

BUDDHIST FAITH AND SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT

by Sung Bae Park.

(State University at New York Press, 1983, Albany, NY, 211 pages)

Reviewed by Mu Soeng Sunim

A watershed event in the development of Ch'an Buddhism took place in 732 A.D. in China. In that year, an unknown monk, Shen-hui (670-762), launched the first of a series of vitriolic attacks on the "northern school" of Shen-hsiu (606-706). Students of Zen history will recall that Shen-hsiu had been the head monk at the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen (601-674) and had lost out in a **gatha** competition to an unknown kitchen-boy, Hui-neng (638-713), the future Sixth Patriarch.

The legend of Hui-neng tells us that the Fifth Patriarch transmitted the robe and bowls of the lineage to Hui-neng in secrecy in the middle of the night and urged him to flee down south. Hui-neng duly went south. In future years, his small southern temple attracted a large number of disciples, but he was not an acknowledged Patriarch yet.

Here Shen-hui enters into the picture. He is said to be one of the eleven main disciples of Hui-neng. While Hui-neng had been quietly sharing his insights with his audience in the south, Shen-hsiu had taken over the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch after his teacher's death. Under him, the school of Ch'an continued to wield considerable spiritual and political influence at the T'ang court. The school continued to prosper under his two outstanding disciples, P'u-chi (651-739) and I-fu (658-736).

Shen-hui's first serious attack on what was, for him, the "northern school" of Ch'an occurred in a large assembly convened for this purpose at the monastery of Ta-yun-ssu at Hau-t'ai. The purpose of the proceedings was to "determine the true and the false with regard to the succession of (the sect of) Bodhidharma." Apart from accusing the northern school of usurping the patriarchate, Shen-hui claimed that it held an erroneous view of enlightenment. The correct view of enlightenment advocated by the Patriarchs, he claimed, was "sudden;" the "gradual" approach of the Northern School was a blatant perversion of the true teachings.

For the next thirty years, with the true zeal and fiery determination of a prophet, this old scrapper continued to flail away at the Northern School. In the process, he suffered insults, threats to his life, exile, praise and finally a position of

power at the imperial court. In the end, he destroyed the Northern School and established Hui-neng as the "legitimate" Sixth Patriarch of the school of Ch'an.

But the controversy between the "sudden" and "gradual" approaches was only beginning. When Korean monks brought back Ch'an (son) to their homeland in the early ninth century after being trained in China, it was the sudden approach they advocated. But what they advocated came into immediate conflict with the beliefs of the existing Buddhist establishment which venerated sutras, especially the Avatamsaka Sutra. Although technically not aware of the gradual approach of Ch'an Buddhism, the sutra or the doctrinal school in Korea came to be identified with the gradual approach. In Korea, the lines between the gradual and the sudden approaches or (in terms of struggle for spiritual and political influence) between the Son (Zen) and the Kyo (Doctrine) school came to be more sharply drawn than they ever were in China.

What divides the gradual and the sudden approaches? Very simply put, the gradual approach is based on **faith** that through prescribed religious practices, one can get enlightened and **become** Buddha. The sudden approach, on the other hand, is based on a **faith** that one is already a Buddha and all one has to do is to hold firm to this faith. Thus a certain kind of faith underlines both approaches.

Sung Bae Park, who is an assistant Professor of East Asian Religions at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, has written this highly erudite book exploring the underpinnings of this faith of the sudden approach which begins with the proposition, "I am Buddha." Professor Park is a former monk of the Chogye Order of Korea and we thus have the benefit of his training in the Korean Zen temples.

The value of Professor Park's book lies in his effort to explore the phenomenon of faith in the entire Mahayana Buddhist tradition. The dynamics of faith, as outlined in the Avatamsaka Sutra tell us about the representative "gradual" approach. Chinul, the real founder of Korean Zen, as quoted by Professor Park, makes a clear distinction between the Doctrinal and the Patriarchal faith. When asked about the difference between the two teachings, Chinul said:

"...The doctrinal teachings encourage people to have faith in the principle of cause and effect.... Patriarchal faith is not the same as above, because patriarchs do not depend upon any principle of cause and effect in the conditional world. It only stresses that there be faith that everyone is originally Buddha; that all people intrinsically possess the perfect Buddha nature; and that the marvellous essence of **nirvana** is perfectly complete in everyone. Hence, there is no need to search anywhere else, because since the beginning, those have been complete in oneself."

One of the most interesting, and original, thesis advanced in Professor Park's book is the "nonbacksliding" nature of patriarchal faith. In his chapter on faith in Pure Land Buddhism, he makes a comparison between the seemingly "other-power" (Japanese: tariki) faith of Pure Land and the "self-power" (jiriki) faith of patriarchal Zen. However, on close examination, he finds the "other-power" faith of Pure Land to be just as nonbacksliding as the patriarchal faith. Here is Professor Park's key argument:

"The point here is that, in Buddhism, right practice and right enlightenment require right faith, i.e., patriarchal faith. However, patriarchal faith can be developed from the viewpoint of either self-power or other-power. The criterion of patriarchal faith is not self-power or other-power, but 'pu-t'ui, "nonretrogressional" or "nonbacksliding." Since the most important consequence of patriarchal faith is sudden enlightenment, it is the sudden and unretrogressive quality of our faith, not its self-power or other-power orientation, that determines whether it is patriarchal or doctrinal."

Professor Park's book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on Korean Zen and Korean Buddhism in English language. Closely argued and academically impeccable, it is not light reading by any means but rewarding enough for those who care to plow through it. □

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PRIMARY POINT

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CORRECTION: In the November 1985 issue of *Primary Point*, we made several errors in the article about Ms. Myung Sook Chun going to Manchuria. She was born in Yenji, Manchuria and left there 38 years ago. Our sincere apologies to Ms. Chun.

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SPECIAL PLEA: Pattie Goodwin, who lived and worked quietly as the kitchenmaster at Providence Zen Center for two years with her 11 year old nephew Daniel, suddenly found herself embroiled in a bitter custody battle with the boy's natural mother and maternal grandparents. The boy she had raised from the age of two with the family's blessing was seized by police and child welfare officials last April and hidden in a foster home. Even though the natural mother has signed papers asking Patti to adopt her son, the battle in state

court over temporary placement is still unresolved. Daniel, now 13, has repeatedly told the court he wants to go back home with Patti. The state Supreme Court will soon make a ruling on permanent custody. Meanwhile Patti has incurred over \$30,000 in legal fees trying to have Daniel returned to her, and Daniel still languishes in a foster home. Some of the state court's resistance to Daniel's returning home is because police told the court that he was living in a "Buddhist commune," and the family opposed Patti's decision to become a nun and train in Korea, where Daniel would live temporarily in a monastery.

If you would like more information, please write. Meanwhile, can you help bring Daniel home and help Patti pay her legal bills? If you can help in any way please send your contribution to the "Pattie Goodwin Defense Fund," c/o Mu Soeng Sunim, Director, Diamond Hill Zen Monastery, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, Rhode Island 02864.

KAHAWAII: If you borrowed Ruth Klein's collection, please return them. Thanks!