

## Book Reviews

### THE MARATHON MONKS OF MOUNT HIEI by John Stevens, Shambala Publications, Boston; pp 158; \$12.95

Reviewed by Mu Soeng Sunim

Just when we thought we knew all there was to know, and some we didn't even want to know, about the connection between Zen and Buddhism to things A to W— from archery to writing, with non-corporeal motorcycle maintenance, throwing a baseball at 165 mph, a la a nonexistent Sidd Finch, and myriad other hobbies and entertainments thrown in between— along comes a book which truly jolts our perceptions of human will and effort. And it's not even a flaky book about flaky people.

THE MARATHON MONKS OF MOUNT HIEI is a first glimpse for non-Japanese into the lives and training methods of Tendai Buddhist monks who run up and down the slopes of Mount Hiei for 18.8 miles a day for 100 days, without fail, as part of their religious training. The physical stress and wear and tear of these runs may equal, or even exceed, what the 26-mile marathon athletes experience. The graduates of this course may undertake the Great Marathon of 1,000 days, the ultimate test of human faith and endeavor.

As author John Stevens, a distinguished facilitator of Japanese Buddhism and martial arts for westerners points out, "It may well be that the greatest athletes today are not the stars of professional sport, not the Olympic champions, not the top triathlon competitors, but the marathon monks of Japan's Mount Hiei. The amazing feats and the incredible endurance of these "Running Buddhas" are likely unrivaled in the annals of athletic endeavor." An oversized claim indeed but one which begins to take on the dimension of being an understatement when we look at the accomplishments of these monks. What's more, "...the prize they seek to capture consists not of such trifles as a pot of gold or a few fleeting moments of glory, but enlightenment in the here and now—the greatest thing a human being can achieve."

Mount Hiei overlooks Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto from the north and is headquarters for the Tendai sect of Buddhism. Tendai (Chinese: Tien-t'ai) was established on this mountain in 788 A.D., by the great monk Saicho (766-822). The historical significance of the Tendai sect has been such that all the founders of great Buddhist sects in Japan— Eisai (Rinzai Zen), Dogen (Soto Zen), Honen (Jodo), Shinran (Jodo Shinsu), and Nichiren (Nichiren sect)— started their careers as Tendai monks. In course of time, the monastery founded by Saicho, today known as Enryaku-ji, the head temple of Tendai sect, grew into "one of the largest religious complexes the world has ever seen, a virtual state within itself, peopled by some of the best and worst priests of all times. Throughout its long and varied history, Tendai Buddhism has encompassed the lofty and the base, the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the awful."

The Tendai sect has always been eclectic, a reflection of its founder's personality, and an amalgam of almost every single Buddhist practice available in ancient China where Japanese monks traveled for inspiration and unraveling of secrets. Today the temple system on Mount Hiei offers a comprehensive program for the education of its monks as well as innumerable spiritual practices for attainment of enlightenment which is the goal of a Buddhist of any color or stripe. A remarkable twelve-year retreat at Jodo-in, site of Saicho's tomb, and the Great Marathon of 1,000 days (to be completed in seven years) are two of the most rigorous practices undertaken on Mount Hiei.

Monks who wish to become abbots of one of the subtemples of Mount Hiei are the ones most frequently applying for permission to undertake a 100-day marathons. A novice monk spends a week in preparatory training where

he is given a secret handbook (which he copies for his use and memorization) giving directions for the course, stations to visit (these are markers for departed Tendai saints and other holy sites), proper prayers and chants for each stop and other essential information. The marathon monk is always dressed in an all-white outfit, unique to Mount Hiei monks, made of white cotton only. Around his waist is a cord with a sheathed knife: these two items are reminders to the monk of his duty to take his life— by either hanging or self-disembowelment— if he fails to complete any part of the practice. This also explains the color of his outfit, which is white, the color of death in Japan rather than the basic Buddhist black. The items a monk wears or carries with him are hallowed by centuries of tradition and no deviation is allowed. A monk is allotted eighty pairs of straw sandals for the 100-day run; in heavy rains the sandals disintegrate in a few hours. The monk may not remove his robe or straw hat during the run, cannot deviate from the appointed course, cannot stop for rest or refreshments, no smoking or drinking, and he must perform all required services and prayers at the appropriate places. The monk starts his run around 1:30 A.M., and takes about six hours to come back to his starting point. The rest of the day is spent in preparing his meals and more services. It's not until 8:00 or 9:00 PM that the monk has a chance to go to sleep. Between the 65th and 75th day of the run, the monk runs a 33-mile course which takes him through the city of Kyoto itself. This special run takes nearly twenty-four hours to complete and, as a result, the monk loses one day of sleep. As soon as he comes back to the temple, it's almost time to start next day's run. The first month of the run is extremely difficult and causes immense physical suffering. By the 70th day, however, the monk acquires a majestic and relaxed stride; to the onlooker he may appear to be gliding over the boulders without touching ground.

Very few monks apply, and even fewer are given permission, to attempt the Great Marathon of 1,000 days. Upon completion of 700th day (usually after five years of marathoning) the monk attempts doiri, a nine-day retreat without food, water, sleep or rest. This is the supreme test for a Great Marathon monk; those who complete it are said to develop extraordinary sensitivity. Altogether there have been only forty-six 1,000 days marathon monks since 1885. The majority of these monks have been in their thirties, while the oldest completed his 1,000th day at the age of sixty-one.

Whatever motivation may impel these monks to undertake this perilous and arduous training, their efforts are a remarkable testimony of human will and spirit. The transformation that takes place in the marathoning monks of Mount Hiei endows them with a halo of energy and clear-sightedness that can be seen as an affirmation of all that is noble and uplifting in human spirit. What ultimately distinguishes a marathoning monk from a professional athlete is his belief that his efforts will stir up the Buddha-mind not only from deep within himself but also for others who can only look and listen.

**PALKHI, "An Indian Pilgrimage", D. B. Mokashi, Translated from Marathi by Philip C. Engblom, 1987, State University of New York Press, 291 Pages, Cloth, \$39.50.**

Reviewed by Dhananjay Joshi.

"When a man wakes from a sleep, will he try to rescue himself from the river in which he dreamt he was drowning? Then the dream in which he thought he would find knowledge disappears and he himself becomes that heaven in the form of knowledge in which there is neither knower nor object of knowledge." - Dnyaneshwar

This book awakened something precious. Childhood memories are treasured in a corner

of the mind that is reserved for special things. I remembered standing on the street...a ten year old boy looking at the world with wonder filled eyes....and watching this procession (called Palkhi). Hundreds and hundreds of people walking together and chanting together devotional songs composed by various Marathi saints. It was so inspiring and I still feel chills run down my back.

Pilgrimage is a very important part of Hindu tradition and in the Indian state of Maharashtra there is a site called Pandharpur situated about 200 miles from Bombay. Every year, four pilgrimages take place which draw people from all over to Pandharpur and the largest of these pilgrimages takes place towards the end of June. The number of pilgrims exceeds five hundred thousand. The pilgrims are called Warkaris and there is a wonderful description of what this word means— "Warkari means one who makes a Wari and Wari means coming and going. So, one who comes and goes is a Warkari. This coming and going takes place from one's own town to the town of the worshiped deity and back". The pilgrimage to Pandharpur is an integral part of a Warkari's life and he does it as sincerely as fulfilling other responsibilities towards his family and society. This is correct attitude! The path for the Warkaris is described clearly. This path attaches tremendous importance to the chanting of devotional songs composed by saints of the tradition. These are sung in groups and this chanting is the principal act of worship for the Warkari.

As most of the pilgrims are illiterate, coming from villages of Maharashtra, the singing and chanting to them is what the reading of spiritual books is to others. It is wonderful practice teaching surrender and humility, appreciation of life in its simplest and purest form. People from many parts of the country coming together, joining each other at different villages, walking together, singing same songs, speaking together, helping each other, strangers living together for the duration of the pilgrimage with no attachment to the surroundings and comfort, etc. Yes, there are some groups that are organized enough to have proper accommodations through their journey, but most sleep in tents and temples on the way. Many thousands just sleep under the sky on a makeshift bed of a few sheets and if it rains...well, it rains and you just get wet. When the sun comes up, one is dry.

What does Palkhi mean? A Palkhi is a palanquin. The palanquin that the book refers to is very special and it is one that carries the silver padukas (representing the saints feet) of Saint Dnyaneshwar from Alandi (the town where the procession begins) to Pandharpur. This is the core of the procession and it is joined by many others on the way. Mokashi's book describes his experiences along one such journey. His descriptions are full of feelings and profound insights. At one point he says, "I start to talk to the barber in an easy, familiar way. This is his tenth time going along with the Palkhi. He just covers the expenses of the pilgrimage by plying his trade. On rare occasions he has five or ten rupees (half dollar) left over. But his main purpose is not to ply his trade. After all, those who go along with the Palkhi are saints. There is true joy in serving them. His face shows complete satisfaction. The most contented people you meet up with are always the carpenters, the blacksmiths, the cobblers and other small time craftsmen. Is it because their ambitions are so limited? Or do they get their contentment from having an art they can call their own? Whatever may be the case, I think that of all the people, they really know best what is required for contentment"

Here is another wonderful passage: "Then the sun starts to decline and the wind begins to blow. The Palkhi's spirit is reviving. The cymbals and drums have begun to sound loudly again....Feet, feet, feet! All you see in every direction is moving feet...occasionally an echoing sound of Om-Om- Om draws near and then passes on..."

The chanting is still alive in me, I find I wonder if I will ever be one of those who finds contentment.

### THE BUDDHIST HANDBOOK, "A Complete Guide to Buddhist Teaching and Practice", John Snelling, Century Hutchinson, Ltd., London, 1987.

Reviewed by Bruce Sturgeon

John Snelling is a member and former General Secretary of the Buddhist Society, London, England and is currently editor of the Society's quarterly journal, The Middle Way.

In the author's own words, "The Buddhist Society has continued to the present, its traditional function as a kind of shop window in which all forms of Buddhism are, without partially, displayed for the newcomer." The Buddhist Handbook serves as a written manifestation of this same "shop window" function.

The book is subtitled "A Complete Guide to Buddhist Teaching, Practice, History, and Schools." Yet, while it does contain an excellent 42 page summary of "teaching and practices", the book is primarily focused on the history of Buddhism, the geographical transmission of the teaching, characteristics of the various sects and schools, and the people who have played roles along the way.

Beginning with a discussion of the Indian background of Buddhism and a brief biography of the Buddha, the book proceeds through the Four Councils, the Eighteen Schools and then to the development of the Mahayana and Tantra. The largest portion of the book explores the spread of Buddhism, separately noting the development of the Theravada from Sri Lanka throughout Southeast Asia; the Mahayana through China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan; and the Vajrayana (Tantra) through Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union.

Included in the Buddhist Handbook is a compilation of 250 teachers and notaries that have influenced and participated in the spread of Buddhism to the Western world. Each entry consists of a brief biography, including affiliations and major publications. Additionally, there is an address list of 150 Buddhist organizations and Schools (including the Kwan Um Zen School) and a fairly extensive bibliography for further readings on each of the topics covered by the book.

In general, The Buddhist Handbook is lucid and well written, but even at 372 pages suffers from being too brief. The section Teaching and Practices could have been expanded greatly (indeed, entire books have been written on the subject). For example, kong-an practice in Zen and Tantric practices in the

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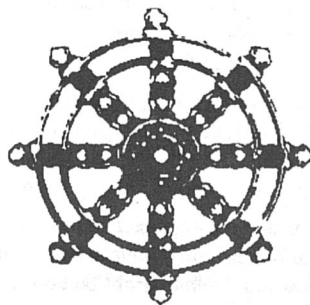
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"Torture or Refuge?"—by Anthony Scionti

(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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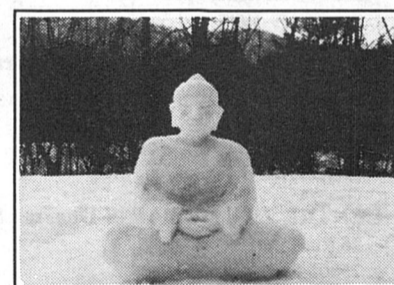
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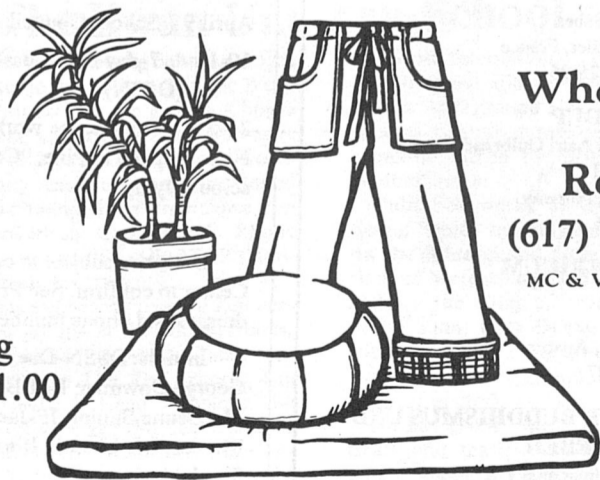
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