

*This is an excerpt from Dr. Roland Wöhrle-Chon JDPSN's doctoral dissertation in social psychology.*

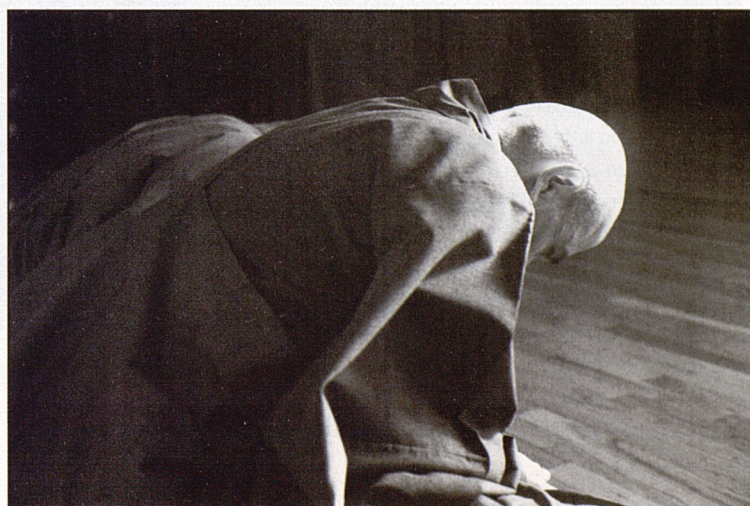
For a Zen student, the following text is a big mistake! It creates the impression that an effort will be made here to observe Zen objectively and turn it into an object with the intention of formulating empirically confirmable propositions. But be assured that I am not following that tack because, in my opinion, scientific methodology does not help us understand Zen. A human being is not a lab rabbit—which, by the way, rabbits are not either—but rather an entity with hopes, individual dispositions, life projects and the anticipation of death. Zen and the meditative path in general emphasize primarily a furthering and realization of the whole person.

There have been many experiments over the years involving meditating people. In 1993, the two Japanese researchers Akira Kasamatsu and Tomio Hirai, conducted an experiment with 48 meditators in an EEG laboratory. They found that after about fifty seconds of sitting Zen with eyes open there occurred slow and regular alpha and theta brain waves. This is normally characteristic of a relaxed, wide-awake mind with the eyes closed or a state of extreme deactivation. From the perspective of orthodox brain research this result is a paradox called concentration without tension or “relaxed high-tension.” It is marked by a high degree of conscious activity along with a de-activated experience of the ego. We can therefore summarize the practice of Zen as a kind of detached attention or awareness. The practitioner tries to let thoughts, ideas, images and feelings pass by without holding onto them or getting involved with them until they reach a condition of before-thinking.

However, can this be understood as a mental experience at all? The mental state of the Zen practitioner is certainly not a form of unconsciousness. On the contrary, the clarity of consciousness and the ability to perceive, are increased. The German word for consciousness, *Bewusstsein*, is made up of two words “conscious” (*bewusst*) and “being” (*sein*), and refers to a kind of “conscious-being” or being-conscious. The contents of consciousness are perceived during the formal practice of Zen but are not actively processed, not conceptualized or reacted to. Through this process of non-doing, conscious-



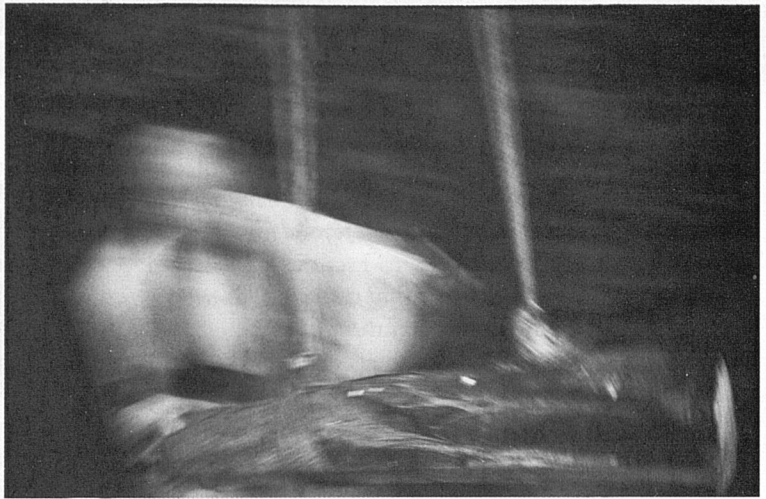
[13



ness loses more and more of its personal egoistic involvement. Without reference to an experiencing "I" or to the individual's concept of self, the reality that is experienced through Zen is realized in an intense and direct way. Here our everyday relational reality is not turned into a subjective inner experience or into an event that can be made use of or "evaluated." That means it is not turned into our *individual* reality.

Zen cannot be reduced to mere mental events in the way that neuropsychology wants to investigate them. The world is not in our heads; rather, we, along with our heads, are in the world. In the west people still seem inclined to understand events as mental, as events-in-our-heads. Maybe that is one of the reasons that western man feels obligated to judge, to manipulate and impose himself upon the world. In contrast, Zen is more a matter of non-doing, of acceptance, of letting reality be. Zen consciousness, or conscious-being, integrates body and spirit. Their relationship to each other is experienced directly as the relationship of man in the world. Zen is the wisdom and the experience of an intimate connectedness and wholeness of the complex of man and world, of subject and object in the here and now. It is not a kind of experience; it is a mode of being.

Guttman, one of the few neuropsychologists who does not simply deny the questions posed by mysticism, "posits two independent dimensions of consciousness. One represents pure activation, including all the various states of consciousness from wide-awake concentrated attention to the deepest unconsciousness. The other dimension, in contrast, represents the clarity of the I, reaching from the obvious experience of a subject-object duality (as is usual for our daily lives and is thoroughly useful) all the way to a complete dissolution of the consciousness of an I." (Guttman, G., & Bestenreiner, F., 1991). Wide-awake attention without any dualistic condition of consciousness would be a possible combination that would describe Zen-consciousness according to Guttman's two-dimensional model. Thus, from Guttman's perspective, the concept of I as a "primary psychological given" could fall away through "a process of differentiation" (ibid. 40). The model makes clear that Zen conscious-being has a deconstructive effect, for, at this point, there is no subjective consciousness left in which the "I" could construct its world. Here, the world



14]

is integrated with consciousness, while the notion of an experience determined and filtered by subjective consciousness is lacking. The possibility arises that human beings, living in a world experienced without an I, could be connected to the world through a process of empathy.

When Zen teachers say that Zen is a return to original nature, what they are pointing to is this direct experience of the unity of man and world. This means that all living beings, including plants and anorganic material, participate in the "just nowness" of existence and experience, of being and letting be. Ego-less Zen consciousness, like all mystical experiences, is an achievement brought about by practice. We must practice in order to leave behind our usual subjective grasping for reality, in favor of an unconstructed existence.

Zen consciousness allows experience and being to be simultaneous. This means that Zen practitioners are more open to unconscious realms and experience themselves as integrated with the world to a higher degree. The more a person can live in a state of forgetting the self, the more they will be psychologically healthy and free of stress.

Zen is not based on moralistic thinking, nor can moral imperatives be derived from it. However, Zen practice means a new evaluation of reality which can lead to a new moral sense. This has two aspects: First, the world loses its meaningfulness for the subject. Life becomes a theatrical play in which we cease being actors. We become the audience, no longer enmeshed in a seriousness which can make us blind. It is a perspective through which the world is transformed into a drama that can be observed in a disinterested manner. Secondly, the I is completely integrated with the not-I, i.e. becomes one with it. Here consciousness is directly acquainted with the illusions and dreams of life, and one comes to feel the pain of the whole world as their own. When inside and outside become one, I am connected in a direct way with all living beings. Their suffering becomes my suffering, just as their joy becomes my joy. The observer does not stand in opposition to the observed. One is not controlled by their reactions, opinions or feelings, and is therefore not helplessly entangled in reality. Rather, one is connected with the world which they themselves *are* and at the same time completely free.

Into what could the rhinoceros stick his horn at this point? (cf. Tao-Te-King, chapter 50)

