An American Koan:
The Sangha as an Object of Awareness
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In a *teisho* , or dharma talk, given in the early seventies at the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Koryu Osaka Roshi referred to the future of the Buddhism in North America, and an important challenge to American Buddhists. He said that of the Three Treasures, the Buddha and Dharma had been most deeply developed in the Buddhist cultures of Asia. He felt confident that the *Sangha*- -- the community of Buddhists -- would be equally developed in North America. This paper will attempt to examine one facet of the development of a Western sangha. The question is whether 'indigenous' Western psychology can offer a useful theoretical contribution to thinking about the growth of Buddhist community in the West. This contribution might be made through broadening our understanding of "sangha" to include the notion of shared unconscious experience and the recognition that systems dynamics play an active role in shaping and sustaining consciousness.

For the most part, Western psychological models are significantly limited when conceptualizing a distinctly non-Western understanding of intentional community. Broadly speaking, these limitations are to be created by an unquestioned assumption about the nature and reality of the self, and by an historically distorted Orientalization of Buddhist thought and cultures.

Historically, interest in Buddhism within the psychological community has been mostly limited to C.G. Jung, who relied on the completely unreliable Evans-Wentz as his source for translations of Buddhist texts. This resulted in Jung's expropriation of Buddhism as another example of his own model of the psyche transposed to cultures which were alleged to be unapproachably alien. Freud's contribution was oblique, as in Totem and Taboo (1918), a brilliant but equally parochial analysis of religion as a neurotic symptom. While Jung's work has much of value in it vis a vis the risks inherent in taking up a meditative discipline and Freud's work offered a trenchant analysis of the dysfunctional aspects of popular religion, neither accessed Buddhist thought. Contemporary psychodynamic interpretations of Buddhism such as Epstein's Thoughts Without a Thinker ( ) insist on compressing Buddhism to fit the Procrustean bed of Western psychology, rather than confront the profound differences and marginal overlap between them. In the last 40 years or so, psychological language has been adopted as the vernacular of popular Western interpretations of Buddhism, which conceals both the limitations of Western psychology and also the radical nature of Buddhism. The result is the evolution of a psychology that promotes the easy acquisition of happiness, and from the Buddhist perspective, the very odd notion of enlightened individuals (as opposed to enlightened behaviors).

With the possible exception of intersubjectivity and systems theory, Western psychology does not appear to question the existence of an inherently existing, independently functioning self-structure. Whether based on the ego and its dialectical relationship to the id and superego in classical Freudian models, the "ego-Self axis" in Jungian thought, or the processes of operant conditioning in behavioral psychology, Western models tend to ignore a fundamental Buddhist premise. This premise is, of course, that the self cannot be said to exist as an unchanging, autonomous and self-reliant entity. Rather, it is subsumed under the principle of *paticca samupadda*, the interdependent co-arising of all phenomena. The challenge, then, is to find useful corollaries within Western models which can support the perspective of self as an inherently non-existent interdependent phenomenon and to conceptualize community based on this principle.

This is a world-view which, as Anne Klein points out, "implies a very different ecology of responsibility, or distribution of agency, than does Western individualism, where the main locus of power is in oneself" (Klein, 1995, p. 43). Klein argues that Buddhism is coming from cultures where the self is seen as embedded in a network of others, both human and non-human, and, as in the case of Tibet, "persons' identities are not 'localized' as they are in the West and the boundary between self and cosmos is far more permeable. This is possible because the self and cosmos are equally alive and equally populated by myriad invisible beings" (Ibid., p. 44). Buddhism probably has never encountered a culture in which individuality and egalitarianism (and capitalism) have been so widely cultivated. It is easy, therefore, to distort and misunderstand Buddhism as it takes root in the West by appropriating to it more familiar psychological models and by subsuming it under more familiar Western perceptions of social order and (primarily) Protestant values: Klein says:

> Another aspect of Buddhism's appeal in the West has arguably been its optimistic views of what is humanly possible. The Theravada, Tibetan, Pure Land, Soka Gakkai, Zen, and other Tibetan forms of Buddhism, which have been among the most well received in this country, promise the possibility of superior mental states or even enlightenment in this lifetime. Such emphasis on personal achievement maps well onto a capitalist mentality, even as it appears to offer spiritual respite from materialistic goals. (p. 234)

This challenge of creating Buddhist community in North America presents itself in multiple forms, from the ongoing *koan* of Buddhist social engagement to the painful series of organizational and personal difficulties at established Buddhist Centers in the US. In fact, one could think of nothing more appropriate for the growth of an

engaged practice than that of creating and sustaining a Sangha in a culture that valorizes the individual over and against interdependent life.

Individualism is, so to speak, in our bones. It is as Stolorow (1992) points out, the central guiding myth of this culture:

> In contrast with the view that modern man suffers from an absence of myth . . . we challenge a central myth that pervades contemporary Western culture and has insinuated itself into the foundational assumptions of psychoanalysis -- The Myth of the Isolated Mind. (p. 7)

Stolorow argues that this pervasive myth creates an alienation from life that rests on alienation from nature, from social life, and from one's own subjectivity. This alienation serves to defend those who subscribe to it from the anguish and anxiety generated by the direct experience of what is described in Buddhism as impermanence. Thus, Stolorow says:

> Positing the existence of mind as an entity introduces a distinction within man's constitution between bodily and mental forms of being. This distinction diminishes the experience of the inescapable physical embodiment of the human self and thereby attenuates a sense of being wholly subject to the conditions and cycles of biological existence. (p. 8)

In the same way, the idea of mind as a separate entity "implies an independence of the essential being of the person from engagement with others" (p. 9). The literary and philosophical expressions of this aspect of the Myth are found in the ontological aloneness and the darkly romantic existential hero. The result is that not only can we not escape the suffering of impermanence, but we are forced to experience it in a social context that offers no support or validation of this fundamental reality: Stolorow says:

> This isolation, so pervasive and deeply rooted in our culture, provides. . . the specific intersubjective context that renders the experience of anguish unbearable and necessitates the disavowals of vulnerability inherent in the myth of the isolated mind. The pain associated with modern man's alienated aloneness is, in addition, diminished with this myth by the calming vision of personal isolation being built into the human condition as the common fate of all mankind. (p. 10)

Alienation from subjectivity has resulted in its reification, so that experience itself is perceived as having "one or another properties ordinarily attributed to things on the plane of material reality, for example, spatial localization, extension, enduring substantiality, and the like. The mind thus takes its place as a thing among things" (p. 11). One of the purest expressions of this unquestioned Myth is the notion of consciousness as an essentially non-existent epiphenomenon of physiology.

As a result of this historical and cultural matrix, we are often quick to join or create groups or organizations that talk about Sangha but rarely engage in making the interdependence of all beings the object of awareness. Other cultures' insights about communal practice tend to be taken in without digestion, and often become platitudes and clichés about "harmony" or "mixing milk with water," while underlying assumptions about the nature of self and other remain undisturbed. Most importantly, there are assumptions about the nature of the organization itself -- that is, the formal, structural aspects of the Sangha -- which are never examined. While it seems obvious that organizations are made up of no more or less than the people who comprise it, organization is oftentimes reified, externalized, and relegated to the realm of prosaic administration. It is as if the organization that supports the practice is somehow not a part of that practice and, therefore, not open to contemplation. What occurs in the Gonpa or Zendo is often not well connected with what goes on in the administration, the Board of Directors, or the front office.

In trying to eliminate the problems created by complex institutions, some second generation American teachers and students have adopted the strategy of simply eliminating them or keeping such structures to a minimum. While this strategy may reduce the kinds of political and social tensions that accompany the growth of an organization, it does not confront the issue directly. The issue, as we are framing it, is the tendency to dissociate the structural aspects of community life from the intentional practice aspects, and to dissociate those practice aspects from the rest of community life. Sangha, then, comes to mean the support of meditation and teaching, while those tasks that comprise the matrix within which meditation and teaching can occur -- the interpersonal and work-related relationships -- are, as it were, secularized. There are few means to bring a focused, sustained awareness to these aspects of life, save for admonitions to be mindful and compassionate. It is as if we cannot look directly at the Sangha as an object of awareness, but can only talk about it. In addition, the issue is almost always addressed as a matter of interpersonal, rather than interdependent, interactions, which reduces Buddhist practice to psychotherapy and creates justifiable suspicion of an

intrusion of an inappropriate kind of psychology into such practice.

Another way to phrase Koryu Roshi's challenge is to appreciate how difficult it is for us to find a way through all the unexamined ways in which we base our experience of relations on individualism, and to see directly-- rather than merely talk about -- the inter-relatedness of people as in the Net of Indra, the social system. A failure to extend what is learned and practiced in the meditation hall to daily life beyond it, to foster a practice in the community as challenging and focused as practice in the meditation hall, may result in the failure of organized Buddhism in North America to ground itself in the culture. There is no turning to other cultures for models, as this is something that we have to work out for ourselves. As Klein (1995) points out, the Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese Buddhist cultural construction of self is significantly different from Western constructions. One result of the Western construction of self is an alienation from the surround, which is perceived as inert and "other:" Klein says:

> Traditional Jewish and Christian cosmologies understand God as the creator of the world, and the world itself as material. By contrast, the theory of karmic cause and effect, which appears to have been an indigenous Indian concept, understands the external world and one's place in it to be created by one's own and others' past activities of thought, word, and deed. Thus, Western peoples live in a world not of their creation, a world composed essentially of matter. Tibetans live in a cosmos they co-create, and that is itself alive. . . (p. 39)

The question is whether there is a way within western psychology to begin to approach this understanding of interdependence. The challenge is to include and maintain awareness of not only what may be called the "conventional" of individual, subjective experience but also the "absolute" of transpersonal community experience simultaneously, and to see how individual experience and communal experience are really two facets of the same phenomenon. To recognize, as in the Zen work, "Sandokai," that the absolute and the relative "fit together like a box and its lid." What keeps us from recognizing this is our collective tendency to fragment the whole into internal and external, into what is taken to lie "within" oneself and what is "outside" in the community of others. This fragmentation is then maintained collectively, in part to protect the unexamined, unspoken assumptions about individual experience, and the whole process of fragmentation and unspoken interpretation is hidden from view. That which may disturb a familiar experience of individual and collective reality is censored; and, after all, no censorship is as effective as that which operates invisibly.

Organizations, as all other human relationships, are held within the minds of those participating in them. They exist in no objective, inherently existent, external fashion. The values, expectations, roles, and norms of the organization are internalized by the members, who consequently construct their own experience of self and other based on the internalized set of role relationships. Gabel (1991) argues this point using the generic "bank" as an example:

> The bank, for all of its pretense and style, consists of nothing more than a group of people in a room. . . .
> Yet to the people immersed within the socially communicated reality within the room, 'the bank' has a ubiquitous presence--in fact, they cannot, except in very private and quasi-unconscious moments of distraction, escape from their absorption in 'the bank' and see before them simply a room full of people. . . Every object and person within the room, in other words, is always already layered over with a relatively impenetrable symbolic coating that seems to derive from this 'bank.' this entity that appears to allocate to each person a role and to each object a signifying power. (Gabel, p. **XXX**)

One thus experiences the self as it is experienced in a role, and experiences others in relationship to other selves-in-role. Gabel argues that in the conventional, every-day, distracted consciousness of most people, self and other appear only within the confines of the social matrix that defines them in role. One knows one's hierarchical peers through the process of internalizing the commonly held role, as well as internalizing the configurations of roles of superiors and subordinates. "Thus, in the relation of teller-supervisor-vice-president, we discover the ontological foundation of the hierarchy as a form of collective being, a form that I am calling imaginary because it creates the appearance, among people who are in fact simply people, of a top-down ordering that serves to establish each person's sense of his or her imaginary social place" (p. 47), The true mode of being of the bank, i.e., that it exists solely in the collective mind, is difficult to see because the whole process has been reified and mapped onto an environment that would otherwise have no particular meaning. In the absence of such collective reification, the bank is simply a big room with a number of people in it.

The result of this process is complex. A world has been created out of the collective imagination of its members, in which very real authority exercises real control. Gabel adds, "In this milieu of universal otherness, the 'bank' is believed in as a kind of "God," as an object of belief which is invested with authorship or authority for the group as a whole" (p. 48). It is this authority which defines its constituent roles and what is reality for those roles.

Implicit in this perspective is that roles serve as vehicles for consciousness; they delimit what is expected, remembered, and perceived according to the parameters of the role occupied. The teller does not (for the most part) allocate his attentive capacities to events internal or external which do not relate to his work. When he leaves work, the

teller becomes any number of other “selves”: son, husband, lover, father, neighbor, etc. Each of these other socially defined roles are co-created by the social matrix of roles, and involve sometimes distinctly different perspectives and experiences of self. This constant flux of different configurations of self-experience can be likened to an IBM typewriter ball, a sphere covered with the alphabet that rotates to strike the paper as needed. At any given moment, the interface between typewriter and paper is defined by one particular letter, but the entire range of possible letters is always present in a latent form. The particular configuration manifests according to the meaning being constructed. In the same way, the self can be understood to be comprised of any number of possible roles, each of which contains of a series of interrelated behaviors and perceptions. Any particular role or configuration of roles is called forth depending upon causes and conditions in the environment.

These roles are internalized as part of individual development, which occurs within the social matrix of the family. Thus, rather than possessing an “authentic self,” individuality is a fluid composite. As Colman (1975) states, “As the child experiences part of his own potential in each new piece of his mosaic self, he begins to discover an “I” that is constant in all these situations” (p.40).

This argument assumes that human beings are profoundly social animals. In Experiences in Groups, Wilfred Bion (1961) points out that to be human is to be connected with others in groups. He compares this affinity to phototropism in plants; it simply happens as an expression of the nature of its being. One cannot be an individual capable of reflective thought and not be defined by membership, past or present, in social networks. Moreover, since the individual develops a sense of self within the context of a group, he or she is always vulnerable to a loss of that individuality in a group. Metaphorically, the group serves as mother to the individual group member’s experience of being, since it sustains and nurtures individual experience. It is, therefore, also capable of inducing regression, evoking “a psychological state on a developmental continuum prior to individuation and individual identity. . . an individual may in part lose his or her individual identity to a group (Bion, 1961 p. 36). Colman argues that this tendency to lose a clear sense of individual boundaries and to merge with others within a group is a constant tidal pull on the experience of self. A everyday example of this pull is the almost archetypal experience of every child (and adult as well) waiting to be chosen for the baseball team. The wish to belong, to be merged with a group, can sometimes overwhelm individual capacities for critical thought, generating anxiety and the concomitant wish to escape that anxiety.

The wish to escape that anxiety leads to creating a way to belong. That belonging comes into being through what Bion describes as “basic assumptions,” that are unconsciously shared assumptions about the *raison d’être* of the group that may have little or nothing to do with the groups overt task. For example, a religious organization’s overt task may involve worship, community service, social contacts, etc. The basic assumption, however, may be that the organization exists in order to take care of and protect its members. Members therefore depend on leadership to tell them what to do, how to think, and so on. Leadership, in turn, will be rewarded only if it caters to these needs, offering a regressed membership platitudes and clichés promising safety and happiness. Members neither expect nor are expected to actually *do* anything (unless told to); they are there simply to be taken care of. An extreme form of this is the religious cult, where leadership is often charismatic and members are dependent, uncritical, and incapable of independent analysis or action. Colman says:

> The basic assumptions. . . .are unconsciously shared by the group in a shifting pattern contingent on a variety of factors which include the difficulty of the overt task, the quality of leadership and followership, and the psychological valences of the members. These shared assumptions are seen by Bion as regressive, defensive operations used by the individual to cope with psychotic anxieties brought on by the fragmenting, boundary dissolving effects of the group process...
> [Melanie} Klein’s formulations of the primitive defense describe for Bion the regressive states which are defended against by individuals through the basic assumptions, thereby creating the common group mentality. . . .the group can be unconsciously perceived by its members as a maternal entity. . ..’The perception of the group as an ever-waiting, potentially symbiotic mother.’ (p. 35)

The group, in other words, has created a system based on both interrelated roles and basic assumptions; this system profoundly affects the consciousness of the individuals within it. Individuals slip into these systems based on their internalized past group experiences and roles within them, for as Colman (1975) states:

> the stage of group consciousness provides the experiential framework for later group behaviors such as evolve in school age children and continue through adulthood. What is newly learned in latency are extrafamilial group interactional skills. The unconscious analogue of group experience, what Bion calls the basic assumption of group life, are already part of the child’s developmental past. (p. 41)

Jones (1989) points this out in another way when he points out that we are socially conditioned “by the cumulative kamma (in turn socially conditioned) of previous and living generations, creating social relationships, structures,

institutions, beliefs, values, and even nurturing appropriate feelings" (p. 69). Our connection to all living people is therefore contained by how we relate to one another. These structures themselves are inherited from those who have long since departed.

Belonging is a fundamental aspect of our social existence that propels us to define our experience of ourselves based on the roles we occupy in the presence of others. A role, whether formal and explicit or informal and outside of awareness, serves as the vehicle through which we belong. As it is a vehicle or a container for consciousness, it is (social) karma. Whether that role is father, child, teacher, student, rebel, follower, etc., it must be defined in connection to others' roles. One cannot be a teacher, for example, without a student, nor be a rebel without an authority.

This, I believe, is a description of *paticca samuppada*. Individual consciousness is conditioned by the objects -- in this case, those within the social matrix -- it perceives. "It is called into being and conditioned by that which in turn becomes its object" (Macy, 1991). Just as no prime mover or first cause can be discovered in the workings of the universe, no prime mover can be identified within a group matrix. There are only contingent patterns that serve to create coherence by organizing individual experience into more and more complex relationships of interlocking roles. Human social systems, therefore, bear the marks of any natural system: they draw energy from their environment and metabolize those energies in the maintenance of equilibrium. They are open systems in that they import energy, convert it, and introduce the product of that conversion into the environment. As with all systems, they tend to create greater and greater internal order. However, human systems differ from all other natural systems in that they are conscious. As Laszlo (1972) points out:

> the living things we know in our experience are phases in the organization of the biosphere: they are *wholes* in one "cut" and *parts* in another. And their own parts are systems on their own level, and even *their* parts are that, until we scrape the bottom of the hierarchy with the atom and its doubtfully "elementary" particles.
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> The ability of human social systems to survive depends in a very great measure on their ability to adapt to changing realities. . . . What the "reality" is that affects the existence of social institutions, states, economies, and so on, depends not only on what the case is, but on what its members, or its leadership, *believe* that it is. (p. 61)

Most importantly, human systems are at least theoretically capable of becoming conscious of themselves.

As a community is formed and grows, the needs and histories of each individual intersect with the needs and histories of all other individuals and the needs and history of the group itself to create a patterned context of interdependent experience. As the Net of Indra illustrates, each node of that common experience -- each person -- contains within it a reflection of all other role experiences. Individuals move in and out of social roles, but the roles tend to remain--one may be postal clerk or a child today and a CEO or a parent tomorrow -- but given the stability of the structure, someone else will fill the role which has been vacated. This availability of roles that are relatively stable through time is the wider karma of the group, organization or culture as it is held in the mind. The past is contained in this organizational or communal structure, as well as the present.

Groups and communities are therefore comprised of the intersection of all the various roles of the individuals and their predecessors, a complex and mostly invisible network created by and held in the minds of those who belong. The medium through which we as individuals take part in social projects--whether that means engaging with others in large social causes, or in organizing a Dharma group-- is in the structure of the organization itself. We tend to view organizations as no more than arrangements that are inert and banal, serving no other purpose than that of coordinating energies. The fact is, however, that these organizations play an active, central role in organizing and sustaining consciousness itself.

How an organization is constructed, takes in, and is taken up by its members reflects the consciousness of its constituent members, and shapes that consciousness in a continuous, unseen process. As we have argued, organizations exist exclusively in the mind; the part that is represented in physical space is meaningless without the interpretation of these objects by all of the members. This also holds for those objects that are not physically perceivable, such as roles, relationships, rules, expectations, and culture. As structures that are held constant in the mind, they represent the dynamic interdependence of phenomena in the continuous process of mutual redefinition. Everyone's experience of themselves and everyone else depends on constant interpretation and reflection of one another. There is no better example of the nature of Indra's net than an organized human endeavor, no matter how inconsequential its goals or its size.

Our problem is that we don't tend to place our attention there -- we put organizations in the background, and in this way we make them concrete. Our everyday experience of organizations is that they exist independently of us "out there," and are connected to us only in the most formal, obvious ways (like assignments, dues, responsibilities, etc.). Because organizations are peopled, organizational problems are experienced as existing between individuals. When organizational problems arise, they are interpreted as interpersonal, and solutions are based on that premise. These solutions usually fail because people assume that the problems exist within individuals; however, they are usually located within the system. Thus, the Sangha is appalled when a teacher sleeps with students, abuses alcohol, or whatever. It

is not our ordinary way of thinking to assume that a teacher's behavior is an expression of a deeper and wider communal issue -- that the teacher and student may have been *used* by the community system to enact something for the system, which has been otherwise hidden, rather than behaving only for the benefit of its individual members. To assume that issues exist only between individuals is to lose sight of what the community as a system or organism is doing, to get lost in the individual images of teacher, student, onlooker, etc., and to respond from the conditioning of our previous experiences with such roles.

So the past is contained in the very act of belonging; the ways in which we have learned to join and seek comfort, safety, and familiarity are always re-creations of past relationships, which form the unconscious structure of the system. We defend against the anxiety generated by present experience by recreating familiar experience without being aware of this, which keeps the system unconscious. For example, a community may seek (and thereby create) a leader who is omniscient, loving, and powerful, and who will offer protection as a good parent. When such a leader is created/found, everyone's consciousness, including the person who occupies the role of leader, will be defined by this constellation. (This leader, for example, will find it difficult to admit both to him/herself and to others to making stupid mistakes, being fearful, or to being callous or indecisive.) This dependent constellation/basic assumption will be stabilized through time by a series of social contracts that reflect this pattern -- all the ways in which the community organizes its work and social arrangements -- and protect members from the loss of those structures that give them a sense of their identity.

Projections are the cement of these social arrangements, exerting consistent pressure on everyone to see, feel, remember and expect behaviors that are consonant with childhood and with relationship to parents. What is more, those same projective forces will exert pressure on those in leadership positions to think, feel, and act in accordance with the hidden assumption that the community is a version of a family. The positive side of this unconscious structure is the creation of a sense of safety and the hope that one will be understood, protected, and encouraged; the negative side is the loss of individual ability to think critically and to act as an adult.

"In one's immediate circle, me and you, husband and wife, companion, and children, is one constantly responding from the past, from one's own upbringing, and 'raising' one's children accordingly? Do anger, fear, and violence erupt about something a child does because it's a replay of what happened in one's own life? The reaction is not deliberate, it happens automatically! . . . Does one see the enormity of the problem? The burden of our whole past conditioning and its continuity?" (Packer, 1990 p.5).

It happens "automatically" in a community because of everyone's unacknowledged, repressed intuition that if the illusion is revealed as being no more than that, then the family and its promise of comfort -- Nagarjuna's "fairy castle" -- will evaporate. All the ways in which the community has been structured in order to support unconscious belief systems will be threatened.

In his article on the decline of Buddhist teaching "Freedom's Just Another Word", Smithers (1992) refers to the historical tension in Buddhism between freedom and the imposition of moral codes as represented by the Vinaya. He points to the developing shift in practice towards freedom from desires and passions and away from "liberation by insight" as evidence of the predicted decline in the "true Dharma." In light of the dynamics of community, is it any wonder why the shift he points to (assuming that he is correct) from Dharma to Vinaya occurs? Precepts are the means by which communal relationships are contained and modulated; desires represent a threat to not only individual practice but (more importantly) to community cohesion. This notion of Vinaya emphasizes freedom from suffering, while liberation emphasizes the removal of ignorance. His criticism of a tendency for "clinging to moral codes" promulgated in the Vinaya can be understood as actually referring to our collusion to maintain social structures that promise to protect us from fears about ourselves and each other. The tension between freedom and moral codes that Smithers identifies is also the tension between awareness and the need to control awareness, *lest it extend into areas which challenge social defenses*. This is why it is so difficult to look directly at the Sangha, but only talk about it: to look at the Sangha directly -- to see and experience the underlying unity which has nothing to do with satisfying individual needs -- would threaten the unconscious or unacknowledged belief systems about individuality, family and safety that are contained in the blueprints from which the community is built.

When the awareness of social causality that is directly related to individuals' experiences of themselves in the present is repressed, how can members of that community really gain awareness of Dependent Co-origination? In light of the Buddha's injunction that practice rests on our ability to think for ourselves and practice empirically, a culture of pernicious dependence created by social dynamics has sobering implications. It makes it impossible to really follow the Buddha's instruction to be one's own salvation, and to make practice one's own. To call this dependence "Sangha" only adds to confusion about the nature of practice, and ultimately threatens its foundations.

Dependence is not the only way in which Buddhist communities are unconsciously patterned, but it is likely the most common. The invitation to re-create familiar, reassuring and archaic social contexts is a powerful one when people are presented with authority figures whose mystique is enhanced by robes, rituals and a formal distance. Moreover, the larger the community and the greater the emotional distance between teacher and student, the more powerful unexamined projections will be. The injunction to surrender to one's guru or teacher is a dangerous one in this environment, since it can be interpreted in the mind of the student as an instruction to become a de-skilled child. This is the exact opposite of Trungpa Rinpoche's notion of the "spiritual friend." Devotion comes to mean mindlessness, and the

foundations for a cult have been laid. Informal roles, such as that of the student-as-child can be created and maintained by the culture of the community because they are needed; if they were not, they would be discouraged or ignored. In this case, the child role is needed and in subtle ways it is encouraged because it supports the complementary role of teacher as powerful parent. In either case, the consciousness of the individual occupying the role is largely defined by it. So, too, are those of all others in roles which fit the underlying collective pattern. This is how roles serve as vehicles of experience and therefore of karma, karma that is neither individual nor impersonal, but both.

In this light, one must reflect on one's moralistic reaction to a teacher's (or anyone else's) transgressions, however heinous they may seem. When Nagarjuna says that ". . . one sees, with the eye of wisdom, that sin does not exist; if sin does not exist, its opposite, good action, does not exist either," it raises the question: "whose sin?" In a community, "sin" can belong exclusively to no one. It is the manifestation of impersonal collective dynamics. In the conventional, relative sense, the "benefit" of these unskillful acts for others which Asanga (Smithers, 1992) points out may lie in the pressure it creates on everyone to examine their attachments.

To move from a focus on individual behaviors to the existence of the interrelated system underlying them is to move from a consciousness of difficulties to a consciousness of consciousness. It results in the recognition, as Jung (1961) says, that "the last amongst them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself -- that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved." From this perspective, when one looks for the Sangha, one finds oneself; when one looks for oneself, one finds the Sangha.

In light of the profound influence that organizational or communal systems have on the consciousness of their members, when we want to consider social action we must be careful to avoid sliding into duality (by failing to recognize the endless relativity of all phenomena) and thereby replicating the ills we wish to ameliorate. If we fail to comprehend and maintain awareness within the groups or institutions that we create to attain common goals, we will have created conditions that will replicate exactly what we wish to change. If we assume that the organization we create to accomplish a socially valuable goal is fundamentally different from any organization we oppose, we have enacted that process which creates suffering in the first place. All human history will be repeated in one form or another within any organization, including Buddhist ones.

If we cling to precepts out of fear of "sin" (that is, to avoid all error), how can we as individuals learn? If we discount the precepts, how can we judge what we are learning? How, moreover, can organizations learn? If we can stay open to experiencing the suffering, oppression and destructiveness that inevitably appear amongst us, we will be in a far better position to understand those forces as they appear elsewhere than if we preach anything to anyone. The Sangha, after all, is not composed of "Buddhists": it is composed of people who carry within them all the ills and all the potential for healing that is contained within our culture. It is this understanding that can produce truly alternative kinds of social action. In this sense, Vinaya serves as a referent to which behavior -- skillful and unskillful-- can be compared, not as a constraint which forbids behaviors. Mistakes become opportunities to develop awareness. As such, the precepts are allies in liberation, rather than standing over and against it.

In other words, it is not the goal that is of primary importance; it is the means by which we attain that goal. If we wish to improve human relationships and our relationship to all life, then the first and most important task is to create and sustain organizations that are *conscious of themselves* -- organizations whose primary task is devoted to awareness not the awareness of others, nor only the awareness of their individual members, but of themselves as reflective entities. This is the way which leads to organizations that protect enlightened relationships within them. I would suggest this direction for the Sangha, as it may evolve in North America.

This is what I take Koryu Roshi's statement to mean. We don't need a new vision of relationship. How can one create new relationships by an act of the intellect, without those relationships merely reflecting that with which we are familiar? The way to engage in action is not to come up with new ways to act: the way to engage is to maintain awareness in new contexts. Appropriate action will flow naturally from open awareness. In short, we need to see the ways in which we are already related more clearly. Just seeing that changes the way we relate.

The Meanings of Sangha

Sangha can have various levels of meaning. Kalapuhana (1992) emphasizes his interpretation of the early Buddhist sangha as an Order in which monks and nuns would be supported in finding their own salvation:

> . . . the Buddha proceeded to organize the Order of monks and nuns in a manner that reflected his own philosophy. The ultimate goal of the *religious* life. . . is the absence of constraints (*vimutti, nibbana*, etc.). Thus a life of ultimate purity is also a life when possessive individualism should be renounced. . . . It is significant that when the question of a successor in whom the disciples could take refuge was raised during the Buddha's last days, he responded by saying that the doctrine (*dhamma*) he had preached and the discipline (*vinaya*) he had instituted would be their guides. This was a novel idea, unknown to the political and religious organizations contemporary with or prior to Buddhism. It is important to note that the Buddha's conception of democracy was not based strictly on a majority-minority distinction. The underlying moral principle was the welfare of oneself and

> others; the concept of "other" could vary, depending on context. (1992, p. 28)

The Dalai Lama (1991) emphasizes sangha as the development of the Three Jewels within oneself, that is, as an internal state: "For us, what is of prime importance at the beginning is to develop a deep conviction in the Three Jewels in general, and in particular, the possibility of achieving dharma, Buddha and sangha within ourselves" (p. 39). Macy (1991) emphasizes the potentiality for sangha to reflect paticca samuppada in the creation of a moral community:

> How can radical relativity serve as a moral grounding?. .. I saw how [paticca samuppada] underlay everything he taught about self, suffering, and liberation from suffering. I noted how it knocked down the dichotomies bred by hierarchical thinking, the old polarities between mind and matter, self and world, that had exasperated me as a spiritual seeker and activist, and as a woman. (p. 54.)

Klein sees sangha as depending upon the ability of members to understand projective mechanisms as a result of the cultivation of mindfulness:

> . . . being aware (but not critical) of weakness, defect, or confusion in oneself or others relieves the strain caused by trying to fight it or pretend it is not there. Similar to what psychologists call "owning one's feelings," such a move empowers the conscious self. Growth takes place, not without effort, but without the kind of fight that can divorce the self from its own source of strength. When all the voices of self are fully owned, they are less likely to be projected onto others. In this way, self-acceptance translates into acceptance of the other. (p. 81)

Sangha can thus be seen as multi-layered. It includes the interpersonal aspects of respect, support and compassion of members for one another, the intrapersonal awareness of the vicissitudes of self-experience, and the awareness of the manifestations of the three kayas. In addition to these, I would suggest the possibility of the Sangha as an entity becoming aware of itself.

At this point we can ask how we are to go about doing this. As we have been defining it, Sangha means to shift one's consciousness in collaboration with others to create and live in a believing, intentional community. This shift involves no less than a journey through oneself in the moment and in the presence of others, to a glimpse of a much wider and deeper "interrelated mind" that allows one to experience and utilize a reality concealed by every-day social interactions.

Work of this sort involves bringing covert or unconscious processes into awareness, uncovering existing group/community dynamics that, for whatever variety of reasons, have remained hidden. As people begin to sense what has been kept out of awareness by social dynamics, they may begin to feel stressed, bored, angry with one another, threatened, attracted, etc. This is the direct encounter with the suffering and pain created by attachment to self and duality which have been concealed by the social amenities of everyday, automatic interactions.

A large part of this shift of consciousness is the recognition that there is a complex social system which has been operating outside of most people's awareness for most of the time. This system has its own properties and uses its members to pursue its own dynamics, which profoundly influences a community's ability to survive and succeed.

This shift requires studying these phenomena as they occur in the moment. These hidden forces can be brought to reflective awareness -- as the koan of "Isan's Buffalo" indicates -- by perceiving one's own perceptions as they are occurring. Equally, attending to one's own ongoing experience is the essence of practice; for, as Dogen Zenji stated, "to study Buddhism is to study the self. To study the self is to go beyond the self. To go beyond the self is to be enlightened by all things."

In our unique definition of Sangha, attention is extended to shared unconscious experience -- making what is implicit, explicit -- and in particular on revealing fantasy occurring within oneself about oneself and others*. I am using fantasy here as does Palmer (1979); "not in the colloquial sense of an idea about reality which may or may not be true, but . . . a mode of experiencing relations with objects which is usually unconscious." In this sense, unidentified and unexamined fantasy is roughly the equivalent of *makyo*: the Japanese word for illusory experience that functions to limit and therefore obscure the perception of reality. This would also include fantasy in relations between teachers or leaders and students/followers, and how each individual contributes to the processes. These shared collective fantasies are the stuff of cultural myths, and form the core of how the system is organized.

Thus, to first recognize the existence of fantasy as it occurs and then to recognize that it is fantasy is to move from the consciousness of difficulties to the consciousness of consciousness. This is not an easy; it rests on the cultivation of samadhi, and requires the collaboration of others. It requires (at least initially) the perspective of someone who can see these group-level phenomena and offer the description of the unfolding to the group as it is happening. To do this oneself from within an unexamined communal fantasy is almost impossible; there is, after all, no one to confirm that such a shift is not merely an aberration of thought, since "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed are deviants." In

addition, in a dependent culture one has little with which to even begin such a shift, assuming it can be conceived of. Making this shift rests on the ability to experience the evanescent, protean unity of the individual and the group, to elevate one's gestalt from the interpersonal/intrapersonal to the systemic, and to be able to see projective, unconscious processes as they occur within oneself and between individuals. To an individual caught in dependent unconscious assumptions, such sophisticated thought processes are functionally impossible. In a dependent culture, people look to leadership to do the thinking for them.

Acquiring this ability takes practice. It means cultivating an internal emphasis on group experience and how the group exists and is experienced within oneself. It is not, as far as I know, a typically Western orientation to belonging. It also requires a different attitude and method of those authorized by the community, for it is authority in the community that must endorse and protect this way of seeing.

This is a skill that American teachers in particular would do well to acquire. It is up to the teacher -- as a model of leadership -- to accept as a central core of responsibility the task of awakening and encouraging such an awareness in those being taught. The ability to see unconscious patterns of organization and social myths offers alternatives both to how teaching is presented within the community, and to how the community may be structured to better facilitate learning. Our cultural tendency is to view leadership as being compounded characteristics of individual ability: one's charisma, competence, social skills, etc. From the social systems point of view, leadership is more the location of an intersection of individual competence and group/community dynamics. Leadership is *created* by community, even though it may appear to be created or sustained by a few individuals. Thus, the community *as a whole* is responsible to no small degree for the nature and competence of its own leadership, and leadership is always (barring overwhelming outside interference) a reflection of community dynamics. Recognizing this offers opportunities for learning that would remain inconceivable in dependent cultures.

The challenge and promise offered by Koryu Roshi, then, may be to develop the Sangha as a self-reflective consciousness capable of learning through time. As T.S. Eliot (in Palmer, 1979) says:

> . . . There is, it seems to us,
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience.
> The knowledge imposes a pattern, and it falsifies,
> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been. (p. 187)

The challenge is to develop a group practice that can tolerate this openness; one in which one can, in the Chinese definition of ordination, "leave one's family" and its promise of permanence and security, and enter the always-becoming Dharma.

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