

The following talk was taken from the opening speech at the summer Kyol Che (a 19-day intensive retreat) held at Diamond Hill Zen Monastery on July 30. Lincoln Rhodes, who is Abbot of the Kwan Um Zen School, supervised the design and construction of the monastery, a process which started in the winter of 1983-84 when the first trees were cut to clear the building site.

It's a treat to be up here, because I will finally be able to use this building in the way it was intended. For several years we've been building it, so it's very wonderful to be leading a retreat here.

Whether you've been a student of Soen Sa Nim's for a long time, or even if you just came here this weekend, you've all heard a few talks about Zen. "Zen mind is everyday mind." "Only pay attention." "When you're washing dishes, just wash the

dishes." "When you're doing something, just do it 100%."

If that's all Zen is, why go to the trouble of building a monastery? We did go to a lot of trouble to build it, for instance, just getting 34,000 pounds of roof tiles up on the roof! Why do that if Zen is just paying attention to everyday mind? I see a lot of you came from places like Kansas or Toronto. You can wash dishes in Kansas. You can pay attention in Toronto. Why come this far?

The Buddha was a very high-class teacher, so he said it was because human beings have desire, anger and ignorance. I'm not so high-class, so I would say we come here because we're crazy or dumb. The Buddha was a much better diplomat than I am. Saying we're dumb doesn't sound nice.

About five years ago I was really dumb. I went on a 100-day retreat by myself in a cabin in the woods for the winter. Many things happened on that retreat, but coming up here to speak tonight reminded me of

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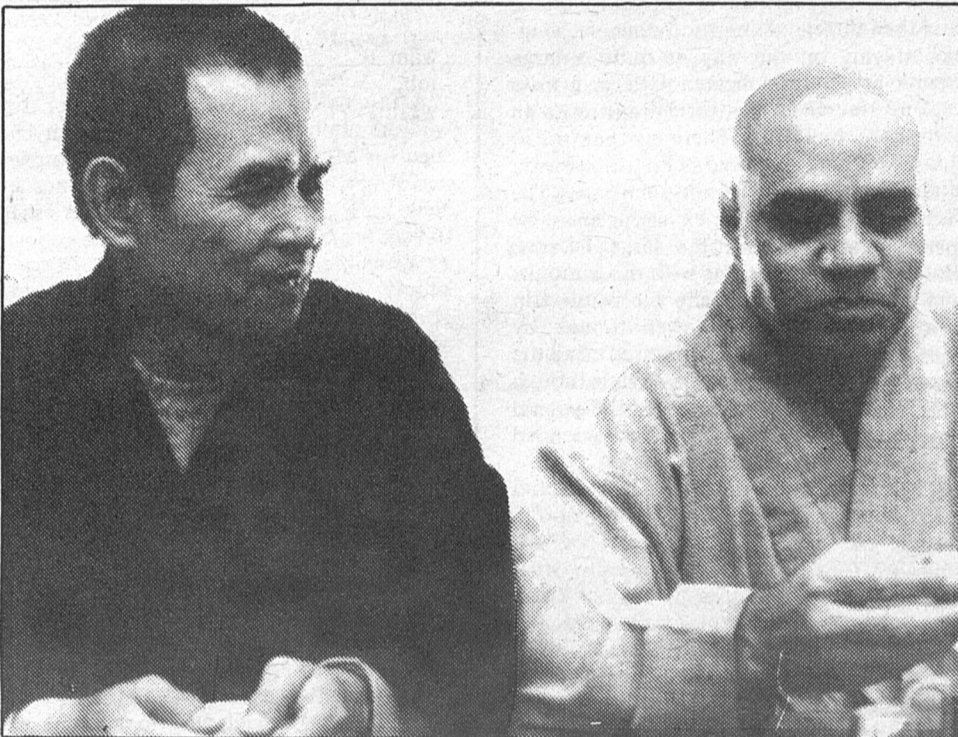
A GENTLE RAIN

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Thich Nhat Hanh was accompanied by his student, Sister Phuong, director of Plum Village, a peace community which Thich Nhat Hanh established in the south of France. About 10 people live there pursuing mindfulness practice. Plum Village is open to visitors only one month during the year. In a talk to the PZC community, Sister Phuong spoke of her experiences during the Vietnam war and her ongoing efforts to feed and educate the refugees, especially the children, from that and subsequent conflicts in Vietnam. Sister Phuong is a lay member of the Tiep Hien Order.

Thich Nhat Hanh's attendant for this American visit was Arnie Kotler, a Berkeley Zen student who was secretary to Richard Baker Roshi. Arnie explained that Vietnamese Zen "is a complete blend of mindfulness practice and zazen."

In a talk at PZC, Thich Nhat Hanh discussed the practice of Buddhism in America.



Thich Nhat Hanh and Mu Soeng Sunim, director of Diamond Hill Zen Monastery.

enlightenment or liberation. And you practice very hard. Many Asian Buddhists have great respect for that kind of courage and frankness.

"Buddhism is not one; there are many kinds. And there will be a truly American form of Buddhism, which many of us look forward to seeing. It is possible that Buddhism will get a fresh start in America, because America is still very young and vigorous."

In discussing the alienation from Western society that many American Buddhists seem to have, Thich Nhat Hanh said, "It is like a plant pulled out of the soil, which cannot be replanted. Even if you try, the plant itself resists. The soil does not seem to be fit for the plant. I think something is wrong with the soil, and something is also wrong with the plant. Meditation is to find out, in order to make a compromise."

Using the analogy of a tree, in which we are leaves being nourished by the roots, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke of the activity of the leaves which is necessary to nourish the roots.

"All of us are not only children of society, we are the mothers of society. We have to nourish society. But how can we do that if the stem linking the leaf and the tree no longer exists? Society needs us, especially when we have an insight that can help change society, make it into a more livable place. Therefore, trying not to be alienated from society is very important."

In his recent book, *A Guide to Walking Meditation*, (available from Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 27, Nyack, NY 10960) Thich Nhat Hanh says, "The practice of walking meditation opens your eyes to wonders in the universe. It turns Samsara into the Pure Land. It lets sorrow and worry fall away, and brings peace. But walking meditation also helps us to see pain, anguish and suffering. When we are aware we can see clearly what is happening in life. I often tell meditation students, 'If you can't see

what is happening in front of you and around you how can you understand your true nature?' It is not by closing your eyes that you see your own nature. On the contrary, you must open your eyes wide and wake up to the real situation in the world to see completely your whole Dharma Treasure, your whole Dharma Body. The bombs, the hunger, the pursuit of wealth and power—these are not separate from your nature."

"Every path in the world is your walking meditation path. Once you are awake, you will not hesitate to enter these paths."

"When I returned to Europe after trying to help the boat people, I felt that Western life was not life. It seemed strange to me. After seeing refugees who had suffered so much to survive at sea, I landed at the airport in Paris, and driving home I passed cities and supermarkets with colorful lights. It was like walking in a dream. How could there be such disparity? Here people were seeking pleasure with liquor under neon lights. There people on the sea were pursued, robbed, raped and killed. Aware of suffering, I rebelled against the superficial way of life."

Thich Nhat Hanh's visit seemed to have a profound impact on students who attended his retreat and talks at PZC. Buddhist Peace Fellowship board member, Ruth Klein, a long-term PZC resident and coordinator for his East Coast visit, noted inclusion of women in everything. "There was a clear, conscious pattern of referring to men and women in his speech. I asked Sister Phuong if he had had to work on that and she said no, he had always been (aware) that way." In discussing the retreat (in which she acted as liaison between Thich Nhat Hanh and PZC and Diamond Hill Zen Monastery), she said: "It was clearly designed to be accessible to families, and to be re-

spectful to men and women in their family responsibilities." Ruth said that Thich Nhat Hanh makes no distinction between monks, nuns and laypersons. "Your status in the Tiep Hien Order does not depend on whether you are celibate or not."

A Zen student who was born in Vietnam, worked in Cambodia and lived at PZC, becoming Head Dharma Teacher before she moved, Van Loc Tran said, "Thich Nhat Hanh's gentleness and humility has reached the very depth of my being. I still feel a lot of joy and sadness at this moment. A retreat can be done in a family, among friends. A teacher is not very necessary. The commitment to practice mindfulness, understanding and love is sufficient for a good retreat. There is nothing such as 'personal.' Everything is 'inter-being' with each other. What we do will affect other people, trees, animals, in a word, the whole universe. This helps me be more and more aware of my actions and words."

Jim Doran, Director of Cambridge Zen Center, said of the retreat: "I saw how a different form of practice (mindfulness) opens different perspectives. When you met somebody or were just walking by another person, you came to a complete halt, looking at the other person, haphchanged (palms together) and smiled, then continued on your way. After several days of this I got a tremendous hit. I was so used to our Zen style of avoidance in which if you're practicing hard on a retreat, you avoid making eye contact with the other participants. Here the practice was the very opposite. You were supposed to make eye contact, smile, and as you haphchanged, say to yourself, 'A lotus for you, the Buddha to be.' So with this form, other people became an opportunity to practice, instead of being a possible hindrance or distraction (that would) water down your retreat."

"The qualities of joy and ease were built into the forms or the retreat and even the schedule. I saw in mindfulness practice a more flexible form for family, career, regular lay life."

Several people who came to the retreat from other Zen schools were angered by the relaxed style and left, one immediately following the orientation. Thich Nhat Hanh had asked people not to get up earlier than the scheduled time (of 6 a.m.) in order to do their own practice, but to follow his form. After training in the Kwan Um Zen School for a number of years, Ruth Klein noted that she found it even more demanding and disciplined to relax, go slower, to take time to breathe and be mindful. At one point Thich Nhat Hanh observed, "Many people seem to view their practice as an obstruction to their lives." Ruth reported that he often said "Practice is joyful. If it is not, you are doing something incorrect."

Following this East Coast visit, Thich Nhat Hanh and his attendants went west for public talks and workshops in Colorado, Texas and California, leaving many people with "new appreciation of the richness of mindfulness practice and walking meditation." As Ruth Klein said, "I experienced him as a gentle rain that slowly seeps in." □



Photo by Ruth Klein

CZC resident VanLoc Tran and Sister Phuong discover that they have the same Dharma name—"Barefoot Sister."

"I think most of the Americans who come to Buddhism are intellectuals, young people. And the door to enter the Dharma is not the door of faith, but the door of psychology." He noted that in looking at the encounter between Buddhism and Western civilization, people often speak "as if the West has never had Buddhism. Therefore it is interesting to see what is Buddhist in non-Buddhist traditions. That way we can better understand (both) Buddhism and Western civilization. I think that the encounter between Buddhism and Western civilization is a very exciting event in our century. Something important might happen because of that."

"A number of you who have come to Buddhism seem to have rejected everything that is faulty in Western civilization. It is courageous to abandon everything in order to engage oneself in the search for

FINDING YOUR SPOT

Continued from page 3

one thing that has stayed with me. It was winter, snowy and cold, and most of the time I was by myself. There were some people who stayed nearby and came and went, but there were long periods when I was by myself. Often I'd be lonely, and all kinds of thinking states would appear.

About two-thirds of the way through the retreat I started to go to a particular tree every afternoon around 4:30 after I finished sitting. It was on top of the small mountain in western Massachusetts where I was doing the retreat. Called the look-out tree, it was a big pine tree on the edge of a cliff. It had branches in just the right places, like a step-ladder. It was very tall and you could climb to the very top.

Near the top was a place where you could sit and hang on to the tree. I started doing this every day. I didn't know why. It just seemed as if I needed to do that. It was my spot. You could see for 40 or 50 miles. Sometimes it would be really cold out and the wind would be blowing the tree and I would be hanging onto it, swaying back and forth, just looking out.

Sometimes airplanes would go by, sometimes geese. Through the woods I could see a house a few miles away and sometimes smoke would be coming out of the

chimney. I couldn't see any cars, but I could hear horns beeping once in a while, or the buzz of a chain saw.

It was very comforting to me to go up to that tree and see that the world was going about its business the way I remembered it. Being lonely, sometimes I'd start thinking about what it was like down there in that house. Maybe they were having hot chocolate. One's mind does that sort of thing. That's probably why I went to the tree, for some companionship.

Once I even went there in the middle of a snowstorm, climbed up and sat for half an hour. I couldn't see much. But I faithfully went there every day, made that a part of my practice. And over a period of time something happened that I wasn't even particularly aware of, something about the mind becoming still. Something like this has to happen when we practice.

When we're part of the world, there's all this: drive down the street and you can go right into the movies, the shopping mall, the pizza place, the liquor store, the kids, the action. That's not good or bad, but with all that happening, it's very hard for human beings to perceive clearly and not get caught up in all the activity. We're trying to make sense of it, that's why we're here tonight. And there's an incredible necessity to have the mind become still enough so that it can tell what's moving "out there" from what's moving inside the mind. The only way we can do that is to still the mind. If we can do

that, then maybe we can perceive what's actually happening.

For most of us, the only way to do that (I'm actually just speaking for myself) is to frequently take away a lot of the junk. Here at the monastery we're just left with the trees and the birds and a very simple schedule, simple meals, simple everything. It's going to be so simple that we won't be able to blame anything on this situation. Whatever appears that is complicated is not from this situation. We still won't believe that, but it's true. We'll get a chance to see all this activity in our mind, the coming and going into the future and the past, rather than just being here right now.

So we need to make some places that are like the pine tree was for me. For the next 19 days, this monastery is going to be our pine tree. And if this building isn't enough, then go outside and find your spot out there. This is where we're going to be, and not being able to change that will help a lot. So much of the day we spend at the controls, trying to change things so they'll happen the way we'd like it, instead of just letting things happen.

Many things will happen to us during the next three weeks. We can try a lot of different responses and none of them will quite do it. We need to do something about the amount of time our minds spend thinking about the future and the past.

Some people will decide that practicing Zen means "nobody's home," or that Zen

is freedom, or non-attachment. But whatever you put in the blank after "Zen is..." is a mistake. We'll probably fill in that blank anyway, but perhaps we won't have to be so attached to our idea. Perhaps we won't have to grab onto something to understand and make something out of this retreat.

So I'm very happy that someone went to all the trouble to make this monastery, that these trees went to the trouble of growing out there for us, that all the bugs came here to live and do their thing. We dumb human beings have to be reminded to use this precious time, this precious situation, and not to waste it on fantasy and dreaming. I hope all of us can do that. Thank you. □

Lincoln Rhodes is Abbot of the Kwan Um Zen School and Providence Zen Center, where he lives with his wife and two daughters. He received his Ph.D. in biochemistry at M.I.T. in 1971, taught at universities and did medical research. After meeting Soen Sa Nim in 1973, he traveled extensively with him and helped many Zen groups start their own residential communities. When the Providence Zen Center moved to Cumberland 5 years ago, he designed and supervised the construction of several major buildings, including a passive solar heated meditation hall. He is supervising the design and construction of the new Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in Cumberland. He was ordained a Bodhisattva monk in 1982.

NEW ZEN GROUP IN PROVIDENCE

Three long-term residents of Providence Zen Center recently moved into the city of Providence and have started a branch Zen group. Ellen Sidor, editor of **PRIMARY POINT**, purchased a two-family house on the East Side so that her teenage daughter Inga could be closer to her school. They live in the second floor apartment and have a small Dharma room.

David and Shana Klinger, both very active Dharma Teachers for years in the development of Providence Zen Center, live

downstairs with their one year old daughter Mae. David, former PZC Do Gam (Vice Abbot), was made a Senior Dharma Teacher this July. Shana has held many positions at PZC, including housemaster and financial director. David is continuing his apprenticeship at the PZC Artisans Studios with the Korean woodcarver Mr. Kim, and Shana has been working as a therapist. With Ellen, they are sharing responsibility for holding practice upstairs, which is six mornings and three evenings a week. An un-

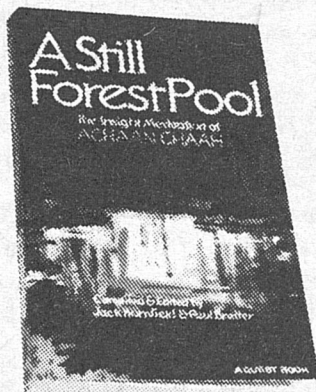
furnished third floor is being converted to add a larger meditation room, bathroom and bedroom. Once completed, this space will make several rooms available for new residents who want to join the practicing group.

The Klingers and Ellen have been discussing the project for several years and decided it was time to try having a branch group in the city which would be lower key and more convenient for city residents, as well as a way to attract new residents and retreat participants for the main temple in Cumberland. Since the Providence Zen Center moved out to rural Cumberland six years

ago it had lost a number of formerly active members who found the early hours and difficult transportation to be obstacles. Some of these old members have started re-appearing at the branch group and have expressed gratitude that an in-town place to practice has become available.

Since they have moved into the city, the group has maintained close ties with Providence Zen Center. Davy and Ellen are now outside directors of PZC, and Ellen is continuing as editor of the quarterly. An opening ceremony for the Zen group will be held when Soen Sa Nim returns to the East Coast in December.

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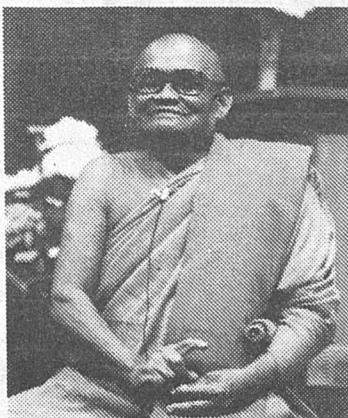
A Still Forest Pool

By Jack Kornfield and Paul Breiter

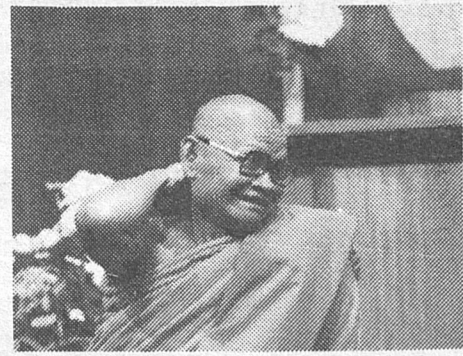
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