

## 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.*

### 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.

## 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.

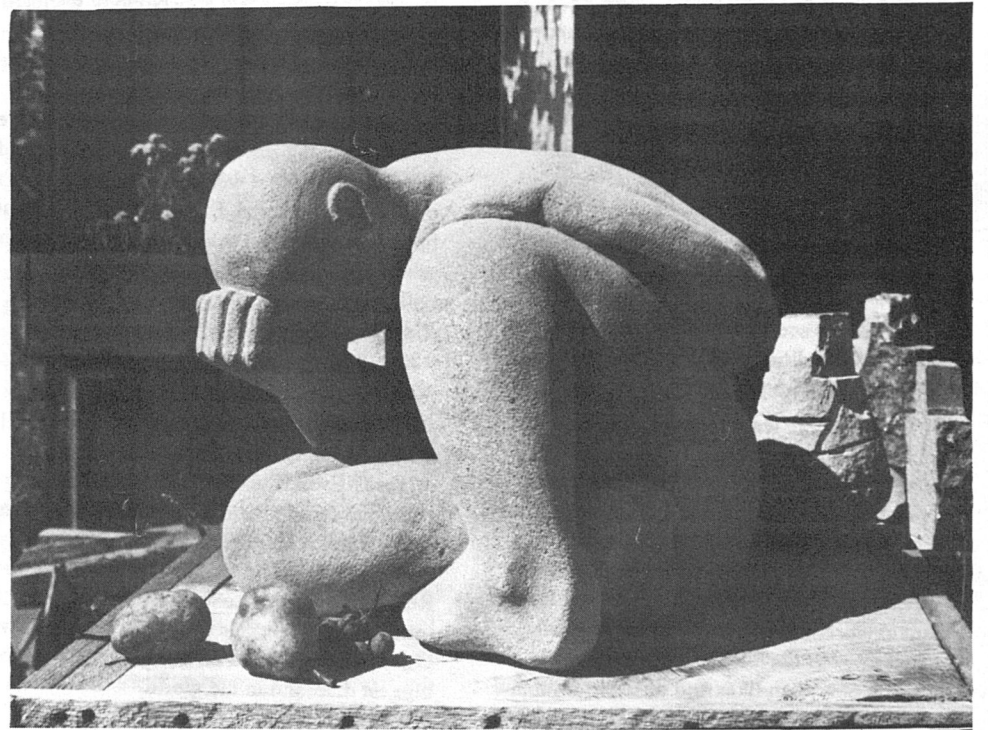
People commented on the similar problems and benefits found in different workplaces. Greed, hate, delusion and power plays are no monopoly of for-profit organizations, but are everywhere, even in Buddhist organizations. It is easy to throw stones at Corporate America, but we felt that we were

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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**"Torture or Refuge?" — by Anthony Scionti**

*(Continued from page 9.)*

water, a match, a book, a watch? What are words?

When the talking therapy began again, I tried to connect this sense of the emptiness of reality to my clients' specific problems. Everyone, when defining their problem, would sooner or later use some label: insensitive, lacking confidence, cruel, good, bad, and so on. These labels served as the "reality" which supported the problem in question. Whenever one of these label-realities arose, we would refresh our memories of the emptiness of all labels. The idea was to show that the labels which served as the foundation of both their problem and their rhetoric about it (always inseparable) were empty of any definition except for what the person was making. In this way people who came in order to learn how to cope with a certain problem, found that the problem dissolved before their very eyes when they stopped making labels.

I felt that I had achieved a very high application of practice and teaching to everyday life. Right Livelihood. Then my personal circumstances changed suddenly and completely. Seemingly instantly, there was no counseling practice, no office, no reputation, no money, no one to look to for support (free of charge), no one even with whom to share life or love. Try as I might, I could not break out of it. It would not go away. My karma and horrible personal suffering were not even slightly impressed with my fancy understanding.

I began doing heavy construction, working with people who did not necessarily care about "personal growth" or "spiritual awakening". I found myself surrounded by the typical, macho, foul-mouthed, beer-drinking construction types. It's only that some environments are naturally attractive and some are not. This one was not.

My partner was arrogant, always right, thick-headed, and could not walk by one piece of work without criticizing what was wrong with it and pontificating how it should have been done... "if any one around here had any brains, that is". He also thought he was God's gift to women and he never stopped talking.

Then, a few strange things happened. A psychic told me that I was in the dire straits that I was in because of being "arrogant, stubborn, and possessive." Next, Soen Sa Nim told me that desire or clinging (controlling) mind makes having nothing. Finally, to add insult to injury, one worker on the job asked if my partner and I were brothers.

The Great Round Mirror had struck again. I had met the enemy and he was me. I realized that one is never teaching anyone else. The world around me reflects what I am, and in those reflections, I can only see myself. The Great Round Mirror has no one else to reflect.

How to use the practice in my everyday occupation became a very different question. What is everyday occupation? Only banging nails and carrying lumber? Only making enough money to survive, only to do it all over again the next day? Finally, what makes it all worthwhile to me is keeping my practice intact and shining. When everything in the world was taken away from me (or me from it), I was left with only my life-practice. One's life becomes torture or refuge depending on the nature of one's practice.

Everyone's everyday occupation is correct life-practice. There is nothing to reconcile because they are one and the same. The reconciliation is the realization of their sameness. Moment to moment keeping a sincere and compassionate heart - no judgments, no clinging, no cheating, no violence; keeping it clean, no self-reflection at all; just following the outside situation moment to moment. Only what is this, how can I help this situation?

Mud, wood and concrete  
 Are the Buddha's original face  
 The roar of machines and workers shouting swears  
 Are now the great sutras  
 The Karmacrete forming life never stops pouring.  
 Whoa, put it all down, stay awake!  
 Do you hear? Do you see?  
 "Hey, concrete comin' down the chute  
 Be careful; Let'er slip once and you've bought it!  
 Stay awake!"  
 Vrrroooooooooooooohhhh...  
 "Yo, need a hand over there?..."  
 Then how about lending one over here?"

*Editor's note: The above verse is a variation on Zen Master Seung Sahn's closing poem in the "Temple Rules":*

Blue sky and green sea  
 Are the Buddha's original face.  
 The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song are the great sutras.  
 Where are you going?  
 Watch your step.  
 Water flows down to the sea.  
 Clouds float up to the heavens.

*Anthony Scionti is a long time member of the New Haven Zen Center. He lives in Branford, CT.*

**BOOK REVIEWS**

*(Continued from page 11.)*

Tibetan tradition are defined and noted, but not explained. However, for what he attempts to do, Mr. Snelling has done quite a serviceable job. He presents a broad overview that is comprehensive without getting bogged down in the details. The Buddhist Handbook is an excellent reference book that would complement anyone's bookshelf.

**RETURNING TO SILENCE, "Zen Practice in Daily Life", Dainin Katagiri, 1988, Shambhala, 194 pages, Paperback, \$10.95**

*Reviewed by Dhananjay Joshi*

Consider our daily life. Just for a moment. Why do we practice? Why do we go on retreats and sit every day? Why do we struggle with the kong-ans given by our teachers? Why? It is a tremendous challenge to sit a long retreat and meditate for hours, but it is a harder task to integrate what we learn during that grueling period of self-examination into our daily life. Moment to moment, we must attain the clarity that integrated practice means. We must blend our practice into our relationships every waking moment. This is wholehearted living. This is 'just living' and nothing else.

Zen practice is very simple and very clear. Truth is 'Just this'. Practice is not sitting, or walking or lying down, but an activity of enlightenment itself. This is what Katagiri Roshi's book points to. "Buddha is your daily life" is his message to us and he brings it to us with great enthusiasm.

This isn't a book that one can read and put aside. I think it has to be read slowly and deliberately. It has to be experienced. When Katagiri Roshi tells us to 'sit' we must try to understand. "When we sit, two flavors are there," he says, "One is very sharp, cutting through delusions, suffering, pain and any

emotion like a sharp sword. This is called wisdom. But within wisdom, there must be compassion. This compassion is to see human life for the long run... Compassion comes from the measure of our practice, which we have accumulated for a long time. It naturally happens. The second flavor of silence seen by the Buddha's eye is to accept all sentient beings as they are, what is, just is of itself..."

The book is based on Katagiri Roshi's talks with his American students. It also includes a commentary on "The Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance" from Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo: Giving, Kind Speech, Beneficial Action and Identity Action. He tells many stories and his words are simple and direct. He is concerned and compassionate and we feel it. In the section on beneficial action, he says, "When we see the human world today, it scares us. We feel fear just walking on the street. But even under these circumstances, there is no reason to stop living in peace and harmony. Under just such circumstances we have to live in peace, because there is still a chance to create our own beautiful world and to teach people too. We should not forget to give thought constantly, day by day, to how we can live in peace and harmony with all sentient beings. We have to do this. This is really beneficial."

Katagiri Roshi places special emphasis on the meaning of faith in Buddhist meditation. There is a wonderful chapter on 'The Ten Steps of Faith'. In the section on Right Faith, he says, "Faith in Buddhism is to trust in perfect tranquility, which means to trust in something greater than just our conceptualization...so, if we trust this tranquility and practice it, it is alive in our life and very naturally our life becomes joyful and peaceful and we can share our life with people because we know how to live with people."

Can we do this? Of course we can. "With a gentle expression, with a kind, compassionate attitude, we have to take care of our life and other people's lives... Very naturally we can practice giving, we can practice loving speech, we can practice beneficial action, we can really help others".

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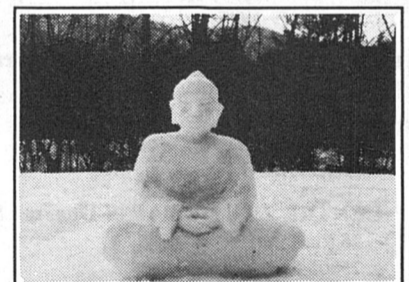
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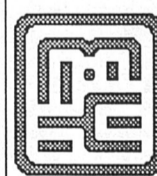


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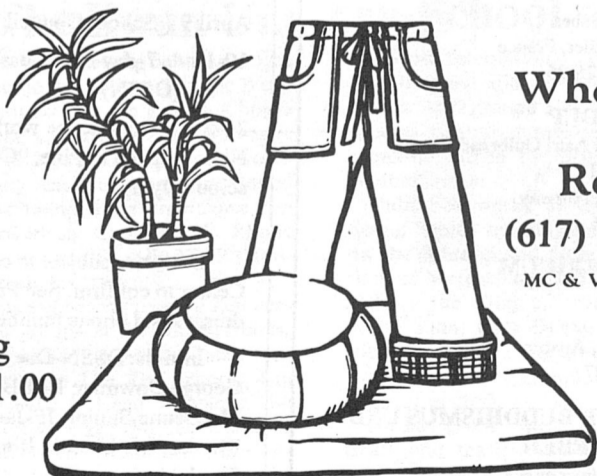


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