

PRIMARY POINT

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PASSIONATE JOURNEY, The Spiritual Autobiography of Satomi-Myodo. Translated and Annotated by Sallie B. King, 1987, Shambhala, 212 pages, Paperback, \$12.95.

By Dhananjay Joshi

One of the most endearing things about spiritual practice, is that one can find sources of inspiration almost everywhere. If one is receptive enough and sensitive to one's surroundings, everything becomes a 'Teacher' in the truest sense of the word. Of course, there are scriptures and religious texts to map out progress for one, but then, Zen teachings have never really been that patient with texts. One must work hard and try again and again with utmost sincerity. Seeking truth can be a lonely journey, but the rewards are magnificent.

I always find it an immensely satisfying experience when I read about the efforts of seekers such as Satomi-San who overcame tremendous odds. Starting with a sincere heart, they strive on. Satomi-San believed in her sincerity. To be sincere is to know one's true nature. Satomi-San's religious encounters are fascinating. A reluctant early marriage and motherhood, abandonment, loss of her child and a struggle to keep the balance between sanity and insanity were only the leading experiences on her way to becoming a shamanic miko. She subjected herself to intense ascetic practices and served as a medium in exorcisms. At midlife, when she turned to Zen, she gained a different perspective to all these experiences without negating them. In Zen, she found the peace and fulfillment she sought. Under the guidance of Yasutani Roshi, finally she discovered her spiritual home. She writes at one point: "I, who had made a 180 degree turn once before, turned another 180 degrees. Truly, I turned 360 degrees and arrived at the original starting point....". Embarrassed that her writings may seem like self-advertisement, she says:

"Awakening from the dream, I see: Sincerity is simply my original nature Where, then, shall I look for it?"

The book is in two parts. First part contains Satomi-San's autobiography and the second part consists of the commentary on the autobiography by the author. Professor Sallie King's commentary is lucid and provides a wonderful insight into the spiritual changes in Japan at the time, especially keeping in mind that Satomi-San was a woman and received her own share of unfair treatment from the society she lived in. This historic context is very revealing.



TAKE THE "A" TRAIN...members of Chogye International Zen Center in New York City performing the "Subway Sutra."

GLIMPSE OF ABHIDHARMA

(From a seminar on Buddhist Psychology), Chogyam Trungpa, Shambhala, 1987, Paperback, 117 pages, \$10.95.

By Dhananjay Joshi

I like the first sentence of this book... "The Abhidharma is perhaps regarded as dry and scholarly, theoretical. We will see...". What the late Trungpa Rinpoche wanted to do was to present the Abhidharma and "to begin at the beginning and present the pure, immaculate, genuine teaching." It is important to understand the theoretical base of any teaching and then in our practice reach that balance between the practice and the intellect. Abhidharma has been taught in various ways and numerous books exist from simple expositions to voluminous commentaries. Students have devoted years to learning this basic philosophy of Buddhism common to all schools, but the key is to "neglect neither the intuition nor the intellect." This book provides a glimpse into Abhidharma with a view to combining the intellect and the intuition in a very sane way and the resultant clarity helps us lead our lives with less confusion. The Abhidharma looks precisely at the mind and we in turn must use that precision

in our meditation and in our life. Purity in meditation must translate into purity in action. It is very simple, indeed!

That is what strikes you about this book. Drawn from a seminar on Buddhist psychology, the individual chapters are in the form of a short discussion followed by questions and answers, and the simplicity of Trungpa Rinpoche's exposition is very charming. In the chapter on Practice and Intellect, he says: "The main thing we have been trying to do is to make the study of this particular subject experiential...No perfect scholar would study this way and no perfect practitioner would look at this subject the way we have...On the other hand, an open scholar and an open practitioner might both find it quite appropriate..."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

It was interesting to read a few lines of Rusty Hicks from the honorary book for Master Seung Sahn in P.P. June 1987. Hicks talks about Christians merely believing in ideas about God. I only know from my own Christian path (the eastern orthodox as lived for example by Serafim of Sarov) that God is seen and celebrated before all ideas. The essence of the Trinity, which is central to the orthodox life, is not thought or ideation. It is the primary purity that is never tainted by ideas. Every Sunday we celebrate this before-idea, before-time, before-place purity.

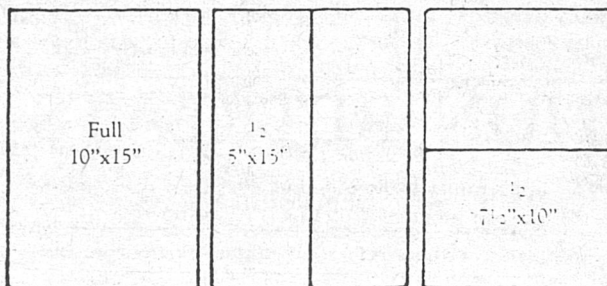
I know from many instructing letters to me from Master Seung Sahn that Zen is this not-making. But many people have ideas about Zen and practice to get rid of them. In orthodox Christianity we use icons, incense, candles, gestures with the body like bowing to the floor, with the hand - thumb and two fingers for the Trinity, two joint fingers for the two natures of Christ (that never mix), and so on. Why make ideas out of these? Making the cross is just making the cross, bowing is just bowing, kissing the icon is just that. Christ is just this and never thinking this.

However, if you think about becoming an independent person before you can believe in God, then you are making ideas about yourself. Rusty Hicks talks about believing in yourself. I think I know a little about it, just letting this ordinary body and mind be what it is. But it is tricky! Safer it must be to let only this, only not making, only God before mind, be what He is already. At any rate, that is my feeling about it.

In the dharma - Keep up the good journal!

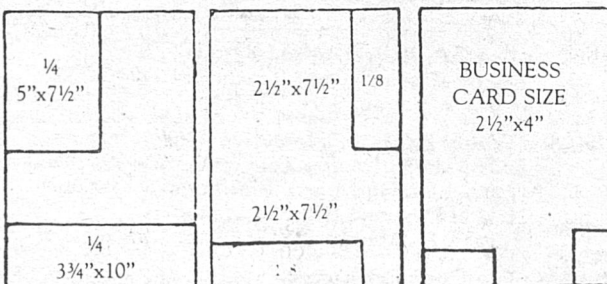
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