

Inquiring Without Images

I would like to make one correction about the introduction. It was mentioned that I was influenced by Krishnamurti. It is not a matter of influence at all, but simply a matter of seeing clearly for oneself, what is pointed out clearly. This is freedom from influence.

The title of this conference is "Women in American Buddhism." It is a fact that one is a woman or a man. Also that one has an image of oneself as a woman or a man. Not just one image but a whole host of images. That one is a Buddhist is an image. That one is an American is an image, apart from the fact that one carries some papers when one goes abroad. If one looks carefully, to think of oneself as American is tied up with images, emotions, and feelings of separation, as are all images.

Just before leaving to come here, I was asked a question by a woman who was working in the kitchen. (She had dropped in recently, and had been very active in women's movement) She asked me, "What are you going to say to these people when you go? Are you just going to talk about this or that, or are you going to be concern-

listen to some things at all. It may be too painful or too threatening.

Do you see that you do have an image of yourself as being somebody or many "bodies"; being a Buddhist, being a woman, being an American? The American image was recently very much appealed to by watching the Olympic games. Does one watch deeper than what one sees on the screen? When the national anthem is played, when the flags go up and our young men and women stand on top, does the patriotic heart start beating and feel good, having been given a boost — but a boost to what? A boost to an image! If one's country has won lots of medals, one doesn't mind seeing others win one too every once in a while, because one is also identified with the image of "brotherhood."

As far as one's religious affiliation is concerned, is one identified with it, attached to it, so that one's self-image includes and is invested in the religion, the religious group or center that one belongs to? This can easily be tested. When someone criticizes one's religion, does one feel defensive immediately, personally

because one has been manipulated.

Watch it for yourself. You will discover amazing things, what goes on in this mind and therefore throughout this body. Anything that goes on in this mind, any single thought, is totally connected with the whole organism — electrically, neurochemically. One pleasurable thought gives a gush of good feeling. Then one wants to keep that, which is another thought. "How can I keep that?" When it stops, "What have I done to lose it?" "How can I get it back?"

The poor body has to respond to all of this, not even done yet with the pleasure, when already there is pain. The body isn't done with it quickly. It takes the physical organism a while to get back into balance. I don't know whether our bodies even know what balance is anymore. There's so much residue still there, not just within the body, but of course within the brain.

We do all this mental bookkeeping, remembering what he or she did to us this morning, yesterday, a year ago, sometimes ten or fifteen years ago. "I'm not going to forget that," one says, which means no relationship with the person is possible. The person is branded, marked. One sees him or her and there is the image of what he or she did. Our response is dictated by the image, dominated by it. When there is an insight into this whole process, and one sees it, the seeing is already the interruption of it. Nonetheless, image-making may continue because it's very pleasurable to us. We live in and for our images, even if they're painful, because we think we have to live for something.

Can one question all this? I don't call this work "Zen" anymore, because the word is extra, unnecessary to the inquiry. This fundamental inquiry into the human mind and body (not my mind and body personally, but the human mind) doesn't need any descriptive label. To the extent that this mind (as it functions in images, in blockages, in contradiction and conflict) is clearly understood, the whole human mind is clearly understood, because it does not differ fundamentally from one person to another. On the surface, superficially, we're all different, but fundamentally each of us has an image of being a self, of being someone.

To see that this is an idea, a thought creation, seems inordinately difficult. The self-image feels so solid, so real, that one takes the self for a fact. One confuses it with this body and the ongoing processes of thought, sensations and emotion. But there is no owner of all this.

To say "this is me" and have an image — "I'm good at this, I'm poor at that" — is a mental construction, a bunch of thoughts and ideas just like any other thought and idea, part of that stream of thinking poured out by the brain. Yet "this is me" is the root of all our individual interpersonal problems and our international problems.

Most of you here are probably very concerned with the state of the world, the terrorism, the fighting that goes on in the Middle East and elsewhere. Recently I heard a famous news commentator, reporting about a new violent incident in Jerusalem where Christians, Muslims and Jews are at bloody loggerheads with each other. He said, "How is it possible, in the place where three of the greatest religions were born and all of them preach peace, that people kill each other? It's unfathomable." But if one thoroughly understands identification, investment, image, defensiveness and aggressiveness by seeing it directly in oneself as it happens, then it is not unfathomable that members of religious groups fight each other and even kill each other.

So what is one going to do about all of this? Which was the question asked of me by this woman in the kitchen, "What are you going to do about it?"

It is a simple fact that this work can only start with oneself. If in oneself confusion reigns, images dominate and motivate one's action and position and goals of what one



Photo by Sonia Alexander

Toni Packer is the resident teacher at Genesee Valley Zen Center, Rochester, NY. Born in Germany in 1927, she then lived in Switzerland, where she married an American student. They moved to the United States in 1951, where she studied psychology at the University of Buffalo. In 1967, she became a student of Kapleau Roshi. In 1971 she was asked to begin counseling at the Rochester Zen Center, and in 1976 to take on additional teaching duties. Her encounter with the work of Krishnamurti led her to a deep questioning of all the established forms and traditions, including those of Zen Buddhism. She left the Zen Center in 1981 when she felt she could no longer work within the boundaries of the Buddhist tradition. In 1982, Genesee Valley Zen Center was founded, where Toni now teaches and administers, together with the resident staff.

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ed with women? How they have been downtrodden in spiritual traditions, placed at the bottom of the hierarchical structure? How men consider that women are incapable of liberation, emancipation, enlightenment (which holds for the Zen tradition as well as other Buddhist traditions)? There are women who are waiting to hear about it. Are you going to address yourself to this? What are you going to do about it?"

The work of questioning deeply into the human mind is more than specific issues, or specific problems. The whole human condition is embraced. However, this work is not doing what we normally do and have been doing for hundreds and thousands of years: namely, rushing to solve problems in a more or less violent way. This work is to understand a problem, not just superficially, or even deeply, but totally. It is to understand so completely that the problem may be resolved not through a solution, but through understanding.

Before continuing, let me say something about listening — because we are from many different backgrounds, places, countries, traditions, or no tradition. How does one listen to a talk like this or the following ones? Can you listen carefully as though it was just a conversation between you and me? How are you listening? Do you have an image of Toni?

To my surprise, when meeting me, a lot of people say "I know about you. I've heard about you." So do you have an image? Knowing about Toni, having an idea about her, maybe you've read a little booklet, heard stories, and now you have an idea of what she is or propagates. And do you have an image of yourself, what group or tradition you belong to? Is there the ever-readiness in the mind to compare what is being said to what one already knows? Then you're not listening. You're comparing, and what is really said flows by unheard.

So, at least for the short duration of this talk, is it possible to suspend what one knows, to suspend comparison? Can one just be open, completely open, not knowing how one will react, just receiving? If one has an image of oneself or of this person that is sitting here, this pure listening is impeded or distorted. One reads into it or subtracts from it, or one will not want to

attacked and hurt? Or if somebody praises one's group or center, is one's vanity flattered? One's personal vanity, one's identification — this is "me."

And as a woman, what kind of images does one nurture, mostly unaware? Many people say to me that women have such a bad image of themselves, that one has to work on one's image, improve it, which means substituting a good image for a bad image. But why does one need any image? One doesn't understand the difficulties, the impediment, the separation that all images create within ourselves and among each other.

At times one may well have witnessed the battle of inner images: one wants to be a good mother, but one always wants to go to retreats. There are guilt feelings as the mother, and guilt feelings if one doesn't go to retreats enough. So there is a battle of images within, which expresses itself in general irritation. And in inter-personal relationships too there is strain; two people living together having images of themselves and the other inevitably creates contradictions. Who dominates whom? One feels manipulated and needs to manipulate

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Photo by Sonia Alexander

"It is a simple fact that this work can only start with oneself."

wants to be or to become — when that dominates the inner scene, how can one resolve confusion among each other and in the world? One just carries that confusion with one whatever one does. And yet will one start to look, to question everything, and leave no stone unturned, which may shake up one's whole foundation? One may anxiously or defiantly keep one's images and say, "I can't do without them, I'm attached to them. It's human nature."

But is one at least clear what one is doing? Can one see that one's foundation is one of separation and isolation, because it is divided from the foundations of other human beings? Each one is defending their own foundation. Believing in it, putting their refuge in it, and at times reaching as if over the foundation wall to shake hands with someone else, who reaches over his or her foundation wall to shake hands and to assure each other of mutual understanding. Or can these walls break down completely? So that nothing separates us from one another? It is a tremendous challenge.

One may feel that I am exaggerating, that it's my opinion. I'm not trying to give opinions. I'm talking about what comes out of looking very seriously into oneself, and seeing the dangerous consequences of identification with something or somebody, and the danger of being somebody.

It's only when you really work on yourself, as many of you do, probing deeply and stopping nowhere — not "I'm only going this far and no farther" — but going all the way, that one really comes in

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WITHOUT IMAGES

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touch with this fundamental anxiety of being nobody. And usually there's an immediate withdrawal from that anxiety. But will one not escape this time? Will one face that anxiety—but just anxiety? Not stopping the questioning, but simply looking, feeling, listening, quietly with no goal in mind. Just being with what is there or isn't there in utter silence...

Maybe there is a flash of insight into the fact that we are nobody, nothing. With this glimpse comes a joy that cannot possibly be put into words. It has nothing to do with words. It is no image, no thought.

Then the next moment, does one try to grab onto it, make it into an image? "I am somebody who has seen." "Now I know." Does one congratulate oneself again? Does one try to recall and relive the experience? Images come so quickly, like mushrooms springing out of the ground on a moist rainy day. There they are — new images. Will one see them immediately and drop them instantly?

Or does one just carry on, "I've done this thing, I've gotten through it. This is it. I'm no one!" What does it mean — "I'm no one?" It's already become a concept, a memory.

So — is it possible to see and be free of images from moment to moment — really being no one and therefore completely open and related to everyone and everything, with a lovingness that cannot be produced through any kind of practice? Love is not practiceable. It's either there or it isn't, and it is not there when the "me" is there who wants to bring it about, who tries to grab it and hold on to it.

One may deceive oneself as being a loving kind of person being very compassionate. Is it just an image? Do you see it when it comes up? Can it be dropped instantly so one really does not know what one is? Just letting action flow out of this not-knowing, just being in touch with what's within and before one — listening, seeing, responding openly? It's up to each one of us. No one can do it for us. Listen!

EVERYDAY LIFE

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emptiness. We don't recognize what is constantly changing. We try to fix it or hold it in some way. "Oh! I am a vegetarian meditator. This will always be my life." Right away we're headed for trouble. The fundamental teaching of the Buddha is impermanence, constant change. We have to recognize that we are all of it, and it is constantly changing. Emptiness is not like some big black void waiting for us to fall into it and yell for help. Emptiness is constant change, nothing fixed, nothing permanent.

We are a celibate nun, and also we're very sensual people who love being married and having relationships. We are very vulnerable and frightened and childlike, and also very clear-minded and steady, with diamond-like wisdom to cut aside any impediment. We are also fluffy-brained and confused and forget things. We're health food nuts who love to eat burned oatmeal in the morning because "It's good for our practice." We also love those Pepperidge Farm cookies with the sugar icing for tea break.

We are vegetarians and meat eaters. If we don't recognize the meat-eater in us we cannot relate to them "outside". A whole world is off-limits to us. Right away there are conflicts. "You guys are not on the right path, I am." It doesn't mean we have to eat meat, but, being both carnivores and vegetarians, we can choose freely each moment which to be.

There are endless ways to divide us up into little boxes and say "This is the right box." All those parts constantly changing and flowing are us. If we try to exclude a part, it's going to cause us trouble.

As a pediatrician I talk to many parents. I have to know there's a child-abuser in myself, or I can't work at all with child-abusers. If I don't know that part of me, boy, they know it right away: "Here comes that goody-goody." We all have parts that comes home frazzled after a hard day's work and hasn't sat a sesshin in two months because our husband got to do the sesshin this time, and when the kid starts crying and whining, you want to open the window and throw him out. Or you want to say to your teenager, "Look, see you later when you get your act together. Come back in about five years."

Knowing and exploring all those parts is exploring Buddha nature. It's not just human nature, it's everything. I am the grass, the leaves, the Datsun Z. I am Ronald Reagan.

I am a star and a piece of dirt. All of that blending together and constantly changing is who we are. It's not a blend in the sense of gruel, like on the seventh day of sesshin when the cooks keep mixing the leftovers from days before into the pot and it comes out all gray with some little green flecks in it, not tasting like anything. It's a rich and lovely blending like Chinese food, that preserves and recognizes the diverse elements: salty, sweet, spicy, crisp and soft, and so on. That's what our mixture is — delicious. Our Buddha nature is delicious, as Gesshin said.

We mentioned the notion that women don't have Buddha nature or can't become enlightened until they become men. Should we reject that notion? Or can we examine it, ask what it means in a deeper sense...women can't become enlightened until they are born as men? Absolutely right! I can't become enlightened until I have been born as a man, as a woman, as neither and as both.

Men cannot become enlightened until they know their masculine nature, their feminine nature, the nature that is neither and both.

So let us practice together. Every life and every minute of life is communion, coming into union with who we are. □

GENTLE AND STRONG

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grabbiness? Or are we sitting instead with this kind of mind that other women teachers have spoken about today, this open-hearted, not-knowing, giving-up-yourself practice? No grabbiness, no gaining idea, just moment after moment open.

When we had finished the California sesshin, we sat around outside in a circle

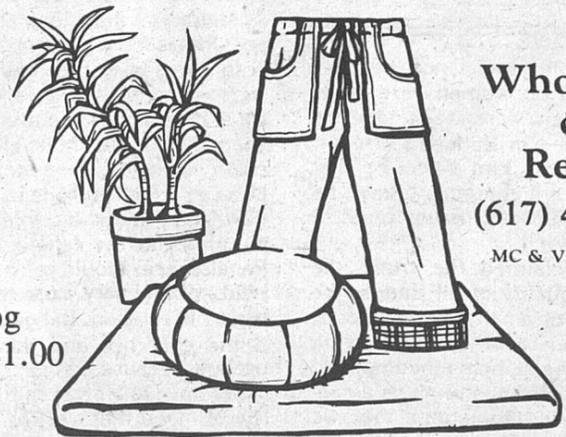
and had a very intimate time together, really open-hearted, ready to share experience and feelings of freedom and deep compassion with one another. What came out of it were feelings of real strength with that compassion. There was our compassion and wisdom, gentle and strong: real women warriors cutting off all their delusions about what they could or could not be. There we were!! □



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