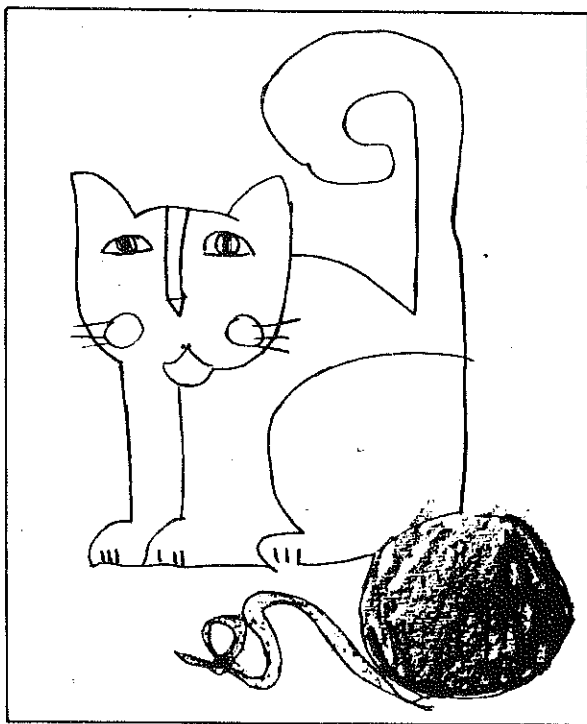


ZEN NOTES



A: I have difficulties because I cannot be like a saint.

H: Then, can you be like a cat?

A: No....

H: If you can't even be like a cat, how can you expect to be like a saint?

--Haya Akegarasu (Drawing "Kitty" by Brian Ozaki, age 6)

When Nature is governing, the king is enthroned; when Nature fades, the king is no more. When Nature is governing, body and mind exist; when Nature fades, body will be scattered. You will attain Buddhahood in your own nature. Do not try to find it outside yourself. When your nature is covered by delusions, you are a sentient being; when your nature is awakened, you are a Buddha.

Compassion is Kwannon; renunciation is a sage. That which purifies is Shakyamuni Buddha; that which is plain and straight is Amida. The human ego is Sumeru Mountain; greed is the ocean; thirst is the waves.

SOKEI-AN SAYS

In the last part, Hui-neng said: "Soul is the earth, Nature is the king. The king dwells upon the earth of soul." He is still speaking of Nature.

This Nature about which the Sixth Patriarch is speaking, is different from our usual understanding of nature, as we might say: "Nature in the Yosemite Valley is very beautiful." Nor is it as we say of someone: "His nature is sweet."

If the soul is an ocean of fire, this "nature" as used here expresses an idea that is like the fire vibrating in a candle flame. You remember when Prometheus went to heaven and brought down the fire to the earth. This fire is Nature--in English, animus. It is like our alaya consciousness, or like the foundation of manas consciousness.

When Nature is governing, the king is enthroned: The king is sitting on his own throne.

When Nature fades, the king is no more. Then everything becomes disordered and you die. If you say that brain is first, mind next, and heart third--then Nature is fourth and Soul is the fifth. That is all that governs you, but they are all one family. Soul is the base, then Nature, then heart, then mind, and last, brain. It is as though Soul is the father-consciousness, and Nature is the mother-consciousness. Then there are heart, mind, and brain. I don't think that Westerners make such an order in the mind, but to understand mind activities it is better to use consecutive order.

The Nature of which the Sixth Patriarch is speaking here is the mother-consciousness. So it would be better to say: "When the Queen is governing, the Queen is enthroned. When Nature fades, the Queen is no more. When Nature fades, the body will die." Thus, the whole world disappears from you, and you yourself will disappear from your own consciousness. Then consciousness disappears and returns to the ocean of Nirvana.

All the beautiful things, the ugly and the good things end there.

From my own view of my own life, I realize that in my youth I was using my brain; later, I used my mind and heart; in these days I am

BOOKS NOTED

Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia

Edited by Richard Cavendish

304 pp. 435 illustrations

Rizzoli, New York, 1980, \$35.00.

The Secret Message of Tantric Buddhism

By Pierre Rambach

180 pp. 250 illustrations

Rizzoli, New York, 1980, \$40.00.

Esoteric Buddhism, or Shingon as it is known in Japan, was the latest and one of the most sophisticated of the Mahayana teachings to be carried from India to the Far East. Like Zen, it sought to present a method of realization here and now, actualizing the radical metaphysics of the Avatamsaka Sutra. But while Zen was essentially a Chinese development, Esoteric Buddhism, as it was transmitted to China during the T'ang dynasty, remained distinctly Indian in form and expression. In Shingon, moreover, the doctrine of the perfect interpenetration of the absolute and phenomenal worlds fostered a system of meditation in which iconography and ritual played a crucial part, leading the initiate to perceive the original identity of the "Three Mysteries"—the activities of body, speech and mind—with ultimate reality itself. This state, often symbolized by the Sanskrit letter "a", is embodied in the figure of the Buddha Mahavairocana and expressed in turn through his diverse manifestations, the rich array of deities, both benign and fierce, by which the Shingon monk embraces the totality of experience within the Absolute.

After a succession of Indian patriarchs, Hui-kuo, the first Chinese master to receive the teaching, passed it on to his Japanese disciple, the priest Kukai (Kobo Daishi), who was then studying in T'ang China. Through Kukai's genius, the esoteric teaching was systematized and transmitted to Japan, where, after perishing in China with the Buddhist persecutions of the ninth century, the Shingon school continued to flourish, becoming a major influence on Medieval Japanese religion and culture and remaining a vital force to the present day.

Focusing principally on the Japanese esoteric tradition, Pierre Rambach, a student of Japanese culture trained in architecture (and, from the evidence of many of the plates included here, a skilled photographer) has compiled a sumptuously illustrated introduction to Shingon iconography and its role in religious practice. Although the importance of mudras and mantras and of the various deities is given due attention, the main emphasis is on the concept of mandalas, and there is a detailed treatment of their symbolic function, with every aspect clearly analyzed and diagrammed. The mandalas, many in private collections, have been beautifully reproduced, and indeed the illustrations are the real glory of *The Secret Message of Tantric Buddhism*, drawn from a

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wide range of sources and perfectly complementing the text at every point.

It was Professor Yoshito Hakeda of Columbia University who first called my attention to M. Rambach's book. Himself a Shingon priest and a life-long student of Kukai's thought, Professor Hakeda pronounced *The Secret Message of Tantric Buddhism* an impressive effort and the best general work on Shingon available in a Western language. Informed readers will certainly agree with this assessment. I had only one reservation: M. Rambach is himself clearly sold on Esoteric Buddhism, and his enthusiasm leads him at times to overstate his case; some of the descriptions of Shingon metaphysics here assume the almost reverential tones of a tract. But overall, this seems a minor drawback in what is a lavish, intelligent and comprehensive presentation of a fascinating subject that has till recently remained inaccessible to western readers.

Another handsome volume, just out from Rizzoli, *Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, edited by Richard Cavendish, is a collection of some thirty articles surveying a broad gamut of mythological traditions, ancient, medieval and contemporary. Each article has been assigned to an expert in the field (for some reason, nearly all the contributors are either British or Australian), but in common with most collective efforts, the results tend to be uneven. Curiously enough, with the exception of a provocative essay by Mr. Cavendish on the mythology of Christianity, it is primarily the selections dealing with the major religions that fall prey to the dry, descriptive approach familiar to victims of college "survey of religion" courses. The articles on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, the Far East and ancient Near East all place in this category. However, many lesser known traditions are well-represented here, and there are fascinating and well-written selections on the ancient mystery religions, the early religious systems of the Celts, Scandinavians, Germans and Slavs, Haitian Voodoo and myth, and religious practice in contemporary West Africa. Many of the chapters contain useful lists identifying principal deities and their functions, and the work is beautifully illustrated throughout. One problem here is that a number of the illustrations are not identified as to date or provenance while others, on the same page, receive more careful treatment, an oversight that seems all the more unfortunate in view of the otherwise thoroughly professional character of this attractive book.

Yusuf

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