

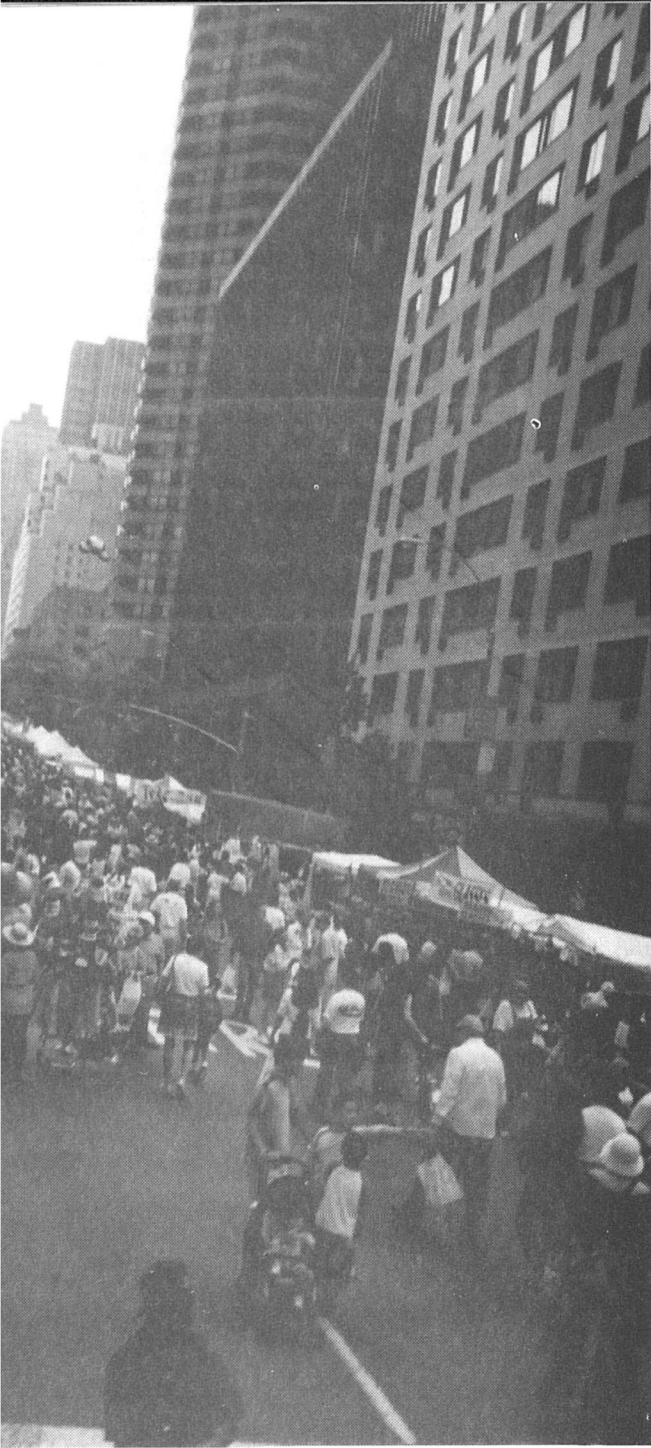
finger painting

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These days the events of September 11 are very much on everyone's mind. This naturally leads to many questions about the meaning of these events and how they relate to our Zen practice. While these questions are timely, their answers, aside from superficial political ones, seem to lie outside of our grasp. We've all experienced the fact that words fail us in the face of this horrific event. Actually, September 11 is just a dramatic example of something we encounter daily in more "mundane" situations. We look in the mirror one morning and notice that we are aging; a friend who is seemingly quite healthy becomes ill; a relative dies... Aside from the standard things that we say to ourselves and others about these things, there is still, underneath, a hollowness or longing to resolve "it" somehow.

When the Buddha left his "good situation" and went out into the world, he saw three things: old age, sickness and death. At that time he was profoundly struck by the great question of life, which is brought on by suffering. What are we? Why are we here? At that time he didn't start looking for more explanations—he started looking inside for the answer. An ancient worthy once noted that, "the view of all Buddhas and Patriarchs is the same—no view." Zen has no point of view, no opinion. To someone who just wants to understand something, like our present situation, not a lot is offered here. However, in the end this is one thing which draws us to Zen practice: the basic sanity of "no point of view." So, you will be spared one more analysis of the war on terrorism.

Buddha and the Zen Masters in our tradition do not put forth a religious or philosophical explanation of life but rather point directly to Truth or, as it is said in Zen, "point directly to the human Mind." That's unique in the world of religion. This pointing itself is not an explanation but a means to bring one to a deep questioning about life. Why are we living on this planet? Any meditation practice or spiritual journey boils down to finding the answer to this great question, "Who am I?" As a practice aiming toward attainment, rather than mere un-



derstanding, Zen does not rely on concepts, beliefs, theology or ideology. Zen's method is to evoke our own direct experience of life. After all, these questions cannot be answered by Zen, but they can be answered by you!

The most important dimension of the practice of great questioning is direction—why do it? When the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree it was not out of self-concern. His questioning was for all of humanity, since he was trying to resolve the question of human suffering and existence. Great questioning is wedded to compassion—it's not for me but for all beings. Of course, you are one of those beings. So, even though we may be concerned with our personal quagmire—emotional, psychological, existential or spiritual—ultimately our direction is to answer the great question which goes before these “smaller,” though not insignificant, concerns.

With the fall of the Soviet Union we all breathed a collective sigh of relief because the threat of nuclear holocaust had been lifted. And now we face another major threat, terrorism and the uncertainty and fear that comes with it. Much of human history is the history of conflict and its horrific results. Desire, anger and ignorance are continually going around and around, on an individual, family, national and international level. This war can contribute to our practice by bringing us to a deeper realization that the mind that creates conflict—this human mind—is also in each one of us.

The finger of blame which historically has been pointed at the bin Ladins of the world can also be pointed at us. Zen Master Seung Sahn was once asked where atomic bombs come from; what kind of person would do that? He said, “They are made by the mind which likes this and doesn't like that.” That happens to be inside each one of us. The mind that wants to go to war or get revenge is us. This same mind also has Buddha nature, though more or less hidden. So, recent events can benefit us if they bring home more than ever the great question in each one of us, “What am I?” If we can resolve this question we have moved towards true world peace and helping others.

