

Dear friends, I am really happy to be here and continue where we left off last year, at the conference of Women in American Buddhism, looking at the situation of Buddhism in the U.S. and the emergence of a new tradition. "The Balancing of American Buddhism" is a challenging title since it implies some kind of need to balance. Whether the need to change arises from frustration in personal teacher-disciple relationships, or issues forth from a more fundamental dissatisfaction with the current ethnological division of American Buddhists, remains to be investigated.

Clearly there is a need to clarify our direction. When we began to practice Zen and study Dharma some twenty years ago, we first needed to immerse ourselves completely in the forms that Asian Buddhist traditions brought to us. Now, some twenty years later, we are emerging, realizing the need to integrate the Buddhist Way of Life into our own social structure and culture. This presents a great opportunity for a new and fresh interpretation of Buddhism in a modern world.

But how do we balance, and, more importantly, what needs to be balanced? Wanting to balance presupposes one knows the norm, knows what is "real." To know what is real means to be aware of the great fluidity of the changing patterns of events, like clouds in the sky constantly changing their shapes. Clearly we cannot change the patterns of the clouds. But what can be changed is our perception mechanism. Change means to leave the fixated position of personal perspective and acquire the wisdom of cosmic consciousness. In the realm of cosmic consciousness there is no division between self and other. In direct identification we can only say "not two." All is lucid and self-illuminating.

Very often the general non-Buddhist public looks at Buddhists who meditate as being "non-active," not properly engaged in the world. This view is based on the notion that to benefit the human world one must do something in an active and material way. True compassion, however, is ultimately much more profoundly expressed in **how** we are rather than in actions coming from dualistic awareness. Inactivity and activity are inseparable from each other.

As we sit in meditation, we learn that what we usually call the activity of the world is nothing other than our own consciousness set in motion. When consciousness is at rest, there is peace. When individual self is not interfering, we see true Dharma activity, and for the first time we see things as they are. This seeing, such as it is, is the balance we have searched for. It is the end of desire, and peace of mind ensues. When self is identified with the alternating cosmic cycles of activity/inactivity, we have perfect balance. After working we need to rest. After resting we can work again.

No living being can ever be separate from this perfect activity; every living thing is merely a manifestation of this cosmic activity. In the opening passage of the Diamond Sutra we find a description of the activities of the Lord Buddha:

Near dawn, the Lord clothed himself, took up his bowl and entered the great city of Sravasti to collect

## HOW TO BALANCE A WHITE CLOUD ☯

by Gesshin Prabhava Dharma, Roshi

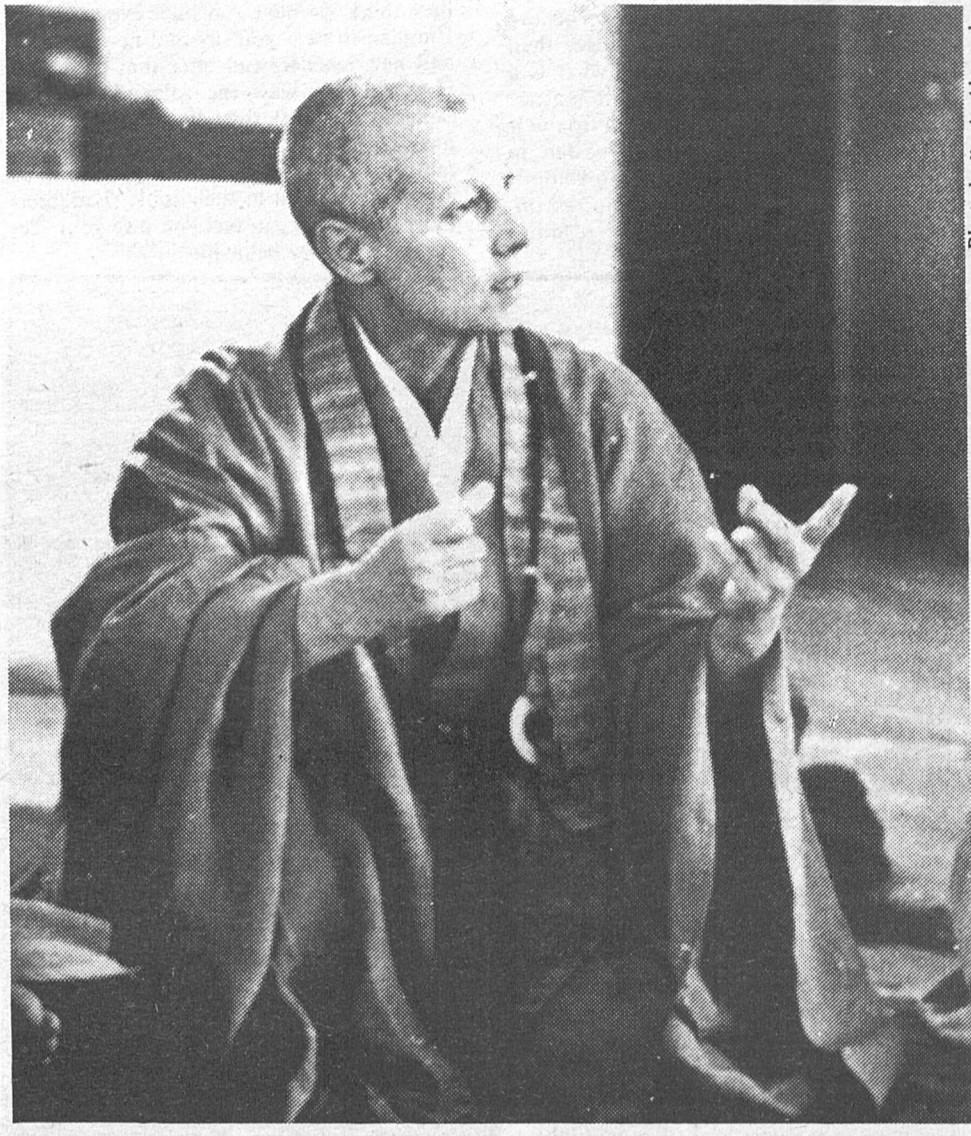


Photo by Sonia Alexander

food offered as alms. Having returned and eaten, the Lord put away his bowl and cloak, bathed his feet and sat with legs crossed and body upright upon the seat arranged for him, mindfully fixing attention in front of himself... At that moment the Venerable Subhuti arose from his seat and showing great respect for the Buddha, said, It is wonderful, most wonderful, O Lord, how much the Tathagata, the Fully Enlightened One, has helped the Bodhisattvas protecting and instructing them.

We usually read over this passage quickly to get to the meaning of the Sutra. Yet here in this opening paragraph we have the complete instruction of a Fully Enlightened One living in the world of human beings, in every activity fulfilling the cosmic Law. The fullness of the cosmic Law, the purity of its miraculous function, lies at the root of every activity. To live in Pure Knowledge of the unbounded potential and its great function, is to be properly engaged in the world.

This cosmic Law is beyond all the ethnic differentiation of the various tradition and yet it finds its mode of expres-

sion just exactly in those various traditions. Becoming enlightened, realizing the cosmic Law as the ultimate reality, leads us to freedom from material illusions and thus to a new understanding of the appropriateness of material as such. It belongs to the foolishness of the ignorant mind to dismiss what cannot be perceived as matter as "unreal."

But we are answerable for all our actions in spite of ignorance and erroneous beliefs. And if we do not realize this cosmic Law to be our own mind essence, we will continue to be dissatisfied and suffer endless rebirths until we learn and accept the true nature of things. From the point of view of this absolute truth, the cosmic Law and its great function are never out of order. A Zen Master was asked, "What eyes will you use to teach the people of this world?" and he responded, "The sun and the moon have never been out of order."

### You Are The White Cloud Itself

The enlightened person is the Total Person, one who flows effortlessly with the Dharma. The word "person" is derived from the Latin "per"—through—and "sonare"—to sound. The Total Person, then, is one through whom ultimate reality, such as it is, is "sounding." If you are lying in the grass looking at a white

cloud drifting through the sky, you are the white cloud itself. At that moment if there is no thought of cloud or self, you are in perfect balance. It is only thought that sets us apart from the enlightened state of mind. The notion of imperfection arises from imbalance in individual consciousness, from being out of sync with the greater activity of the cosmos. In studying the activity of the universe, we find that all superficially differentiated events are unified on the level of the underlying principle of coherence and mutual penetration.

Through a maze of infinite possibilities and multiplicities, the activity of the Dharma always takes the course of the least action. It organizes spontaneously by using the least amount of activity. Thus it is seen as absolutely serene, showing no signs of becoming and yet always going along with the arising and dissolution of the momentary phenomenal events, without being disturbed by them. "Calm, yet freely moving, unknowing in itself, unified and non-discriminating, it is at the same time functioning in every possible way, and is able to discern everything."

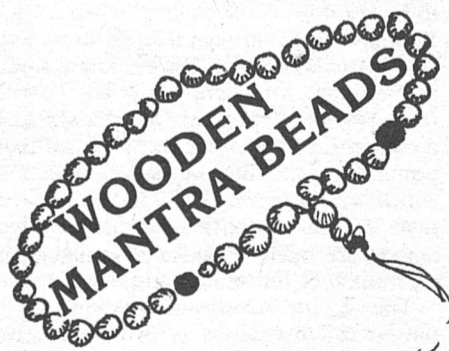
If there is only the will to change and to do good, and fundamental insight into the true nature of things is lacking, we will merely repeat the same mistakes, continuing activity which is based upon erroneous thinking. The sense of balance occurs when the right view of the cosmic Law and its function is gained by the individual. Reaching deeper into oneself means reaching increased order, hence the Zen Master's proclamation: "The sun and the moon have never been out of order." The universe itself in its twofold mode of appearance and disappearance, as form and non-form, is the example of perfect coherence and harmony of all fields of activity effortlessly moving from one level of systems to another, spontaneously transforming, always taking the course of least effort, of the least energy expense.

In Buddhism, balancing means that the individual comes into the knowledge of the full potential of the Dharma in his/her own consciousness and enters into the process of self-regulation of the individual.

The new field, then, where a new tradition can grow is the field of our own consciousness. And new form will emerge naturally from being firmly grounded in this spiritual realization of the unified field of cosmic consciousness. What American Buddhists wear and eat, how they are going to carry out compassionate social activities will naturally evolve from this integration of individual, personal views into the fundamental field of cosmic order. Neither Japanese nor Tibetan nor any other form of Buddhism will be the Buddhism of Americans. Buddhism in America will necessarily reflect our advancements in science, technology, and social structure. This is not only an opportunity for a new beginning, but also the only possibility. Last but not least, it is our responsibility toward the world of all living beings to develop new systems based on "real activity."

### The New Age Being

This new tradition of the Total Person, the transcendent personality, will find its expression in a new way of relating to



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what was hitherto seen as "self" and "other" and "the world." The Total Person is the new-age being, totally awake and aware, at peace with him/herself and interacting in a loving and caring way with all forms of life as well as with all non-forms. The Total Person expresses respect for all things, but relies only on Dharma, realizing that by far the greater power and stability are not to be found in the world of objects and ideas, but in their underlying principle of emptiness. Emptiness or non-form is the ultimate mode of form—and ultimate form is liberation.

Ordinary human existence is frustrating and unsatisfactory until we gain insight into the nature of Real Life. The full discovery of this Potential of human consciousness has within it the seeds for growth and a power for development never yet realized on this earth. It has the power to blaze the trail for the equality of beings of all races, cultures, and nations; and for the opportunity to live in harmony and peace with each other on this planet earth, our temporary home. In the words of Dr. Albert Einstein:

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense of arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description....If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

I cannot think of a better place for this to come to fruition than in the socio-political structure of North America.

May all beings attain enlightenment and grow as happy as they can be. □

<sup>1</sup>Ven. Gesshin Prabhasa Dharma, Roshi, GOING HOME (Los Angeles, IZIA), pg. 5.

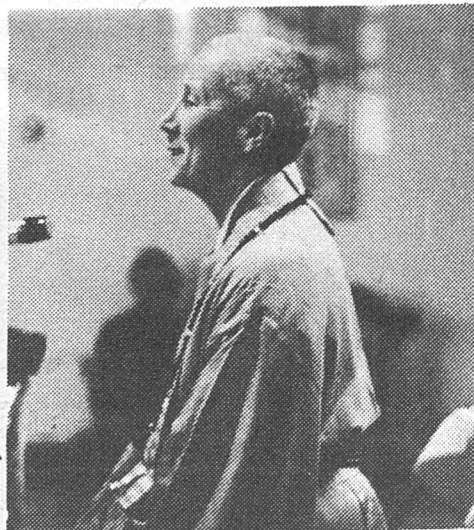


Photo by Sonia Alexander

(Ven. Gesshin Prabhasa Dharma, Roshi, received confirmation as a Zen Master in 1985 from Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Man Giac. She trained as a Zen nun for 15 years under Rinzai Zen Masters in the U.S. and Japan. Founder of the International Zen Institute of America in Los Angeles, she teaches in the U.S. and Europe. A book of poetry entitled "A Sudden Flash of Lightning" with her and Ven. Thich Man Giac's work was published in 1983 by IZIA.

## A TEA CEREMONY

Another aspect of realizing is to have moments of silence in our lives. This afternoon we will practice this in the tea ceremony. The Japanese have created a way in which leaders and servants, masters and assistants and even children from a certain age on up sit together and everyone is regarded as equal.

This sense of equality becomes apparent even in the structure of the tea rooms. A tea room in Japan does not have a standard-sized doorway. It has a tiny two foot opening in the wall, through which you practically have to crawl into the tea room. Whether you are the president or the president's assistant, you have to crawl through this door. Even though at the end of the tea we wear different clothes and show other signs of difference, in the tea ceremony we are all regarded as the same.

It is the same with the tea master, who takes responsibility to guide us through the event. Tea is for tea, it's not just a culturally beautiful thing to do. I'm presenting it because I would like to suggest that all political meetings, all summit conferences, should start this way with people coming into the room through a small door, sitting in a circle around a conference table, and having a cup of tea together followed by a few moments of silence and mindful awareness.

What distinguishes us from animals is that while animals are one with the Dharma, they don't know it. They cannot enjoy it. They live in fear and anxiety. We human beings, who have the capacity for deep meditation and for coming back from that disappearing act into a consciousness in which we can reflect on that, can come into the full enjoyment of living the Dharma here and now as it is. This is how we must begin to make peace in the world, not thinking that we have to do something "out there" to change it. What we are saying when we do that is that it is the others who have no peace and that they need to be taught.

What is nice about the tea ceremony and the way we're going to do it is that you are both "host" and "guest." At the moment you receive the tea from one side, you are the guest. When you put your cup down and pass the tray to your neighbor, you are the host. In the world you should realize constantly that you are the "all." When Jesus realized the truth, he said, "I am the all." Buddha said, "The Dharma and I are one. When you want to see the real me, look at the Dharma. When you want to see the Dharma, look at me."

When we do this tea ceremony, we should first collect ourselves, like the Buddha did. Take your seat mindfully, arrange your clothes around you. When you are



Photo by Sonia Alexander

seated, sit a few moments in silence. Then we will drink tea **together with the whole universe.**

I want you to contribute something to the ceremony in the form of a word, a poem, or music. I would like you not to be tense about having something already created, but trust your intuition. Enjoy the tea, and then let come up just exactly what comes.

Thank you all for your patience. □

We sit here in a circle  
a skylight in each teacup.

A silent circle. Rhythmic sounds of chopping; steaming tea graciously poured, passed and sipped. intermittent bows.

Two hands  
One teacup  
Never empty  
Never full

In my always planning ahead  
I almost missed the steam  
coming from my cup of tea

Praise to the thoughtless thought!

Hot tea, blue rug  
There is nothing so difficult  
about this practice

(These spontaneous poems were some of those offered during the tea ceremony.)

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