coming to America have been less than perfect examples of the tradition as portrayed from early times in the Far East. They have also produced less than perfect sons and daughters in America. Will America, with its open society and omnipresent media and communications, be able to maintain a hagiography for their Zen masters, acceptable to the mass of disciples? Or will the modern Zen master in America, finally, lose some of his bells and scarves?

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