

Bad friendship

Avoiding unwholesome teacher-pupil relationships and abuse of religion
An essay by Piya Tan ©2006, 2010

An Open Letter from Founder of Upaya Zen Center

by Joan Halifax, Roshi, The Buddhist Channel, Jan 2, 2010

Dear Daibosatzu Board and Practitioners,

I am Founding Abbot of Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a woman, a Zen practitioner since 1965, and someone who was sexually assaulted by one of her Buddhist teachers years ago. I have been following the discussion on the AZTA [American Zen Teachers Association] listserv for many months about the Eido Shimano “case.” <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,9796,0,0,1,0>

Why Buddhism?: Violations of Trust in the Sexual Sphere

by Roshi Joan Halifax, Founding Abbot Upaya Zen Center, The Buddhist Channel, Jan 3, 2011

Santa Fe, New Mexico (USA) — We all know that rape as a weapon of war has been used against women and nations for thousands of years. Rape, forceable seduction, seduction through trickery, power and domination, seduction through loneliness or delusion have also been part of most, if not all, religions.

Yes, if you want to demoralize a nation, rape its women, its daughters, its sisters, its wives... And if you want to deepen the shadow of any religion, turn wisdom and compassion into hypocrisy, and stand by, conflict averse, as its male clergy disrespects women, has sex with female congregants, dominates women, abuses women, degrades or rapes them.

<http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,9803,0,0,1,0>

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1 Mahānāga Thera,gāthā

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| 1 | Who respects not his fellows in the holy life
wastes away from the true Dharma like a fish in little water. | 387 |
| 2 | Who respects not his fellows in the holy life
fails to grow in the true Dharma like a rotten seed in a field. | 388 |
| 3 | Who respects not his fellows in the holy life
is far from nirvana in the Dharma-rajah’s teaching. | 389 |
| 4 | The one who respects his fellows in the holy life
abandons not the true Dharma is like a fish in a great pool of water. | 390 |
| 5 | The one who respects his fellows in the holy life
sprouts up like a good seed in a field of the true Dharma. | 391 |
| 6 | The one who respects his fellows in the holy life
is near to nirvana in the Dharma-rajah’s teaching. | 392 |

(Mahānāga Thera,gāthā, Tha 387-392)

2 Negative relationships

2.1 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP IS THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. Like the other Indian religions of his time, the Buddha places great emphasis on listening to the Dharma (*dhamma-s,savana*),¹ as it is the basis for wisdom. Such an endeavour—“listening to another’s voice” (*parato ghosa*)²—is said to be one of the two sources of wisdom; the other is wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*).³

While it is obvious that wise attention is a basis for wisdom, and unwise attention is its opposite, “listening to another” can be a basis either for wisdom or for delusion.⁴ Listening to a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa mitta*) is a great way of cultivating wisdom, while associating with a bad friend (*pāpa mitta*) encourages delusion and suffering. Yet, we can also learn from listening to bad friends, that is, to listen with wise attention so that we understand the nature of negative actions.

To pay wise attention means to see the facts of impermanence, suffering and not-self behind what is said or done. Whatever people say, whether they are spiritual friends or bad friends, it has something to do with the Dharma, but while a spiritual friend’s words tend to point to the Dharma, those of a bad friend tend to point in the opposite direction. We need to be wise in which choosing direction to look and move.

We have already discussed spiritual friendship elsewhere [SD 8.1]. Let us remind ourselves here that “spiritual friendship is the *whole* of the holy life,”⁵ and just as dawn surely brings the sun, declares the Buddha,

Bhikshus, I do not see any other thing by which the unarisen noble eightfold path arises and the arisen noble eightfold path develops to completion except through spiritual friendship.

(S 5:35)

It is useful to note that the expression “bad friend” (*pāpa mitta*) here is a generic term, a general expression that refers to any kind of person, whether a parent, a teacher, a spouse, a lover, an employer, a co-worker, a friend, an acquaintance, or a religious teacher. The easiest way out of a bad friendship is to get away from the negative environment for a more nurturing one, if this is possible. If this is difficult or impossible, we need to find effective time to strengthen ourselves inwardly. In due course, we should be strong enough, perhaps in fellowship with other spiritual friends to assist that bad friend.

For a bad friend is really an overly-inflated bubble of bad air waiting to burst. He or she is in dire need of spiritual help, but is unable or unwilling to see the need for it. When the bad friendship is with a family member, it can be very difficult to deal with. The best way out of such a bad friendship is to get away from the negative environment, at least for some time, or whenever necessary, so that we can heal and strengthen ourselves.

Sometimes, the reason we are attracted to bad friends is that they seem to embody all the good things we desire, they seem to be all that we want to be—the only problem is that we do not really know that these qualities do not really bring us true happiness. In the blinding light of bad friendship, we only see what we want to see, and we are caught up with such mirages like Narcissus admiring his own reflection at the poolside, pining away, turning into an unthinking plant.⁶

2.2 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP AND SPIRITUAL TRAINING. Spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life in that it underlies and pervades the Buddhist spiritual training in moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom. Simply put, this threefold training covers every aspect of the mundane path before it

¹ **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70.23/1:480); **Caṅkī S** (M 95.26-33/2:175 f); **Kāla S 1+2** (A 4.146/2:140); **Dhamma-s,savana S** (A 5.202/3:247), 5 benefits; **Maṅgala S** (Kh 5.9/3 = Sn 265/47), an excellent blessing.

² **Kim Diṭṭhika S** (A 10.93/5:187); Pm 1:138.

³ On *parato,ghosa* & *yoniso manasikāra*, see **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43.13-14/1:294); **Āsāduppajaha Vagga** (A 2.-87/1:87); **Kim Diṭṭhika S** (A 10.93) lists 8 bases for wrong view (*aṭṭha diṭṭhi-t,thāna*), viz, (1) regarding the aggregates (*khandha*), (2) ignorance (*avijjā*), (3) sense-contact (*saññā*), (4) perception (*saññā*), (5) thinking (*vitakka*), (6) unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*), (7) bad friends (*pāpa,mitta*), and (8) listening to others (*parato ghosa*) (A 10.93/5:185-189). Cf Sn 696. On wise attention, see **Nimitta & anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

⁴ **Āsāduppajaha Vagga** (A 2.97/1:87).

⁵ **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2/5:2 f = S 3.18/1:87 f); cf Sāriputta’s remark, S 45.3/5:3.

⁶ See **Spiritual friendship: A textual study** = SD 34.18 (2.5.2).

evolves into the supramundane path of the saints. They are like having a good seed, planting it in good soil, and letting it sprout forth.

Moral virtue deals basically with the restraint of body and speech, and taming them so that we can get along with others. This is a very minimum requirement for a successful spiritual community, or any group to be workable. The essence of such a training is embodied in the five precepts, the spirit of which may be summed up as follows:⁷

- to show every respect for life and living beings,
- not to hinder or lessen the wholesome happiness of others in any way,
- not to violate or exploit the person or freedom of another,
- not to miscommunicate what is true and beneficial to others,
- not to cloud up our senses and minds such that we are unable to know and see true reality.

In the light of such an understanding of moral virtue, we can define a bad friend as one

- who shows no respect for life and who lacks compassion,
- who does not really contribute to the true happiness of others,
- who violates or exploits our person or freedom (does not respect us as a person),
- who fails to communicate what is beneficial for our wholesome growth,
- who does not inspire us to think or feel for ourselves, or to realize our spiritual potential.

Moral virtue is the basis for mental cultivation: we tame our body and speech so that we can enjoy the full or effective potential of our hearts and minds. A bad friend is one who hinders or distracts us from such a progress. Being generally self-centred or lacking true wisdom, a bad friend is unwilling or unable to share any wholesome quality with us. Instead of looking within to tap our own wholesome potentials, a bad friend induces us to let him or her take charge of our lives.

The most detrimental of bad friends is one who becomes “somebody” at the cost of our being “nobody.” In other words, a bad friend, especially a false teacher, cunningly makes us dependent on him in almost every way, but the reality is that he or she is utterly dependent on us to keep his ego and body going.

Such a bad friendship discourages or disempowers us from thinking for ourselves. He has an agenda, and we are the tools for its implementation and success. We are simply mental slaves, blinded by the charisma we attribute to such bad friends. The tragic state and outcome of having a bad friend is that we will never be able to progress spiritually—because we have handed our remote control to someone else.

2.2 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP AND UPLIFTMENT. Ideally, spiritual friendship is the positive interaction between a wise, experienced and compassionate teacher, and a respectful, amenable and grateful student. Often enough, we may find that the student, at least in the initial stages of the training, to be less than respectful to the teacher, not always easy to admonish, and motivated by arrogance and self-interest. Despite such difficulties, a skillful awakened teacher like the Buddha would be able to inspire such a student towards spiritual maturity.

A case in point is that of the monk **Meghiya**, a personal attendant of the Buddha (A 9.3 ≈ U 4.1). Meghiya sees a delightful place for solitary meditation and insists on spending time there despite the Buddha’s request that he wait for a little while. When Meghiya still insists in his plans, the Buddha lets him do as he pleases. Meghiya then finds that he is overwhelmed with mental hindrances (arising from experiencing some past karma), and simply could not meditate.

He returns repentant to the Buddha, who admonishes him on spiritual friendship and the qualities that bring about spiritual maturity. The Dhammapada Commentary summarizes the Meghiya Sutta in its **Me-**

⁷ The five precepts (*pañca, sīla*) are those of refraining (1) from harming life, (2) from taking the not-given, (3) from sexual misconduct, (4) from false speech, and (4) from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness. See **Pañca Vera, bhaya S** (S 12.41.4-9/2: 68 f) = SD 2.2 (4.2) & **Sīlānussati** = SD 15.11 (2.2). On def of the first 4 precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290) = SD 5.7 Intro (2). On the dangers of breaching the 5th precept, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31.8/3:182 f) = SD 4.1.

ghiya Thera Vatthu (the Story of the Elder Meghiya, DhA 29.1): the Buddha rebukes him for disobeying, and then admonishes him, closing with the following **Dhammapada** verses:⁸

<i>Phandanam capalam cittam dūrakkham dunnivārayam ujum karoti medhāvī usukāro 'va tejanam.</i>	The mind is shaky and unsteady, hard to restrain, hard to control. The wise straightens it like a fletcher an arrow.	Dh 33
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<i>Vārijo 'va thale khitto okam-okata ubbhato pariphandati 'dam cittam māra 'dheyyam pahātave.⁹</i>	Like a fish cast onto dry land, thrown up from its watery home, this mind flounders about, trying to shake off Māra's hold.	Dh 34
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Despite Meghiya's indiscipline and impulsiveness, the Buddha is patient with him, even ready to admonish him when he faces problems. A good teacher, in other words, is a spiritual friend who does not give up on a pupil, and is capable of putting him back on the right track. If not, at least, such a teacher is capable of giving good advice when a pupil or congregation is in need of it.

3 Charisma and external refuge

3.1 CHARISMA IS A LOP-SIDED RELATIONSHIP. Bad friendship is an interaction of what is negative in both parties. Psychologically, this may be said to be *transference* on the pupil's side, and *counter-transference* on the guru's side. Transference is when certain strong emotions we have shown to significant others in the past are projected on to a present subject so that we are effectively re-living a delusive past relationship.

The "significant other" here is usually a parent-figure or a love-source, a bond of gratification that we have not yet outgrown or that is still unresolved. Such an unresolved need hang from our minds like hooks ready to latch on to anyone whom we perceive as having the qualities we desire. Such a transference can range from a mild admiration for the subject to a pathological hero-worship.

Most religions thrive on such a relationship, where we, as followers, attribute charisma to a guru, preacher or leader, or on a deeper level, when we transfer our need for succour to a divine parent-figure. The televangelists and mega-church preachers of our times clearly have a good sense of such needs of their congregations. Understandably, personal packaging and branding helps: such guru figures often dress and groom themselves well, and assume impressive names, presenting themselves as faithful, affable and successful people, or even being eccentric in some vaguely mystical way.¹⁰

The guru-figure, on the other hand, is, as a rule, either highly ego-starved, craving for love and attention, or steeped in hate bent on destroying whatever stands in his way, or deeply delusive often with a bent for self-aggrandisement or claims of some religious power. With such a serious emotional dislocation, the guru is a bad friend who is either aware of a follower's weakness or need, and exploits them, or is simply oblivious of their mutual folly until it is too late. This is called counter-transference.

The guru, dependent on the support and adoration of others, has to regularly put up a front that befits his charisma. Even when the guru fails or faults his or her followers, this is *rationalized* as the fault of the followers, or that the guru is testing them, or simply that the guru's actions are beyond the comprehension of the ordinary followers. The followers' transference wedded with the guru's counter-transference be-

⁸ See **Meghiya S** (A 9.3/4:354-358 ≈ U 4.1/34-37) & SD 34.2 (1.2).

⁹ *Pahatave*, inf of purpose, alt tr, "in order to avoid Māra's realm"; often confused with fut pass part *pahatabbam*, as found in Comy, which also takes *pahatave* as an alt form of the inf *pahātum* (DhA 1:289). See Norman, review of Carter & Paliwadana, *The Dhammapada* (OUP, 1987), *Buddhist Studies Review* 6,2 1989:159 = *Collected Papers*, Oxford: PTS, 1996:164.

¹⁰ On transference, see **Gadhabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b (2).

comes a deadly potion of *psychological co-dependence or projection*,¹¹ resulting in a mutually destructive relationship.

3.2 EXTERNAL REFUGES ARE UNSAFE. Bad friendship is unwholesome because the guru or parent-figure can easily manipulate or abuse his pupils or charges. Not only would the guru-dependent person work unquestioningly for the guru, but he would relish any attention from the guru-figure, even mental abuse (taken as a test) or sexual abuse (taken as a reward or blessing of sorts). Such a relationship can only escalate into mutually assured destructiveness, as regularly reported in the scandals and crises that plague guru-centred Buddhism (see below) and other power-based religions.

Bad friendship, as such, is an interplay of predominantly negative or delusive emotions amongst individuals. In a bad friendship, the pupil is always available for abuse and corruption by the guru, because the pupil has *externalized his locus of control*: he has handed his remote control to the guru. Such ethical or psychological aberrations become acceptable, even the norm, when the guru is institutionalized as an awakened or divine being, or someone with special powers—and hence is regarded as being “beyond good and evil.”¹²

The best antidote and prevention of such a destructive guru-centred rut is for us to cultivate a proper understanding of “**self-refuge**” (*atta,saraṇa*) through mastering some level of wisdom, especially the Buddha’s teachings on the five aggregates, the latent tendencies, and how the mind works. The five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are what we really are. Such teachings help us to understand that we create our own worlds through our sense-experiences. If we are our own creators, then we can end the destructiveness and remove the delusion.¹³

Another useful healing knowledge is that of how **the latent tendencies** (*anusaya*) work. Without proper spiritual training and wisdom, we tend to be nose-led by our past. We are drawn to persons and situations we perceive as pleasurable and rewarding: these appear so because we unconsciously link them with some pleasurable past experiences, such as childhood conditioning, peer influence, or communal indoctrination. Conversely, we tend to dislike and reject people or situations that we perceive as depriving us of such pleasure-objects or distracting us from such objectives.¹⁴

The severity of this problem is clearly addressed by the Buddha when he declares the urgent necessity for **self-refuge**: this declaration is made by the Buddha immediately after he awakens and just before he passes away. In **the Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2), we see the newly awakened Buddha seeking someone better or higher (such as a guru or God) to revere and live dependent on, but found none, and comes to the conclusion,

“What now, if I, honouring, respecting this very Dharma, to which I have fully awakened, were to dwell in dependence on it?”
(S 6.2.8/1:139) = SD 12.3

The key term here is “dependence” (*upanissaya*) which must be properly understood. It has the following senses: “support, basis; foundation, condition, prerequisite,” and also “vicinity, nearness” (DP). All these definitions refer to the basis for spiritual progress. However, since the Buddha has already awakened, “dependence” here refers to his life being filled and moved by the Dharma.

For unawakened beings like ourselves, instead of depending on *a person or thing* for our development, we should only resort to looking within ourselves for spiritual growth. This understanding is confirmed by the fact that the Buddha goes on to relate this to the practice of the four satipatthanas or foundations of mindfulness, that is, mind-training leading to a direct understanding of the conscious body, of feelings, of the mind, and of spiritual states.¹⁵

The Buddha’s admonition here is that we should seek no one as our refuge: there is no true refuge *outside* of ourselves. *To go to the Buddha for refuge* means to be inspired by the Buddha not as a person,

¹¹ See **Gadrabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = sd 24.10B (2.4.1).

¹² See **Beyond good and evil** = SD 18.7 esp (9).

¹³ On the 5 aggregates, see **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) = SD 17.1a.

¹⁴ On latent tendencies, see **Anusaya** = SD 31.3.

¹⁵ See **Satipatṭhana S** (M 10/1:55-63) = SD 13.3.

but by what he *is*, that is, awakened. Since the Buddha awakens himself through his own effort, we too can awaken ourselves.

Similarly, **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), too, records how the Buddha, after declaring that even he, as an awakened being, has to pass away, admonishes us through Ānanda:

Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves,¹⁶ being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dharma as an island,¹⁷ with the Dharma as your refuge, with no other refuge. (D 16.2.26/2:100 f = 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164)

This, in short, is the Buddha's very first and very last teaching: we must be our own refuge, for who else can a true refuge be?¹⁸ Buddhism, is in other words, a quest for self-understanding, self-liberation and self-mastery:

<i>Attā hi attano nātho ko hi nātho paro siyā attanā'va sudantena nātham labhati dullabham</i>	The self is the self's master [We are our own masters], for, who else could the master be? with a self that is well-tamed, indeed, one gains a master that is hard to find.
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(Dh 160; cf 380)

4 Case studies

4.1 EVEN FAMOUS TEACHERS CAN HAVE WRONG VIEWS. The Buddha Dharma comprises stories and teachings, that is, accounts in conventional terms (*pariyāya*) of successes and failures of various people, and the presentation of systematic teachings (*nippariyāya*),¹⁹ that uplift or can uplift such people to higher spiritual levels. The former are filled with *case-studies* of those who initially fail spiritually, that is, actual or didactic situations illustrating the workings of the Dharma in liberating them from their predicaments.

In our own times, too, we have numerous situations of spiritual failure, sometimes involving a famous teacher, sometimes a whole group or system, usually both. When such failures are honestly and openly examined with wisdom and compassion, they become valuable lessons for us and future generation. Such in-depth investigations are not to scapegoat or finger-point at those to blame (even where there clearly are guilty parties), but to look out for patterns of negative and destructive attitudes and conduct that foment and aggravate such situations so that they are not repeated.

An in-depth familiarity with such cases and a wholesome understanding of them, allows us to detect early or hidden signs of religious abuses, weaknesses and failures before they worsen. Or perhaps when such situations are uncovered at an advanced stage, there is still a Chance to salvage what is good, and to learn from where we have failed so that we can revitalize the system.

Religion becomes truly healing when it goes beyond its cycle of routine, rituals and rhetoric to inspire and encourage its followers to look deeper into themselves. The *spirituality* of a religion is its ability and will to examine itself, like a great tree that sheds its dead outer bark and grows new leaves, flowers, and fruits, and providing shade and beauty to those it shelters. On the other hand, if a tree, especially as a huge one, is rotten at the root or in its trunk, it would destroy many should it fall.

Fortunately, we have a growing number of useful case studies of Buddhist systems and individuals that have failed. Most such studies have been done by practitioners of Buddhism in the West. An important reason for the proliferation of such failures in Western Buddhism is the lack of an emphasis on moral restraint and social distance between teacher and pupil, which are common features in oriental Buddhism.

However, as Buddhism becomes more globalized and more this-worldly, such systemic and individual failures assume more common and predictable patterns. Such case studies, therefore, provides valua-

¹⁶ "As islands unto yourselves," Skt *ātma, dvīpa*; P *atta, dīpa*.

¹⁷ "With Dharma as an island," Skt *dharmā, dvīpa*; P *dharmā, dīpa*.

¹⁸ See **The one true refuge** = SD 3.1.

¹⁹ See *Pariyāya nippariyāya* = SD 68.2.

ble records and insights into our human nature, and how Buddhist training can nurture us out of such trials and tribulations to be true learners, even awaken us to our best spiritual potential.

Two very well studied, and to some extent, resolved, cases of religious scandals are those that occurred during the period between the 1970s and 1990s in the US. We shall examine the cases of Vajrayana Buddhism (Vajradhatu and Shambhala centering around Chogyam Trungpa) and of Zen Buddhism (San Francisco Zen Center and Richard Baker), for purposes of understanding the nature of bad friendship and religious failure, and a quest for spiritual healing and growth.

The (Ahita) Thera Sutta (A 5.88) points out that *even famous teachers can have wrong views*.²⁰ And when such people do have wrong views, a great many would be affected by its fallout. The karmic consequences of such teachers are very dire, too, as they are bound for rebirth in subhuman planes for a long time indeed.²¹ And if we think that such false teachers are above morality and karma, then we are a part of the problem, too. We need to see the crises as they really are, and rise well above them.

4.2 SCHOLARLY REPORTS. A number of practitioners and scholars have written *first-person reports* or *psychological reviews* of these crises, thus providing us with valuable insights into them. The first case study we shall examine is one about a very painful scandal involving an incarnate Tibetan lama and his successor in the Vajradhatu community in the USA in the 1970s. The second case is that of the San Francisco Zen Center and its leader Richard Baker in the 1980s. Our study will be based on the reports of such practitioners and scholars as Katy Butler, Stephanie Kane, and Sandra Bell.

Katy Butler is a free-lance reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and a student at the San Francisco Zen Center, California. This is a first-person report on Buddhist teachers in the US who sexualized relationships with students. She cites cases involving Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Vajra Regent Osel Tendzin, leader of Vajradhatu community; and Richard Baker Roshi, head of the San Francisco Zen Center. She briefly discusses reactions of the leaders of the centres and communities upon discovery of the scandal, and its consequences for students (1990).

Stephanie Kane is affiliated with Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Her essay is based on an ethnographic research that focuses “on the construction of personal and public identities of HIV positive persons. More specifically, it is about how identity links up with AIDS-related risk behavior, and in turn, how these associations are represented in courts, communities, and mass media.” She examines the case “of a Tantric Buddhist teacher and his student/sex partner, both of whom have since died of AIDS... The community response to the reported discovery of HIV transmission from teacher to student has not been unified. Calls for criminalization have been voiced, but they were considered blasphemous.” (1994).

Sandra Bell is an anthropologist and lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Durham, UK. She has published papers on the expansion of Buddhism in the West in various journals, and also writes on gender and sexuality in Theravāda Buddhism.

5 Lineage of denial: The Vajradhatu Community

This section is based on the following papers (which should be read on their own):

- **Katy Butler**, “Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America.” *Common Boundary* 8, 1990;²²
- **Stephanie Kane**, “Sacred deviance and AIDS in a North American Buddhist community” (1994),²³
- **Sandra Bell**, “Scandals in emerging western Buddhism” (2002).²⁴

²⁰ A 5.88/3:114-116 = SD 40a.16.

²¹ See eg **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206.4/5:293) = SD 3.9. See also **Lohicca S**, where it is stated that “wrong view leads to one of two destinies: hell or an animal birth” (D 12.10/1:228).

²² Katy Butler, “Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America.” *Common Boundary* 8, May/June 1990:14-22. See also: Butler, Katy. (1991).

²³ Stephanie Kane, “Sacred deviance and AIDS in a North American Buddhist community,” *Law and Policy*, 16,3 1994:323-339. Kane is affiliated with Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

²⁴ Sandra Bell, “Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism,” in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed M Baumann & C Prebish, 2002:230-242.

5.1 CHOGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE

5.1.1 Great and alcoholic. Vidhyadhara Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987), the 11th incarnation of the Trungpa tulku²⁵ in the Kagyu lineage founded the Vajradhatu International Buddhist Church, Boulder, Colorado, and taught Tantric Buddhism. Katy Kane reports that he “was revered as the embodiment of Buddha...” and chose women students who “acted as devoted sexual servants to the Buddha in the body of Trungpa Rinpoche.”

Trungpa was the teenage head of several large monasteries in Tibet, when the Chinese invaded in 1959 and forced him to flee. Eager to come to terms with the West, he gave up his robes for a business suit, schooled in Oxford, fell in love with Shakespeare and Mozart, and married an English woman, Diana Mukpo. Together with Akong Rinpoche, Trungpa founded Samyé Ling in Scotland, but later left for the US.²⁶

Trungpa was an alcoholic, who sometimes lectured with a glass of sake²⁷ in his hand. Characteristic of cult gurus, he taught that every aspect of human existence—neurosis, passion, desire, alcohol, the dark and the light—was to be embraced and transmuted. He called this “crazy wisdom” (*drubnyon*), alluding to a small tradition of eccentric siddhas, most of whom worked intimately with one or two students.²⁸

5.1.2 Living like royalty. Trungpa and his English wife lived in a palatial mansion, the Kalapa Court, in an upper-class district of Boulder. Guests, even followers, were admitted by invitation only. In fact, the residence was set up “to reflect a courtly hierarchy, with followers eager to serve as cleaners, attendants, guards, cooks, and so on.” (Bell 2002:233). Inmates had to take a vow never to divulge Trungpa’s lifestyle, or the unrestrained sexual liaisons of his disciples.²⁹

Many from the 1960’s American hippie generation were quickly attracted to him. Amongst those who became Trungpa’s students were the poets Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, playwright Jean-Claude van Italie, Shambhala Publications publisher Sam Bercholz, and poet-journalist Rick Fields, author of the well known history of American Buddhism, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (1981). The Vajradhatu community was based in Boulder, Colorado, from where students ran businesses; started Naropa Institute, an accredited Buddhist university; edited a journal on contemplative psychotherapy; and published a widely-read monthly Buddhist newspaper, the *Vajradhatu Sun*.

Trungpa’s lifestyle could, in the least, be said to be hedonic—a supposedly enlightened incarnate being who regularly indulged in worldly pleasures. The more serious students were upset with such cognitive dissonance,³⁰ but somehow could not help feeling grateful to him for his compassion and gentle provocative genius. The point is that they were simply baffled by his ways, like deer on a dark country road staring into the bright headlights of a car speeding towards them.

²⁵ A tulku (Tib for Skt *nirmāṇa, kāya*) refers to an incarnate or “emanated” lama, regarded as enlightened. A recent Chinese word for tulku is 活佛 *huófó*, lit “living Buddha,” clearly a misnomer, and rarely used outside of Chinese sources. Modern Chinese sources typically refer to a young tulku as a “soul boy,” traditional 靈童 simplified 靈童 *língtóng*. Such misnomers and misconceptions should be avoided in Buddhist usage. See **Rule by incarnation** = SD 36.7.

²⁶ Wikipedia: The building that now houses Samyé Ling, Eskdaslemuir, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, was originally a hunting lodge, which housed the Johnstone House Contemplative Community, founded by a Canadian Theravada monk named Anandabodhi. When the community declined, Anandabodhi returned to Canada. He subsequently ordained in the Karma Kagyu tradition and was enthroned as Namgyal Rinpoche by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa. In 1967, the Theravada community sold the centre to two Tibetan lamas and refugees, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Akong Rinpoche, who renamed it Samyé Ling. In 2000, Samyé Ling, too, was riddled with scandals: see reports in the *Scottish Daily Record* (**Jamie Macaskill** 2000) & *The Independent* (**Robert Mendick** 2000).

²⁷ *Saké*, Jap alcoholic beverage made from rice.

²⁸ Sandra Bell 2002:232 f; also her “‘Crazy wisdom,’ charisma, and the transmission of Buddhism in the United States,” 1999.

²⁹ Stephen Butterfield 1994:100; Sandra Bell 2002:233.

³⁰ See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26) = SD 1.11 (3.1) (*Samvega* and cognitive dissonance).

5.1.3 Communal denial. Some students, reliving the struggles they had had with their alcoholic families, reacted to Trungpa by psychologically denying his alcohol and sexual addictions.³¹ A woman student even served him big glasses of gin the first thing in the morning. Others resolved their cognitive dissonance by believing that he had *vajra* (“adamantine”) nature, so that he was immune to the normal effects of alcohol. They swallowed the story that it was a way of putting “earth” into his system, so that he could relate to them. No one seemed to suspect that he was possibly an alcoholic.

This even led other students to become heavy drinkers themselves. And when some of them joined Alcoholics Anonymous in the early 1980s, their recovery seems to threaten others. The first woman to become sober was asked to quit the board of a home-care organization founded by Vajradhatu members.

5.1.4 Painful death. In 1986, Trungpa, 46, lay dying of terminal alcoholism, incontinent, belly bloated, skin discoloured, hallucinating and suffering from varicose veins, gastritis and oesophageal varices (swollen veins in the lower gullet), a condition almost certainly caused by cirrhosis of the liver. Only an inner circle knew about all this—the obvious symptoms of excessive drinking. “The denial was bone-deep,” said Victoria Fitch, a household staff with years of experience as a nursing attendant, “I watched his alcoholic dementia explained as being in the realm of the *dakinis* [guardians of the teachings, visualized in female form]. When he requested for alcohol, no one could bring themselves not to bring it to him...”

When Rick Fields, editor of the *Vajradhatu Sun*, wrote a short article summarizing on the crisis, he was not allowed to print it. When he tried to publish it again in March, 1986, he was fired by the Regent. “The suppression of public discussion echoed both the Asian tradition of face-saving as well as the dynamics of alcoholic families,” noted Katy Butler. They were like family secrets, things which we do not talk about, especially with outsiders. Even Kalu Rinpoche, one of the first Tibetan masters to teach in the West, forbade his American students to comment on the Vajradhatu scandal.³²

5.2 THE VAJRA REGENT

5.2.1 Gay and positive. In the face of his impending death, Trungpa appointed Thomas F Rich (1944-1989) of Passaic, New Jersey, as his successor, who was titled Vajra Regent Osel Tendzin, “Radiant Holder of the Teachings.” In April 1987, following Trungpa’s death, Tendzin took over leadership of the Vajradhatu community, the largest Buddhist group in the West, and was the first westerner to lead such a group.

Tendzin was gay and sexually promiscuous, and “was renowned for his charisma, positive arrogance, and his power with language.” (Kane 1994). As such, he was respected and unquestioned in whatever he did, even his wildly frequent sexual intimacies with many of his male students.

Although in the 1980s, Tendzin was aware of his HIV positive status, he continued to have unprotected sexual relations with his students, both gay and straight, without informing them. Five members of the community’s inner circle knew about his condition, but none of them warned the larger community of the health risk to his sex partners, or their partners.

Over a year later, in December 1988, a community member, son of a long-term student, announced that he was HIV positive, as was a young woman he had sex with. He stated that he could only have been infected by Tendzin.³³ As word spread through the community, some called for Tendzin’s resignation as regent. Tendzin refused: “He thought that his level of spiritual enlightenment would protect him and his

³¹ On psychological defence mechanisms, see **Gadhabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b. On denial as a psychological defence mechanism, see **Memes** = SD 26.3 (3.3.2).

³² See Katy Butler 1991:137-141. Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989) was himself not above scandal. **June Campbell**, his translator and former Karma Kagyu nun, who writes about her experiences (esp sexual abuse in the guise of tantric practice) and investigations in *Traveler in Space* (1996). For a review by Karen Lang, 1997, see <http://www.buddhistethics.org/4/lang2.html> & *The Independent* (UK), 10 Feb 1999: (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/i-was-a-tantric-sex-slave-1069859.html>).

³³ See Butler 1991:138.

partners from AIDS...” (Kane 1994). He was treated like a king, and came to behave like one; he was regarded as a god, and came to think he was one. Until it was too late.³⁴

5.2.2 Renewal. In an effort to resolve the situation, a high lama, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche,³⁵ asked the Regent to go into retreat, but urged the Vajradhatu members to respect the Regent’s authority. (Butler 1991:143). After the retreat, Tendzin returned and took over the community again. Those who rejected his authority were fired from key positions, denied permission to teach meditation, and barred from joining in advanced practices with the rest of the community. The conflict reached such a level that the two factions sent delegations to Nepal and India to win over senior lamas to their respective sides. (Butler 1991:146)

In 1990, Khyentse responded by advising Tendzin to go for a “strict retreat” for a year. Tendzin complied, but died of AIDS in the following August. With Khyentse’s urging, the board of directors agreed to appoint Trungpa’s son, known as the Sawang (“earth-lord”),³⁶ as the new leader that same year. One of the first things he did was to disband the old board and appoint a new one. His leadership was cautious and consultative, showing signs that it had shifted from a charismatic cult to an organizational set-up.

5.2.3 Vajradhatu becomes Shambhala. With Tendzin’s death, reconstruction efforts began. To revitalize the membership, the new leaders renamed their organization as Shambhala International, based on Trungpa’s vision in the mid-1970s, when he introduced “a parallel and supposedly ‘secular’ form of meditation practice” known as Shambhala Training.

Shambhala is the name of a mythical kingdom of enlightened beings ruled by the wise. The purpose of the training is to create a Shambhala-like society. Trainees need not give up their religions nor do they have to regard themselves as Buddhists. Despite such open ideals, the movement continues to support meditation centres such as Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia and conduct weddings and funerals. It also runs educational and training programmes aimed at both individuals and at business corporations. Most participants, however, keep to the long-term training based on Trungpa’s interpretation of Vajrayana.³⁷

Due to Shambhala’s dynamic and open approach, it is popular with open-minded intellectuals. One of its great attractions is the prospect of meeting people who have interested in spirituality with a present-day currency. Another group are the artistically inclined as the movement provides a rich combination of contemplative practices, intellectual investigation and artistic experimentation.³⁸

6 Faulty transmissions: The San Francisco Zen Center

This section is based on the papers already mentioned [5], and also the following reports:

- **Katy Butler**, “Events are the teacher: Working through the crisis at the San Francisco Zen Center.” *CoEvolution Quarterly* 40 winter 1983:112-123.
- **Stuart Lachs**, “The Zen master in America: Dressing the donkey with bells and scarves.” 2006 & 2008.

6.1 RICHARD BAKER & THE SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER

6.1.1 Dynamic and self-propelled. In December 1971, shortly before Zen master Shunryu Suzuki died, he gave “Dharma transmission” in the Sōtō Zen sect to 36-year-old³⁹ Zentatsu Richard Baker (b 1936), a Harvard graduate, thus “making Baker, for his students and for all future people in his lineage, an authentic link to the historical Buddha.”⁴⁰ As Shunryu Suzuki’s sole western heir, Baker also became the official teacher and abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC) (popularly called the City Centre).

³⁴ See *LA Times* article by John Dart, 1989: <http://www.aegis.com/news/lt/1989/LT890302.html>.

³⁵ Born c1910-28, died 1991, head of the Nyinma school.

³⁶ Full title (enthroned 1995): Sakyong Mipham Jampal Trinley Dradül Rinpoche, eldest son of Trungpa, was born as Ösel Rangdröl Mukpo in 1962 in Bodhagaya, India. Diana Mukpo was his stepmother. See: <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/sakyong/smrbio.html>.

³⁷ Dawson & Eldershaw, “Shambhala warriorship,” 1996:209.

³⁸ See <http://www.shambhala.org/>.

³⁹ In Japan, it is unlikely that anyone would find himself in charge of a training temple until he was around 50. See remark by Blanche Hartman, current abbess at SFZC (Bell 2002:237).

⁴⁰ Lachs 2006:3 digital ed.

Through the energetic, resourceful and persuasive young Baker, the SFZC established Green Gulch Zen Farm, a practice community in Marin County (just north of San Francisco); the Tassajara Bakery (in Ashbury Heights, San Francisco), made famous through its cook books; Tassajara Zen Mountain Center (Carmel Valley, CA); and Greens Restaurant (at Fort Mason, Marina District, San Francisco), which served vegetables grown at the farm.

Despite their success, Baker could not delegate authority to other senior practitioners in his expanding organization. In fact, Baker “became isolated from his peers, who should have been encouraged and enabled to provide him support and guidance.”⁴¹ The Center’s board of directors comprised of priests ordained by Suzuki; but it met sporadically, and Baker made all the decisions himself. In the spring of 1983, however, a meeting convened and decided that Baker should take an indefinite leave of absence.

6.1.2 Violating the third precept. The winter edition of the Center’s journal, *Windbell*, reports: “The precipitating event which brought this about was his [Baker’s] relationship with a married resident woman student, and the upset which this caused for those principally involved, and for others in the community who knew about it.”⁴²

The *Windbell* report adds that Baker, who was also married, had been “involved in similar situations before.” All this was even more upsetting because Baker had been teaching that although Zen practice did not entail celibacy for priests and laypeople, a person’s sexual conduct should not harm or deceive others, and that a teacher’s conduct should be exemplary.

6.1.3 Baker’s other excesses. Apparently, Baker was in *psychological denial*. Senior members recollected that initially Baker did not seem to understand or accept why so many were so upset. In a 1994 interview, Baker stated, “It is as hard to say what I have learned as it is to say what happened.”⁴³ **Sandra Bell** summarizes the problem situation as follows:

Baker was perceived to have failed to treat other priests, who had also received ordination from Suzuki Roshi, as equals and peers. Expansion took place at great speed, but little attention was paid to the overall organizational structures of control and decision-making. Baker grew removed from the ebb and flow of community life, and was protected from the complaints and suspicions that surrounded him by an inner circle of “courtiers.”⁴⁴

(Butler, “Scandals in emerging Buddhism,” 2002:236)

As the Centre and its associated businesses grew, many students worked within the organization for long hours and minimum wages (US\$3.35 at the time), while Baker spent over US\$200,000 in one year and drove a US\$26,000 BMW. Much of this spending was related to his job as abbot, but he also spent impulsively on art, furniture, and expensive restaurant meals. The Center paid \$4,000 for his membership in New York’s exclusive Adirondack Club. There was clearly an unsustainable gulf between the material world inhabited by the abbot and the gruelling lifestyles of many of the students, whose labor and financial contributions were sustaining him.⁴⁵

6.2 POST-BAKER SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER

6.2.1 Rebuilding. Following Baker’s departure, during 1985-86, the Center and its satellites painfully and carefully remodelled themselves away from charismatic leadership for a more diffuse organizational model. The first post-crisis issue of *Windbell* featured photos and write-ups of a dozen individuals (five of them women) who have “taken on many of the teaching and practice responsibilities of the Zen Center.”⁴⁶ Amongst them was Tenshin Harold (Reb) Anderson, who was appointed abbot of the Center by the board in 1986.

⁴¹ Blanche Hartman, current abbess at SFZC (Bell 2002:237).

⁴² *Windbell* 17,2 1983:3.

⁴³ *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 4,2 winter 1994:35.

⁴⁴ Katy Butler, “Events are the teacher,” 1983:120.

⁴⁵ Butler 1983:112 f.

⁴⁶ *Windbell* 31,2 1997.

Currently, the SFZC board of directors is filled through elections by the Center's membership. The board meets at least six times a year, and amongst its tasks is that of appointing the Center's president and abbot (both nominated from a Council of Elders), and other officers. Each of the satellites of the Center [6.1.1] have at least two abbots or abbess. However, Tassajara and Green Gulch each have their own board of directors. Each satellite has a Practice Committee, comprising senior practitioners, and which meet weekly. In 1992, an Ethics Committee and subsequently an Ethics Review Committee, worked on the "Ethical Principles and Procedures for Grievance and Reconciliation," adopted by the board in 1996.⁴⁷

6.2.2 Forgiveness. As a gesture of reconciliation, Baker was invited to attend abbess Hartman's installation ceremony in 1996. The following year, her co-abbot, Norman Fischer, organized a retreat with Baker and 35 students from the 1970s and early 1980s as "a gesture of forgiveness," adding that

If a Buddhist sangha, a group of people dedicated to compassion and understanding, is not willing to try to heal its own wounds and deal with its difficult past with clarity, trying to prevent further harm in the future, does it makes sense to hope that others with even more difficult conditions will be able to do their work?
(Windbell 31,2 1997)

In the twenty-five years since leaving San Francisco Zen Center, Baker has quietly continued as a Zen teacher, starting and building two practice centers.⁴⁸ In 1993, a well known Vietnamese Zen master, Thich Nhat Hanh, wrote of Baker, "To me, he embodies very much the future of Buddhism in the West with his creative intelligence and his aliveness." (Schneider 1993:138-149)⁴⁹

7 Simple questions, basic truths

7.1 LEARNING THROUGH SUFFERING

7.1.0 Stuart Lachs. The crises that shadowed the Vajradhatu community [5] and the San Francisco Zen Center [6] are painfully dramatic, but these are not the only ones.⁵⁰ In an important way, these crises punctuate the deeper and insidious patterns where a person, especially a teacher, pastor or leader is unquestioningly obeyed and adored to the exclusion of other sources of wholesome learning and growth. Understandably, such crises are more common in Vajrayana and Zen Buddhism where such systems are centred around powerful guru-figures.

A silver lining in the dark cloud of the crises that shadow western Buddhism is the willingness of those who have suffered first-hand from such crises to examine them in due course and heal themselves with insight, contrition and forgiveness. They have suffered painfully on account of their great desire to know the Buddha Dharma. One such practitioner is **Stuart Lachs** (b 1940), who started Zen practice in 1969. He later joined Tassajara, and other Zen centres. In the early 1990s he met the Chinese Chán monk, Sheng Yen, and worked with his group; then, he went on to Taiwan to practise. He visited various Zen centres in Hawaii and London. Back in the US, he spent time in the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in Ukiah, CA.⁵¹

With his meeting the Chán master, Sheng Yen, Lachs became interested in an academic investigation of Zen, which included institutional history, myth-making, and the interaction of Zen and the state. He began to better understand the events and crises over the years that had bothered him but made no sense.

⁴⁷ See Bell 2002:237 f.

⁴⁸ That is, the Crestone Mountain Zen Center, Colorado & Buddhistisches Studienzentrum im Johanneshof (Buddhist Study Center at Johanneshof) in the Black Forest, Germany: <http://www.dharmasangha.org/teachers.html>.

⁴⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, despite this glowing statement, was well aware of Baker's wrong-doings: see Lachs 2006: 4 (digital ed).

⁵⁰ A similarly devastating scandal (involving sex and other improprieties) shook the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) around the same period (1980s): see Piya Tan, *History of Buddhist 2*: "The spread of Buddhism," 2005: (23).

⁵¹ See <http://personallifemedia.com/guests/999-stuart-lachs>.

His interest in *the sociology of religion* focussed his writings on his years of practice with Zen groups. Since 1999 he has been practising mostly with a small circle of friends or on his own.

His critical writings are honest and balanced, giving great insight into the breadth and reality of the situation in a non-technical way. In 2008, in his “Introduction to my Articles,” he wrote,

Critical thinking is Buddhist and Buddhism is critical thinking. By demanding tough answers and not being satisfied with easy ones, I hope to improve the situation of Zen in America which, since the mid- 1960’s, has suffered from repeated scandals—scandals that hurt its practitioners, caused others to leave and marred its reputation for years to come.

Buddhism has a history of adaptability to many cultures. No doubt, it will adapt to the West. We have an opportunity, by understanding the institutions and history of Zen, to claim its true spirit and inherent freedom for our lives. (Stuart Lachs, 2008)

One of Lach’s most comprehensive critical surveys of the “Zen problem” in the US is his paper entitled, “**The Zen master in America: Dressing the donkey with bells and scarves**” (2006) which can be found in numerous links online. In this section, we will briefly look at some of his valuable insights into the Zen masters of our time.⁵² Students are, however, advised to read this insightful paper in full for themselves.

7.1.1 Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

7.1.1.1 WHO IS A ROSHI?⁵³ Suzuki Roshi, the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and its leader until his death in 1971, was an impressive person, loved by the Center’s members. In the introduction to Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (1970), Baker quotes Trudy Dixon’s description of Suzuki as the ideal of a fully realized Zen master:

A *roshi* is a person who has actualized that perfect freedom which is the potentiality for all human beings. He exists freely in the fullness of his whole being. The flow of his consciousness is not the fixed repetitive patterns of our usual self-centered consciousness, but rather arises spontaneously and naturally from the actual circumstances of the present. The results of this in terms of the quality of his life are extraordinary—buoyancy, vigor, straightforwardness, simplicity, humility, security, joyousness, uncanny perspicacity and unfathomable compassion. His whole being testifies to what it means to live in the reality of the present. Without anything said or done, just the impact of meeting a personality so developed can be enough to Change another’s whole way of life. But in the end it is not the extraordinariness of the teacher that perplexes, intrigues, and deepens the student, it is the teacher’s utter ordinariness.⁵⁴

“This,” remarks Lachs, “is perhaps the most idealistic description of a roshi in print in the English language.” Trudy Dixon, the editor of the *Windbell*, the magazine of the SFZC, who penned this romanticized image of a roshi was only reflecting a collective delusion or expectations of her colleagues. The phrase, “A roshi is...,” Lachs adds, “makes it apply to all roshi when it is questionable whether it applies to even one roshi. Interestingly, by the time Baker penned this, he knew he would be Suzuki’s successor, and thereby, become a roshi.” Was Baker preparing the ground for himself?

⁵² This section, except §7.1.5 (on Maezumi Roshi), are excerpts, paraphrases and summaries of Lachs’ paper, which has very useful footnotes, most of which are quoted here in standardized format.

⁵³ Rōshi (老師 Chin pinyin: *lǎoshī*) is a Jap non-official honorific title used in Zen Buddhism that lit means “old teacher” or “elder master,” and usually denotes the person who gives spiritual guidance to a Zen order. Chinese Chán Buddhism uses the related title *shīfu* (師父 or 師傅 lit “master father” or “father of masters,” an honorific for respected master of religion or some skill (incl martial arts, cooking, etc); also used for addressing monks and nuns generally. Cf *sensei* [7.1.4n]. **Stuart Lachs** has argued that Zen institutions in the West often attribute a mythic status to the title *rōshi* with harmful consequences (2002).

⁵⁴ *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, 1970:18.

7.1.1.2 SUZUKI'S PERSONAL LIFE. Suzuki's life was not always happy. Married three times, his first wife contracted tuberculosis and returned to her parents shortly after marriage. His second wife was bludgeoned to death with a hatchet at the age of 39 by an erratic, antisocial priest whom Suzuki failed to dismiss, despite warnings from others.

Suzuki had difficulties with his children, too. Despite being perceived as quiet, soft spoken and kind by his Japanese parishioners, at home he often harshly scolded his oldest daughter Yasuko.⁵⁵ Suzuki's son Hoitsu would sometimes flee from his father, terrified by "the fierce look in his eyes."⁵⁶ His daughter Omi committed suicide after 9 years in a mental hospital. Suzuki, living in America at the time, did not attend her funeral, despite pleas from his son Hoitsu, living in Japan. Suzuki waited 6 months before informing his other son, who lived across the street from the SFZC.

7.1.1.3 TELEPHONE TRANSMISSION. It is known that Suzuki was not strict about giving "Dharma transmission" based on spiritual attainment. For example, he gave his son, Hoitsu, Dharma transmission, even though Hoitsu did not study with him.⁵⁷ This is perhaps understandable since Hoitsu inherited Suzuki's temple, keeping to Sōtō Zen tradition. Suzuki once gave Dharma transmission, as a favour to a friend, to someone that Suzuki did not personally know: this was sometimes jokingly referred to as a "telephone transmission."⁵⁸

Suzuki was somewhat fixated on the idea of reforming Sōtō Zen in Japan by having his American students go there as living examples of reform. However, the first two students he sent to Japan experienced emotional breakdowns while the third, though being the best trained for the task, felt himself totally uninformed and unprepared: he was ordained just before leaving for Japan without any training.⁵⁹

7.1.1.4 BAKER'S "ENLIGHTENMENT." Similarly, Suzuki chose Baker as his only American Dharma heir not based on his level of "spiritual attainment," but because "Dick's commitment is at another level," said a senior SFZC student," so the rest of us simply were not in a position to criticize him."⁶⁰ In other words, Suzuki instructed his students that Baker's conduct was to be taken as being above reproach. This is not surprising since, in Sōtō Zen, "spiritual attainment" is not a criterion for Dharma transmission.⁶¹ Of course, notes Lachs, we might further ask what Suzuki meant by "commitment" (2006:5). In short, Suzuki was not as straightforward and transparent as his followers perceived him to be.

By stressing that it was "real" transmission (based on spiritual attainment) that he had given Baker, Suzuki apparently showed a total misunderstanding or misjudgement of Baker's character. This is baffling because Suzuki spent over 15 years in intimate contact with him. In doing so, he also fed Baker's existing penchant for grandiosity. We shall see below how Suzuki was similarly impressed by Soen Nakagawa Roshi's iconoclastic display [7.1.2].

Might Suzuki, a seemingly gentle and humble country priest, have also felt some level of inferiority, taken by Baker's grand gestures, apparent ease in dealing with the murky realities of the actual world, his fundraising ability, and access to people of wealth and renown? Did his interest in having the Center grow quickly and in reforming Sōtō Zen in Japan make it easier to "not see" Baker's faults? Lastly, according to the genealogical model of Zen lineage, the Dharma giver is referred to as "father" and the Dharma receiver as "son." One cannot help but wonder if Suzuki's actions, in part, came from his emotional, paternal feelings for his Dharma "son" Baker, a relationship that he did not seem to have with his two birth sons. (Lachs 2002:5)

⁵⁵ Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*, 2001:62-68. See also Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber*, 1999:137-152.

⁵⁶ Chadwick 1999:134.

⁵⁷ Downing 2002:68.

⁵⁸ Op cit 69

⁵⁹ Downing 2002:59 f.

⁶⁰ Downing 2002:170.

⁶¹ T Griffith Foulk, "The Zen Institute in Modern Japan," in *Zen, Tradition and Transition*, (ed) Kenneth Kraft, NY: Grove Press, 1988:157-177. Foulk points out that roughly 95% of Soto priests have "Dharma transmission," because the Soto sect strives to match the institutional structures of Dogen's time when every temple had to have an abbot and every abbot must have Dharma transmission.

It is possible that on account of the Japanese-American cultural divide, Suzuki was unable to read Baker's character flaws that were obvious to some of his "unenlightened" American students. Suzuki, however, was lauded as a person without a defect, showing no self-interest, desire, interior calculation, or shortcoming. Yet, we all know that no human is like this. Suzuki or any other Zen master only looks this way, warns Lachs, if we avoid looking at their real life. But that is the way that Suzuki, Baker and all roshis are presented in the tradition: as idealized reflections of the original truth and perfection of the Buddha. This is an institutionalized delusion that needs to be analyzed on its own terms.⁶² (Lachs 2002:6)

7.1.2 Shunryu Suzuki Roshi & Soen Nakagawa Roshi

7.1.2.1 WORDS OF POWER. In the autumn of 1970, Suzuki Roshi was ill and left Tassajara for what was understood to be his last visit. On the drive back to San Francisco, he and his party stopped at a retreat centre near San Juan Bautista (in San Juan Valley) where Soen Nakagawa Roshi was in the last hours of a weeklong sesshin (meditation retreat). Nakagawa was a prominent Rinzai priest known in the West for his iconoclasm, theatrical displays, poetry and his connections to a number of teachers who brought Zen to the US.⁶³

Though Suzuki did not feel well the next day, he gave the Saturday lecture at the City Center during which time he described the visit with Nakagawa, as follows:

At the end of his sesshin we bowed more than thirty times, calling out many buddhas' names. He called some special names: Sunshine Buddha, Moonlight Buddha, Dead Sea Buddha, and Good Practice Buddha. Many buddhas appeared and bowed and bowed and bowed. That is something beyond our understanding. When he bowed to all those buddhas, the buddhas he bowed to were beyond his own understanding. Again and again he did it.

And he served us matcha [powdered green tea] from a bowl which he made himself. What was he doing, I don't know, and he didn't know. He looked very happy, but that happiness is very different from the happiness we usual people have. Our practice should go to that level, where there is no human problem, no Buddha problem, where there is nothing. To have tea, to have cake, to make a trip from one place to another is his practice. He has no idea of helping people. What he is doing is helping, but he himself has no idea of helping people.⁶⁴

7.1.2.2 ENLIGHTENMENT RHETORIC. Assuming that Suzuki is not delirious from his illness, we can say that he is waxing lyrical with mythical language. This might be perfectly credible if Suzuki were talking about a bodhisattva or some character in a Zen story; but Suzuki was referring to another living human, namely, Nakagawa Roshi, whom he presented as a living Buddha. Since Zen teaches that one must be enlightened to be able to recognize another enlightened being, Suzuki was effectively stating that he was himself enlightened.

In doing so, Suzuki has brought the original perfection of the Buddha into the present, as described by Peter Berger.⁶⁵ Bourdieu, in a similar vein, notes that they "consecrate themselves, monopolize the not-

⁶² On institutional or institutionalized delusion, see **The Three Roots, Inc** = SD 31.12 (6).

⁶³ Robert Aitken, Philip Kapleau, and Eido Shimano were former students of Nakagawa. Yasutani Roshi, a close friend of Nakagawa's, came to New York City (NYC) in his place when his mother's illness kept him from visiting.

⁶⁴ Chadwick 1999:386-387.

⁶⁵ Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy*, says: "...religion can be a powerful instrument for the effective maintenance of bad faith. Just as religion mystifies and thus fortifies the illusionary autonomy of the humanly produced world, so it mystifies and fortifies, its introspection in individual consciousness. The internalized roles carry with them the mysterious power ascribed to them by their religious legitimations. Socialized identity as a whole can then be apprehended by the individual as something sacred, grounded in the 'nature of things' as created or willed by the gods." (1957:95).

ions of Truth, Wisdom, and Freedom and thereby draw a boundary between themselves and ordinary people.”⁶⁶ In short, Suzuki simply failed to “kill” the Buddha when he met him!⁶⁷

Yet Suzuki speaks of himself (and Nakagawa) as being “ordinary.” This is not just a paradox, but different things *made same* in his “enlightened” state, and that he and Nakagawa are the *same*. Suzuki states that Nakagawa’s behavior is beyond our understanding, implicitly meaning that we are all the same in *not* understanding it. This is not just rhetoric, since statements of sameness only have meaning when coming from someone with authority, someone in touch with countless Buddhas.⁶⁸ Lachs explains:

We see how Suzuki describes or shall we say sells or seduces his students with his flawless image of Soen [Nakagawa]. He does this without any reference to theory, history, or Zen principles, so that the complexity of a real person is replaced by a simple and iconic image. Suzuki is seducing his students with an image of Soen as the perfect Zen master, manifesting effortless power, happiness, and the complete fulfillment of the path.⁶⁹

In fact, this false construction can be viewed as an underlying duplicity throughout Zen, which in this case is promulgated by Suzuki, albeit unconsciously. Suzuki can speak rather off the cuff like this because he is describing a world-view that his own students, well socialized into American Zen culture, have fully internalized: the standard model of Zen.⁷⁰

They have experienced this repeatedly in Zen teachings, rituals, stories and talks. It is also so easily described and accepted because that is the space in which Zen exists: the ways of talking, ways of moving, ways of doing things, the views and understandings that make the world have sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s time and energy.

Suzuki’s words have particularly strong effects in this setting because he is preaching to the converted. It is just this frequency of repetition that enhances its reality-generating strength. Its strength is also enhanced in this case, because it is coming from the SFZC’s supreme authority figure, Suzuki roshi. He is the group’s legitimate spokesman. He *is* the group personified.⁷¹ He is talking his students through an image of the idealized Zen roshi and making it “real” by giving it a body and name, a time and place in the real world. In effect Suzuki is saying, here is your perfected Zen man, Soen Nakagawa roshi, a living Buddha. I recognized him and hence myself as such and bowed and had tea with him yesterday just a few miles down the coast.

(Stuart Lachs, “The Zen master in America,” 2008:7 digital ed)

⁶⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1991:211. They make themselves synonyms of themselves, in effect saying, “I am the Truth.”

⁶⁷ Burton Watson, (tr), *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-chi lu*, NY: Columbia Univ Press, 1999:52. Ironically, Suzuki, in his *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, in introducing *zazen* (sitting meditation), writes, “Kill the Buddha if the Buddha exists somewhere else. Kill the Buddha, because you should resume your own Buddha nature” (1970:27). See also Sam Harris, *Killing The Buddha*, Harris, *Shambhala Sun*, Mar 2006.

⁶⁸ Berger 1957:35, 36. Berger discusses the unique capacity of religion to “locate” human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference.

⁶⁹ “The description of effortless and simplicity would resonate well with Suzuki’s students as it contrasted so with their Zen practice. Besides starting the day at 4 am with meditation, many had families and jobs to balance, they also attended week long sitting meditation retreats (Jap *sesshin*) and when possible three month long training periods (Jap *ango*) at the Center’s monastery, Tassaraja. For many, the long meditation periods could be painful. Their lives would hardly be described as effortless and simple.” [Lachs’ n, standardized]

⁷⁰ See eg DT Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 1st Series, London: Rider & Company, 1949; Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, NY & Tokyo, Weatherhill, 1965. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Weatherhill, 1970. See *Zen Mind* p18 “for perhaps the most idealized description of the Zen roshi in the English language” (Lachs 2008).

⁷¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Stanford University Press, 1990: 139. The ch “Social Space and Symbolic Power” (pp123-139) is relevant to the discussion of roshi/Zen masters and their students. [Lachs’ n]

7.1.2.3 THE POLITICS OF SIMPLICITY. If a truly *simple* (that is, a humble) person were to say that “it is all the same” to him, it will have little or no weight. In the Zen context, a student speaking this way would be viewed as speaking out of place or above their position or beyond their understanding. Statements of sameness come from on high: “It is top dogs who get to legislate sameness,” says Alan Cole, “And, in fact, it is the very declaration of sameness that makes them superior.”⁷²

Suzuki could speak of his “simple” life because he is well treated and supported as a Zen master, so that he did not have to work like others. In fact, as an “enlightened” master, he did not even have to practise at all; he could do and say whatever he liked, and they were all enlightened gestures. Lachs elaborates:

The description of effortless and simplicity would resonate well with Suzuki’s students as it contrasted so with their Zen practice. Besides starting the day at 4 am with meditation, many had families and jobs to balance, they also attended week long sitting meditation retreats (sesshin) and when possible 3 month long training periods (ango) at the Center’s monastery, Tassaraja. For many, the long meditation periods could be painful. Their lives would hardly be described as effortless and simple. (Stuart Lachs 2006:16 n79)

Here, it might be said that humility shown is hidden pride. For the blindly faithful, their minds are drugged, so that any mention of the master’s special or supreme state is like a pleasurable fix. But this is never enough.

7.1.3 Soen Nakagawa Roshi & Eido Shimano Roshi

7.1.3.1 ZEN MASTERS ARE ONLY HUMAN. In the *Vimāṃsaka Sutta* (M 47), the Buddha exhorts us to carefully observe and examine even himself to ensure his true goodness before accepting his teaching and training.⁷³ In fact, if we care to investigate, we generally know more about the Zen masters of our time than we know about those of old. As Stuart Lachs has shown, Suzuki’s rhetoric about Soen Nakagawa is more fantasy than reality [7.1.2], and this is generally the rule with most of the other Zen masters today.

We will now look at Eido Shimano, Nakagawa’s prime disciple, who received Dharma transmission from him in 1972 in a dramatic public ceremony. Shimano, too, had a long history of sexual and financial scandals, beginning in Hawaii in the early 1960’s while staying with American Zen teacher Robert Aitken (1917-2010).⁷⁴ Within a couple of weeks of each other, two women in Aitken’s group had mental breakdown and were hospitalized. Concerned, Aitken consulted with their psychiatrist who suggested that he volunteer at their mental health ward.

7.1.3.2 IATROGENIC ZEN. In due course, Aitken asked Shimano to come along. One day, the hospital psychiatrist confided with Aitken that the head nurse of the ward had revealed that these two women broke down because of Shimano’s “degradation.”⁷⁵ The head nurse also believed that Shimano was volunteering so that he could prey on other women. Aitken was “stunned” and followed through with an investigation.

⁷² Alan Cole, *Text as Father*, 2005:201.

⁷³ M 47/1:217-329 = SD 35.6.

⁷⁴ The information about the Shimano episode in Hawaii is the result of a private correspondence between Aitken roshi and Stuart Lachs. Aitken was given permission to teach in 1974 by Yasutani’s heir, Yamada roshi and received Dharma-transmission from him in 1985 making him an independent Zen master. He later broke with Yasutani’s Sanbo Kyodan sect because of what amounts to Japanese chauvinism. See Robert Sharf, “Sanbokyodan Zen and the way of New Religions,” 1995. Aitken was also disturbed because his Dharma transmitted heirs would need to be examined by Japanese roshis with whom they had no prior relationship, one of whom was junior to him. This raises a number of questions about the meaning and trustworthiness of Dharma transmission. [Lachs’ fn]

⁷⁵ This is the word that Aitken used in his private correspondence to Lachs.

Certain of the accusations, Aitken flew to Japan to consult with Nakagawa Roshi. Aitken however sensed that he “did not take the news very seriously.” Aitken and Nakagawa then consulted Yasutani Roshi⁷⁶ but “he was even less concerned.” Aitken returned to Hawaii disappointed.

7.1.3.3 SHIMANO’S ZEN. Shimano found out about his trip, and shortly thereafter “felt obliged to move to NYC [New York City].”⁷⁷ Nakagawa found him a wife, “presumably to absorb his misdirected amorous passions,” but it did not work. As Baker reported in 1982 to a SFZC Board of Trustees meeting, Shimano continued to be sexually involved with his students, which led to periodic scandals. One of the worst was in 1976, when a good part of the membership either resigned or was thrown out by Shimano, by then a Zen master, himself.

For the next seven years or so, scandals surrounding Shimano continued. Nakagawa apparently did nothing to stop him. In 1976, Eido Roshi, as Shimano was known by then, opened his own temple, the large Dai Bosatsu in upstate New York,⁷⁸ but Nakagawa did not attend the opening. Shimano continued with his numerous sexual affairs. In March 1984, Nakagawa died alone at his home temple, Ryutaku-ji. However, even in his death, Nakagawa lends legitimacy to Shimano, as he allowed at least part of his ashes to be buried at Shimano’s Dai Bosatsu Zendo.⁷⁹

7.1.3.4 NOT LOSING FACE. Losing face, notes Lachs, is an extremely important matter in Japanese culture. Despite Nakagawa’s status as a Zen master, he appeared powerless to deal with Shimano, as he was “constrained by his cultural background as any other ordinary or ‘usual’ Japanese.” In so doing, he did not serve well the American disciples who so worshipped him.

Before his death, Nakagawa had returned to Japan, leaving many of his American followers disappointed, yet leaving his Dharma heir, Eido Shimano, with unquestioned authority and legitimacy.⁸⁰ Shimano could rightfully claim that he was the sole heir of Nakagawa living in America, continuing his scandalous life, preying on unsuspecting Western students.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Yasutani was founder of the Sanbokyodan sect of Zen. Though small in Japan, it is perhaps the largest Zen sect in the West.

⁷⁷ Robert Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, Counterpoint, 1996:21. See pp15-22 where Aitken discusses his relationship with Nakagawa and gives more information about Shimano. He mentions that the other monks at Ryutaku-ji “seemed to have doubts about Shimano” and that Shimano was not accepted by them. Aitken says that his relationship with Nakagawa fell apart after mentioning Shimano’s trouble with women in Hawaii. Aitken felt that Nakagawa blamed him for Shimano’s trouble in Hawaii. Aitken also attempts to explain Nakagawa’s loyalty to Shimano, which was perplexing to westerners. Aitken believes that in his later years, Nakagawa felt betrayed by Shimano and that his “life and commitments” were “unfulfilled.” [Lachs’ fn]

⁷⁸ Fully, Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-Ji, located deep in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York.

⁷⁹ See *Buddhadharma*, spring 2006:20.

⁸⁰ American students, incl Aitken, may have expected Nakagawa to be something he was not. Nakagawa viewed the world through a Japanese cultural lens, something different from the American lens. It may have been unrealistic on the part of Americans to expect Nakagawa to be open about or to question a Dharma heir, much less any aspect of the Zen system he represented. Cultural differences are almost never mentioned in terms of a Zen master. Of course, doing so opens a can of worms: when is the master expressing a cultural view and when is he expressing pure teaching? Though Zen spokespeople like to abstract Zen out of culture, time, and place, in actuality, it is always embedded in and speaks through a culture. [Lachs’ fn]

⁸¹ On 9 August 1995, Aitken and seven other American Zen teachers wrote a letter to the President of the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society, Shimano’s organization. They mentioned interviewing former students of Shimano over a period of three decades and hearing the “same depressing story” about Shimano’s “sexual misconduct and abuse” and that these relationships are “exploitative and extremely damaging to his victims.” They suggest Shimano either resign or enter a program to “help him with his harmful predilections,” noting that completing a program does not guarantee a cure. The author has a copy of the letter. There is no evidence that Shimano did or did not enter such a program, but we do know that he did not resign. [Lachs’ fn]. For the mentioned letter, see: <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/ZenTeachersToZSSBoard.pdf>.

On 15 June 2010, the Zen Studies Society board of directors, following up on the Aitken papers,⁸² in a meeting, acknowledged Shimano's indiscretions and drew up a new set of rules forbidding any form of sexual advance or liaison. On 21 June, however, a woman publicly announced during dinner at the Catskill temple that she had a consensual sexual relationship with Shimano over the past two years. On 19 July, the Board announced that Shimano had resigned from it, but will remain abbot until 2012, and will not take new pupils.⁸³

On 5 February 2011, the Zen Studies Society (ZSS) made an official stating that Eido Shimano Roshi and his wife Aiho-san Yasuko Shimano have both retired as abbot of The Zen Studies Society and the director of the New York Zendo Shobo-ji respectively. The statement says that both have "retired openly and without reservation from all administrative authority," and that Shimano will not be teaching under the auspices of the ZSS. Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi, who received Dharma Transmission in 1998, was installed as the new abbot on 1 January 2011.⁸⁴

7.1.4 Walter Nowick & Philip Kapleau

7.1.4.0 DHARMA TRANSMISSION AS RITUAL. Lachs next directs our attention to another important aspect of post-World War II movement of Zen to America. That is, Americans who spent years practising in Japan, upon returning to America, were often believed to have "finished" their training and/or to have received "Dharma transmission." The point is, as we have seen, that "Dharma transmission does not actually ensure that a person has any spiritual attainment, but because students believe this to be the case, it has great social currency."

Dharma transmission, whether real or perceived by believers, is merely a ritual in Zen, but is "the symbolic capital of the Zen rhetoric concerning the unimaginable attainment of the enlightened Zen master." Zen masters heavily capitalize on this symbol of "empty" but alluring power. In this category, states Lachs, were Walter Nowick, founder of Moonspring Hermitage Zen Center in Surry, Maine,⁸⁵ who studied under Zuigan Goto Roshi, and Philip Kapleau, founder of the Rochester Zen Center in Rochester, NY, who studied under Nakagawa Roshi and Harada Roshi, but primarily under Yasutani Roshi, one of Harada's heirs.

7.1.4.1 WALTER NOWICK. Nowick was rumoured to have received "Dharma transmission" as early as 1967, but this became widely accepted when the 1969 fall issue of *Windbell*, the SFZC's magazine, published a lineage chart showing the Rinzai and Sanbokyodan⁸⁶ (Harada) lineages in America. It showed Nowick as a Dharma heir of Zuigan Goto Roshi, "though how this was determined is not clear."

Nowick maintained silence on the claim. He allowed his students to call him Walter, though a few called him *sensei*.⁸⁷ This form of American informality made him appear to have even greater attainment since he did not assume a title or honorific, or appear attached to old and foreign religious institutional forms and roles. However, this did not last. Due to his unseemly interferences in his students' personal

⁸² These records, kept from 1964-2003, were notes Aitkens kept of Shimano's liaisons, based on conversations with women who had confided in him: http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html.

⁸³ Mark Oppenheimer, "Sex scandal has US Buddhists looking within," NY Times, 20 Aug 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/21/us/21beliefs.html?ref=us>. For full archive: <http://www.shimanoarchive.com/> (posted by Stuart Lachs on Buddha-L, 23 Aug 2010).

⁸⁴ See further an instructive report by Erik Fraser Storlie, "Lineage Delusion": <http://sweepingzen.com/2011/02/08/lineage-delusions-eido-shimano-roshi-dharma-transmission-and-american-zen/> or <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,9885,0,0,1,0>.

⁸⁵ Lachs was a member of Moonspring Hermitage, 1970-1981. He held many positions of responsibility, incl President of the Board of Trustees, leader of the meditation hall (jikijitsu), and instructing new members in meditation and others aspects of life at the Center.

⁸⁶ The Sanbokyodan sect of Zen was founded by Yasutani. Though it is perhaps the largest sect in the West, it is rather small in Japan.

⁸⁷ *Sensei* 先生 (Chin *xiānshēng*) is a Jap title used to address teachers, professors, professionals, incl politicians and clergymen, and other authority figures. Like *rōshi* (老師 Chin pinyin: *lǎoshī*) [7.1.1n], it is also used to show respect to someone with some level of mastery in an art form or some other skill, such as artists, musicians and novelists; but is not used for addressing Chinese monastics or priests.

lives, and his autocratic and erratic teaching style, his rural group shrank from about 45 members to only about a dozen.

By the early 1980's, Nowick's older Dharma brother in Japan, Soko Morinaga Roshi, was invited by an ex-member to come over to help revitalize the failing group. In due course, Morinaga confirmed that no Dharma transmission was ever given to Nowick.⁸⁸

By the late 1980's, Nowick had stopped teaching. The fractured group reorganized itself as Morgan Bay Zendo, a non-sectarian Buddhist meditation center without one specific teacher. It was run by a Board of Directors, some of whom were former students of Nowick. Unfortunately, this new group later ran into trouble. The head of its Board of Trustees, Howard Evans, a prominent citizen of Morgan Bay (Blue Hill, ME), was accused of paedophilia with a number of teenage boys.⁸⁹

7.1.4.2 PHILIP KAPLEAU. Kapleau's case is even more complex. In the late 1960's, it appeared that Kapleau and Yasutani Roshi, his teacher of some ten years, had a serious disagreement. Before leaving Rochester, Yasutani told Kapleau that he was severing their relationship, and confirmed this in a written letter upon his arrival in Japan.

Kapleau kept silent about the matter.⁹⁰ However, according to Hugh Curran, who was head priest, living at Kapleau's Rochester Zen Center, NY, at that time, Kapleau confided in him⁹¹ that Yasutani had initiated the break mainly because Kapleau was unwilling to attend more retreats in order to receive further Zen training. This, it seemed, was partially related to Kapleau's dislike of the disreputable Eido Shimanō [7.1.3], who was also his junior, and under whom, to some degree, he would be in the training.

This refusal must have struck the conservative Yasutani⁹² as being something heretical, a denial of an ancient Japanese custom—hierarchy and knowing your place in the order. If these suppositions were correct, it was a perfect example of a clash of cultures.

SELF-TITLED ROSHI. In 1971, shortly after Baker became a roshi [6.1.1] by receiving "Dharma transmission" from the dying Suzuki, Kapleau announced to his students that he, too, wanted to be called roshi. "Clearly, this would increase his sanctity and authority," explains Lachs. It would also enhance his status "in the free market place of Western Buddhism."

It was widely believed that Kapleau had finished his training, but that he had not been formally given the Dharma transmission because of the last minute break with Yasutani. In the following years, Kapleau enjoyed all the privileges and authority of the title.

YAMADA ROSHI. In 1986, David Scates, a disgruntled ex-student of Kapleau's, wrote a letter to Yasutani's successor, Yamada Roshi, complaining about Kapleau. Yamada, then head of the entire Sanbokyōdan sect, knew Kapleau well, as Yamada had translated for him with Yasutani, and given him koan interviews in Yasutani's absence.

Yamada did not know Scates at all, but nonetheless wrote a long letter complaining that he and his fellow translator Kubota Roshi were not duly credited for their contributions to Kapleau's bestselling book,

⁸⁸ Lachs has a copy of the letter.

⁸⁹ See Alicia Anstead, "Community Concern: Blue Hill group confronts effects of sexual abuse through education, support for victims," Bangor Daily News, 28 March 2007:1 & 28 June 2007. For the reports, see <http://www.bangordailynews.com/detail/138246.html> & <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-165793459/blue-hill-group-persists.html>. It should be noted here however that the molestations were done by Evans, also an acupuncturist, during his acupuncture treatments of the subjects, not in connection with the Zen group.

⁹⁰ At the time of the break, there was a rumor that it was caused by Kapleau wanting to chant the Heart Sutra in English, rather than in Japanese. Yasutani, according to this story, was strongly against this change, which led to misspoken words and the break. This explanation, however, was not widely accepted. [Lachs's fn]

⁹¹ Hugh Curran, in a private correspondence with Lachs, described the break and Kapleau's decision to use the honorific "roshi."

⁹² Yasutani was extremely conservative and was described as a "fanatical militarist" as was his teacher, Harada roshi. Yasutani was against unions, wanted the universities as they were, "smashed one and all" and blamed world conflicts and wars on Western-style social sciences that enhance the idea of self. See Victoria, Brian, *Zen At War*, 1997:167 f; also 190 f. [Lach's fn]

Three Pillars of Zen (1965). Perhaps even more explosive was the fact that Kapleau had only finished one third of Yasutani's koan curriculum and was, therefore, definitely not a Dharma heir.

CERTIFIED TRANSMISSIONS. Kapleau defended his position by claiming that only he and Yasutani Roshi knew that he had completed most of the koan course (ironically admitted, after all, that he did not complete the training!). However, by this time, Yasutani had died. Kapleau, "perhaps being cautious, never said exactly what he did and did not finish." Kapleau also attacked the character of the disgruntled ex-student Scates,⁹³ and also maintained that Yamada did not do as much work on the *Three Pillars of Zen* as he had claimed.⁹⁴ The letter exChange is very interesting as it shows Yamada harbouring bitter animosity towards Kapleau for nearly 13 years and, with the slightest provocation even from a complete stranger, explosively vented his discontent.

Kapleau continued to be silent over his Dharma heir status. Clearly, he wanted people to believe that he was a full-fledged Zen master. He had, after all, noted Lachs, assumed the title roshi, "perhaps to compete with Baker and Eido Shimano." He even went on to give Dharma transmissions to others, though he did not have it himself. Ironically, this might have worked, since what we give away remains ours, in a Zen way.

In fact, Kapleau received only two certificates from Yasutani: one dated 7 August 1958, stating that "he passed the initial barrier" [Mu koan] and as such, is "granted qualification as a propagator/evangelist of this religious order," and the second, dated 28 June 1964, stating that he had been ordained as a Soto monk and, as such, "he acquired the qualification of a Buddhist priest."⁹⁵ According to the Sanbokyodan sect, neither of these two certificates has much significance when it comes to being a legitimate Zen teacher. Yamada charged that Kapleau might be fraudulent in holding out that his precept or kensho certificate is a Dharma transmission document.

KUBOTA ROSHI. In 1997, Ji'un Kubota Roshi, Yamada's successor as head of the Sanbokyodan sect, answered an enquiry from a Polish Zen group asking about Kapleau's credentials. He replied that Kapleau did not finish his training, claiming that Kapleau's fame for the *Three Pillars of Zen* was undeserved because he [Kubota] and Yamada had translated "all" of the work in the book. He added that Kapleau "was not able to read Japanese" and only made their translation "more understandable" to native English readers. He remarked that Kapleau was arrogant and proud, and treated Yasutani "abusively and impolitely." He then proclaimed, "He [Kapleau] is no more a Zen man. His teaching is no more Buddhist Zen but only his own philosophy."⁹⁶

Lachs asserts that both Nowick and Kapleau misled their students and the wider Zen community by encouraging them to believe that they both had completed their training. Nowick, when confronted by a former student with Morinaga's letter, responded by saying that Morinaga should not have discussed his training. Kapleau, too, on a separate occasion, similarly claimed that Yamada should not have discussed his training. The fact was that both did not like having the truth of their training made public.⁹⁷

7.1.5 Taizan Maezumi Roshi. In 2005, Shannon Hickey⁹⁸ presented her paper on "Clergy Training in American Zen" at the AAR Annual Meeting 2005, where she mentioned scandals at American Zen

⁹³ Hugh Curran maintains that Kapleau had a tendency to dismiss criticism by attacking the messenger.

⁹⁴ David Scates, the fellow who initiated the letter exchange, gave Lachs copies of the letters. They were meant to be public, so anyone interested can email Lachs at slachs@att.net for a copy of the exchange.

⁹⁵ Lachs has photocopies of the two documents along with a translation by Brian Victoria, author of *Zen at War*. Anyone interested in a copy can email Lachs at slachs@att.net.

⁹⁶ Lachs has a photocopy of the letter available to anyone interested by emailing me at slach@att.net.

⁹⁷ Lachs 2006:9.

⁹⁸ Rev Wakoh Shannon Hickey is Asst Professor of Religion at Alfred Univ, Rochesterr, NY. She had studied American religion and Buddhism at Duke (2003-2008). She was a fundamentalist Christian, expelled from her church for questioning its teachings, and began practicing Buddhism in 1983. That same year, she was ordained as a Soto Zen priest. Two decades later, she earned MA and MDiv degrees at a liberal, interdenominational Christian seminary, where she was the only Buddhist student. She also worked as a hospital chaplain, serving cancer and psychiatric patients of all faiths (and none).

centres. She also related how **Taizan Maezumi Roshi**,⁹⁹ founder of the Zen Center of LA, suffered bouts of alcoholism and had extramarital affairs with female students, including a teenager. Although he had treatment for alcoholism, while in Japan, in 1995, after a night of drinking, he fell asleep and drowned in a bath tub at his brother's temple, a fact that was withheld until years later.

In 1983, Maezumi publicly admitted he was an alcoholic, and was treated at the Betty Ford Clinic. At the same time, it became known that he was having sexual relationships with some of his female followers, despite being married to Martha Ekyo Maezumi. Maezumi was, as such, somewhat different from the other Zen masters we have mentioned.

Maezumi was very forthcoming throughout in admitting his mistakes and made no attempts at justifying his behaviors (Chadwick 2004). Nonetheless, these revelations shook his students, many of whom left as a result. But the community continued, and those who remained were forced to see Maezumi on a more human level. For some students, this was actually a breakthrough, as they were no longer deluded into thinking a teacher could be above imperfection.¹⁰⁰

7.2 SATORI IS NOT BODHI. Throughout this study, we have taken care to use the expression “Zen enlightenment” (and avoided the term “awakening”) so that we do not confuse the Chán or Zen idea with the early Indian notion of awakening (*bodhi*). In Zen, satori is apparently what is transmitted in the ritual of “Dharma transmission.” *Bodhi* or awakening is not something that can be transmitted, just as someone else cannot “wake up” for us.

We have to awaken ourselves from our sleep of ignorance and craving. Whatever our terminology, we should never confound satori with bodhi. When we understand and accept this fundamental difference between the two terms, we can better understand why an “enlightened” Zen master behaves in such and unconventional, even anti-social, manner. This also explains why Zen masters are no more virtuous than we are (perhaps even less so than many of us), and that they still fall for worldly gains and pleasures in ways that many of us would not even think of.¹⁰¹

Zen must be understood as a Japanese religion, Vajrayana of the Tibetans must be understood as a Tibetan tradition. Zen is a Japanese Buddhism: they use Japanese, they dress Japanese, they behave Japanese. Vajrayana is Tibetan Buddhism where they use Tibetan, dress Tibetan, behave Tibetan. The significance here is that Zen is more Japanese than it is Buddhist. Vajrayana is more Tibetan than it is Buddhist. They are heavily acculturated and are Buddhisms in their own right.

If the Buddha's Teaching is to grow in the West or anywhere else, not be a Japanese transplant or Vajrayana import, it must *take root* in local soil, become a native and natural part of our hearts and minds. Zen's material and cultural aspects must be transcended; Vajrayana's excesses and eccentricities must be renounced. It is not the question whether they are religiously true or false, but that no culture should impose itself on another, to exploit and abuse another, to the extent of stifling what is wholesome locally.

We need to see the Dharma through our own eyes; for, we can never truly see the Dharma through the eyes of others.

It is simply surprising how Zen and Vajrayana had colonized the minds of “free” Americans all these decades. Such a mental enslavement is of course much more widespread and deep-rooted because these external aspects of Zen and Vajrayana, of Buddhism, or religion in general, are *symbols of power*. And the emotionally disempowered and those seeking spiritual empowerment, even in a bona fide manner, are easily drawn to them like moths to light.

We, as new and far-flung generations of Buddhists, members of an extended family of global Buddhism, must each seek our own wholesome local expressions of our Buddhist lives. We might be moths, but

⁹⁹ Maezumi was lineage holder in the Soto, Rinzai and Harada-Yasutani lineages.

¹⁰⁰ The lamas and roshis we have reviewed here is of course only serve as case studies for an on-going problem. Some deviance of many other religious dignitaries are not so easily detected nor amenable to proper restraint and reform. One such current case is that of the Gelugpa “monk,” “geshe” Michael Roach and his female “spiritual partner,” Christie McNally: see **The Three Roots Inc** = SD 31.12 (3.4.7).

¹⁰¹ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (2.2.4) “Gradual vs sudden awakening.”

let us be drawn to the Dharma flower and drink its nectar, so that we have a true taste of the Dharma, the taste of freedom.¹⁰²

7.3 THERE ARE NO ZEN MONKS; NO NEED TO BE TIBETAN TO BE BUDDHIST

7.3.1 Why they cannot even help themselves. Despite their claims to being emanations (tulku) of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, the incarnate lamas are still enticed by status, material gains, and sexual pleasure. Despite their claims to a Dharma transmission going back to the Buddha himself, or being enlightened themselves, Zen masters are still enticed by status, material gains, and sexual pleasure. Why is this so?

The answer is quite simple: they are *not* what they claim to be. More detailed explanations are really worth pursuing. For, such studies and investigations will reveal to us the nature of religious language, the power of symbols, and the vicissitudes, trials and tribulations that we will face in our search for awakening and liberation. There are a growing number of documented researches and monographs by specialists who explain these interesting human manifestations of religions and their significance.¹⁰³ These often serve as helpful pilgrims' guides, giving tips on safety and expedience while on our religious journey.

7.3.2 Good acts. In the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (D 1), the Buddha points out that all our views—whether philosophical or religious—arise from feelings (*vedanā*) and sense-contacts (*phassa*). All such views are “merely the agitation and vacillation of those overcome by craving.”¹⁰⁴ They arise from the way we react to our sense-experiences: they way we “sense” the world around us and how we think. The Western or westernized mind is easily drawn to the intellectual and philosophical, which is the kind of Vajrayana and Zen we often see in the West and in a westernized person.

Even the Zen pioneer in the West, DT Suzuki, in a light moment, remarks: “Zen claims to be ‘a specific transmission outside the scripture and to be altogether independent of verbalism,’ but it is Zen masters who are the most talkative and most addicted to writings of all sorts.”¹⁰⁵ The tulkus and roshis are also very good actors and rhetoricians because they have come from societies whose deep and ancient roots in high feudal culture still unconsciously shadow them.

The lamas and roshis may appear calm, even radiant and majestic externally—these are the demenour of feudal princes and lords of their cultural past, appearing before adoring and docile subjects—but underneath all that emotional lull lies the rumblings of the unenlightened mind, desiring to be free from their feudal chains, yet fearing that there is too much to lose. So they are caught in a cultural and spiritual bar-do, limbo, intermediate state.

7.3.3 Historical and social notes

7.3.3.1 HISTORICAL NOTE. One of the reasons for such an inner uncertainty that haunts the high lamas and low roshis we have studied here may be historical. They both come from disenfranchised and disempowered communities. Beginning in the 13th century, through support of the powerful Mongol hordes, Sakya Pandita, of noble blood and a powerful religious leader, became viceroy of Tibet. In time, the various Tibetan Buddhist sects became powerful and ruled their own respective regions.

From between the 12th and 14th centuries, the Tibetan Buddhists introduced the tradition of tulku [7.5], emanations of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, who could inherit the huge wealthy estates (Tib *labrang*) of the incarnate tulkus. Such hagiology became institutions that further entrenched the power of the monks. But this monastic power was destroyed when the Chinese occupied Tibet in 1959.

Between 1959 and 1961, most of Tibet's over 6,000 monasteries were destroyed by the Chinese. During the mid-1960s, the monastic estates were broken up and secular education introduced. However, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the notorious Red Guards systematically destroyed or vandal-

¹⁰² See further **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.5.4) “Why Chan master are *not* awakened.”

¹⁰³ For a start, see the biblios of **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b & **Rule by incarnation** = SD 36.7. For a wide range of titles on sexual abuse and religion, see start of the Biblio below.

¹⁰⁴ D 1.105-117/1:39-41 = SD 25.2.

¹⁰⁵ (In his intro to Zenkei Shibayama's *A Flower Does Not Talk*, Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1971:9). See also **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.3.3).

ized much of Tibet's Buddhist heritage. Only a handful of the important monasteries remained without major damage, and thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns were killed, tortured or imprisoned.

Such an uprooting of one's culture and connections—and huge political and financial losses of the elite monks—must surely have some kind negative impact on them. But the Tibetans are generally a hardy people. Many Tibetans see the holocaust precipitated by the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet *as part of the agonizing process of the unification of the world*. They believe that the inner workings of the individual's heart is capable of preventing mutual and global destruction by manifesting enlightened principles in life. This is where the Tibetans as a people are at their strongest.

7.3.3.2 SOCIAL NOTE. Apparently such cultural strength was lacking in Trungpa despite all his attractive qualities. Perhaps it is a case of culture clash or cross-cultural dislocation.¹⁰⁶ The two cultures are polarized between Asian deference and Western licence, and they were neither familiar with nor prepared for the twain's meeting.

Traditional Tibetan society and Japanese society, like most Asian communities, run along a complex system of reciprocal obligations, which were unspoken but clear. All levels of relationships and all relationships between the levels are subtly controlled by *a strong desire to save face*. There is an invisible space or social distance between groups and between individuals, with each individual clear of his status and duties.

There were no such social controls in the America that high lamas or the Japanese Zen masters who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s. It was then the aftermath of the 1960s free-love drug-taking psychedelic hippie culture. It was a time of unprecedented social freedom and moral licence. Bell describes the situation in which Trungpa found himself, thus:

His American students' behavior was loosely governed by contractual relationships; by frank, open discussions; and by individual choices rather than by shared social ethics and mutual obligation. His ancestors had lived in the same valley for the same generations; when he first arrived in America, he flew from city to city like a rock star. While America removed all social limits from Trungpa Rinpoche's behavior, his students became his household servants, chauffeured his car and showed him a deference appropriate to a Tibetan lama or feudal lord.

The same deference was shown to his dharma heir, Osel Tendzin. "His meals were occasions for frenzies of linen-pressing, silver-polishing, hair-breadth calibration in table settings, and exact choreographies of servers," said television producer Deborah Mendelsohn, who helped host Tendzin when he gave two meditation retreats in Los Angeles, but has since left the community. "When he travelled, a handbook went with him to guide his hosts through the particulars of caring for him, including instructions on how and in what order to offer his towel, underpants and robe after he stepped from the shower.

This parody of Asian deference, combined with American license, ultimately proved disastrous, and not only at Vajradhatu. At Zen centers as well, students took on Asian gestures of subservience while their teachers sometimes acted "freely": drinking, spending money, making sexual advances to women and men, all with precious little negative feedback. The deference often went far beyond what would have been granted a teacher in Japan or Tibet.

(Sandra Bell, "Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America," 1991:145)

7.3.3.3 DISCERNMENT. **Barbara Aziz**, a well known social anthropologist at the City University of New York, who spent 20 years doing fieldwork among Tibetans in Nepal and Tibet further informs Sandra Bell that

...pressure for the community is very important in controlling behavior in Tibetan communities....

In Tibetan society, they expect more of the guy they put on the pedestal...if such a scandal had happened in Tibet, the whole community might have felt polluted. Osel Tendzin might have

¹⁰⁶ See Bell 143 f.

been driven from the valley. Depending on the degree of community outrage, his family might have made substantial offerings to the monastery for purification rites and prayers to infuse society with compassion. [Tibetans] demonstrate all kinds of reverence to a rinpoche, but they won't necessarily do what he says.... I see far more discernment among my Tibetan and Nepali friends than among Westerners.

(Quoted by Sandra Bell, "Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America," 1991:145)

Alan Roland, a psychoanalyst and author of *In Search of Self in India and Japan*,¹⁰⁷ notes that idealizing one's teacher is part of an ancient and healthy tradition in India, Tibet, and Japan: "The need to have a figure to respect, idealize and imitate is a crucial part of every person's self-development."¹⁰⁸ But Eastern cultures are far more articulate about that need and culturally support it." (1988)

Roland's observations confirm that Asian students approach the teacher more subtly than Americans, who generally commit quickly and completely, if they do so. Asian students may display deference, but may reserve judgement indefinitely. Asians may even defer to those of superior ranks, but may privately withhold respect or affection. This deference is clearly reflected in a conversation by the social inferior's almost spontaneous and generously harmonious "yes," which means "I hear what you say, but it does not mean that I agree with you," or "I agree with you, but it does not mean that I will do it."

Such attitudes are compelled by a common Asian characteristic of face and shame. The student or social inferior may not wish to bring shame upon the superior nor lose his own face by being perceived as lacking respect for seniors and superiors in public.¹⁰⁹ To avoid shame and save face, an Asian student would as a rule maintain social distance from the respected person, and if he suspects transgressions or irregularities in that superior of a nature that he deems intolerable, he would simply leave in silence and avoid that person.¹¹⁰

"In America, it's often the reverse," observes **Sandra Bell**,

Some Vajradhatu students could forgive Osel Tendzin as a human being, but could not treat him as a leader. Few Americans can show deference to someone they don't venerate without feeling hypocritical. Faced with this cognitive dissonance, they either abandon deference and leave, or they deny inner feelings. (Sandra Bell 1991:146)

In 1990, **the Dalai Lama**, at a conference in Newport Beach, California, gave this advice:

Part of the blame lies with the student, because too much obedience, devotion and blind acceptance spoils a teacher. Part also lies with the spiritual master because he lacks the integrity to be immune to that kind of vulnerability.... I recommend never adopting the attitude toward one's spiritual teacher of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. This may seem a little bold, but if one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaging in unsuitable or wrong behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior. (Quoted in Bell 1991:146)

¹⁰⁷ Alan Roland, *In Search of Self in India and Japan: Towards a cross-cultural psychology*, Princeton: Princeton Univ Press, 1988.

¹⁰⁸ Cf **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2/1:138-140) = SD 12.3.

¹⁰⁹ In the early Buddhist texts, this is known as *sāraṇija*, which may be rendered as "deference, social fearfulness": see **Sāraṇija S** (A 5.10/3:127) = SD 28.9a (3).

¹¹⁰ There are of course exceptions. In 2009, a woman member of a Tibetan centre in Singapore encouraged her young daughter to socialize with a young Tibetan monk, and learn Vajrayana from him. The couple ended up having a baby. The young monk had to disrobe, went into denial about his monkhood, and turned to drinking and gambling. The woman suffered great stress and was often tearful. She came for my meditation class and found the breath meditation very uplifting: "For the first time, I felt good," she said. She failed to come for the second session (cultivation of lovingkindness): she phoned us and apologetically said that her mother had reprimanded her for turning to a "Hinayana" system, when "only Vajrayana works!"

7.3.4 They must be really bored! Another interesting question arises: if these masters claim they are enlightened, why do they indulge in physical pleasures, such as sex and alcohol? Are these the “sport and play” or “skillful means” that emanations of some cosmic Buddha or Bodhisattva, in their great compassion, are showing us so that we could come closer to the Dharma? The brahmins (such as the poet Jayadeva Gośvami, 13th century) invented a myth in their Bhagavata Purāṇa, claiming that the Buddha was the 24th avatar or earthly manifestation of their god, Vishnu, appearing in the world to promote non-violence!¹¹¹ Some even say that this “Buddha” avatar was also aimed to confusing those who were anti-brahminical.

It is highly unlikely that the Buddhists themselves would invent a myth that would ultimately discredit themselves. Moreover, there are clear rules that monastics should avoid sex and drinking, and to be celibate and sober at all times. These rules also apply to lay followers on their own level, that they are not to have extramarital sex, or with those who are married or engaged, and also to abstain from intoxicants and addictive substances. Even the saint of the path¹¹² keeps to such ethical rules, and would do so naturally, as they are truly and morally pure.¹¹³

The causes of the colourful misdeeds and mishaps of the Tibetan gurus and Zen masters in question must surely have arisen from something more down-to-earth, like **boredom**, a common affliction of the intelligent and magisterial when caught in a protracted presence of the pedestrian and having to deal with unenlightened worldlings. Just as we act childlike with a child to communicate with him on his own level, even so these exotic gurus behaved childishly before the child-like.

Boredom, however, is more than merely the absence of a stimulating and interesting ambience: it also incites the desire to rise above a situation that we do not really enjoy. This explains the Sisyphean drunkenness of these bored barons. Not only do they feel they are well above their minions, they often feel that the rest of society itself is not up to their mark; hence, they dream of a new society, a Nara renaissance, a Shambhala.

The painful but true point is that no “new society” ever worked the way people wanted it. Every individual in a society is likely to envision *his own* perfect society, if he ever spends time dreaming of a better place. Society is a conglomeration of disparate and self-serving individuals: the best way for them to live is under a just legal system, a caring social set-up, and a sustainable economy. If there were ever such a society, it would be *the early monastic system*.

On a higher level, the boredom of these lamas and roshis can be explained by the fact that though they might be meditation masters, they are not really accomplished in the fruits of meditation at all. After all, they indulged in the sexual excesses and moral improprieties which even most of their own humble and faithful followers abstain from. Perhaps their meditation systems do not really work.

We see the true exemplars of the contemplative tradition, such as the forest monks of the Theravada, live very simple lives, without money nor sex nor material pleasures. Their looks and lifestyle might not be as grandiose as those of the high lamas or Zen masters, nor very rarely do we ever hear of them speaking of any meditation lineage. These unassuming forest monks clearly empower their followers more effectively with moral virtue and meditation training leading to their own realization of wisdom—and with significantly less mistakes and misdeeds.¹¹⁴

The problem with sex is that it is never satisfying, and the reason for this is because it is a body-bound pleasure, and as such is gross and impermanent. If a pleasure is fully and truly satisfying, we will never need it any more. Such a pleasure is clearly nirvana: we only need to attain it once. Obviously, the

¹¹¹ For a Buddhist response, see Steve Collins, *Selfless Persons*, 1990:9.

¹¹² The “path” here is the noble eightfold path: see **Aṭṭha, puggala S** (A 8.59/4:292) = SD 15.10a.

¹¹³ See **Beyond good and evil** = SD 18.7.

¹¹⁴ The more likely weaknesses of such forest practitioners would probably be some minor inaccuracies in quoting details of Buddhist stories, or taking a firm stand in their vision of a teaching and meditation method, or being too busy with teaching duties, or not always available when you need them for consultation on a difficult problem on Dharma or meditation. There are just too few of them.

sexualized lamas and roshis are neither enlightened nor awakened. They are addicted to sex and drinks because they do not know any greater pleasure.¹¹⁵ They definitely have not experienced any dhyana.¹¹⁶

7.4 A SPECIAL TRANSMISSION OUTSIDE THE TEACHING

7.4.1 Ancestor worship. Zen Buddhism is the Japanese adaptation of Chinese Chán, a system based on philosophy and meditation that is significantly influenced by Daoism,¹¹⁷ and whose organization is clearly Confucian in its upkeep and reliance on a lineage of ancestral teachers.¹¹⁸ The various Chán and Zen groups each have their own genealogies, and there are significant variations and contradiction in their listings. Scholars who have closely studied such attempts at religious legitimization have concluded that these lineages are more hagiological and legendary than they are historical.¹¹⁹

The famous Chán saying, “A special [separate] transmission outside the teachings” 教外別傳 *jiào wài bié zhuàn* was invented in either Korea or China, and dates back no further than the 5th or 6th century.¹²⁰ This line epitomizes the Chán claim that it does not depend on the sutras and teaching for its authenticity, like most of the other Chinese schools of Buddhism in ancient China. The problem is that without any such means of legitimizing itself, Chán would not be able to attract followers and sustain itself.

The ancient Chán masters came up with a clever spin, or rather it evolved over a period of time. This effort at self-legitimization was mainly done through concocting elaborate genealogies of Chán masters going back to the Buddha himself. This idea was inspired by the Confucian tradition of respect for their ancestors. Confucian influence on the Chinese urban masses, especially the ruling elite and the affluent, was very strong. If the Chán tradition were to survive, it needed to outdo the Confucianists, as it were, to gain the support of the powerful and the rich. As such, the Chán and Zen effectively became an East Asian Buddhist tradition of glorified ancestor worship.¹²¹

7.4.2 Zen is not dhyana. Pick any book on Chán or Zen, especially one of the ancient classics, you are unlikely to find any mention of dhyana (*Pjhāna*), much less on instructions for attaining dhyana. This is because Chán is essentially Chinese, generally rejecting what is Indian, except perhaps for the early “patriarchs.”¹²² Some knowledge of Chán 禪 (simplified, 禅) history in China will give us a good understanding of the idiosyncrasies of Chán and Zen in our own times.¹²³ Two salient aspects of Chán Buddhism—“A special [separate] transmission outside the teachings” and sudden enlightenment—define its characteristically Chinese or East Asian character. Chán and Zen claim to be a special teaching that is not found or legitimized by the sutras or Indian Buddhism [7.4.1]. Chán nonetheless depends on key Indian Buddhist terms and concepts to explain and promote itself.

Chán Buddhism, for example, often speaks of “sudden enlightenment,” that is, an “immediate” and “direct” insight into reality. Zen scholar **Robert Buswell** has pointed out that this Chán notion of the non-duality of “no-thought” closely parallels the early Buddhist teaching of *papañca* (mental proliferation),¹²⁴ or conceptualization as a form of projection (*xilùn* 戲論), “of imputing one’s own vision of the world to the world itself, and assuming that to be the sole reality.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁵ For a detailed study, see **Māgandiya S** (M 75/1:501-513) = SD 31.5.

¹¹⁶ See further, **Sexuality** = SD 31.7.

¹¹⁷ See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.5.3) (Chan Buddhism and the dead).

¹¹⁸ See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.3.2.1) (Legitimization through lineage).

¹¹⁹ See esp John R McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*, 2003; Alan Cole, *Fathering Your Father*, 2009;

¹²⁰ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.2) (The Chán root quatrain).

¹²¹ For a more detailed study, The four Chinese schools are Tiāntái (天台), Huáyán (華嚴), Chán (禪) and Pure Land (Jìngtǔ 淨土). “Bodhi,dharma and the Chán lineage”; on the origins of **Chan patriarchship**, see (5.2.4.9) esp (4).

¹²² The 4 peculiarly Chinese Buddhist schools are Tiāntái (天台), Huáyán (華嚴), Chán (禪) and Pure Land (Jìngtǔ 淨土): see **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (1.1.4).

¹²³ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b.5.

¹²⁴ On *papañca*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18) = SD 6.14 (2).

¹²⁵ Buswell 1987: 331 f. On “no-thought,” see **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.2.4.7).

However, the Chán and Zen masters *had philosophized* such key ancient ideas, reinterpreting them according to Daoist conceptions of reality. Just as the Dao is experienced directly, even so, *to see directly into the true nature of things is to be enlightened* (first B, then A). This sounds deceptively Buddhist, but the early Buddhist texts would actually say: *To be enlightened is to see directly into true reality* (first A, then B). The Chán and Zen masters have literally turned Buddhism on its head!

On a more serious level, such a revision of early Buddhism leaves no place for the progressive development of *samādhi* and *prajñā*, of concentration and wisdom. “Ultimately, what need was there to retain such terms if *samādhi* and *prajñā* were collapsed into one another, or were said always to be present?” asks Buswell (1987:330).

Efforts of uprooting all that is *hīna, yāna* (“inferior vehicle”), what is “Indian” or “gradualist,” from Chinese Buddhism were successfully implemented especially by two very dark figures in Chán history, namely, Hézé Shénhuì (荷澤神會 670-762) and Dàhuì Zōnggǎo (大慧宗杲 1089-1163). In many ways, these two Chán shadows shaped much of what we know as Zen today.

During the 7th century, Shénhuì (in south China), envious of Shénxiù 神秀 (606?-706) and the East Mountain School (called the Northern School by Shenhui), patronized and venerated by the notorious empress Wǔ Zétiān, launched a successful campaign to discredit him for teaching a “foreign” (Indian) system of “gradualist” meditation, while the true practice (according to Chán) was that of “sudden” enlightenment.¹²⁶

A few hundred years later, another Zen evangelist, Dàhuì Zōnggǎo, jealous of the growing success of the “silent illumination meditation” (*mòzhào chán* 默照禪) of the Cáodòng 曹洞 school, vehemently denounced Qīngliǎo Zōngjué 清了宗珏 (1091-1152) and his traditional meditation, in his epistles and sermons to the literati.¹²⁷

Such campaigns against the traditional teachings and meditation were so successful, it could be said that the practice of dhyana (*jhāna*) became practically unknown in ancient mainstream Chán and Zen. The sad reality is that Chinese Chán history seems to be a chronicle of sectarian rivalries, with each group trying to outdo the others by claiming ancient lineages and introducing new or special forms of meditation, very much like the professionals of today who give new catchy names to the meditation they have modified for their own kind of therapy.¹²⁸

7.4.3 The Zen of words. When we read materials about modern Zen, that is, those rooted in the Japanese form, we often enough find some of its basic terminology somewhat confusing, especially words like priest, monk, temple, monastery, sangha, precepts, and satori. There are other Zen terms taken from early or traditional Buddhism but used in a Zen way, but these are key and ancient Buddhist terms, that need to be properly defined and used.

In this essay, I have used words like priest (male or female), temple, community and order in reference to contemporary Zen. I have carefully avoided using words like monk, nun, monastery and sangha, which are semantically inappropriate here. This is partly to convey the concern of traditional monastics who prefer to keep these terms in their original contexts. Here we will briefly discuss the feasibility of these two apparently opposing views.

7.4.3.1 MONK OR PRIEST? A first Zen fact we need to be familiar with is that there are *no* Zen monks or nuns today. In fact, it's the law. In 1872, the Meiji government of Japan promulgated a law that simply stated: “From now on Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, there will be no penalty if they wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activi-

¹²⁶ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.2) “Northern-southern schools controversy.” On Shenhui, see John R McRae, 1986 etc.

¹²⁷ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.2.4) “Cáodòng ascent.”

¹²⁸ The comparison here, of course, is only in form, not of intentions. The most famous of which is surely “Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction” (MBSR): <http://www.mindfullivingprograms.com/whatMBSR.php>; see also Breathwork: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breathwork>.

¹²⁹ Robinson & Johnson 1982: 181.

ties.”¹³⁰ Known informally as **the *nikujiki saitai*** 肉食妻帯 (“meat-eating and marriage”) law, it was introduced to incapacitate or at least weaken Buddhism as a political and social force in Japan.¹³¹ This decri-minalizing measure triggered a century-long debate in the Japanese Buddhist world, as clerical leaders and rank-and-file clerics strove to interpret and react to their new legal context.¹³²

The word “monk” comes from the Greek *monachos*, “single, alone,” that is, a holy person who lives alone, which entails celibacy, as in the case of the early Buddhist monastics. Japanese Zen priests, as a rule, have families, drink sake, or are not celibate. Similarly, not all Tibetan lamas are celibate: the word *lama* is simply a term of respect for a teacher.

Lamas and roshis, whether laymen or monastic, but who do not keep to the celibacy rule, are really *not* monks. It is best to call them “priests.” The word *priest* is derived from the Latin *presbyter*, meaning “elder.” A priest is a clergy man, often a performer of rituals, and is not necessarily celibate.

Such distinctions would give us a clear idea of the roles of monks, nuns, priests, priestesses and lay people in a community. When such people keep to their avowed roles, there is a good chance for harmonious relationships in the community for the sake of social, personal, and spiritual growth. Moreover, the credibility of a religious system depends very much on the accuracy and weight that it places on some key terms. Even when *a person* is unclear, reckless or erratic in his usage of words, it is difficult to take the person seriously, what more *an institution*.

7.4.3.2 SANGHA OR CHURCH. Another early Buddhist term that is freely used in American Zen communities is the term *sangha*. The word etymologically means “comprising, fathering,” so that it refers to a “herd” (as in a group of animals) or “tribe” (as it was used amongst the ancient Sakyas and similar tribes). The word was adopted by the Buddha for the *monastic community*, partly to reflect their fellowship, partly for the democratically consultative nature of the community.

The use of “sangha” (as an anglicized word) for a Zen community evokes a sense of “church,” that is, a spiritual community under a single leader with a common purpose. The community in Boulder, Colorado, USA, started by Trungpa Rinpoche, for example, was called “the Vajradhatu International Buddhist Church” [5.1.1]. Such a usage is possible because perhaps none of the Theravada monastics in the US raised any objection, or pointed out the proper usage of the word, or their protests were not heard.

Generally, Theravada Buddhists (especially onastics) would disapprove of to the use of *sangha* to refer to any lay community, as the term *parisā* (“assembly”) is the more appropriate term. The word *parisā* is actually used in the ancient texts to refer to the fourfold assembly of monks, nuns, laymen and lay-women,¹³³ and as such would be close to the sense of “church,” which reflects the ambience of the American Zen communities. Otherwise, the modern word “church” is perfectly appropriate for such a warm and focussed community.

While we have every right to use whatever term to express our ideas or actions, where the term has a living meaning and significance, it should be respected. This is especially in the case of such terms as *sangha*. The stories of the Zen improprieties in the US in the 1990s, is also a record of misuse of terms sacred to living Buddhists, especially to those who actually keep to the celibacy and contemplative tradi-tion of early Buddhism. If Buddhist terms are to be meaningful, they should be appropriately used.

7.4.3.3 PRECEPTS, TRANSMITTED OR UNDERTAKEN? Like many other Mahayana schools, Zen also speaks of “transmitting the precepts” to followers. Again, this seems to be a cultural innovation, for we have no antecedent in the early texts for a need of “transmitting” the precepts. All that we see in the early

¹³⁰ Date 1930: 621 (qu in Jaffe 2002).

¹³¹ The Japanese monks were esp powerful, feared even by the shoguns, in the Nara period (710-784). The ar-resting of Buddhist monastic powers started in the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) and was complete by the Meiji era (1868-1912): see Piya Tan, **History of Buddhism**, ch 5 “The spread of Buddhism: Buddhism in Japan,” §§9-13 (Nara period), 12 (Tokugawa period), 23 (Meiji restoration).

¹³² See **Sexuality** = SD 31.7 (9.1). See also Richard Jaffe, *Neither Monastic Nor Layman: Clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism*, Princeton, 2002: 4, see <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s7171.html> & <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/pdf/512.pdf>. See also **Skillful means** = SD 30.8 (8.3.3).

¹³³ See eg D 16.3.7-9/2:106 f; S 2:218; A 2:132, 4:313 f, 5:10; J 1:40.

Buddhist texts is the Buddha *exhorting* the monks and other followers (including us today) to be morally virtuous by keeping to the precepts.¹³⁴

The precepts are *not* objects that could be transferred from one hand to another. They are ethical principles that we consciously and deliberately “undertake” (*samādiyāmi*). They are not a ritual of empowerment by another, but a self-induction to pattern our lives in keeping with right spiritual priorities and values, beginning with the respect for life.¹³⁵

7.4.3.4 ENLIGHTENMENT OR AWAKENING? Chán/Zen *enlightenment* and Hīnayāna *awakening* are literally and spiritually *worlds apart*. We should neither confound nor conflate the two. Early in its history, we often enough see the Chán attacking and rejecting the Hinayana system [7.4.2]. The acceptance and incorporation Hinayana teachings into Zen is a relatively recent practice, with access to the texts and translations of early Buddhism.

In fact, Zen monks almost never speak of “sudden enlightenment” to the uninitiated. Even the Zen monks in training would begin with the humble but necessary dosage of study of the early Buddhist texts and its meditation.¹³⁶

Any Chán “monk” who claims to be “suddenly” enlightened but is not awakened, or places himself on the same level as the Buddha (indirectly claiming supreme awakening) but is not in reality one, would be guilty of an offence entailing defeat (*pārājika*), that is, automatically falling from the state of monkhood or nunhood.¹³⁷

However, no such offence would apply, if we do not equate any terms of Chán enlightenment (*wúwéi*, *satori*, etc) with the early Buddhist conception of *bodhi*, etc.¹³⁸ Since Chán and other forms of Chinese Buddhism and East Asian Buddhisms are effectively separate religions in their own right, very different from early Buddhism, there is no question of these priests “transgressing” monastic rules that they do not live by in the first place. In this sense, there are no Zen monastics.¹³⁹

7.5 THE POLITICS OF ENLIGHTENMENT.

7.5.1 Dharma is realised, not transmitted. Another Vajrayana and Zen tendency to objectify, externalize, commodify or thingify the Dharma, is found in the expression, “transmission of the Dharma.” This is possibly a spill-over from the courtly or imperial days of Buddhism, when some object of authority (such as a robe, or a seal, or trinket) is handed down from the ruler, empowering the monastic as a supreme lama or a national teacher.¹⁴⁰

Apparently, in Chán and Zen, and in Vajrayana, to a large extent, enlightenment is not a self-realization or self-liberation that arises through self-effort (something like our knowing that we are full after a meal). The roshi or guru will decide when we are “full” and confer a certificate to attest it. Interestingly, it is said at least one Vipassana meditation group had actually issued documents to certify that a candidate had attained dhyana or streamwinning!¹⁴¹

Chán enlightenment, in other words, ritually handed down from master to pupil, is clearly different from the early Indian notion of *bodhi*.¹⁴² However, as a ritual, it is merely an external activity; the inside is still empty, and need to be filled. Buswell makes an interesting first-hand observation here:

Even a casual perusal of Korean Sōn literature will reveal that there is much support within the Korean tradition for subitism. The technique of **kanhwa Sōn**,¹⁴³ virtually the only type of medita-

¹³⁴ See eg *Sāleyyaka S* (M 41/1:285-290) = SD 5.7; *Veḷu,dvāreyya S* (S 55.7/5:352-356) = SD 1.5.

¹³⁵ On the precepts, see *Veḷu,dvāreyya S* (S 55.7/5:352-356) = SD 1.5 esp Intro (2).

¹³⁶ See Buswell, *The Korean Monastic Experience*, 1992:159 (meditation), 217 (study).

¹³⁷ That is, the 4th *pārājika* against claiming superhuman states (*uttari,manussa,dhamma*) that one has not really attained (Pār 4 = V 3:109).

¹³⁸ On *satori*, see Foulk 2000: 40-42.

¹³⁹ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.5.4) “Why Chan masters are *not* awakened.” See also **Sexuality** = SD 31.7 (9.1).

¹⁴⁰ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.2.3.1) “Metropolitan Chán.”

¹⁴¹ Communication from Sujato Bhikkhu of Santi Forest Monastery.

¹⁴² See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.5.4) “Why Chan masters are *not* awakened.”

tion used in contemporary Korean monasteries, is even termed a “shortcut” (*kyōngjōl*; Chin *ching-chieh*)¹⁴⁴ to enlightenment because of its emphasis on generating an instantaneous awakening instead of developing a sequential series of practices.

But when Korean meditation monks who are training in the *kanhwa* technique routinely admit that they expect it will take upwards of twenty years of full-time practice to make substantive progress in their practice, there seem to be valid grounds for questioning how *subitist in practice* the Sōn tradition really is. (Buswell 1992: 220; emphasis added, reparagraphed)¹⁴⁵

7.5.3 Tulkuship is a Tibetan social construct

7.5.3.1 RESURRECTING THE BUDDHA. On the question of religious lineage, the Vajrayanists seem to be more imaginative than the Zennists. The Vajrayanists of Tibet were also masters of political expedience, making use of Buddhist teachings, even adjusting or innovating them, for such agenda. The best known of such innovations is clearly the institution of the *tulku* (Tib *sprul-sku*), which in Sanskrit is *nirmāṇa* (emanation). The lama who bears the title of tulku is said to be an “emanation” of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.

The tulku idea is based on the view that the historical Buddha was merely an earthly manifestation or emanation (*nirmāṇa*) of an eternal omniscient cosmic Buddha. Technically, this is called *docetism*, which formed the basis for a Mahāyāna explanation of the Three Bodies (*tri,kāya*) of a Buddha (a teaching not found in the early texts). This idea probably began with the **Lokottara,vāda** or “supramundane school,” so called because they viewed the Buddha as a divine being. They spread to Afghanistan where, sometime between the 3rd and 5th centuries, they built the colossal Buddhas at Bamiyan, reflecting their view of transcendent Buddhas.

The **Bahu,śrutiya** school, too, contributed to the idea of a divinized Buddha by asserting that he had imparted both worldly teachings and other-worldly teachings. This led to the Mahāyāna division between a Buddha’s “emanated body” (Skt *nirmāṇa,kāya*; Tib *sprul-sku* = *tulku*) and the “enjoyment body” (*sambhoga,kāya*). An example of *sambhoga,kāya* beings are Amitābha Buddha and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Since tulkuship is an innovative and political expedient, but there is a need to justify it. As we know, religious language is notoriously protean—anyone could say anything about it—which explains why there are so many religions, and why even within a religion, every group, everyone, *every lama has his teaching*.

Once when a lama was asked what if he had chosen the *wrong* candidate for tulkuship, his reply was very instructive: Bring me any young child, say of three, we can, under the proper conditions, easily groom him into one!¹⁴⁶ This is clearly understandable because Tibet, in her pre-occupation days, was a theocracy, where the high lamas were royalty who ruled the country, and the Potala had its own prison and police (like the Vatican palace in mediaeval Europe).

7.5.3.2 BUDDHA THE KING. The ancient Buddhist monks often found themselves in a tight spot when they are patronized by rulers or had to serve as officers of the courts. In ancient Chinese history, Buddhism, since it is a “foreign” religion, was popular with foreign conquerors who ruled China. But there was another reason for this: they used Buddhism to legitimize their position and power.

The non-Chinese rulers of the **Northern Wei** (*Běi Wèi* 北魏) or Tuòbá-Wèi Dynasty (386-534),¹⁴⁷ for example, quickly adopted Buddhism, a non-Chinese faith, as their state religion, an instrument of imperial power, and an open way to heaven. As “foreign rulers with a foreign religion,” they were not constrained by the influence and intrigues of native ideologues, namely, the Confucianists and the Daoists.

¹⁴³ That is, *kànhuà chán* [5.1.3.1].

¹⁴⁴ *Jīngjié* 徑截. See also Buswell 1987: 350.

¹⁴⁵ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.5.2.2) “Is Chan really sudden enlightenment?”

¹⁴⁶ See **Rule by incarnation** = SD 36.7

¹⁴⁷ See <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Division/beiwei.html>.

Monks often served as political advisors at the courts, but not all of them were philosophers. The early monks like the Kucha monk Fótúchéng 佛圖澄 (232-348) were simply magicians. These monks came up with a wildly ingenious idea to resolve the problem of serving lay people (such as the Tuòbá rulers): the monk advisor Fǎguǒ 法果 (d 416-423) of Northern Wei, for example, fabricated the doctrine that the Tuòbá ruler was *a living incarnation of the Buddha!*

While such politicizations of the Buddha and his teachings were exploited ad hoc, fuelling the rise of the powerful in Chinese history, the Tibetan religious elite, too, used a similar innovation, that is, the tulku tradition, on a more permanent basis for their rulers and leaders.¹⁴⁸ A Western Buddhist remarks:

In feudal Tibet tulkus formed a religious counterpart to the hereditary aristocracy, and Tibetans learned to navigate the system's contradictions, regarding tulkus as emanations of Buddhas whilst knowing that they frequently engaged in political feuding so byzantine¹⁴⁹ that westerners are often warned to stay out as they will never fathom the issues.

(Visvapani, review of 3 books on the Karmapa controversy, 2006)¹⁵⁰

Much of the kind of Vajrayana and Zen we have examined here, like religion in general, is predominantly spin and show, promises and performance, and the best stage for this is the followers' limited knowledge, or better, ignorance. Ironically, such spin doctors and show masters are really less spiritually advanced than their own followers. These shadow masters are trying to entice their innocent followers into their own shadows.

The bottom line is that these kinds of high lamas and Zen masters clearly cannot even help themselves: how can they ever help us? We can only help ourselves, by directly tasting the nectar of the Dharma in the suttas, in our meditation, in our own lives and relations with others, above all, in our true wisdom and liberation. Otherwise, it would literally be a transmission *outside* of the teaching.

8 Dealing with bad friendship

8.1 CONDITIONS FAVOURING BAD FRIENDSHIP. When Buddhism reached the West, an ancient and profound Eastern religious system encountered a younger, more fragmented American society, notes **Katy Butler**,

The new American Buddhists enthusiastically built Japanese meditation halls lined with sweet-smelling tatami mats, and Tibetan-style shrine rooms with altars laden with ceremonial bowls of water and rice. Trying to build new communities, they cobbled together structures that combined elements of Eastern hierarchy and devotion and Western individualism. This blending of widely divergent cultural values was complicated by the fact that many students hoped to find a sanctuary from the wounds of painful childhoods and from the loneliness of their own culture. When the scandals erupted, however, many found themselves, like Dorothy at the end of the *Wizard of Oz*, "back in their own back yards," having unconsciously replicated patterns they hoped to leave behind.

(Katy Butler 1991:139)

There is a common feature in both the Vajradhatu and the San Francisco Zen Center crises: their highest teachers simply fell into scandal, the apex collapsed and the centre fell through. Fortunately, the perimeters and sides succeeded in keeping themselves mostly unbroken and intact so that they would heal and rebuild themselves. But there were vital lessons to be learned.

In the aftermath of these crises, looking back into the shadows of the crises, **Katy Butler** identifies these four common elements that characterize them:

¹⁴⁸ See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (1.2.5), "The Buddha as ruler"; also **Rule by incarnation** = SD 36.7.

¹⁴⁹ (From the "Byzantine" empire) "highly complex and occasionally devious."

¹⁵⁰ <http://buddhistbookreviews.blogspot.com/2007/02/books-on-karmapa-controversy.html>.

- (1) Patterns of denial, shame, secrecy and invasiveness reminiscent of alcoholic and incestuous families;
- (2) Soft-peddling of basic Buddhist precepts against the harmful use of alcohol and sex;
- (3) An unhealthy marriage of Asian hierarchy and American license that distorts the teacher-disciple relationship; and
- (4) A tendency, once scandals are uncovered, to either scapegoat the disgraced teachers or blindly deny that anything has changed. (Katy Butler 1991:139)

Devious, powerful or charismatic guru-figures not only are unhelpful in solving our personal problems, but they actually prolong, even worsen, our weaknesses when we take them as substitute parents or Buddhas. Empowerment is not licence to practise a ritual: no one has a franchise on the Buddha or Bodhisattvas. Empowerment really means our willingness and ability to let ourselves to grow spiritually. While a bad friend stunts our growth, a true spiritual friend expedites our mental and spiritual evolution.

Where a person or system downplays basic points of moral virtue and mental training, and rationalize difficult but real issues with quips and koans, our problems not only remain, but they are trivialized. Such an attitude either means that that teaching is not meant for solving personal problems, or is unable to do so. Then, we need to go on to seek what really works for us without harming us.

System like Vajrayana and Zen come from ancient cultures, reflecting the ways of old. When such systems are transplanted into the bodies and minds of the newly urbanized, they are likely to be attracted to the exotic and exoteric, the strange and magical, in them. These are the stage-lights of the cultural stage that would blind us if we look into them. Instead, we need to look at what these light are shining on, and to understand their significance, if they help in our spiritual growth.

It is not helpful to blame the deviant lamas and roshis themselves: they are the sad products, the symptoms, of the weaknesses and failure of the system that produce them. As long as we support and propagate such a system, we will have to taste its bitter and toxic fruits. Perhaps, such systems may work where they originated, and that they where they should remain. Just as the Japanese know that the blow-fish is lethal, but when properly prepared, it serves as delicacy, we need to *indigenize* such systems. Basically, this means that we need to work with Buddhism in such a way that it is not only relevant to our lives in our community, but also to each of us as individual, that we can spiritually grow.

8.2 WIDENING THE CIRCLE. Those whom we treat as faultless gurus or as gods, would soon be deluded enough to believe themselves to be so. On a deeper level, such co-dependent relationships betray the fact that both parties might know some Buddhism but have not really tasted its spirit. Or worse, the guru-figure may be abusing both Buddhism and his followers, so the abused followers remain morally stunted and spiritually blind to true reality.

After the departure of Richard Baker from the San Francisco Zen Center, its board and members worked hard in rebuilding themselves [6.2.1]. Rejecting the old person-centred leadership, they moved towards a more democratic structure of authority or “board management.” In fact, such a set-up is common in non-monastic Buddhist organizations and groups (in Malaysia and Singapore) which are registered as “societies” and run by duly elected “committees.”

Such a routinization of charisma into a more representative form of committee-run organizations, when used against a background of a spiritual hierarchy, as in the case of the post-Baker SFZC [6.2], it can remove the likelihood of any domination or exploitation by a charismatic guru-figure. The SFZC resident students, for example, now have a senior practitioner whom they could choose, and they can Change practice advisors as they wish.

The healing process of Vajradhatu [5.2.3] is its transformation into Shambhala International (SI), a more democratic and open training centre.¹⁵¹ There is less focus on guru-devotion, with greater emphasis on training workshops involving a large range of teachers and facilitators. Students may sign up for courses without being attached to a teacher. Indeed, even non-Buddhists may join its courses. The Buddha

¹⁵¹ http://www.shambhala.org/about_shambhala.php.

Dharma, after all, is not just for Buddhists, anyone may touch and taste if—but, as the Buddha says, they must be anxious to learn.¹⁵²

9 When the light blinds

9.1 COMPASSIONATE WISDOM VERSUS ETHICS. It should be noted that this study on bad friendship (*pāpa mittatā*) as exemplified in the various lamas and roshis, is based almost exclusively on materials written by their own practitioners and students, who weathered the crises, and many of whom went on to rebuild themselves and their centres to what they are today. Theirs is a record of incredible faith and resilience, and above all, deep faith in the Buddha Dharma.

There is even one voice that went against the current of popular notion of an unequal relationship, where the teacher dominated the student's person and life. This might well reflect the general trend, but apparently there were a few who felt otherwise. **Stephen T Butterfield**,¹⁵³ for example, in his paper, "Accusing the tiger" (1992), speaks of a different angle to the "recent sexual scandals that have surrounded sexual teachers of Eastern thought in the West."

Writing as someone who was sexually involved with such a teacher, he rejects the notion that there is a disparity of power between teacher and student, arguing that the two are "equals from the start." For Butterfield, the source of right conduct in Buddhism are *wisdom and compassion*, and this, he argues, is different from *ethics* as the source of right conduct, as in theistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) which entail dualisms of good/evil, flesh/spirit, self/other, etc.

To Butterfield, the Buddhist precept of refraining from sexual misconduct, if violated, is "but a lapse of awareness, which can be transformed into an occasion for honesty and further mindfulness by the confession." He defends his late teacher, Chögyam Trungpa, who sexualized relationships with female students as a practice of *tantra* that can involve sex between teacher and student.

Butterfield, nevertheless, admits that the misdeeds of Trungpa's regent, Osel Tendzin, who infected students with AIDS [5.2.1], "left a legacy of confusion and pain, especially for his students. But a concept of violated sexual ethics does not help us understand what happened, nor is it likely to safeguard anyone in the future."

9.2 THE BRIGHTER THE LIGHT, THE DARKER THE SHADOW

9.2.1 Seek and we shall find. How is it that deviant teachers can survive, even flourish, even in the most advanced of societies, amongst some of the more intelligent people? The simple answer is the as long as we are driven by greed, by hate, by delusion or by fear.¹⁵⁴ For those attracted to wealth, power and pleasure, the symbols that such gurus display are very attractive.

For those driven by strong lust and unresolved desires, the loose language and lives of such gurus endorse and entice their own weaknesses. For those with a propensity for hate or anger, such guru-devotion will only harden into a strong bias against all other forms of Buddhism, even against other teachers.

Delusion is an especially tricky unwholesome root, especially common in the deeply intellectual and intelligent. If we are this kind of personality, we are likely to hold strong, even narrow, views, and sooner or later we will meet the kind of guru who seems to endorse or epitomize such views. Our views have now become visible, as our sacred idols. Or, since the gurus are mighty characters, we might rationalize or accept that might is right.

There is always a deep, unspoken sense of fear of guru-figures who rule our lives. Our (mis)understanding of karma might hold us back from speaking out, even when the guru is blatantly wrong or immoral. Fear arises from attachment and from ignorance. We fare of losing what we desire; we continue to cling to what we desire out of sheer ignorance.

Lachs summarizes the San Francisco Zen Center crisis [6.1] as follows:

¹⁵² D 16.2.26/2:100 f = 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164. See **The one true refuge** = SD 3.1 (3.2).

¹⁵³ English professor, Castleton State College, Castleton, VT, USA.

¹⁵⁴ These are the 4 biases (*āgati*, D 3:182, 228; A 2:18). On account of which we commit foolish and evil actions of body, speech and mind.

Baker was able to get away with such bad behavior, in part, because of the way he manifested his authority. He gave his followers two choices: obey his words without question or be marginalized. Being marginalized was tantamount to being forced to leave, a choice that was too painful for many people to contemplate.

Leaving meant giving up what made life seem most meaningful, leaving close friendships and the joy of community. Therefore, in their need to remain at the Center, members recognized, consciously or unconsciously, a powerful incentive to buy fully into Zen's mythology. This was especially true of some of the older students and of people wanting to climb Zen Center's ladder to positions of authority, power, and prestige, which was totally dependent upon Baker's sanction.

As Upton Sinclair¹⁵⁵ said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on not understanding it."

Obedience, subservience, and discipline were well rewarded at a large institution like the San Francisco Zen Center. Baker controlled rewards, such as providing a Chance to live well at Green Gulch farm and granting positions of authority and respect at Tassajara monastery or the City Center.

On the other hand, he dealt severely with people who stood up to him or spoke against him. According to Downing, almost everyone recalls "a pervasive and sometimes punitive atmosphere of silence and secrecy."¹⁵⁶ (Lachs 2006:3 digital ed)

9.2.1 Where silence can deafen. We are likely to regard teachers that we respect as those who are wise and able to give us good advice, even uplift us from our personal problems and difficulties. Those raised with East Asian conditioning and values, however, generally tend not to share their personal problems with others, mainly for fear of losing face, and also because they are unwilling to be socially indebted to others. Those with Western upbringing are more likely to share even their intimate issues or lapses with anyone they know well enough. The rationale is that "if you know my secrets, they are no more secrets, so you can't use them against me." But things do not always work that way.

Michael Downing, in his book, *Shoes Outside the Door* (2001), notes that Baker made public what he elicited from his students in the privacy of the dokusan (interview) room. They were also told to consult him on all life decisions. With at least one student, he wanted to know what she told her therapist about their relationships. Baker was, in other words, using the dokusan as a way of prying into the lives of his students, and keeping them under his control.

Both Buddhist counselling and clinical counselling have ethical rules that things told in privacy of the counselling, should not be made public.¹⁵⁷ Counsellors and instructors, however, often quote cases for study, where either they are quoted with the permission of the client, or no names are mentioned and with certain details Changed so as not to embarrass the client, but benefit other student with actual counselling scenarios.

On the other hand, a principle of Buddhist psychotherapy is that of *self-help*. The spiritual friend or counsellor is a facilitator who trains and inspires us to let go of our painful past (very different from the Freudian therapy of digging up the past) and to work on the seeing stillness and clarity in the present moment. In other words, Buddhist therapists, as a rule, encourage a growing level of self-counselling.

The rationale is very simple, we are our best counsellors, but we need some level of awareness and lovingkindness, that is, of unconditional self-acceptance. Once again, we are trained and reminded not to

¹⁵⁵ Sinclair was a Pulitzer-winning American author (1878-1968) who devoted his writings to documenting and criticizing the social and economic conditions of the early 20th century. His works, such as *The Jungle* (1906), exposed the injustices of capitalism and the overwhelming impact of the poverty.

¹⁵⁶ *Shoes Outside the Door*, p. 243. Also see Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1991:138-139 for a discussion of censorship. "...it is the structure of the field itself that governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression, and not some legal proceeding...."

¹⁵⁷ See eg **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31.23-24/3:197) = SD 4.1.

give our remote control to another, even the guru (especially the guru). More importantly, self-counseling is a form of mindfulness practice where we are wisely aware of our thoughts and actions, keeping them within moral constraints. When we fall into lapses, we review them for their causal conditions, and correct them. In this way, we grow in self-wisdom.

9.3 LONELY IN A CROWD. Most people who first come to a Buddhist centre or group do so out of a desire to learn more about Buddhism or to make some friends. In other words, a significant number who join Buddhist groups feel the need for some meaningful connection with like-minded people. Some may even be otherwise lonely people, but feel themselves most at home with a particular group.

Sadly these are the kind of people—those who are emotionally attached to a group—who are likely to try to fit into the group at almost any cost. They tend to be unquestioning followers, even to the extent of being servile. This is understandable because the thought of leaving the group or losing the approval of others is very difficult for them to bear. They feel as if they have nowhere else to go.

These are the kind of students or members who are the most vulnerable to guru abuse, because of their group dependence and reticence in voicing any faults that they detect in the guru. Indeed, it might be in their nature not to see any fault in the guru if they are in the habit of worshipping him. So this is a vicious cycle that such people live in.

On the positive side, in a healthy and robust Buddhist community, such people (they are usually faith-inclined followers) make very good workers and volunteers that give the time and energy for those with greater learning and organizing skills to work their talents. Indeed, the daily grind of such communities will simply stop or stutter with the unassuming of these humble but necessary and true Buddhist workers. If we value the dedication and benefit of such workers, we have to ensure they are untouched and unchained by guru-figures.

10 The foundations and benefits of spiritual friendship

10.1 THE FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. Bad friendship hinders, even destroys, our spiritual life. Its opposite is spiritual friendship. In simple terms, this is good mentoring, that is, where a mentee or student emulates the good qualities of the mentor or teacher, and is inspired to discover his own special qualities so that he can cultivate them to maturity.

The Meghiya Sutta (U 4.1 = A 9.3), a key discourse on spiritual friendship, gives a list of four meditations conducive to spiritual maturity, and five benefits of spiritual friendship. The four meditations are

The meditation on foulness ¹⁵⁸	should be cultivated for abandoning lust.
Lovingkindness	should be cultivated for abandoning ill-will.
The mindfulness of breathing	should be cultivated for cutting off distracting thoughts.
The perception of impermanence	should be cultivated for eliminating the ‘I am’ conceit.
	(U 4.1.7-13/35-37 = A 9.3.7-13/4:356 f) = SD 34.2)

The four meditations are a well-selected set of mental practices that conduces to mental maturity based on spiritual friendship. The meditation on foulness (that is, reflecting on the less attractive aspects of a person, of both self and others) removes, or at least lessens, lustful distractions. Although friendship might begin with some elements of physical attraction, it can only be healthily sustained and grow on the basis of an unconditional acceptance of both self and other—this is lovingkindness.

Accepting ourselves unconditionally means that we begin just as we are, and from there, we go on to forgive ourselves of what we see as past issues and lapses: if we do not forgive ourselves, no one can.

¹⁵⁸ This is the term commonly found in the Suttas, and refers to the 31 (or Comy, 32) parts of the body, beginning with “head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin.” The term *asubha, nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). On details of practice, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.5/2:293 = M 10.10) = SD 13.2-3; **Kāya, gatā, sati S** (M 119.7/3:90) = SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

Then, we are likely to end up looking for some kind of self-punishing religion, or look for a succour-giving parent-figure, or fall into the deep rut of being fanatically and destructively religious.

Buddhism is not just about love; it is about loving, “inside out.” This is what lovingkindness is. We can begin by loving ourselves, by seeing our own good qualities and being amazed at them. Or we could begin by loving others, by rejoicing in their wonderful wholesome qualities. If they are in need of emotional support, we stretch to them a hand of compassion. True love or lovingkindness is not how nicely others treat us, but how we show others that we truly try to see the goodness in them.

Lovingkindness brings us a deep sense of joyful peace, which is further deepened and broadened with the breath meditation. To truly love others is to give them space for self-expression and self-growth. We need to spend time with ourselves, too, to recharge ourselves so that we are not discouraged when things do not work out, or when we see flaws in those whom we love.

Breath meditation brings about a profound inner stillness. This meditation begins with making our body as comfortable as possible, so that we need not bother about it for a while. We then go on to notice how increasingly peaceful the breath is, until there comes a time when we do not need to notice it any more because our mind is so peaceful. We simply enjoy the inner peace: there is just this stillness with no body around, as it were!

When we emerge from such a profound stillness, we cannot help but notice how *impermanent* such a blissful state is. At the same time, our mind is so calm and clear, that we truly notice the pattern of things, living and non-living. They all rise and fall. They rise and fall with such rapidity, and with such subtlety, that it is difficult to notice them when we are busy with ourselves and others. This perception of impermanence centres and focusses our lives so that we are ever clearer of our priorities. In this way, we have more quality time, that is, the space to do things that really matter, to be with people and situations that conduce to our spiritual growth, and to be with those who would really benefit from us.

All such reflections should be directed towards the realization that there is nothing inside or outside of our body that we can really *identify* with: we are simply *not* it. The point is that we, as unawakened beings, as a rule, tend to identify with or anchor onto something tangible, a propensity known as “self-identity view” (*sakkāya ditṭhi*). If we can, with wisdom, let go of this self-notion, then we are on the way to attaining streamwinning, to have a first glance of nirvana.

Subtle notions of an inner self still lingers in our unconscious, making us see ourselves and others differently, of measuring ourselves and others—this is known as “conceit” (*māna*). If we are able to look deeper into the falseness of our self-notions, then we would see that there is nothing that we can really measure anything with. There is only the rising and passing of mental events, so that the moment we think, “I am,” we are no more. Grammar and language stop working on this deep level of reality. When we truly understand this, we are on the way to become fully liberated as arhats.

10.2 THE BENEFITS OF SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. The Meghiya Sutta also lists **five conditions that conduce to spiritual maturity** (*pañca dhamma paripakkāya*), which it equates it the benefits of spiritual friendship,¹⁵⁹ as follows:

- (1) Meghiya, when a monk has **a spiritual friend**, good companion, good comrade,
- (2) it can be expected that he will be morally virtuous, restrained in keeping with the Code of Discipline [Pāṭimokkha], seeing danger in the slightest fault.
- (3) ...it can be expected that this talk concerned with austerity that is conducive to the opening of the heart, that is to say:
 - talk on wanting little,
 - talk on contentment,
 - talk on seclusion,
 - talk on not socializing,
 - talk on exerting effort,
 - talk on moral virtue,

¹⁵⁹ U 4.1.7-13/35-37 = A 9.3.7-13/4:356 f = SD 34.2.

talk on mental cultivation,
 talk of wisdom,
 talk on liberation,
 talk on the knowledge and vision of liberation—
 such talk as this he attains at will, without difficulty, with no trouble.

(4) ...it can be expected that he dwells exerting effort in abandoning unwholesome states and promoting wholesome states. He is vigorous, steadfast in striving, unrelentingly working on the wholesome states.

(5) ...it can be expected that that he is wise, endowed with noble wisdom into the rise and fall of things that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

(U 4.1.7-13/35-37 = A 9.3.7-13/4:356 f) = SD 34.2)

The very first benefit of spiritual friendship is an intrinsic one: it is good in itself. When we meet our spiritual friends, our spiritual mentors, we cannot but feel a sense of secure joy. In a sense, spiritual friendship is an unequal relation: the mentor is wiser and more experienced than we are, and from which we benefit, concurring to our own spiritual growth. This is as natural as water flowing downwards from the heights.

Yet, spiritual friendship, on account of its interactivity, also brings the best out of both the mentor and the mentee. In fact, the spiritual friend or mentor, too, often learns a lot from such an interaction, unless he is an adept (non-learner), an arhat. As such, spiritual friendship is also open to an interactivity on a level ground, as it were. Here, the mentor and the mentee inspire each other in the expression of beauty and truth, in mutually raising and refining one another's consciousness. This is called "true-hearted friendship."¹⁶⁰

So much spiritual energy arises from such an interaction. This is the kind of energy that best fuels a Buddhist community, and which inspires others to see their innate goodness and bring it onto the conscious and active level. It is from such true friendship that we inspire and bring out the artistic talents, intellectual genius and unconditional goodness in others. Spiritual friendship is the ground for beauty and truth, and where we are able to truly appreciate that *beauty is truth, and truth beauty*.

When we are truly happy, we will naturally do good. The truly happy are also morally virtuous. Conversely, when we are morally virtuous, we will naturally be happy, too. Spiritual friendship, by its very nature, is a morally interactive relationship. Moral virtue ideally entails the best that we can offer to others, to healthily work and interact with others, through our bodies and speech. This is essentially what the five precepts are about. [2.2]

Such a morally virtuous life only enhances our spiritual energies, fuelling us more joyful interest in our connections, fellowship and working with others. But we should direct the most vital effort towards our own spiritual development. For, it is our *inner* energies that make our friendship *spiritual*. In exerting such effort, we continue to grow spiritually and empower ourselves to become spiritual mentors to others.

Spiritual friendship and true-hearted friendship not only create and build beauty and truth, but they also refine our senses to see things within and without more clearly. We become truly wise, so that in due course, we are able to see directly into true reality. We become *awakened*. For this reason, the Buddha declares that the spiritual life is the *whole* of the holy life.¹⁶¹

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¹⁶⁰ True-hearted friendship (*suhada mittatā*): see **Sigāl'ovaxda S** (D 31.21-26/3:187 f) = SD 4.1.

¹⁶¹ **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2/5:2 f = SD 34.9) = (**Kalyāṇa,mitta**) **Appamāda S** (S 3.18/1:87 f = SD 34.3).

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