

March/April 2011

The Meeting of Zen
and
A Course in Miracles
by Jon Mundy, Ph.D.

*When there are no unnecessary thoughts
in your mind everyday is a good day.*
Zen saying

The stillness of the peace of God is mine.
Perhaps we are now ready for a day of undisturbed tranquility.
Workbook Lesson 273 from ACIM

A Little Story

A minister was conducting religious services in an asylum for the insane in England. His discourse was suddenly interrupted by one of the inmates crying out, "I say! Have we got to listen to this tommyrot?" The minister, surprised and confused looked to the supervisor and said, "Shall I stop speaking?" The supervisor replied, "Keep right on. That won't happen again. That man has only one sane moment every seven years."

What is so attractive about Zen and the Course is the appeal they both make to reason and sanity in an otherwise insane world. Both schools of thought encourage us to look to the quiet, receptive mind where we can see without adding any interpretation to what is seen. *The ego analyzes; the Holy Spirit accepts.* (T-11.V.13:1). Notice the Zen-like qualities of the following passage from the Course.

*The Voice of the Holy Spirit does not command,
because It is incapable of arrogance.
It does not demand, because It does not seek control.
It does not overcome, because It does not attack. It merely reminds.
It is compelling only because of what It reminds you of.
It brings to your mind the other way,
remaining quiet even in the midst of the turmoil you may make.
The Voice for God is always quiet, because It speaks of peace.*
T-5.II 7:1-7

As I watched the airplanes fly into the World Trade Center, two lines from *A Course in Miracles* passed through my mind,

*This is an insane world,
and do not underestimate the extent of its insanity.*
T. 14 I. 2:6

and

*Do not underestimate the intensity of the ego's drive
for vengeance on the past.*

T. 16. VII.3:1

According to the Advaita Vedanta Philosophy of Hinduism, Zen, and the Course, this is a *phenomenal* world – a *dream world*. It is "Maya" or illusion. The world is not "bad," and therefore, to be condemned. It is not "good" and to be praised. It is what we make of it. Lesson 268 from the workbook of the Course says, "Let all things be exactly as they are." Zen says, "Be *in* the world but don't be *of* the world." Don't be caught in the world. There is no need to renounce the world – we need only see it as it is and let it be what it is.

*Many have chosen to renounce the world
while still believing it's reality.
And they have suffered from a sense of loss,
and have not been released accordingly.
Others have chosen nothing but the world,
and they have suffered from a sense of loss still deeper,
which they did not understand.
Between these paths there is another road
that leads away from loss of every kind,
for sacrifice and deprivation
both are quickly left behind.
This is the way appointed for you now.
W.155. 4:2-4 & 5:1-2*

Buddha's great enlightenment was that all of life is *desiring* or *attachment*. The ego's attachments to the "things" of the world keep us in illusion.

Words and the World

I had a near death experience in 1976, and afterwards I could not talk for over two hours because I realized that anything I said would be a "construct," that is, an attempt to try to put into words the description of an experience which did not fit into words. Bodhidharma, the legendary founder of Zen says, "Devise no words." They call this state in China "mo chao." "Mo" means *serene* or *silent* and *chao* means *reflection* or *awareness*. It means a mirror-like quality – just reflect. Be receptive rather than projective. In the same way, *The Course* asks us not to judge the world. The line I probably quote most often from the Course is:

Let him be what he is and seek not to make of love an enemy.
T-19. IV (D) 13:8

Zen says observe without comment, criticism or commentary; observe without judgment. *The Course* says, *words are but symbols of symbols and thus twice removed from reality*. (M-21 1:9-10). The *word* starts the *world*. The moment we enter the world of words, the world begins. So it is that an infant lives in the void until they begin to develop words, labels, identities,

especially the identity of “me” and “mine.” Everyone is born a mystic, then we draw the child toward the school and the church and the mystical fades away in face of the material – the social – the personality — the world.

We begin with a construct. We begin to concretize. We begin to build a castle – an ego and a system of belief. With time, it gets more and more solidified. A study of the evolution of castles during the medieval period and beyond shows how they became more and more defensive. And so it is in the development of an ego structure. The more concrete, the more unyielding; the stronger, the more isolated; the more cut off from the whole of life; the more desperate the situation becomes.

To know God is to *live* in God – to know one’s reality as part of God. God is not something about which we can theologize. God is not "extrinsic" to us. God is "intrinsic." God is not in the someday future. God is right here, right now – in my *immediate* experience. The more awake I am, the more I *know* God – not in an egoistic way— that would be impossible. Rather, God is known in a deeply loving experience of Life Itself.

It's Not About Theology

A Christian philosopher attending a conference on World Religions in Tokyo said to a Shinto master, "I don't think I get your ideology. I don't understand your theology?" The Shinto master looked at him for a moment and then said, "We don't have a theology. We do not have an ideology. We dance."

*A universal theology is impossible.
But, a universal experience is not only possible but necessary.
C- In. 2:5*

Zen is not a theology. Zen is a pure, absolute, inculpable religion. Theology contaminates and pollutes. Theology is something about which we may have "debates." People have been arguing for centuries because of "dogmas," ideologies, geocentrism, egocentrism, nationalism – "anyism" will do. Anyism is an illusion. Only, knowledge of the pure heart of God brings us to the truth.

Peace,

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