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HEART TO HEART: ZEN AND RELIGION: THE ROOTS AND THE SHAPE.

An un-dated teisho, most likely delivered to an English speaking, Christian audience in the mid- or late 1980s, made available to Sydney Zen Center in a xeroxed form.

This text addresses some of the most fundamental and delicate religious issues.

Therefore, it should be read, quoted and analysed in a mindful way.

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Heart to Heart:  
Zen and religion: the roots and the shape.

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Zen originally comes from the religion of Mahayana Buddhism. But the spirit and practise of Zen go beyond institutional religion. The heart of Zen, is indeed religious, and the heart of religion is Zen. What relationship is there between Buddhism and Zen, between Christianity and Zen, and between religion and Zen ?

The roots of Zen are in ancient India. Indian Mahayana sutras and philosophy being at the source and origin. Particularly the 'indwelling of everything in everything else', of the Avatamsara Sutra (Hua Yen Buddhism), and the Heart Sutra's 'form is no other than emptiness, and emptiness no other than form', are the very heart of Zen. The 'heart to heart' transmission of Zen can be traced back to Indian origins, as can be seen in Kukai's response to Saicho's request for Kukai's Indian manuscripts. The straight-backed lotus sitting of zazen is yogic in origin as well. Chinese Taoism gave to Zen an appreciation of, and identification with, nature.

The Japanese contribution was the systematization of the Zen practice and the addition to it of discipline and aesthetics via the Zen arts. As regards the koan practice, 'who am I?' is the well known inquiry of Ramana Maharishi which goes back to the upanishads. Who am I? What is the real? Where do I go? Such is the quest of the ancient Indian seekers for salvation-enlightenment. It was, however, the heart-response of East Asia which formed the heart of Zen,

Zen is sometimes identified with the discipline, or the rituals, or the aesthetics, all of which is distortion of authentic Zen. Zen is

primarily and fundamentally a way of salvation, or of enlightenment-compassion which bursts forth in Linchi's realisation of the concrete human individual as the "absolute" subject & master, or better, the true person of the way, and which is actualised in the great compassion of the bodhisattva "Four Great Vows". Zen as is known today by most, has a 'Japanese-made' body and form. There are also Chinese, Korean and Vietmanese forms of Zen and these cannot be ignored in the understanding and transmission of Zen. Being rooted in these traditions and discipline is vital, but these are not without ambiguity and darkness. The letter kills, the spirit gives life. Spirit, even Zen spirit, cannot live apart from the letter. It is above all in the truly enlightened, authentic person that the letter becomes spirit, and the spirit becomes life-giving word. He or she is the 'ferryman' between the worlds.

The main point made in the essays is - that Zen must be practised simply as Zen, which means, zazen and koan practice, and that Christians can practice Zen wholeheartedly, can lose themselves into Zen and find new life. Standing in the in-between of Buddhism and Christianity, one can come to quite a new perspective and depth. In this journey, a Christian is not a Christian, a Buddhist not a Buddhist: then, the Buddhist is truly a Buddhist and the Christian truly a Christian. As one Christian practitioner put it nicely, - "when I am a Buddhist, my mother hates me: when I am a Buddha, she adores me". 'Putting on' the mind of Christ ; 'putting-on' the heart-mind of Buddha. From heart to heart.

Heart: hsin or shin, can mean mind, heart, self, soul. Yamada Ko-un Roshi used to translate it as heart-mind: in Zen literature it was usually translated as mind, and Zen in the West tended towards the philosophical, intuitive, wilful, mindless, a-personal, freedom aspects. Zen, as Mahayana Buddhism, is the heart-mind of wisdom - compassion: suffering heart, seeking heart, discerning heart, heart liberated, transformed, enlightened, compassionate. This 'heart' is the unity of the human and cosmos and god. Heart is presence and mystery: knowing as well as unknowing: grace and freedom: time and eternity: beauty, truth and goodness: joy, peace, sorrow and compassion. The journey is from heart to heart. From heart-mind to heart-mind is the transmission. Mu\_shin to mu-shin: empty heart to empty heart of no-heart.

How many heart-minds are there? Standing nowhere how do you let your heart-mind come forth ? Middle of the night, the moon is laughing - do you hear ?

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