

THE
WILD, WHITE
GOOSE


the Diary of a Female Zen Priest



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by
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Front cover: The author reading the Scriptures as a junior monk at Dai Hon Zan Sōjiji.

Frontispiece: The author after her ordination ceremony in Malaysia.

Page 474: The author leading the procession at the Jūkai ceremony of Ketchimyaku at Shasta Abbey.

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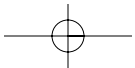
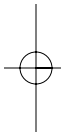
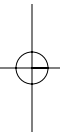
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To all women seeking Spiritual Truth and especially
to those who have ever entered into Zen training.

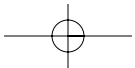
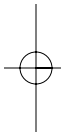
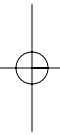


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Preface.

This book may do the reader more harm than good if he does not first read this preface; and it will be worse than useless to him spiritually if he does not read the annotations as they occur in the text.

This book is published purely for the purpose of showing how Buddhist training was done by me in the Far East. The material for this book has been taken from diaries covering a period of almost eight years spent by me in Far Eastern temples. In Books One and Two I describe the first two and a half years of my religious training as a junior trainee in one of the leading monasteries of Zen in Japan, up through my first kenshō and my Transmission as an heir in the Dharma to the Chief Abbot. The training of a junior, although often a somewhat gruelling experience, is to a certain extent like the cultivation of a hot-house plant. Once one has found one's True Nature and had one's faith and spiritual strength established in the semi-seclusion of the junior years in a monastery, it is necessary to be "transplanted" into the world, without leaving the actual monastery itself, for that faith and strength to grow to the point of being able to be of real use to others. Books Three and Four are the story of the growth of a Zen priest into a teacher through the process of testing and trial which six years of the responsibilities of holding office in the monastery, dealing with religious politics, and running my own temple naturally provided. It is

through this seeming morass that each of us must travel if we are to progress from our initial understanding of the Truth to higher spirituality. This aspect of religious training is particularly relevant both to the senior trainee, priest, or new teacher and to the advanced Buddhist layman—all of whom are faced daily with some form of the experiences recounted herein. The particular form which those events took for me was, of course, in part determined by the fact that I was a Western trainee in a Japanese setting; very similar occurrences happened to all of the other Western trainees whom I knew in the Orient. The reader should always remember that the purpose of this book is to show him or her how training must be done in the “mud” of daily life in order to grow straight and strong the stem of the lotus flower of his own spirituality. To this end great care should be taken to read the numbered footnotes which serve to indicate where I went wrong in my own training at that time. This work is equally meant to teach by the example of what *not* to do! Above all, please do not become caught up in the apparent “unfairness” of the actions of some of the people around me. What they did must be included here in order that one can see my reactions to it, both wise and unwise; their actions are *not* published to cause others to become angry and especially they are *not* published to cause the reader to engage in idle speculation as to people’s identities. I have no wish to identify, expose, or embarrass anyone whatsoever.

For this reason, and because I value highly the right to privacy of everyone, I have found it necessary to not only change names and locations, but also years, countries, and, in some instances, the sexes, ages, habits and behavioural traits of characters. Some characters represent a combination of several real people; some real people whom I knew in the East at that time are not represented here at all; some characters have been invented for the sake of reporting certain thoughts which are germane to the teaching. Some teachings discovered *later* have been reported in conversation form *here* for the sake of making a more complete book although they did not necessarily take place with the characters I have indicated. All of this I have

done since I have *no* wish whatsoever to invade the privacy of *anyone*, living or dead—I respect the privacy of others far too much. I have tried to preserve the integrity of the circumstances and events of my training without causing harm to others.

The result, therefore, is a work of fiction in the respects mentioned above. *Events* spoken of *actually* took place, however, and documents, letters, etcetera, mentioned in the text all *actually* exist in the Archives of Shasta Abbey. Out of respect for the privacy and rights of others letters have been paraphrased and identifying details deleted or changed, in consultation with legal counsel. In some instances a certain amount of poetic license has been taken in order to give the events a better flow. Conversations are reported as accurately as possible but not necessarily with the characters with whom they originally took place. My opinions, actions and reactions are also recorded here as accurately as possible but many I have since seen to have been imprudent and would not repeat in the light of my present, I hope more mature, state of mind; it is amazing how wrong a person can be with regard to some situations and events. When events warrant it in this respect, annotations will be found appended to the text by numbers. Taking cognisance of the above information, therefore, *any* resemblance to *any* person, living or dead, is *purely* coincidental.

The terms “monk” and “nun” which may appear in the text are sometimes used for translating the word “unsui,” a term applied in Japanese Zen to both men and women in religious training, and which can only accurately be translated as “trainee.” The terms “monk” and “nun” are misnomers since they carry a connotation of enclosed monasticism from the Christian tradition. In Japanese Sōtō Zen, it is expected that all trainees will eventually become priests, whether they be male or female, although there are some who do not go up the ranks beyond unsui as a result of not completing their formal training in a temple. There are some schools of Buddhism which do have nuns in the more Christian sense, but these are not found in Sōtō Zen. In the interest of keeping the diary as close as possible to its original wording, the term “monk”

rather than the term “unsui,” which would have been preferable but is unfamiliar to Western readers, has been used to indicate both male and female trainees. I was not fully appraised of the correct translation and interpretation of “unsui” until my later years in Japan.

Introduction.

*Flying clouds in a flying sky,
I listen and hear the wild goose cry;
Peaceful eve but it's no use
For I am sister to the wild, white goose.*

*My heart knows what the wild goose knows
For my heart goes where the wild goose goes;
Wild goose, sister goose, which is best,
The flying sky or a heart at rest?*

I do not know the author of this poem but it is highly applicable to my state of mind when I left England so many years ago for the Far East. Somewhere I have heard that a goose is a stupid creature; and it is for this reason that I identify myself with one. The story told in this diary is that of a woman who gave up the world, a good position in life and worldly comforts in order to search for—she knew not what. Whatever *it* is, it cannot be caught and held—it can only be experienced—one cannot realise it merely from reading books. “Remember thou must go alone; the Buddhas do but point the way,” says the scripture. Books do not even manage that.

All searches start with the premise that we have something to look for, something which we have, perhaps, lost. Those who

do not find what they are seeking console themselves with the thought that it never really existed and forget about it—those who find it start looking for something else. Human nature is such that it is constantly desiring something, never being satisfied with that which it already has. I wanted an end to this.

I know now that they who *search* for the absolute never find it for, whilst attachment to desire exists, it will never manifest itself; as soon as the search ceases and the searcher learns to clean up his life and accept things as they are he is *filled* with the absolute for, indeed, it was never lost. This is the secret entry to the gateless gate of Zen—the barrier which all must pass if they wish to understand Zen behaviour and Zen books. It is so simple that no-one believes it and this fact alone results in many, who are otherwise serious and well meaning, abandoning their search and deciding that the absolute never existed at all or, at least, not for them. They go in search of something less worthy and end by becoming mediocre, unhappy or even bigoted.

Although we can ask a thousand different questions and get a thousand different answers yet, in fact, there is only one question and, to that question, no answer that will ever satisfy logic. So the Zen kōans that are given to Zen students, and the questions that they ask, are really one question and the reader must ask it in his own words for I cannot write his own particular formula thereof for him; and he must find his own answer to his kōan for himself, within him, for no-one can tell it to him. When he can live without doubt he will have found his answer without knowing it, and when he has doubt he will never find it for he will again be searching, searching And yet we must always go on. We must, at every moment, find the right answer. This is the “Gyate, gyate, haragyate” of the Hannyashingyō,—the “going, going, going on, always going on”—never stopping, never resting, only continuing without doubt. The doubting mind is in hell. The undoubting mind is in heaven. And this heaven is the Pure Land of the Shin Buddhists and the Nirvana of the Zenist—and the hell is the state that most men create for themselves in the every-day world in which they live.

All philosophers know that if we reach perfection we must end or start again; each time one has a *kenshō* experience one starts again at the beginning although the memory of the first one, translated thereafter into faith, makes each successive one easier to come by. If a Zen Buddhist *stops* his training after a *kenshō* he will be worse off than he was before he had it. So always he must do his *Zazen*—sitting meditation—and, for this purpose, he must turn every action of the day into *Zazen*, whether it be peeling the potatoes, washing the floor or sitting in the meditation hall. If he decides he has finished his training he has ceased to begin it. So no Zen master ever admits that he is enlightened; if he did he would not be! He just keeps going, doing that which has to be done and doing the best he can in both sickness and health whilst life lasts. By his deeds we can tell if he is real or not and by no other means; there are many whose words are excellent but whose actions prove them to be ordinary men of the every-day world. If a man is the living embodiment of the Buddhist Precepts, if he evinces no doubt whatsoever as to the rightness of his actions and if he accepts all the consequences thereof, even when he has been wrong, without demur, then he is real and a sage worthy of being followed.

When I, like the untamed goose I was, set sail from England I had a question to which I sought the answer because that was the level of understanding at which I was then and with which I must, perforce, start. My question was a normal one for someone who had seen the bloodshed and cruelty of the Nazis in that last great and terrible war. I thought my question was profound and meaningful—I was that naïve! My teacher was to tell me, at a later date, that there were three levels at which all questions existed:— the question actually asked, the question in the back of the questioner's mind and the real question which was embedded in his heart and of which he was usually completely unaware. A true teacher's duty is to answer the last of these three and forget about the other two. There will be many who will not consider my question to lack profundity for I was asking why death and cruelty should exist and I was an angry young woman who wanted answers; time was to show me how

wrong I was to do so. For what, in reality, was I actually asking? A reason for being alive when so many of my friends had been killed? A reason for not being alive? Had I a desire for eternal life? A desire for total annihilation? All these questions, and many more, are facets of the question I took with me to the Far East whilst the question I *should* have been asking was:—when was the first arising of selfishness? It is in order to force the pupil to look within himself for true answers to true questions that Zen teachers employ obliqueness in their teaching methods and, for this same reason, the Zen monastery, in the Far East at any rate, trains its inmates with a degree of severity as to create for them a man-made hell. This seeming hell enables the student to find the opportunities that are constantly offered for his enlightenment and then all questions are put into their true perspective rather than possessing their original emergency.

In the diary which follows I give an account of both the heaven and the hell which I created for myself when in training. If the events are looked at singly, or out of context, only severity and senselessness will be seen but, if looked at through the eyes of faith and religion and regarded as opportunities for the discovery of the heaven that is within ourselves, they will be seen to be of the greatest use; what, in the eyes of the world, would be regarded as severe treatment, will be seen to be acts of the greatest kindness. The scriptures tell us that the kindest Kanzeon (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) is to be found in hell for there all opportunities for bettering oneself exist.

Understand that at *all* times I was a volunteer in the temple where I trained in Japan although the early parts of my diary, when in Malaysia, speak of events which were very much outside my control; I could have left the Japanese temple at any time I wished but I preferred to stay. The reason was simple. When I found out what my real question was I knew I had no alternative but to go on with my training for what had really brought me to a monastery was not why death and cruelty existed but why *I* was as I was. Death and cruelty were in me just as much as they had been in Hitler's S.S. troops and I knew that the real reason for my going to the East was because I

wanted to do something about myself and I knew that I was willing to put up with anything in order to change. However much other people disliked me I disliked myself a lot more; I needed to change *me*. It was the realisation of what my *true* question was—what caused the *first* arising of selfishness, why am *I as I am*?—with my petty ideas, opinions, likes, dislikes, hates and loves—not why is the *world as it is*—and the need to have a heart at rest, that made me put up with untold hardships and difficulties. Cruelty and death were in the world because of me and people like me; it was useless to try to change the world; I had got to change myself and, in so doing, the world would change also. Anyone who gives up Zen training is a person afraid of facing himself; the need to face ourselves is the real reason that every one of us comes to religion; they who fail are not willing to accept that the answer to their question is not the answer they wanted.

The above was the reason I went but, in changing myself, I found something more than the solving of my kōan. Shakyamuni Buddha went out in search of the reasons for birth, old age, decay and death; it was his *acceptance* of their inevitability as a sequence of events in time as we know it after he saw his Original Face, i.e. after he was enlightened, that brought him freedom from their tyranny. It was the *acceptance* of the fact that the world is as it is because I and thousands of others like me have refused to do anything about ourselves, and my willingness to do something about me, that brought me freedom and peace along with the knowledge that I must never cease my training if I would improve myself. To be satisfied with the answer to a question when it is something is acceptance; to be satisfied with the answer when it is nothing is acceptance; to be satisfied with an answer that has got rid of the concepts of something and nothing is to accept the immaculacy of Zen, to know one's Original Face, but such an answer cannot be put into words—we can only talk around it until, like the Oozlum Bird, it eventually swallows itself.

