

# ZEN BOW

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## DIET AND ZEN PRACTICE

Philip Kapleau

When Shakyamuni, not yet a Buddha, seated himself under the Bo tree for his supreme effort and resolved that "Though only my skin, sinews and bones remain and my blood and flesh dry up and wither away, yet never from this seat will I stir until I have attained full enlightenment," he had behind him six years of the most fearsome austerities. Of these, prolonged fasting and the consumption of but one grain of rice a day were two of the milder forms. Yet he failed to gain emancipation through these harsh means. One day as he lay in a faint half dead from hunger and exhaustion, tradition tells us he clearly perceived that such self-torture could only lead to death and that without a body the inner freedom he desperately sought could not be won. So he eagerly drank the rice-milk a concerned village maid offered him, gradually regained his strength and thereafter determined to steer a middle course between self-mortification and self-indulgence.

The futility of punishing the body as a way to enlightenment, so dramatically conveyed to us by the Buddha, is clear enough. What is less clear is the point where legitimate self-denial leaves off and actual asceticism begins.

Asceticism, obviously, is a relative term. One man's meat turns out to be another man's poison. During my stay in a Buddhist meditation center in Burma many years ago we were told by our monk-

preceptor not to meditate either in the half- or full-lotus position as both were unnecessarily painful -- had not the Buddha himself taught the Middle Way, which eschewed the path of asceticism? The posture urged upon Westerners and Burmese alike was sitting with legs folded one in front of the other. A Westerner inquired whether the solid wood plank bed without bedding of any sort on which we all were required to sleep did not constitute a form of self-torture. He was told in all seriousness, "Not at all, it is the most natural thing in the world once you get used to it." Upon my return to Japan I described the Burmese sleeping accommodations to several of my Zen monk friends, who normally sleep on a thin quilted mattress placed on two-inch thick tatami straw matting. "Why, that's mortification of the body, which the Buddha rejected!" they exclaimed. Upon being told that the Burmese labeled the lotus position harsh and ascetic, they laughed and replied, "No, once learned it is perfectly natural."

What is even more grueling for Westerners to adapt to is the meal of ~~rice~~ served three times a day in Japanese monasteries and twice a day in the Burmese, where solid food is not taken after noontime. To an Asian monk, however, for whom rice is virtually a mystique, the consumption of such quantities -- and the whiter the better -- is only "natural." Of the three or four Americans I know who have lived in a Japanese monastery for six months or more and who regularly ate the standard diet, not one

*"The mind of the Zen adept is taut-ready like a drawn bow."*

escaped either anemia, beriberi, chronic constipation or all three. Their bodies, unaccustomed to such great quantities of rice and such uniquely Japanese foods as miso (fermented soybean mash), had to labor to extract even the barest nutrients from them.

Rice -- this time brown -- is now being used by Zen students in America to torture their bodies. In this case it is under the prodding of Georges Ohsawa, a Japanese who has promoted it as the "perfect food" in connection with what he unabashedly calls a "Zen macrobiotic (i.e., long-life) diet." (Ohsawa, by the way, died several years ago at the age of 70, ten years short of the span he had predicted for himself.)

"In Japan," Ohsawa has written, "those who live longest as a group are the Buddhist monks. The traditional ways of eating and drinking, which still survive intact in the Zen Buddhist monasteries, continue to confound the scientific seekers after long life and eternal youth."<sup>1</sup> As it turns out, brown rice is not the perfect food -- whole wheat and whole rye flours are both richer in protein, vitamin B, and minerals.<sup>2</sup> Further, brown rice is not eaten in Zen monasteries. Ordinary Zen monks, as distinguished from Zen masters, are not especially healthy or long-lived, their diet is not based on the yin/yang principle, as claimed elsewhere by Ohsawa, nor is the macrobiotic diet Zen. Given the widespread interest in Zen today, it is highly improbable that the macrobiotic diet would have lasted as long as it has had not Ohsawa gratuitously linked brown rice and the macrobiotic diet with the fruits of advanced Zen practice.

One of the few crises that occurred in the monastery where I stayed involved brown gohan, the Japanese word both for rice and a meal. One day the Roshi surprised everyone by having brown gohan

I YOU ARE ALL SANPAKU, Georges Ohsawa, page 93.

<sup>2</sup>See booklet by El Molino Mills, Alhambra, Calif., on food value of grains.

served instead of the customary white. Then a rare thing happened: the monks deliberately violated the stringent rule against wasting food by eating a couple of mouthfuls of the rice, as though to satisfy themselves it was as bad as they thought it would be, and then leaving the rest. The next day the brown gohan was again served and the same silent drama played out. On the third morning white AND brown rice were placed on the table. All except the Roshi and me reached for the white, which was consumed with the usual speed and gusto. The following day not a grain of the brown appeared and it was clear the monks had won the battle of the rices. Though one could not doubt the genuineness of the Roshi's concern for the health of his monks, it was obvious from the start that this was a crusade for which he had little stomach, for with the resumption of white rice (mixed as usual with barley) the Roshi, as if to say "Now that's over with, let's enjoy our customary gohan," ate his with as much relish as the rest.

In his book YOU ARE ALL SANPAKU, Ohsawa has written, "In Zen Buddhist monasteries the most superior disciples are always selected for the singular honor of becoming cooks... They are selected so that their superior knowledge and experience in the selection and preparation of food, according to the teaching of the Unique Principle of Yin/Yang, may support and sustain the developing judgment of the other disciples... In Zen Buddhist monasteries this traditional manner of selecting, preparing and serving food is called shōjin ryōri. The closest translation would be 'cooking which improves the supreme judgment.'"

Shōjin ryōri would correspond to what the Hindu scriptures call sattvic, or pure, foods. In the Hindu spiritual tradition milk, butter, certain cheeses, fruits, vegetables and grains are pure, since they bring a feeling of purity and calmness to the mind and at the same time nourish the body. On the other hand, such foods as spices, meat, fish, eggs and alcohol are called rajasic, or stimulating, because they stimulate the

nervous system and excite the passions. For the Japanese, however, who had little taste for milk, butter or cheese until World War II, shōjin ryōri foods are seaweed, miso, sour plums, mountain potatoes, black beans, mushrooms, salted radishes, the root of the lotus and, of course, rice, but not dairy products.

The shōjin ryōri foods most frequently served in the Zen monastery are rice, miso soup, salted radishes and potatoes, while the others are eaten only occasionally and sparingly. The monks could hardly maintain their minimum health and perform the hard work required of them, however, if this slim fare were not buttressed by feast days celebrating the Buddha's birthday, Bodhidharma's death day, the monastery founder's day, and the like, when all manner of vegetarian meals are served. The monks are further fortified by dinners of fish and meat, rice, vegetables, fruit, cake, beer and saké wine provided on those frequent occasions when they are invited into the homes of believers to chant sutras in memory of the family dead.

Even so there is much sickness among the monks. Stomach disorders are common, as they are among the Japanese population as a whole (Japan has the highest incidence of stomach cancer in the world), and TB and other pulmonary diseases have always been rampant among the Japanese, Buddhist monks included. Those who live longest are not the ordinary monks and priests but the Zen masters. This is due, not to their diet (which in any case is better than that of the monks) but to their years of zazen meditation and the deep inner calm it brings them. Those masters who have passed on at a comparatively early age -- Dogen at 50 and Bassui at 60 -- were believed to have been victims of tuberculosis.

In the thirteen years I have lived in Japan, mostly in and around monasteries and temples, I never heard it said that monastery food was selected on the basis of the principles of yin and yang. Indeed, how could it be when much of the food is donated and the monks are trained to accept gratefully and without pre-

ference whatever is given them? It is true that the job of chief cook in the monastery is entrusted to the monks most advanced in their practice, but not for the reason given by Ohsawa, namely, that they have superior knowledge of the "unique principle of yin/yang." The reason is simpler and at the same time more profound: their minds are purest, i.e., most equable. For if one preparing food is angry or resentful, fearful or anxious, the mental vibrations resulting from this impure state of mind are communicated to the food and "poison" it, so that a sensitive person eating it may experience stomach upsets, headaches or other illness. This is why only the most superior monks are selected for this important job.

There is much to be said for a simple diet. Most people overeat, and Seneca's observation that men do not die naturally but kill themselves with their knives and forks is as true today as it was in his time. No one can carry on Zen practice effectively who is troubled by indigestion, chronic constipation and kindred ills resulting from eating too much or eating the wrong kind of food. A safe guide is never to eat more than two-thirds one's capacity. Especially if one has a sedentary job, exercises little and meditates long, to eat little is better than to eat much. A sparse diet helps zazen in yet another way by muting sexual desire and the fantasies which it spawns. As one's practice advances and samadhi is gained, the body-mind acquires such a keen sensitivity and subtlety that there is a natural preference for "pure" foods and an aversion to the "coarse" variety (such as meat, for example). Indeed, during the deepest states of samadhi the body requires little or no food but seems to extract a different kind of nourishment from the atmosphere.

Until this point is reached, however, it is unwise if the body is accustomed to meat and fish and eggs, suddenly to give them up, as the resultant strain may bring about illness and put an end to zazen. Whatever dietary changes are made should be introduced gradually, giving the body's chemistry time to adjust.

There need be no fear of dispensing with animal proteins. In his book *A TURNING POINT IN NUTRITIONAL SCIENCE*, Dr. Ralph Birchler, of the Bircher-Benner Clinic in Switzerland, writes, "If you start with a natural diet containing a sufficient amount of fresh food, green leaves and cereal germs, then mankind can not only exist without animal protein, but it can attain a much higher level of health... full health is attainable without animal food." To which may be added that there is greater stamina, a sense of buoyancy and purity. Despite this, it may be better not to give up meat and fish but to wait until they give one up.

Before Americans decide to adopt either the *shōjin ryōri* food of the Japanese or the *sattvic* foodstuffs of the Hindus they would do well to ponder the fact that these diets grew out of the spiritual needs of peoples molded by a climate and terrain unique to themselves, and that their minds and bodies were formed by a way of life different from our own. Even if the Ohsawa macrobiotic diet followed the regimen of the Zen monks (which it does not), it would be unsuited to Americans, based as it is on the dietary preferences of an older generation of Japanese.

The truth is, there is no such thing as a Zen diet; there cannot be, for it is a contradiction in terms. The minute one proclaims THE perfect diet beside which all others pale, he enslaves himself to it. This is not Zen, which teaches perfect freedom to accept or reject without compulsion or remorse. Every "ism" -- whether it be vegetarianism, meat-ism, brown rice-ism or even Buddhism -- is a hang-up, a limitation on our inborn freedom and therefore not Zen. The serious practitioner of Zen will find that as his subconscious fears evaporate and his compulsive habits disappear, his built-in body wisdom will naturally select the kind and quantity of food necessary for his physical, mental and spiritual growth, just as a small child will instinctually eat the foods right for it if its instincts are not thwarted by the arbitrary will of its parents.

It may be helpful to conclude this article with some statements about the dietary habits of the monastics and myself, since members occasionally write to inquire about them. In the two and a half years the Rochester Center has been in existence a certain dietary regimen has evolved which has wrought great improvement in our health and added impetus to our practice. Needless to say, it does not involve a "perfect" diet.

Wherever possible, we avoid canned or processed foods. The sugar we use, sparingly, is natural brown, and our bread, whether it is baked by us or bought, is whole wheat or rye. Other kinds of donated bread are gratefully eaten. Seasonal raw fruit and vegetables are favored-over cooked, but we do not make a fetish of raw foods. Only two meals a day are served, breakfast and lunch. However, on heavy work days a light supper will be served. Once a week, on Sunday, no food is served at all, but liquids are taken by those who wish them, or perhaps an orange or apple. We do not eat with chopsticks or use Japanese-style lacquer bowls, nor do we eat kneeling. We use American-style knives and forks and dishes and sit on chairs at mealtime.

Neither meat nor fish is served at the Center and eggs only twice a week. In the beginning we did eat some fish and meat, most of it contributed by members. However, as our desire and need for animal foods diminished, we stopped preparing it. Members who had contributed fish and meat dishes out of a genuine but misplaced concern for our health soon caught on and switched to vegetable casseroles. Curiously, there is a widespread, mistaken notion that meat and fish are prohibited by Buddhist ethic, that one cannot eat them and practice Zen. If this were true there would be few Buddhists in the world. I know many enlightened monks and laymen in Japan who eat fish and meat, though those who are most advanced in their practice eat neither. The prohibition is only against eating meat from an animal killed specifically for one's own food. The Buddha himself is said to have died from eating a piece of rotten

meat (some scholars claim it was a mushroom) at the home of a follower. Though he normally ate only sattvic foods, his sense of gratitude would not permit him to refuse it.

Breakfast at the Center begins with fresh fruit followed by a bowl of raw wheat germ to which is added a teaspoon of dried torula yeast, sesame seed, yogurt, and buckwheat honey. (In cold weather a hot cereal like Wheatena or oatmeal is added.) Not only is this mixture nourishing, but what is equally important, it is tasty. While decaffeinated coffee is occasionally available, the liquids usually served are raw milk (furnished by one of our members), roasted barley tea, or herb tea.

We make our own yogurt from powdered non-fat dry milk at one-seventh the supermarket price. Raw wheat germ, which tastes considerably better than the toasted store variety, costs us 17½ cents a pound, while at the supermarket it is 60 cents. The buckwheat honey, organic and rich, is bought in the farmers' market in 5-pound jars for 30 cents a pound; the store price for an inferior grade is 50 cents.

A typical lunch consists of a potato or rice casserole (both brown and white rice are eaten) or buckwheat groats, one cooked vegetable, and a salad of raw lettuce and spinach, tomatoes and cucumbers or other seasonal vegetables. Dessert is mostly fresh fruit. If donated, it may be a cake. We do not eat between meals.

To sum up: certainly for Americans unaccustomed to large quantities of rice, an exclusive diet of this food, whether brown or white, can be harmful. "Pure" food diets, whether Japanese or Indian, are keyed to the available foods and tastes of those countries and not our own. American Zen students will find their practice aided by a dietary regimen more in accord with their own food tastes and habits. Animal proteins can safely be dispensed with if the process is a gradual one. Substituting whole grains, nuts and vegetable proteins brings a gain in stamina and lightness. To make a categorical impera-

tive of any diet is contrary to the spirit of Zen, which teaches freedom and not attachment.

In the profoundest sense, health is more than a matter of eating the right kind and quantity of food. We are nourished or depleted more by our thoughts than by proper quantities of proteins, calories and vitamins. A mind feeding on lust, greed, revenge or anger will poison the most nutritious food, leaving the body-mind vulnerable to disease. In the end, without zazen, which purifies the heart, clarifies thought and invigorates the body, macrobiotic diets, sattvic diets, ALL DIETS, are deficient.

#### THE DECEMBER SESSHIN—IMPRESSIONS OF A BEGINNER

In the cold grey of a December afternoon 35 people gathered at the home of Mary and Alan Temple for the 4-day ro-hatsu sesshin (which celebrates the Buddha's enlightenment). They came from Florida and Georgia, from Illinois and Massachusetts, and of course from the Rochester area for the occasion...35 persons chosen from the 55 who had applied. Fifteen were women, the rest men. They represented a wide range of occupations and all ages from 19 up.

The spacious new Temple home, located just outside Rochester, has three floors for sleeping and eating, as well as a huge squash court that converted handsomely into a zendo.

As a newcomer, I was quickly swept into the bustle of getting settled. It was easy to tell the old hands from the new -- by what they brought and didn't bring. By the swift efficiency of their preparations, the way they arranged clothing and toilet articles for quick location in the pre-dawn darkness. For me the feeling of beginning a tremulous journey into the unknown was quickly dissipated by friendly helpfulness.

My initial impression was of a swirling mass of people being shaped into a functioning team by skillful organiza-

tion. The logistics of moving zendo, kitchen, dining facilities, sleeping and bathing equipment into a distant house must be monumental. The way in which it was accomplished by the monastics was an impressive exercise in Zen practice. I never heard an impatient note in any voice, nor saw an irritable gesture. Only quiet competence and gentleness.

Suddenly..the gong..and opening ceremonies. As a newcomer to Zen and one unversed in Oriental culture or tradition, the ceremonies and chanting are both initially "strange." But somehow "right." All the ceremonies are impressive in their feeling of antiquity, continuity and beauty.

Then the sitting starts. (You knew the rohatsu sesshin was more arduous but an extra five minutes in each sitting period and an hour at the end doesn't SOUND long. That first day it became an object lesson in the relativity of time.)

It is hard to adjust to the new zendo's walls. My mind has all the stability of a ping pong ball. How does everyone look so Buddha-like when they sit? Obviously I am the only beginner. No..a lecture for first-timers leaves a number of seats empty. Good! Maybe they'll fidget a bit and keep you company. Come on..get back to your practice! The battle between determination and habit has been joined. It's a comfort to see that those rock-like, impassive, hara-centered figures around you also have difficulty getting their legs straightened out when the kinhin bell rings.

The first night...and sleep is a furtive acquaintance. What if you didn't hear the morning bell? (How could you miss it, it turns out.) What if your legs really did stop working..maybe they'd just step over you? (So they do it in soccer and that's just a game.) Then it's 4:30 and you're back in the zendo, struggling to keep your eyes open. Gradually it becomes impossible to tell morning sittings from night sittings, lunch from supper, one day from the next. There is only this incredible experience happening, sweeping you along

with it. The mind begins to come into focus. The periods of concentration lengthen. The teisho lectures, the words of encouragement and support in dokusan begin to come together into a meaningful pattern. Deeper and deeper you go, through childhood fears and ancient guilts. Infantile resentments and petty rages sweep through you and pop like soap bubbles against the sword of your koan. Concepts learned long ago and carried like excess baggage are discarded in a flash of insight. The ego makes a desperate effort to protect itself and leaves you exhausted with its frenzy. In the emptiness that follows you see it suddenly as a feral animal, cornered and at bay, snarling in fury at this assault. THIS is what you have been protecting, defending, coddling, indulging, excusing all these years? THIS?? A burst of laughter comes bubbling up from the deepest well of your being, and joins other laughter that has suddenly filled the zendo. It's an "oh of course" kind of laughter. Marvellous laughter. Liberating, belly-deep, tension releasing, affirmative laughter. Unself-conscious, clean, pure, free. Sensei comes in from dokusan and remarks with a twinkle that sesshin have a life of their own...and wonders aloud if this is the sesshin that some had called dead, the night before!

The rohatsu sesshin has indeed come to life and 35 human beings with it. Vibrant life, with a surge and a vigor never even guessed at before. Life with buoyancy, purpose and direction. Now when the kinhin bell rings, you spring to your feet with a new grace and vitality. The sesshin comes to a close and you ask yourself how you could have wondered if it would ever end. It can't end. You've just begun!

I look around at my fellow participants. The disparate group that assembled, miles back and eons ago, is a fellowship now. We have worked...the hardest, most intensive, most rewarding kind of work. We have encouraged and supported each other, contributed to each other, drawn strength from each other. Now, bound by the deepest possible ties strangers have become brothers.

No words can do justice to my feelings. But the one word that is, perhaps, most constant in my mind is gratitude. Gratitude to Sensei for his constant, tireless effort and support, his limitless patience and boundless certainty. Gratitude that he has walked this road before me, and now is here to guide me as I start the same journey. Gratitude to the Buddhas, for The Way, to the Center for being here, to the karma that brought me here. There is a Way! Since the rohatsu sesshin I have known the joyous certainty that nothing in life is more important...or more incredibly wonderful.

Before the first step is taken  
the goal is reached.

Before the tongue has moved  
the speech is ended.

-Zen Verse

#### NEW ZEN BOW TITLE PAGE

The new title page which appears with this issue of ZEN BOW is intended to express not only certain qualities essential to Zen training but also something about the Rochester center at this point in its life. The change symbolizes a new phase in the Center's growth, a new start, and relates not only to the purchase of the building at 7 Arnold Park last August but also to the spirit of rededication with which Center members responded to the fire of October 4, 1968 and set about rebuilding what had been lost.

The more conscious reason for redesigning the layout, however, grows from the confusion expressed by ZEN BOW's readers as to the exact meaning of the title. Does ZEN BOW signify an act of obeisance? Is it somehow related to archery? Is it a pun on "bough" or "beaux"? Similar questions have come to our attention with enough frequency that we have thought it time to clear up the matter. Actually, ZEN BOW was

originally intended to carry three associations. (This was of course the problem. We tried to say too much and ended up conveying very little.) One of these associations was with the act of humility in which we bow to one another in the zendo. Another was a pun on zenbo, the Japanese colloquialism for a Zen monk. We realize now that few Americans have the familiarity with spoken Japanese required to appreciate this play on words, so it becomes merely obscure. The third and final meaning was that expressed by the quotation which will appear from now on at the bottom of page one: that the mind state most conducive to Awareness is characterized by an even tautness; massive composure; attention without tension; samadhi.

d.a. levy

We were saddened to learn late in November of the passing of d.a. levy (he spelled his name in lower case), editor of the buddhist oracle in cleveland, ohio. The anguish with which d.a. felt and expressed the suffering of his fellow creatures was indeed extraordinary and his earnest advocacy of the Buddha's Dharma was unstinting. Our feelings at his passing seemed best expressed by one of d.a.'s dharma brothers, bill wyatt, now in a Tibetan monastery in Scotland:

"dear venerable sensei -

i have just received tragic news from cleveland, ohio. d.a. levy, editor of the 'buddhist oracle', shot himself with a .22 caliber rifle on sunday the 24th of november. he finally got away from the greyness of cleveland and the pretas and hungry ghosts of lake erie. may he have safe bardo journeys. may he reach that other shore. gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha. levy was a fine and beautiful person, he tried in his own way to promote and encourage the practice of buddhism, he will be sadly missed. may the clear light be his guide. yours in the dharma..."

When working on Zen, if one can bring forth the "doubt-sensation" (i.e., intense self-questioning) he is then in conformity with the principle of the Dharmakaya. He sees the whole earth brightly illuminated, without the slightest obstacle. But if he assumes that this is the Way, and is unwilling to release it, he sits only on one side of the Dharmakaya and is unable to cut off the root of life (i.e., Ego). It seems to him that there is still something in the Dharmakaya to understand, something that can be taken hold of and enjoyed. He does not realize that such thoughts are childish. Because such a person has not cut off the liferoot (the cause of Sangsara), he is sick through and through. This is not Zen. If one reaches this state, he should put all of his body and mind into the work and take up this great matter, still (knowing that) no one is there to take it up.

When working on Zen, if one can bring forth the "doubt-sensation," he is then in conformity with the principle of the Dharmakaya, and the whole world turns into a vortex. Immersed in the tossing waves and surging billows, he will enjoy himself greatly. However, when the Zen practitioner reaches this state, he is apt to become attached to this wonderful experience which so fully absorbs him. Thus he will not progress further, even if pushed; nor will he turn back, even if he is pulled down. Consequently, he cannot put all his body and mind into the Work. Such a man is sick through and through. This is not Zen. When one reaches this state, he should disregard danger and death; only then will he conform with the Dharma.

As Master Tien Tung said, "The whole universe (then) becomes like cooked rice. One can dip his nose (in the bowl) and eat as much as he likes"...

When working on Zen, if one is able to bring forth the "doubt-sensation" in conformity with the principle of the Dharmakaya, he will then see that the mountains are not mountains and that the water is not water. The whole earth becomes suddenly complete, lacking nothing. But just as quickly, when a discriminatory thought arises in his mind, a curtain seems to have been drawn before him, veiling his body and mind. When he wants to take up his (realization of the Dharmakaya), it refuses to return to him. He attempts to break through it, but it cannot be broken. Sometimes, when he takes it up, it seems to be there; but when he puts it down, it becomes nothing. I call such a man "one who cannot open his mouth and exhale, who cannot shift his body and change his pace." At that moment he can do nothing for himself. When one reaches this state, his entire body becomes full of sicknesses. The point is that you must practice Zen in a single-minded manner! Your mind must be sincerely focused. When you bring forth the "doubt-sensation," you will see that the mountain is not a mountain and that the water is not water; but do not bring up any discriminatory reflections or arouse any second thoughts...

—From THE PRACTICE OF ZEN  
by Chang Chen-Chi

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