

IV. Contemplative Intention:
John, Dōgen and the Actualization of Will

A warrior learns to tune his will....
It is...the road to the naqual.

Castaneda's don Juan

The words "attention" and "intention" both stem from the Latin tendere meaning "to stretch." Given the foregoing discussion we might say that non-discursive attention is a stretching of the human will toward the Absolute within the intramental confines of personal consciousness. Yet though a stretching, it is not a straining. In John and Dōgen we come to understand that the effort involved in keeping the attention focused and consciousness clear is paradoxically balanced by a rest, a peace, a letting go, a letting be, a surrender. Within one and the same will-as-attention there thus seems to be a dialectical complementarity between the effortful and effortless will, between the will-to-attain and the will-to-receive, between the will as struggle and the will as submission.

This same dialectical balance is found when we move from the circumscribed realm of attention to the more generalized realm of intention. Here the stretching of the human will toward its source is seen in a larger frame. We see that the contemplative gesture of non-discursive attention is embedded in an intentionality of the heart which spreads itself over the cognitive, conative and emotive network. And yet, characteristic of contemplative intentionality, there is along with the yearning for the ought, a deep affirmation of the is, along with activity, a corresponding receptivity.

1. JOHN: THE WILL AS FAITH, HOPE AND CARITAS

John's journey proceeds as an "emptying of the soul of all that is not God." The soul, as we have seen, is composed of "spiritual" and "sensory" parts. The emptying of the latter is the work of traditional asceticism; the emptying of the former is the work of non-discursive contemplation.

John amplifies his explanation of the emptying of the "spiritual part of the soul" by further dividing it into its three constitutive functions, intellect, memory and will. For the transformative work to proceed, each of these functions must be emptied. In their phenomenal state, intelligizing, remembering and willing are "beclouded" and "impure;" they lack the ability to relate themselves to their unitive, divine ground. Their objects are multiple, ego-borne, self-referential, idolatrous. Intellect, memory and will lack a unifying intentionality toward God. Through the non-discursive attention of contemplation, an attitude of dis-identification with the soul's objects, John wishes to empty or purify the soul's three functions of their vagaries. Thus, he directly equates the emptying of the intellect, memory and will with growth in the theological virtues, faith, hope and caritas. In the Ascent, he writes:

As we outlined for the sensory night a method of emptying the sense faculties of desire for their objects...so for this spiritual night we will present a method of emptying and purifying the spiritual

faculties of all that is not God. By this method these faculties [intellect, memory and will] can abide in the darkness of these three virtues [faith, hope and caritas] which are the means and preparation for the soul's union with God (A2,6,6,).

Sometimes, John speaks of the virtues not as a result of the apophatic process but as its cause:

Faith darkens and empties the intellect of all its natural understanding.... Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions.... Charity also empties...the will of whatever is not God and centers them on Him alone.... Because these virtues have the function of withdrawing the soul from all that is less than God, they consequently have the mission of joining it with God (N2,21,11; cf. A2,6,2).

John's equation--emptying of the (self-aggrandizing) intellectual functions = growth in the (self-transcending) theological virtues--is didactically effective. Through it John is able to place his systematic emphasis on contemplative emptying (quite new to the Catholic theological tradition) within a traditional theological/psychological context. Yet we should not let the facility of this device and its oversimple faculty-psychology blind us to the subtlety of John's psychological understanding. For the field described by

phenomenal intellect —————> intellect imbued with faith
 phenomenal memory —————> memory permeated by hope
 phenomenal will —————> will become caritas

is indeed the entire field of human consciousness. This diagram does not describe a simple switch from "off" to "on" but the boundaries of a vast transformative project. John means to tell us that as the psychotransformative work proceeds, all the interdependent powers of the soul are re-vitalized and newly constellated. The structure of consciousness, its general "trait" or "mode" is open to a virtually infinite spectrum of transformation. John's only tool for expressing the spectrum is the rather cumbersome distinction between ordinary, misdirected intellectual functions and the theological virtues. "Faith," "hope" and "caritas" refer to the powers of intellect, memory and will as the latter's egocentric and centrifugal valences are gradually transformed into theocentric and centripetal ones.

Faith, hope and caritas are not three praxes, but three descriptive nuances for consciousness undergoing transformation under a single praxis: contemplation. When John is asked how one practices faith, hope and charity in their purity he does not have three answers. He has one: non-discursive contemplation:

If the spiritual person directs his intellect in faith according to the doctrine given him [i.e. imageless, non-discursive contemplation] it is impossible for him not to instruct his other two faculties simultaneously in the other two virtues. For these faculties depend on one another in their operations (A3,1,1).

...And the conduct required of the memory and the intellect...is also necessary for the will. Since the intellect and other faculties cannot admit or deny anything without the intervention of the will, the same doctrine that serves for the one faculty will evidently apply to the others also (A3,34,1).

Though faith, hope and caritas may, at the beginning, have distinct objects, they begin to melt into a single intention as the objectless, apophatic work proceeds. Contemplation renders each more subtle, less prone to attach themselves to phenomenal supports. At the outset, faith, we may surmise, is mere belief in propositions; hope is a form of spiritual materialism, a clinging to some future destiny; and, charity, perhaps, is an act of the ego to "do good" under pressure from the superego. But as the journey proceeds this changes. The cataphatically-toned and utilitarian functions of faith in something, hope for something and care for beings and things are transformed into apophatically-toned, ontological virtues of pure faith, pure hope and pure charity. In their purity, their objectlessness, "faith," "hope" and "caritas" become a single attitude of spiritual nakedness and radical openness toward the activity of God.

The transformative process here being described may be simplified in the terminology of "will"--even though the latter involves a paradox. Kant came to teach Western man as no man before him may be viewed as having taught that

ordinary consciousness is willful, interpretive and manipulative. We see the world through colored lenses. Freud and the science he spawned seem to have added a psychological dimension by describing that willfulness as fundamentally egocentric and narcissistic. Translating into religious terms, one might say that phenomenal consciousness is naturally idolatrous. The entirety of the contemplative gesture in John and Dōgen, and perhaps in all its instances, may be understood as an effort to purify consciousness of its ordinary willfulness. One of John's synonyms for the contemplative opus is, in fact, the "emptying of the will." The willfulness of ordinary consciousness is emptied, however--and here is the paradox--only through acts of will. What keeps the activity of contemplative willing from simply being an aggravation of the willfulness of phenomenal consciousness is its linkage to the transpersonal Will. For John, as for the majority of Christian mystics, the ultimate motif of contemplative transformation is the conformation of the human will to the will of God. Yet the purity of this linkage is constantly challenged by the soul's habitual reflex to identify with and attach itself to phenomenal supports:

Those who not only pay heed to these imaginative apprehensions, but think God resembles some of them and that one can journey to union with God through them, are already in great error and will gradually lose the light of faith in their intellects (A3,12,3).

Aware of this tendency, John resorts as always to the emptying posture of non-discursive contemplation. In willing to attend to no-object, the idolatrous willfulness of intellect, memory and will (i.e., the functions of consciousness) become "emptied"--transformed into the receptive willlessness of faith, hope and caritas:

And it is by means of faith that the intellect is united with God.... This union is effected by disuniting oneself from everything imaginative (A3,12,3; cf. A2,28,1).

...In the measure that a person dispossesses his memory of forms and objects, which are not God, he will fix it upon God and preserve it empty, in the hope that God will fill it.

John adds that "hope always pertains to the unpossessed (and unpossessable) object" (A2,6,3). His ontological hope is an intending of his entire being toward God as present. It is a waiting, open quality which grounds intentionality in that present. Though objectively distinct, hope and faith fuse indissolubly in the psychological subject: the unknowing openness of the faith is joined by the present-rootedness of the hope. Finally,

we would achieve nothing by purging the intellect and memory in order to ground them in the virtues of faith and hope if we neglected the purification of the will through charity (A3,16,1).

Even the soul's fierce longing for God (John often warns of spiritual gluttony) must be emptied into a profound acceptance. In the gesture of submission, the contemplative act-of-will achieves its greatest will-lessness. The unknowing of faith and the present-centeredness of hope are thus joined by a pure intentionality of surrender. For John, the language of attainment of these three virtues is a way of pointing to a single profound transformation of consciousness. They mark a "turning about at the seat of the mind," a turning about which re-turns the human will to its ontological source.

Faith, hope and caritas thus seem to be interdependent aspects in the actualization of a single, unified intentionality toward God. The spiritual freedom (A3,5,3; A3,26,6; A3,18,8; A3,19,5; N2,7,4; N2,9,1; A1,4,6; C35,2-3) won through consciousness' gradual coursing in objectlessness seem to confer on that intentionality deeper and deeper degrees of nakedness. In its fully realized condition, this pure intention seems to be a personal will whose chief characteristic is, nevertheless, its letting-be--its 'rest' within a transpersonal Will. Here, and perhaps for the first time, the human will knows itself authentically, for here it is no longer deluded by the seeming reality of the self.

Though John expounds upon all three of the virtues, it is clear that he has a favorite. If he were to pick just one to stand for all three and to mark the quality of a

consciousness in transformation, thus intending, thus attending, it would be faith--empty, receptive, objectless, grasping no-thing.

2. DŌGEN: THE WILL AS FAITH, DETERMINATION, DOUBT AND KARUNA

Contemplative forms of Buddhism are often contrasted with its theistic forms and with other theistic religions in terms of the former's disregard for faith. This stems, we suggest, from either a too limited conception of faith or a misunderstanding of those contemplative forms. If faith is taken merely as an intellectual affirmation of unverifiable propositions (for which the term "belief" should now be reserved; "now" because Wilfred Smith [1979] has shown that, whereas belief originally meant more than knowledge--knowledge plus the resolve to act upon it--it now means less than knowledge), then it is true that Buddhist contemplatives have little interest in faith. But if faith is understood existentially as a predisposition of the heart, a deeply felt conviction of the truth of the Buddha's teaching that invites still deeper understanding, an intending of the conditioned self toward the Unconditioned Real, then to propose that contemplative Buddhism is antagonistic to such faith is crudely false. Here we shall test this thesis on Dōgen only. Dōgen, we shall argue, sees faith not only as a necessary predisposition for the journey to self-awakening but also as the very substance of that awakening.

The word "faith" in English translations of Dōgen's works is a translation of either the Japanese shin 信, or shinko 信仰, or of their Chinese originals. Dōgen, of course, got the language and the idea from the Chinese

who in turn were doing their best to translate the original Sanskrit. The original Sanskrit is sradhha and in the Samyutta Nikaya (V, 199-200), faith (Pali, saddha; Sanskrit, sradhha) is presented as the first of the five cardinal virtues of the Buddhist path (the other four being vigour, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom). Faith is called the "seed" without which the plant of spiritual insight cannot begin to grow (Samyutta Nikaya:76,181).

The Sanskrit sradhha is composed of srat (heart) and dha (to place or establish). It is thus a setting of the heart upon something--or better, the experience of finding one's heart established in a conviction of the truth (of the Buddha's teaching). "Heart" points perhaps to that hara-like place within us where the ordinary distinctions between will and intellect and mind and body melt in a superior fusion. Until one can abide in this heart, a radiating, hub-like center, one is condemned to live along the spokes and their oppositions. Buddhist sradhha, in any case, suggests an all-pervading unification of intention toward the Noble Path.

Dōgen scholar, Francis Dōjun Cook, finds the root srat interesting for another reason, namely its relation to sat, meaning real or true. Taking advantage of the semantic flexibility of srat and dha (evidenced by their longish entries in the Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary), Cook reads sradhha as "to possess the true" or "to generate the true". "In both scriptural and commentarial literature,"

he says, "it [sradhha] denotes a degree of spiritual development in which one has come into possession of the true and/or real in the sense that the real and true is an experienced fact" (personal correspondence).

Narada Thera complements and amplifies these notions of sradhha with his own summary of its meaning in the Pali Canon:

Saddha is well-established confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. Purification of its mental associates is its chief characteristic. It is compared to the water-purifying gem of the universal monarch (which) when thrown into water, causes mud and water-weeds to subside. The water is consequently purified. In the same way Saddha purifies the minds of its stains (101).

Narada is saying that faith, like meditation itself, is psychologically potent. It purifies its "mental associates." Faith not only makes contemplative practice possible, it contributes to its psychotransformative power.

The esteem given to faith by the Buddhist tradition did not disappear during its sojourn in China. Perhaps its most striking example is Fa-tsang's Hua-yen i ch'eng chiao i fen-ch'i chang, wherein are discussed the 52 stages of the Bodhisattva career leading up to Buddhahood. Only stages 51 and 52 are de facto Buddhahood, that is, samyak sambodhi. This fact lends importance to another, namely, that the first ten stages are grouped under the rubric of "faith" 信. For Fa-tsang, "faith" is already a kind of Buddhahood. What Fa-tsang inherited and lent systematic order to was the

earlier Indian and Chinese Mahayanist sense that faith, far from being a mere provisional trust in doctrines which awaits later validation, is already prajna-wisdom itself in an early stage of its unfolding. The awakening of faith is a degree of the same insight or understanding which when ripe will be full Buddhahood.

Cook has also reminded us that the Chinese greatly radicalized the Indian Buddhist doctrine of the tathagathagarbha. If the fertile Void of Buddha-mind was ontologically prior to the individual self, a sect like Ch'an reasoned, then who is it that has faith, who is it that attains enlightenment? Ch'an taught that the arising of such things as faith, meditation practices and so forth are the activities of the seed-potential within each person. Cook interprets that "it is the Buddha we have (are) in the form of a seed-potential which has faith, begins to do zazen and so on. Faith, then, is of the nature of wisdom or understanding because it is in fact the first appearance in our life of this innate Buddhahood" (personal correspondence).

Dōgen not only shares such an attitude, he brings it to its highest pitch. Dōgen was an indefatigable proponent of zazen, the discipline through which the Zen aspirant comes to realize his True Nature. Exhortations to zazen are one of the most prominent aspects of his writings. Yet for Dōgen the vaunted jiriki or self-power of Zen was closely knit to an underlying attitude of faith. The concept of faith belongs to the basic tenets of his teaching and, says

Dōgen scholar Hee Jin Kim, "zazen-only cannot be fully understood apart from the consideration of faith--the element fundamentally important in Dōgen's thought" (Kim, 1975: 80). He elaborates:

Dōgen does not imply that faith precedes enlightenment or is eventually replaced by enlightenment. Throughout the ongoing advance in enlightenment (bukkōjōji) faith and enlightenment, believing and seeing are twin companions of emptiness and the Buddha-nature. ...For Dōgen, faith lies in original enlightenment, enlightenment comes from original faith (81).

"Original enlightenment" refers to the Zen view that ab illud tempore, in our very nature, we are perfectly awake and enlightened. The Buddha-nature and our own nature are non-different. It is because our intelligence thus participates in its Source that faith, as a motive power of being, can arise: "Faith lies in original enlightenment."

And it is the intentionality of faith--a profound receptivity, an emptiness of the grasping self before Reality, and thus the perfect existential reflection of zazen--that helps us to overcome our ignorance of the fact of original enlightenment: "Enlightenment comes from original faith."

The similarity to John of the Cross is most striking. In John, the kenotic attitude of pure and dark faith accompanies and reinforces the practice of imageless contemplation so that together the two are able to overcome existential

separation from God. Yet it is our given, ontic union with God which predisposes us both to the awakening of faith and the practice of self-emptiness. In Dōgen, original, primordial enlightenment makes faith possible. Faith, polished to adamantine lustre in zazen, is the "substance" of enlightenment.

All beings are Buddha, says Dōgen. And practice and enlightenment are identical. These two basic ideas of Dōgen shed light on his conviction that faith is the beginning and end of Buddhist practice. Because practice and enlightenment are identical, Dōgen says that practice is not to be thought of as instrumental, as something done in order to achieve the ultimate goal. Many, it seems, have wrongly taken this as Dōgen's denial that there is cultivation, transformation and progress in Zen practice. In fact, it is Dōgen's typically Zen warning to guard against the kind of mind that becomes egoically attached to its own progress. The Hindu proverb, "Act without seeking the fruits of action," is not a denial of action's fruits but a caveat addressed to the seeker and the quality of his attitude. Zazen, and Zen practice in general, does effect transformation, does contribute to the realization of innate Buddhahood. But to practice with attachment to results is self-defeating. Zen practice must be carried out with an empty will.

Dōgen evokes empty willing in his hearers by asking them to practice in full conviction that the practice itself is Buddha-activity, the actualization of the Buddha

that one already is and will 'more fully' be. Writes Cook:

Faith marks the beginning of the Buddhist practice because at that point there is a conviction concerning the truth of the Buddha's teaching. However, though practice progresses, it is to be understood as a greater actualization of Buddha-nature (one inch of zazen, one inch of Buddhahood) and increasing certitude with regard to the veracity of the Dharma. One never goes beyond faith, in a sense, though a partial understanding is supplanted by a deeper understanding (personal correspondence).

One cannot overstate the profound harmony that exists between Dōgen's existential faith and that of John and other Christian contemplatives. According to Augustine, John's mentor in faith, God tells the searching heart, "You would not seek me had you not already found me." The practical import of both of Dōgen's ideas--innate Buddhahood and the identity of practice and enlightenment--are present here. The Christian contemplative seeks because God is already within him/her. All beings are Buddha-nature. Prayer is the realization of right relationship to God-activity, as zazen is the realization of right relationship to Buddha-activity. Each is an end in itself. They are also means to deeper insight into the primordially existent situation. The entire armory of Zen paradox is directed against the false interpretation of this activity as one of a self making progress. The Christian doctrines of the supremacy of God's grace and the error of pride serve an identical psychological purpose.

Dōgen's pronouncements on faith vary in significance. As Abbot of trainees and Patriarch for Buddhist believers, he affirms and extols Buddhist beliefs as necessary to the cultivation of religious life. As mystic and Zen master he abandons conventional truth to speak, insofar as it is possible, from the standpoint of the Absolute. The following quotations are offered to suggest this exoteric/esoteric range in Dōgen's utterances on faith:

He who venerates [the Buddha] with a believing heart will surely be blessed.... For according to the Dharma left us by the Perfected One, Buddha image, sutra and monk contribute to the blessedness of both men and gods. He who respects them will assuredly be blessed, and he who lacks faith commits a transgression (Shōbōgenzō Juundōshiki, in Dumoulin, 1963:171).

It is imperative for those who practice the Way to believe in it. Those who have faith in the Way should know for certain that they are unflinchingly in the Way from the very beginning... (Gakudōyōjinshū, in Kim, 1975:81).

The spiritual realm of the Buddhas is totally incomprehensible. It is not reached by the workings of the mind; still less can it be known by a man of disbelief or inferior intelligence. Only a person of great capacity based on right faith is able to enter here (Bendōwa, Waddell and Abe, May 1971:138).

And, quite remarkably:

...while both your mind and your flesh may be at times in idleness or unbelief, confess it in utter simplicity to the Buddhas who come before you. This merit will richly nurture undefiled faith and spiritual

endeavor, which are unobstructed. As pure faith is realized, both the self and the others will be changed, and the sentient and the unsentient shall enjoy its efficacy far and wide (Shōbōgenzō Keiseisanshōku in Kim, 1975:81).

Nowhere else in Zen literature and rarely even in theistic literature is faith's power so highly extolled! Dōgen's utterance attributes to faith (rare though this particular species is) a power usually reserved solely for enlightenment, namely, a power which radiates from a personal locus to suffuse everything--the sentient as well as the unsentient.

In the following passage, Dōgen guards against the misunderstanding of faith as a superficial movement of the ego-will. The ontological primacy of the former cannot be the product of the derivative reality of the latter. Though the will-as-faith must seem to begin as a partial straining of one part of the personality against another, it discovers its own authenticity only when it suffuses the totality of man's mind-body. As such, it carries enormous psychotransformative power, coextensive with enlightenment:

The virtue of faith is engendered neither by the self nor by others. Because it is [generated] not by forcing oneself, by one's contrivances, by being coerced by others, or by fitting the self-made norm, faith has been imparted intimately through patriarchs in India and China. Faith is so called when the entire body becomes faith itself (konshin-jishin). Faith is one with the fruit of

enlightenment; the fruit of enlightenment is one with faith. If it is not the fruit of enlightenment, faith is not realized. On account of this it is said [in the Mahaprajna-paramita sastra of Nagarjuna] that faith is the entrance to the ocean of the Dharma. Indeed where faith is attained, there is the realization of Buddhas and patriarchs (Shōbōgenzō Sanjushichihon-bodaibumpō, in Kim, 1975:81).

Thus, for Dōgen, faith is not only a prerequisite and accompanying attitude to the practice of zazen, but an "attainment" as well. What begins, perhaps, as a relatively superficial assent to objects of faith, settles ever more deeply into the marrow of the psyche, transforming the will to that radical openness unto Reality wherein faith is no longer a means but an end, the very mark of the aspirant who knows his Principle and lives within Its Will. The praxis that clears the psyche of impediments so that gestating faith, increasingly object free, may descend to its root is, of course, zazen. Kapleau echoes the master's teaching on faith and zazen-only (shikantaza):

...the very foundation of shikan-taza is an unshakable faith that sitting...with mind void of all conceptions...is the actualization...of the inherently enlightened Bodhi-mind with which all are endowed. At the same time, this sitting is entered into in the faith that it will one day culminate in the...direct perception of the true nature of this Mind.... In authentic shikan-taza neither of these two elements of faith can be dispensed with... (Kapleau, 1965:7).

Joining the movement of the will as great faith (dai-shinkon) in Zen practice are two other intentional gestures: great doubt (dai-gidon) and great determination (dai-funshi). Dōgen does not mention these three as triad, but the tradition of doing so goes back at least as far as Hakuin. "A man who lacks any one of these," he says, "is like a three-legged kettle with a broken leg" (Miura & Sasaki, 1965:42-43). In contemporary Zen writing both Shibayama Roshi (1970:40) from the Rinzai tradition and Yasutani Roshi from the Soto (Kapleau, 1965:58-59) make mention of these three elements. If great doubt and great determination complete the tripod of Zen intention, they parallel, at least in structure, the hope and caritas which complete the Christian contemplative intention. The truest parallel to caritas is of course karuna or compassion and a reflection thereon will close this section. First, however, we shall look at great doubt and great determination in relation to hope and caritas, if only to enable these somewhat different species of religious willing to amplify one another.

Yasutani characterizes strong doubt (daigidon) in the following way:

Not a simple doubt, mind you, but a "doubt-mass"--and this inevitably stems from strong faith. It is a doubt as to why the world should appear so imperfect, so full of anxiety...when in fact our deep faith tells us the opposite is true.... It is as though we knew perfectly well we were millionaires and yet inexplicably found ourselves without a penny in our pockets. Strong doubt, therefore, exists in proportion to strong faith (Kapleau, 1965:59).

For John of the Cross, the awakening of faith carries with it the awakening of hope. When I know through faith that even as a sinner I am in essential union with God, that He seeks me and that "He is mine and all for me," I am allowed to hope, unceasingly, for the day in which his Presence will be fully known. This pure hope is the very opposite of phenomenal hopes and serves two purposes in John's scheme. It is both an antidote to vagabond memory that steals us from the present, and it is the burning flame of waiting and spiritual yearning which keeps contemplative stillness from degenerating into lassitude. It is not waiting for a future result so much as an emotive longing which is nevertheless grounded in the stillness of the present.

Zen's great doubt, or "perplexity" is a profound attitude of questioning that arises out of the inevitable paradox generated by the ideas of innate and acquired enlightenment. If this world and myself are in fact of the nature of the Buddha, why must I strive? The negative tone of "great doubt" contrasts rather sharply with John's positively toned "pure hope." Yet the gap seems bridged to some extent by the element of attentive intensity that each seems to engender. The tension arising from the paradox inherent in the great doubt--as well as the similar tension artificially generated in the koan exercise--keeps the fire lit, as it were, under the crucible of contemplative consciousness. When one is filled with the great doubt, one