

Practice: Design For Release

by Gary M. Haskins

I spent 5 years in Japan studying an ancient style of pottery called Bizen ware. It was also an opportunity to study Buddhist thought and see its presence as a driving force in Japan, particularly in art.

Bizen ware, usually fired with wood, is made with a unique clay. The earthy, stony texture and infinitely variable fire markings reflect a sophisticated culture and craft. The rustic product, prized for the tea ceremony, is considered innately Japanese, i.e. it originally was not influenced by the clay work from

Japanese, Buddhism and art. I began to see the three disciplines not only as compatible but almost identical.

Was it possible to think about Buddhist ideas while doing the work at the studio? Could I count breaths? Have no opinion? I wanted to give each thing my full attention. Encouraged to "live life as life lives itself", I sought to be utterly occupied with the job at hand. Besides, I might easily crush my hand in the clay mixer, or severely burn myself if I was not fully mindful.



Bizen-ware produced by Gary Haskins

China, Korea, Middle East, etc. Mr. Buyo Shin, my ceramics sensei, is one of the top artists in Bizen-shi, Okayama prefecture.

As long as it didn't take too much time away from my studies with clay and fire, I was encouraged to study different aspects of the culture, such as tea ceremony, religions, flower arrangement, ink painting etc. It wasn't long before I was enjoying books of translation and commentary on Buddhism. The clay work, the people, and the religion shared a vast common ground.

If pottery making was the main course on my cultural menu, The Buddhist readings and consequent joy were the dessert, the sweetness and humor I often overlooked in my everyday activities.

I wondered if I could (and should) devote equal time to studies in religion as to the pottery. Another crafts student in Bizen went a long way to a Zen temple to sit every weekend.

When I asked my teacher if he thought that was OK, the teacher said that he was worried that the student was not fully focused on his instruction. Japanese teachers like to see intense devotion and earnest study on behalf of their efforts to instruct you.

I had to ask myself, could I overcome self-seeking and travel the Eightfold path while still continue my demanding studies in ceramics? Could I practice non-attachment in the pottery shop? Is there such a thing as an egoless artist? This was certainly a Kong-an for me.

Wasn't the Eightfold Path a course in training, in PRACTICE, and a way of intentional living? Patient discipline gradually cures the person of disabilities. Certainly practice was primary for me anyway, trying to learn

The respect of the local potters for the clay, wood, straw, and fire gave me a deeper appreciation too. I learned that we, our ancestors, the clay and straw are all the same materials of the cosmos. That cold, passive lump of clay became the magic stuff of the universe—the slightly used flesh and blood of 10,000 generations.

The Japanese respect for nature, natural materials, and things made with them brought me to clearly face the relationship between the tangible artifacts of man and the less obvious symbolic and spiritual wealth or depravity reflected therein. I tried to make the artwork express something genuine, vital and perhaps even a bit eccentric and humorous.

What is a Zen practitioner but an artist who uses the self as his clay? Reality, as early thinkers and yogis knew it, was an artifact of their own inner vision. They could change their world through the power of the imagination. Meditators are artists with their own lives, painting and sculpting their growth and joy!

I found this practice of externalizing in material form one's subtle inner being vitally important for myself as an artist. In the same way, while the clay was being centered on the potter's wheel, I too was moving into harmony towards my personal point of least resistance.

Gary Haskins, a potter living in central Florida, fires his large, 3 chambered kiln with pine as the fuel for at least three days and nights per firing. Gary also is accomplished in Sumi-e and calligraphy.

Women's Right Livelihood

by Hojun Carol Welker

On March 14-15, 1987 in Berkeley, California, I attended a workshop on "Right Livelihood" entitled "A Celebration of Women in Buddhist Practice", a conference of about 150 women. We focused on finding a means of livelihood that does not do evil, that helps other beings on the planet. The discussion covered a number of issues facing not only women, but all Buddhists in America. The following are my memories and reflections of that conference.

Most Americans on the spiritual path—lay and monastics alike—have to support themselves in some way. We want to support ourselves in a way that does not contribute to the overall craziness of the world or cause us to break the precepts. All jobs have some aggravations, but we asked, "Does this job's aggravations improve or inhibit my growth? Are they challenges to be met, or inequities inherent in the situation?" Some of the women felt that their role in the workplace as women was to find ways to lighten up the situation.

Everyone agreed that jobs that caused harm to others (e.g. trading in weapons, slavery, prostitution) were harmful to self and others. But we could not reach a consensus on how or to what extent we should try to "do good" and help others through our livelihood. How could we even know what "doing good" was? We also questioned if it is wise to work for a nonprofit for a "good" cause and not necessarily have the time, energy or resources to be able to meditate or seek out excellent teachers.

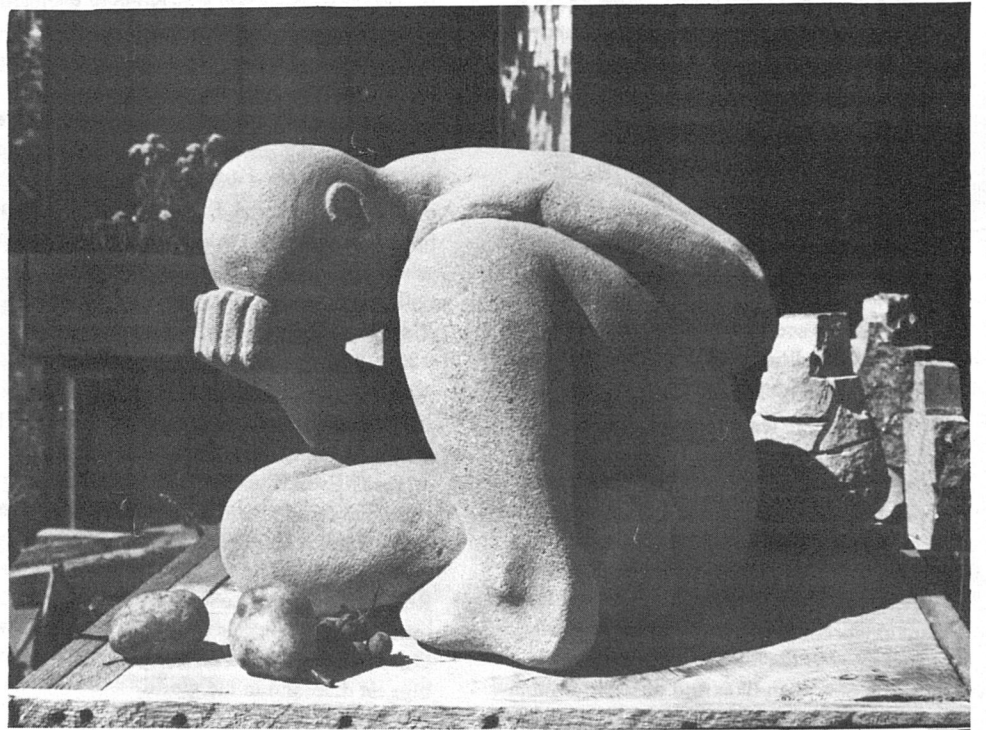
People commented on the similar problems and benefits found in different workplaces. Greed, hate, delusion and power plays are no monopoly of for-profit organizations, but are everywhere, even in Buddhist organizations. It is easy to throw stones at Corporate America, but we felt that we were

living in quite fragile houses ourselves. At the same time, the world of business and profit offers opportunities for helping others. I remembered from my Business School days that one of the major principles for success in the workplace was finding a need and filling it. An attitude of service could be very compatible to both successful practice and a successful form of livelihood. Yes, you can do "straight" work and practice, also.

As the conference progressed, for many the question seemed to be not so much "what" livelihood to choose, but "how" to approach any livelihood. Much disease results from not being centered and open to the teaching directly in front of us. Whatever one does, one needs to have it integrated with one's practice. I can offer a personal testimonial to that point. Several months after the conference, I was diagnosed as having CFS (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), which I believe resulted from a lack of integration between my livelihood and my practice. I could not "fit" my work as a chief finance officer in a large corporation with trying to live and do the Practice Period at the San Francisco Zen Center. I believe that the problem was not so much what I was doing or not doing at either place, but my inability to integrate the two. I continued to keep them as two separate worlds and that was the source of the problem.

One woman told a story about watching a dog follow a scent. The dog would traverse the entire field in a very thorough zig-zag to keep the scent. He had to cover the whole field to find the path and always be open to a new twist or turn. Perhaps, there are some environments more conducive to practice than others, but, like the dog, we must keep our noses open.

Carol Welker is a student of Dainin Katagiri Roshi. She lives in Goff, Kansas, and is a friend of the Kansas Zen Center.



Stone sculpture by Ellen Sidor

Torture or Refuge?

by Anthony Scionti

Right Livelihood. How does your everyday occupation reconcile with your practice and vice-versa?

A couple of years ago it seemed pretty clear. My circumstances were easy to live with and so easy to reconcile. My everyday occupation was being a private-practice psychotherapist at a prestigious medical center. I enjoyed a fine reputation and a fine life. Keeping the greatest direction of the practice in this everyday occupation meant forget about "I, me, my" and act only for the benefit of others. This meant mostly keeping my motivation clear; why was I in this profession—for

money, prestige etc., or to help save all beings from suffering?

I found that the best way to use my practice and the teaching was to reunite the people who came for counseling with some sense of reality. No matter what a client's specific problem, he or she had invariably created for themselves a reality which supported their painful view of life. In trying to address the patient's false sense of reality, every person who came for counseling first worked through a preliminary course in Emptiness. A kind of "what is this?" training. What is a glass of

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Contributors Wanted For Next Issue

Our March Issue will contain a feature entitled "Zen Practice and the Family Life." We need contributors to write on how their family affects their practice and vice-versa. How does the one contribute to and support the other? What kind of conflicts arise? If you're interested, write or call Bruce Sturgeon (Editor), 5 Devonshire Place, Asheville, NC 28803, (704)254-8140.