

III. Contemplation and Emptiness:
The Role of Attention

A warrior must be...impeccable and thoroughly empty before he could even conceive of witnessing the naqual....
To change our idea of the world is the crux of sorcery...and stopping the internal dialogue is the only way to accomplish it....
The rest of the activities are only props.

Castaneda's don Juan

Having examined some of its more important contextual aspects, we now propose to investigate the heart of the contemplative gesture. Let us first say a few words about that obvious metaphor.

When the heart ceases to function, the body dies. It is the sine qua non of the life process. The latter, of course, depends for its fullness upon numerous other functions of the organismic system. Thus the fullness of the Zen contemplative gesture, for example, includes the lotus posture and the intimate sanzen relationship with the master. If one assumes the lotus posture, however, without attending to the mental work, the life of the contemplative gesture will cease. Similarly, a person not engaged in zazen may visit a master for sanzen twice a day but it is doubtful that these meetings will bear much fruit. The master's role in sanzen, it seems, is comparable to that of any coach. He guides the effort and tries to derive the most from it. But the effort itself is the crucial thing and it is a solitary matter.

The heart of the contemplative gesture is something other than bodily posture, something other than the delicate relationship between aspirant and master. It is also something other than the mystical experience in which the gesture may result. All of these enfold the contemplative gesture, give it its particular identity and underscore its most unique or extraordinary aspects. But the psychological heart of the contemplative gesture has no culture, no

particular allegiance, just as the physical hearts of John and Dōgen and all men are virtually identical. In what follows, we shall argue that beneath the similes of purification and the metaphor of "emptying", beneath the practice of Christian contemplation and that of zazen, there lies, in John and Dōgen, a single strategy of the will. And the most important aspect of this strategy is the regular and methodical practice of non-discursive attention--the universal heart of the contemplative gesture.

It is important to remember that the practice of non-discursive attention is not some psychological common denominator that can be ripped from its particular religious contexts and still be practiced fruitfully. Practiced in such isolation it may indeed lead to some extraordinary mental experiences, even powers, that other aspects of contemplative discipline, practice in isolation, cannot produce. But mankind's contemplative gestures have evolved within religious frameworks that have deemed such powers and experiences beside the point. No, by focusing on this all important psychological gesture we do not mean to lose sight of the encompassing religio-ethical and symbolic context in which alone it can properly and fully function. If we take John and Dōgen as our prototypes we may say that the full fruition of the contemplative gesture demands a horizon of "love for all God's creatures" or "compassion for all sentient beings". Outside this profound ethical context the practice of non-discursive attention retains its status as

a powerful psychological tool, but becomes religiously insignificant. This fact should be remembered in all that follows.

Our investigation of the centrality of non-discursive attention will be divided into three parts: 1) The Contemplative Aspirant as a Consciousness-of-Objects; 2) The Metaphor of "Purification" and 3) Non-discursive Attention as Emptying.

1. THE CONTEMPLATIVE ASPIRANT AS A CONSCIOUSNESS-OF-OBJECTS

a. John of the Cross

In John's writings, "soul" is a general term for the psychological subject. The soul is both receptacle and agent in relation to the outer world of phenomena and the inner realm of the Holy Spirit. It is the pivot point of interaction with the world and with the ontological energy he calls God.

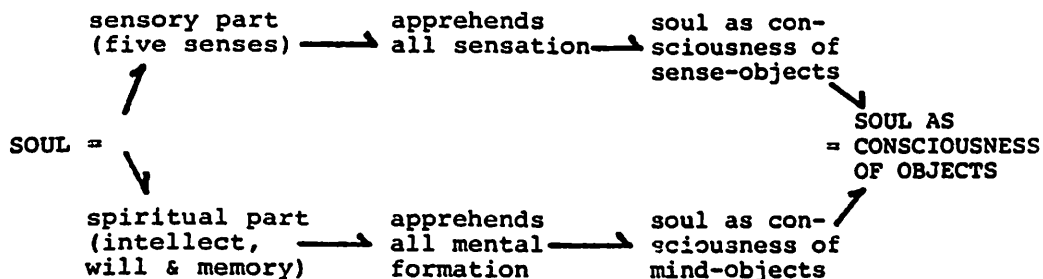
Following traditional Augustinian terminology, John divides the soul into two parts: the sensory part of the soul is the basis of the five senses, while the spiritual part of the soul is the seat of the three intellectual functions, intellection, will and memory /8/.

The soul, then, is the basis or medium of all apprehension, both exterior and interior. The exterior world comes to us through the senses and the data of the senses is consciously apprehended by the sensory part of the soul. When the evidence of the senses is chewed over by the intellect, summoned up by the memory or acted upon by the will, the objects of these intellectual functions are consciously apprehended by the spiritual part of the soul.

John recognizes that certain mentations arise spontaneously in consciousness. He says that our cognizance of the autonomy of such impressions can effect in us a greater degree of self-knowledge. But John does not have a theory of unconscious mentation nor does his method of self-discovery

suggest any systematic attempt to know the unconscious springs of thought and action. The cause of intramental phenomena such as visions or hallucinations John attributes to God or Devil. But even in such cases it is the conscious soul that sees the visions or undergoes hallucinations. Psychic phenomena join sense perceptions and thoughts as simply another class of data, more kinds of objects, consciously apprehended by the soul.

John's soul may thus be functionally described in terms of consciousness: soul is the consciousness of objects, both sensory and mental. This description remains the same regardless of the source of objects (exterior world or interior world of fantasy and conceptualization) and regardless of the objects' relative grossness or subtlety. The following diagram will help to clarify the point:



b. Dōgen and Zen

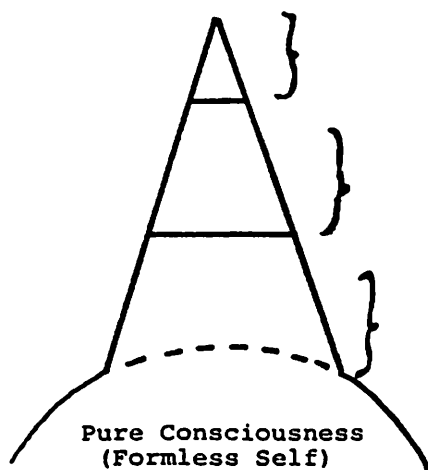
Traditional Buddhist psychology analyzes the individual into an ever-changing constellation of five aggregates or skandhas: form, feeling, perception, impulse and consciousness. Consciousness is thought of as the most important skandha, the one on which the others depend (Conze, 1962:108).

Consciousness is itself divided according to the sense organs of a human being. The Buddhists are unique in that in addition to the usual five sense organs, they posit a sixth sense organ, the mind. Thus, Buddhism speaks of empirical self-consciousness as a combination of five sense-consciousnesses and a mind-consciousness which apprehends sense objects and thought objects respectively.

The contemplative aspirant in Buddhism, therefore, may be functionally described as a consciousness of objects.

Such conceptual analysis, elementary as it may be, is rarely found in the writings of the Zen masters /9/ and, as far as we know, does not occur in the writings of Dōgen. When such an analysis is made in the name of Zen (Suzuki, 1968:169-200; Izutsu:73-74; Kapleau, 1965:327-28), its source and sanction is the Lankavatara Sutra and the Mind-only philosophy of the Yogacara School of Buddhism (Chang, 1971:182-184). The following diagram, stemming from the latter, is as close as one can come to a standard Zen analysis of consciousness. We notice that in addition to the six consciousnesses of the empirical subject, Yogacara, and with it Zen, adds two others, revealing their basic

intuition of the unconscious functioning of the mind. The positing of Pure Consciousness takes us beyond the empirical subject, from psychology to ontology, and indicates the general Mahayana tendency to ontologize consciousness (Kapleau, 1965:327).



Classes of Consciousness

1-6. Sight, sound, smell
taste, touch, intellect.

7. Manas (source of
persistent I-awareness;
functions as conveyor).

8. Alaya-vijnana
("seed" repository).

Since in actual Zen practice the subject is asked to attend only to that which is within the field of empirical consciousness, we are concerned only with that empirical, phenomenal consciousness. The contemplative aspirant in Zen may, therefore, be understood as a composite of six consciousnesses, reducible to the general formula "consciousness of objects."

2. THE METAPHOR OF PURIFICATION

a. John of the Cross

"Everything is received according to the mode of the receiver." John of the Cross quotes this Thomistic standard three times in his writings (N1,4,2; N2,16,4; F3,34) and leaves no doubt that the "mode of the receiver" is highly malleable. "The spiritual part of the soul," he writes, "receives God's spirit...receives everything, according to [its] mode" (N1,4,2). He hints at the transformability of psychological structure when he says that the "breadth and capacity" of the Word is highly refined, subtle and delicate and that such a content demands a vessel of co-equal subtlety and delicacy. "The soul," he says, "is the vessel having [such] breadth and capacity because of its remarkable refinement in this state" (F2,19).

The mode of the soul, in other words, must be transformed in order for it to become conscious of its essential union with God. According to John, the obstacle to conscious realization of that union is the soul's confrontation within itself of "all that is not God." John is fond of this phrase and uses it no less than four times in his writings (A3,16,2; A2,6,2; A2,6,6; N2,21,11). And what is it that is not God? Quite simply, it seems to be the objects of personal consciousness. John repeatedly states that the soul must empty itself of all forms, images, thoughts and visions, "since God is unimaginable." His

formula for psychological transformation leading to union is thus deceptively simple: To know union with God the soul must empty itself of all that is not God, that is, of the mental contents that obscure the radiance of his essential Presencing. John writes that, "the illumination will not be perfect until the entire soul is entirely cleansed, clear and perfect" (A2,5,8). He extends this assertion by offering two similes, likening consciousness-in-transformation first to the removal of veils and then to air cleansed of vapors:

That which I understand as to how God affects this awakening and view of the soul (which is in Him substantially as in every creature) is that he removes some of the many veils and curtains hanging in front of it so that it might see him as He is... (F4,7).

The more the air is cleansed of vapors and the quieter and more simple it is, the more the sun illumines and warms it. A person should not bear attachment to anything, neither to the practices of meditation, not to the savor...nor any other apprehensions. He should be very free and annihilated with regard to all things...for the sake of this deep and delicate listening (F3,34).

In these similes John draws our attention to the distinction between consciousness and its contents. It is at the forefront of another of John's most telling similes, one in which he connects the subtilization of the object-field of consciousness to the awakening of latent powers in consciousness:

In observing a ray of sunlight stream through the window, we notice that the more it is pervaded with particles of dust, the clearer and more palpable it appears to the senses; yet obviously the sun ray in itself is less pure, clear, simple...[when] it is full of so many specks of dust. We also notice that when it is more purified of these specks... it seems more obscure...to the material eye.... If the ray...should be entirely cleansed... of all dust particles...it should appear totally obscure and incomprehensible to the eye.... The spiritual light has a similar relationship to the intellect, the eye of the soul. This...light shines so purely and simply in the intellect and is so divested and freed of all intelligible forms (the objects of the intellect) that it is imperceptible to the soul [i.e., object-consciousness] (A2,14,9-10).

For John, then, consciousness must be transformed-- purified--until the subtlety of its receptivity matches the subtlety of God's Presencing. The subtilization of the object-field of consciousness is described through the metaphor of purification. John's doctrine of essential union affirms that though God dwells eternally and immovably in the soul, His radiance is obscured by the consciousness of objects. To "empty", "purify" or "denude" the soul of its objects is to turn its attention from those objects to the ontological energy which causes both them and their perceiver to be. It is to discover something of God at the ground and root of consciousness.

b. Dōgen and Zen

The consciousness of the Zen aspirant, too, is understood to be highly malleable. Between the existential traits of "unenlightened" and "enlightened," between "beginner's mind" and "expert's mind," there is a spectrum of possibility. Even after the satori-awakening experience, one's consciousness or state of being is capable of further maturity. This fact, often missing in Zen literature, is worth stressing. Garma Chang tells us that,

Zen only begins at the moment one first attains satori.... After one has attained satori, he should cultivate it until it reaches full maturity, until it has gained great power and flexibility. This after-satori cultivation, together with the before-satori searching and striving is what Zen Buddhists call hsing, "the practice" or "the work" (1959:51-52)/11/.

Dōgen, who tells us that his teacher's foremost characteristics were a "veritable passion for zazen" and "depth of commitment to religious practice," also says that after his enlightenment he spent the "next twenty years deepening his understanding in practice" (Dōgen's Hokyo-ki in Waddell, October 1977:112). Dōgen, urging his listeners to the same kind of continued vigilance, says that "the dusty world and [the Buddha Way] beyond it assume many aspects but we can see and understand them only to the extent our eye is cultivated through practice" (Dōgen's Genjōkoan in Waddell and Abe, October 1972:137).

With the phrases "Buddha-nature," "Original Mind," "Mind-Essence," and so forth, Zen points its aspirants to the 'Object' of Awakening. Every possible attempt is made to undercut the dualism that this mental set, "training toward X" invites, yet training is defended as indispensable. Zen abounds with stories in which meditation is derided as a futile attempt to achieve enlightenment and in which we are reminded that "Original Mind" is none other than ordinary everyday mind. Dōgen, himself, tells his listeners to "understand that when you train within the delusive world, full enlightenment is already there" (Dōgen's Gakudōyōjinshu in Masunaga, 1964:61). But non-dualistic jolts are administered, and this is true at least for Dōgen and his tradition, only within a context fully permeated by the mental set of "training toward enlightenment." As Dōgen says in the same work:

I have never heard of anyone who came upon riches without study or who gained enlightenment without training.... One gains enlightenment by training.... If enlightenment can be gained without training, how can we perfect the teaching of the Buddha who knows delusion and enlightenment?

Ordinary mind may indeed be non-different from Original Mind but this truth in its fullness is something ordinary mind does not know and cannot realize simply through assent or intellectual reflection:

In practicing Zen meditation and studying the Way remember that Buddhism is beyond presumption, discriminative reasoning, divination, imagination, intellectual knowledge or ordinary understanding. If it were something attained through such things, it would have constantly been with you from birth, yet why is it you haven't yet awakened to Buddhism? (Dōgen's Gakudōyōjinshu in Kadowaki, 1977:113).

The training of which Dōgen speaks is the training of the mind-body, the transforming of consciousness. The most salient characteristic of the consciousness-to-be-transformed is that it is a consciousness bound up with objects. To the enlightened mind, of course, objects of consciousness are "no hindrance," the trackless flight of birds across the empty sky. But to phenomenal consciousness, to the mind in training, these objects can very well be a hindrance. They ceaselessly elicit the mind's "stick-to-object" tendency, as one Zen master has put it. Objects of consciousness ceaselessly constellate a subject, and if this continuous process is never de-railed, the practitioner is deprived of his chance to realize the relative non-existence of his ego-self. The Zen mind-in-training moves from I see THAT, to I SEE, and ultimately to SEE, as Izutsu (1977:18-62) formulates it. Thus, from the standpoint of the phenomenal, necessarily dualistic, consciousness of the aspirant, the central task of training is to empty consciousness of its objects in order to ripen it for the self-revealing Presence of Suchness-as-It-Is. Dōgen speaks of

"cutting off the function of consciousness" (Masunaga, 1964:71) but perhaps the most direct statement of the process is made by Soto Roshi Philip Kapleau:

The uniqueness of zazen lies in this:
That the mind is freed from bondage to all
thought forms, visions, objects and imag-
inings, however sacred or elevating, and
brought to a state of absolute emptiness,
from which it alone may one day perceive
its own true nature (1965:13).

We recognize in Kapleau's words the fundamental con-
templative distinction between "pure" consciousness and
consciousness of objects. Consequently, we find that the
same sort of similes of purification that occur in John of
the Cross occur in Dōgen's Soto tradition. The late Soto
master, Yasutani, speaks typically in this regard:

...We can say that the mind of a Buddha is
like water that is calm, deep and crystal
clear, and upon which the "moon of truth"
reflects fully and perfectly. The mind of
ordinary man...is like murky water...no
longer able to reflect the moon of truth....
How can we bring the moon of truth to
illumine fully our life and personality?
We need first to purify this water, to
calm the surging waves by halting the
winds of discursive thought (Kapleau,
1965:29).

The formula for realization is again deceptively
simple: personal consciousness must empty itself of all
conceptualizing and imaginative activity which tends to

obscure the non-dualistic oneness of ego and world.

Yasutani even defines zazen as a process of purification:

Your mind can be compared to a mirror which reflects everything that appears before it. From the time you begin to think, feel and exert your will, shadows are cast upon the mind which distort its reflections. This condition we call delusion, which is the fundamental sickness of human beings.... The purpose of zazen is to wipe away from the mind these...defilements so that we can intimately experience our solidarity with all of life. Love and compassion then naturally and spontaneously flow forth (Kapleau, 1965:96).

Let us summarize what we have proposed in this section. The contemplative aspirant, functionally understood as a consciousness of objects, is asked within his/her religious symbol system to discipline his/her mind. This discipline involves a purification of object-consciousness and this purification (or emptying) is, in turn, understood to promote the realization of the aspirant's deepest nature.

We must now look still closer at the metaphor of "emptying" and the mental disposition with which it is intimately associated, namely, non-discursive attention.

3. NON-DISCURSIVE ATTENTION AS EMPTYING

a. John of the Cross

In the works of St. John of the Cross there are repeated references to a contemplative discipline which involves the practice of emptiness with regard to the mind's ceaseless confrontation with thought-objects. In a typical passage we read:

...when a person has finished purifying himself and voiding himself of all forms and apprehensible images, he will abide in this pure and simple light and be perfectly transformed into it. The light is never lacking to the soul, but because of creature forms and veils weighing upon and covering it, the light is never infused. If a person will eliminate these impediments...and live in pure nakedness and poverty of spirit...his soul...will then be immediately transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, the Son of God (A2,15,4).

In line with his opinion that John of the Cross represents the normative contemplative teaching of the Catholic tradition, Maritain describes the primary mark of this tradition as the cultivation of imageless contemplation. As Maritain, himself, puts it:

Prayer demands that she [the soul] should leave the region of sensory images for the sphere of the Pure Intelligible and what lies beyond, while the operation of the intelligence grows more perfect in proportion to its emancipation from sensory images (1943:5).

Such apophatic prayer is the practical adjunct to traditional apophatic theology. Following the lead of the Areopagite, the most seminal source for medieval mystical theologians, Thomas Aquinas encapsulated the method of apophatic theology in these words: "We must proceed by way of remotion, since God in his immensity exceeds every conception which our mind can form" (Clark:139). Meister Eckhart was still more emphatic, adding an experimental accent to his theological utterance: "You must get into the ...core of the Soul so that God's undifferentiated essence may reach you there without the interposition of any idea" (Blakney:98). Of those who have tried to reflect the apophatic method of theology in the mirror of their own consciousness, there is none in the history of Christianity more thorough, nor perhaps more adept, than St. John of the Cross.

In his 1937 treatise on John, Bede Frost wrote that the "...way of Unknowing...in coming to the knowledge of God is...necessary to the understanding of St. John and [it] has been...misrepresented and caricatured where not altogether ignored by modern writers unfamiliar with the primary postulates of Catholic theology" (Frost, 1937:76). Indeed, John has been called the Doctor of Nada, a caricature that stems perhaps from John's remarkable drawing of the Ascent of Mount Carmel (infra) that is, the path of the contemplative soul. If forty years ago John was shunned or misunderstood because of his radically apophatic praxis, times have

changed. John of the Cross and the Cloud of Unknowing have become the primary texts for the current renaissance of the Catholic contemplative tradition--a renaissance fueled by a reaction to the appeal that Asian psychotransformative strategies have had in the West as well as by the exposure of a number of Catholic thinkers and contemplatives to Zen and other Asian disciplines.

The tone of John's teaching is found in one of Augustine's thoughts in the Confessions. In Book VII he reflects on the reality of created things, including his own selfhood, in relation to the God Who Is:

And I viewed all the other things that are beneath thee and I realized that they are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. They are real insofar as they come from thee; but they are unreal insofar as they are not what thou art (Pine-Coffin:147).

In these words Augustine expresses the universal religious intuition that selfhood is somehow less a reality than its Principle and that the true appreciation of Reality lies in seeing through the relative reality of the self. This theme is central to John's writings. The foremost goal of "union with God" is linked with the "annihilation" of the notion of a self-subsistent self and its self-centered will:

The religious must practice the following instructions if he wishes to attain to holy recollection and spiritual silence... liberated from one's own self (Precautions, Kavanagh and Rodriguez:656).

The secrecy of this ascent is evident since ordinarily the losing and annihilation of self, which brings most profit to a man, will be considered worst for him (N2,18,4).

Since the task of becoming empty can only seem to the natural man to be an effort against life,

...we flee from what most suits us. We embrace what fills our eyes with the most light and satisfaction and run after what is the very worst thing for us.... (N2,16,12).

We attribute substantial reality to that which is, at best, derivative. John's remedy for this blindness is the cultivation of an awareness of the reality that underlies all the particular objects of his consciousness, including his sense of self. To see God he must first see through the seeming reality of his self; he must break the natural identification and attachment to his own subjectivity. Since some form of subjectivity is ceaselessly constellated by the objects of consciousness, John prescribes the cultivation of consciousness without an object:

The discreet reader must always keep in mind my intention and goal in this book; to guide the soul in purity of faith through all its natural and supernatural apprehension, in freedom from every obstacle, to the divine union with God (A2,28,1).

...this union is effected by disuniting oneself from everything imaginative (A3,12,3).

...we will present...a method of emptying and purifying the faculties of all that is not God (A2,6,6).

.... The one road belongs to discursive meditation and the other is beyond the range of the imagination and discursive reflection (N1,10,2).

His goal transcends all of this, even the loftiest object that can be known or experienced. Consequently, he must pass beyond everything, to unknowing (A2,4,4).

The illumination will not be clear until the soul is entirely cleansed, clear and perfect (A2,5,8).

.... In the measure that he embarks through his own efforts upon this negation and emptiness of forms, he will receive from God the possession of union (A3,2,13).

God is incomprehensible and transcendent... that is why our journey to God must proceed through the negation of all (A2,24,9).

John's drawing of the Ascent of Mount Carmel, which contains in nuce, his entire doctrine, thus has as its axis:

The Path of Mount Carmel, the perfect spirit
nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing,
nothing.

And within this radical apophasis, John is aware that the aspirant must not cling even to his own desire for union, nor to God, nor to the things of God:

and even on the Mount...nothing.

To charges of quietism or the misunderstanding of his teachings as nihilistic, John responds forcefully:

Do not say, therefore: "Oh, the soul does not advance because it is not doing anything." For if it is true that it is not doing anything, I shall prove to you that it is accomplishing a great deal by doing nothing. If the intellect empties itself...it advances, and the freer it becomes of particular knowledge and acts of understanding, the further it advances in its journey toward the supreme supernatural Good (F3,47).

...If...scruples about...inactivity arise, he should remember that the pacification of the soul (making it calm, peaceful, inactive and desireless) is no small accomplishment. This, indeed, is what our Lord asks through David: Vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus [Ps. 45:11]. This would be like saying: Learn to be empty of all things--interiorly and exteriorly--and you will behold that I am God (A2,15,2).

In the Ascent, John spends three chapters discussing the dangers and delusions attendant to "supernatural apprehensions," that is, non-ordinary intrapsychic phenomena. They can be frightening or dazzling (A3,10,2), but John always returns to the stance of "emptiness" with regard to them (A2,12,2-3; A2,16,11). Summing up his attitude toward them, be they terrifying visions or glimpses of the numinous, he says, "I only repeat that my main teaching is to pay no heed to them" (A2,30,7). This, of course, is precisely the directive given to the student of Zen. H. M. Enomiya-La-Salle, one of the few Catholic scholars to enter deeply and sensitively into the comparative study of contemplation

in Christianity and Zen, notes this similarity (108-109).

John's counsels regarding the attitude one is to assume when confronting the spontaneous stream of object-consciousness are extremely important. They provide a way for us to understand the actual mental posture that lies behind John's vigorous exhortations to emptiness. Taken at face value, the latter would seem to indicate that John taught that a person could empty the mind by sheer exertion of mental muscle. This would lead to the mistaken conclusion that John's emptying of the mind was of the form of Herakles' cleaning of the Aegean stables--that one could, by sheer effort, push all the contents of consciousness out of consciousness as if they were garbage.

We are convinced, however, that this is neither John's teaching nor his practice. His directive for 'effortless effort' (N1,10,4) indicates that he was aware of what is now a commonplace in the psychology of meditation: forceful efforts to suppress the contents of consciousness result only in more of the same. John asks the aspirant to "be content with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God and live without the concern, without the effort and without the desire to taste or feel Him. All these desires disquiet the soul and distract it..." (N1,10,4).

In his own way, John, like Dōgen, objects to contemplative clinging, the strenuous posture of "attaining one thing." He seems to prefer a Christian counterpart to "quiet sitting." Part of the phenomenon of quiet

contemplation is that images, forms and other objects of consciousness arise autonomously. Rather than strain to suppress them or to forcefully empty them out, John indicates a mental posture of peaceful, attentive non-reflection: Neither grasping nor running from what appears before the mind, neither following it nor reflecting upon it. Meanwhile, the underlying intentionality of that attention is directed fully toward the present moment and toward the imagelessness by which John feels he will approach the Divine Presence.

We are led to conclude that in John's tireless instruction to "empty the mind," the real activity of emptying is not an attempt at a forceful, direct emptying of the objects of consciousness, but primarily an emptying of reaction to them. John's war is not with objects of consciousness as such, but with the reactive, associative mind. This is crucial. Such an emptying-of-reaction, a posture of disidentification with the objects of consciousness, may indeed, especially if accompanied by a physical quietude, lead to the state that Kapleau has called "absolute emptiness." And within a religious context, that state of absolute emptiness may elicit extraordinary mental experience. But this state cannot be forced. It must be invited, cultivated. And the sine qua non gesture of consciousness-in-contemplation is non-discursive attention.

In John's contemplation, attention is focused on an 'objectless object'--in this case, God--while objects

spontaneously arising in consciousness are met by a choiceless, non-reactive evenness or "peace." Again we say that this indeed may eventually lead to a mental state that is virtually empty, but the primary meaning of the metaphor "emptying" is this attitude of non-discursive attention: attention without reflection, without interpretation, without reaction or identification. What is being emptied, first and foremost, is the mind's natural tendency to 'stick' to objects, to react, identify, associate, wander, discourse. This would explain the animus behind John's insistence that the Christian contemplative be allowed to glimpse possibilities that lie beyond imaginative/discursive meditation:

The first point to consider concerns the interior corporeal sense (the imaginative power and fantasy). We must...empty this sense of every imaginative form and apprehension...and demonstrate the impossibility of union with God before the activity relating to these apprehensions ceases. Such apprehensions are incapable of being the proper and proximate means of this union.... Meditation is the work of these two faculties [imagination and fantasy] since it is a discursive act built upon forms, figures and images, imagined and fashioned by these senses. For example: the imagining of Christ crucified...or the imagining and considering of glory as a beautiful light...or the picturing of any other human or divine object imaginable....

The soul will have to empty itself of these images and leave this sense in darkness if it is to reach divine union. For these images, just like the corporeal objects of the exterior senses, cannot be an adequate proximate means to God... (A2,12,2-3; cf. A2,16,11).

It is important to understand that under our present interpretation one may have one's eyes wide open and have an image reflected upon one's retina and still be fully involved in the gesture of "imagelessness" and "emptiness." For the crucial thing is not that there exists an image on the retina or an object in consciousness, but that there be no identification, elaboration, or association with that image. All the while, the intentionality of consciousness is fixed on "God" who, for consciousness-in-transformation stands for That which is unimaginable and unthinkable.

For John, God is "hidden within the soul" (C1,6), that is, within the fact of consciousness. Yet his Presence is obscured because consciousness is unconcerned with its ground, center and source (C21,1; C27,1; F1,12; A2,16,11) and the flotsam carried along in its current. The cultivation of non-discursive contemplation is an actively attentive passivity, an objectless desire, which waits in naked openness for the self-revealing Presence of God. God, in turn, is never absent, only hidden by the clouds of mentation:

God, like the sun, stands above souls
ready to communicate Himself (F3,47).

Like the sun, he 'beams' constantly in the sheer ontic fact of awareness. Yet contact with the purity of his radiation requires the disassembling of all filters and reflectors:

It [the soul] thereby empties itself of everything comprehensible to it, because none of that is God; as we have said, God does not fit in an occupied heart (F3,48).

Purify the soul, however, and the sun hidden behind its clouds can do nothing else but illumine and transform:

Wipe away, O spiritual soul, the dust, the hairs, and the stains, and cleanse your eyes, and the bright sun will illumine you, and you will see clearly (F3,38; cf. supra pp. 47-48).

And this clarity of vision is not meant to refer to a momentary state of consciousness but to new, clarified activity in the operative order. For clarity of vision comes about as a result of a "substantial transformation in all [the soul's] faculties" (F3,28).

The blessings of this silent communication and contemplation impressed on the soul... are...inestimable. For they are the most hidden unctions of the Holy Spirit and hence most delicate, and they secretly fill the soul with spiritual riches, gifts and graces... (F3,40).

If this language of the Holy Spirit infusing riches into the soul sounds antiquated, we beg the reader's leave to quote a rather lengthy passage from a contemporary Benedictine monk. Henri Le Seaux (Abhishiktananda) is a Catholic priest whose years in India have influenced his

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understanding of the psychotransformative possibilities of prayer. His words amplify those of John's quoted above and, in addition, relate them to the great Yogic tradition of Asia:

As traditionally understood...the aim of yoga is to quiet the mind, to free it from its innate tendency to dispersion.... Christian spiritual discipline has this at least to learn from yoga--to strive by any effective and acceptable means for quiet and silence in the mind. Such quiet and silence alone make it possible for the Holy Spirit to work freely in the soul.... The highest gift of the spirit is the gift of wisdom, through which the Spirit works in the most intimate places of the soul...where the soul is a pure awareness of itself...beyond all mental activities and perception.... That experience is the natural substratum of any authentic mystical experience. At other levels of the psychological life the mystery of God is apprehended only through concepts and images...essentially incomplete and for ever incapable of leading man to the final goal which is written in his nature. Only at the center of his being can man have a real glimpse of the central mystery of God.... The aim of all yoga is to attain this point.... The God who is experienced in one's coincidence with oneself beyond all vritti (movements) of the mind is...really the experience of the silence of the Father, of the unmanifested mystery of the Godhead, before (as it were) the Father calls the Son, and all of us in the Son, by that "Thou" which fills time and eternity (Abhishiktananda, 1976:29,42,40,41,75).

John struggles nobly to retain the dualistic tension between the innermost core of his soul and the reality of God but cannot help but display a tendency toward outright identification:

Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one...thus each one lives in the other and is the other and both are one in the transformation of love (C12,7; cf. C26,4; C22,3; and, N2,20,5).

No matter how John struggles with doctrine and utterance, however, the adamant core of his practical method remains non-discursive, non-imaginative attention to God:

He will approach God the more closely he withdraws from all imaginative forms, images and figures (A3,3,1; cf. A2,17,5; F3,52).

b. Dōgen

The late Soto Roshi, Daiun Harada, has made the following pertinent remarks in regard to Zen practice:

Now though we usually say simply Zen, there are many kinds of Zen: ordinary man's Zen, Hinayana Zen, Zen of other religions beside Buddhism.... Even though there are so many kinds of Zen, quiet meditative Zen is really the root of all Zen. Quiet meditative Zen is to become still and quiet. It is to unify one's spirit and mind, to enter the state of no-self and to achieve complete stillness and peace through and through.... Quiet meditative Zen is the root and basis of all Zen. It is the elemental Zen that must be practiced in order to enter the Zen of Buddhism.... In quiet meditative Zen, the waves of delusive consciousness and feelings are stilled. Therefore, the main point in Zen is just to get rid of these delusive consciousnesses, that is, to become completely naked, to become completely one, to experience the "great death" (Maezumi and Glassman, 1978a:14,17,19,20).

Harada's description of the nature of "quiet, meditative Zen" is obviously reminiscent of John's quiet contemplation, and our elaboration of this similarity will continue through this section. Of more immediate importance, however, is the distinction Harada makes between "elemental Zen" and the "Zen of Buddhism."

The subject of this section and, indeed, a major focus of this thesis is "elemental Zen." Though not definitive of Zen practice, it is the "root and basis of all Zen" and "must be practiced in order to enter the Zen of Buddhism." We are not, in other words, dealing with something unimportant or derivative. Moreover, "elemental Zen" is the posture in which the aspirant is engaged during the great majority of training and after-satori cultivation. Though nothing can take the place of the intuitive flashes of satori or kensho through which one enters the Zen of Buddhism, "quiet, meditative Zen" presides over the domain of "graduality"--the slow psychological transformation in which, seed by seed, petal by petal, the aspirant's 'beginner's mind' is ripened and readied for fruition.

From the standpoint of the "Zen of Buddhism"--a reality as resistant to conceptualization as fresh air is to containment--comparisons to other states of mind or contemplative methods are beside the point. Defending its own absolute uniqueness, Zen traditionally distinguishes five kinds of Zen (Kapleau, 1965:43), the second of which is gedo Zen, literally, "an outside way." Into this category

the Zennist would place all Zen-like practices that fall outside the boundaries of the Mahayana, for example, Hindu raj yoga and Christian contemplation. (Parenthetically, a Christian contemplative would surely consider Zen praxis gedo contemplation --an outside way, genuine but inchoate.) We are content to honor the final uniqueness of the enlightened Zen man and the Christian and Hindu saints. Each may justifiably look upon his brother contemplative as following a worthy and profound, yet "outside" way. What is fascinating to us, however, is that along the road to the final uniqueness, each contemplative seems to spend a good deal of time in a similar mental posture. We admit that our investigation of the latter does not exhaust either Christian contemplation or shikantaza in their final and complete natures, but if it is a raft upon which the two groups share space for a time, if it is the root and basis of the ultimate stages, it seems worthy of attention. We turn therefore to an exposition of Dōgen's and Soto's zazen/shikantaza--not, to repeat, in its ultimate aspect but in its "elemental Zen" aspect--to highlight the commonality between it and the contemplative mode of John of the Cross.

The Lankavatara Sutra is one of the most important scriptures of the Mahayana, and along with the Avatamsaka, Diamond and Heart Sutras, forms the scriptural basis of Zen. Suzuki has singled it out for special treatment in his Zen studies because its prevailing psychological viewpoint and experiential emphasis are more appropriate to Zen than the

speculative, philosophical climates of the other Mahayana scriptures (Thomas:230ff; Suzuki, 1971:171). In it we find the following exhortation:

...When the existence and non-existence of the external world are understood to be due to the seeing of the Mind itself...[the Bodhisattva] can enter upon the state of imagelessness where Mind-only is, and see into the Solitude which underlies the discrimination of all things as being and non-being and the deep-seated attachments resulting therefrom (Suzuki, 1960:64).

Here, in a Mahayana scripture, we find reaffirmed the practical essence of Zen: the cultivation of an imageless consciousness as an essential step in actualizing bodhi in one's being. We must however be as cautious of the word "imageless" in Zen practice as we were with John. For here too, though quiet sitting may eventuate in a state of consciousness that is actually or virtually empty or imageless (Hirai, 1960:144), "imagelessness" refers not only to such a state but to an attitude that consciousness holds while objects and images naturally arise and pass within it. That attitude of "imagelessness" is properly described as non-discursive attention. Images occur on the retina, thoughts arise in consciousness, but the practitioner neither reacts to nor identifies with them. Thus, though consciousness may contain objects, it is coursing in objectlessness through an attitude of non-attaching, non-discursing attention.

It is often said that Soto practice differs from that of Rinzai in that shikantaza, unlike koan-concentration, has no particular object. But it would be wrong to conclude that shikantaza therefore is a mere daydreaming or letting the mind wander where it will. It is, on the contrary, a state of active vigilant attention. Sense and mental data impinge, but active attention watches such data arise and pass away, thereby preventing its own dispersal and distraction. Though shikantaza has no 'object', it is nonetheless, like koan Zen, single-minded: a one-pointed attention, an emptying of the discursive tendency of the mind. In this intention the two distinct methods merge.

In actual fact, koan Zen and shikantaza are complementary. Either can support the other. It is said that Dōgen's Chinese master Ju-Ching attained enlightenment under a Soto master while working on a koan (Waddell, October 1977:112). Yasutani provides contemporary testimony for the complementarity:

If we were to distinguish the various kinds of Zen now practiced in Japan we would find two major types: koan Zen and shikantaza. The Rinzai and Obaku schools emphasize koan study; the Soto school emphasizes shikantaza. But even when koan study is stressed, shikantaza is not abandoned. The great masters of the three schools always emphasized the importance of shikantaza. Conversely, the finest masters always used koans freely (Yasutani in Maezumi and Glassman, 1977:67).

Whatever subtly different strategies koan Zen and shikantaza may pursue in quest of the ultimate Zen of Buddhism, they seem to converge in the single-minded attention of "elemental Zen." Dōgen certainly favored the practice of repeated quiet sitting. Reminders and exhortations to sit in zazen and to keep on sitting pervade his writings. Dōgen thus praises samadhi as one of the eight awarenesses of the bodhisattva:

Dwelling in the Dharma undisturbed is what is called "samadhi."
The Buddha says: "When you monks unify your minds, the mind is in samadhi.... [It] is not scattered, just as those who protect themselves from floods guard the levy. This is also true for practice. For the sake of the "water of wisdom," then, cultivate samadhi well, and do not let it leak out (Dōgen's Hachidainigaku in Maezumi and Glassman, 1978:69).

Keizan Zenji, the second great patriarch of the Soto school who is sometimes called its "mother," says that,

...one is muddled by the senses and their objects and cannot understand the real self.... 'Neither thinking nor sense': This is your Real Lord. The Lord has neither face nor aspects... (Keizan's Mishaka Sonja in Kennet, 1972:186-7).

To commune with the "Lord," to allow the "Lord" to transform one's consciousness, one must stop thinking. The great 18th century Rinzai Zen Master, Hakuin, states the

case most bluntly in his commentary on the Heart Sutra:

Grasping, walking, man needs no help
He accumulates sin only by thinking
(Swearer:194).

In the 13th century, Dōgen stresses the already centuries old Zen theme of non-thinking in his description of the art of zazen:

Once you have adjusted your posture, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale...and settle into a steady, immobile sitting position. Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Non-thinking. This in itself is the essential art of zazen (Dōgen's Fukanzazengi in Waddell and Abe, 1973:123).

In his commentary on Dōgen's Fukanzazengi, Taizan Maezumi Roshi expands Dōgen's instructions:

...in sitting it is very important not to have your own ideas or thinking. That unconditioned, very plain state of mind, that's the state of non-thinking. And with that state of mind, sit. Eliminate all kinds of mental activities, don't even think of becoming Buddha. That's what he [Dōgen] meant.... By sitting concentrating in zazen we empty ourselves and at the same time we are able to empty the object. So the subject object relationship is eliminated altogether.... That's the kind of zazen he talks about. That's shikan-taza (Maezumi and Glassman, 1977:39).

One begins the practice of non-thinking by disidentifying with the stream of object consciousness. Included in this stream, of course, are the images and impressions that may arise, without objective referent, from the unconscious psyche. Yasutani describes such makyo:

...in our subconscious are to be found all the residual impressions of our life experience, including those of previous existences.... When zazen penetrates so deeply that the surface and intermediate levels of consciousness are stilled, elements of this residuum bubble up to the conscious mind. These we call makyo (Kapleau, 1965:101).

Makyo can be frightful or pleasant, create fear or induce well-being, but because they are not the Ultimate, they are, as Kapleau says, devoid of religious significance. Just as John of the Cross dismisses all that is not God--thoughts, dreams, visions, imaginings--the Zen counsel is:

Never be tempted into thinking that these phenomena...have any meaning.... This is to squander your energies on the foolish pursuit of the inconsequential.... Whenever makyo appear, simply ignore them and continue sitting (Kapleau, 1965:40; cf. W. Johnston, 1970:9; H. M. Enomiya-LaSalle: 39).

We are not sure that John "sat" in contemplation. We assume he often knelt; we know he sometimes laid down (Brenan, 1978:43). Because western science had made us

aware of the important physiological roles yogic sitting postures play in the cultivation of concentration (Timmons and Kamiya, 1970, 1973), we may wonder whether John or his Christian counterparts ever attain the depth of contemplation known for centuries to Buddhists.

In any case, we hope we have shown that John's wish to experience the immanence of the God of apophatic theology led him to a psychotransformative strategy similar to that of Dōgen's shikantaza and of Zen in general. The emptying of spiritual and sensory parts of the soul may perhaps be looked upon as John's peculiarly Christian version of Dōgen's "dropping off body and mind." Echoes abound, we think, between John's utterances on the contemplative gesture of nada, those of Dōgen on non-thinking and those, for instance, of fourteenth century Rinzai master, Bassui, and the twentieth century Soto teacher Yasutani:

Cut down whatever appears in the mind....
In short destroy all ideas.... When you
have eradicated every conception until
only emptiness remains, and then you cut
through even the emptiness, your mind will
burst open and [the Real] will manifest
itself (Bassui in Kapleau, 1965:182;
cf. Ibid:168,181).

You will realize your True-nature only
after your mind has become as empty of
thoughts as a sheet of pure white paper is
free of blemishes. It is simply a matter
of engrossing yourself in Mu so totally
that there is no room for thoughts of any
kind, including Mu itself (Yasutani in
Kapleau, 1965:108; cf. Ibid:29,70,117,128).