

CAMBRIDGE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION: 1957-1969

by Mrs. John Mitchell

In 1957, Dr. Shin-ichi Hisamatsu, accompanied by Daisetz Suzuki and Jikai Fujiyoshi, came to Harvard University to give a series of seminars and public lectures on Zen. Shortly after their arrival, Dr. Hisamatsu was persuaded by Dr. Stewart Holmes, then an editor of D.C. Heath & Co., and by my husband, John Mitchell, and myself to instruct a small group of people in zazen.

My husband and I had just returned from a few months in Japan, where we had spent several weeks in Fukui-ken making recordings at Eihei-ji. We had been sent to the temple with an introduction from an assistant professor of Greek philosophy at Tokyo University (one of my Visiting Scholar tutees at Harvard) to the Reverend Tetsuya Inoue, disciple of Rindo Fujimoto Roshi. Mr. Inoue was in the process of a three-year training period at Eihei-ji and the recordings were made in the temple under his supervision. Mr. Moses Asch of Folkways Recording Company was excited and inspired by the wonderful sounds of the great bell, mokugyo, and dai rai of Eihei-ji, as well as by the impressive chanting. Now twelve years later, a younger generation of students and flower children are also inspired by traditional Buddhist liturgy, and chant sutras as readily and enthusiastically as they sing their own American folk songs. However, in 1957, Mr. Asch's small company was courageous to undertake the expense of this two-record album and long, detailed, illustrated pamphlet. In the stridently conventional and chauvinistic fifties, it did not appear that such a project could be anything but a financial sacrifice. This album, "The Way of Eihei-ji", was the first project of the Cambridge Buddhist Association. The editing of sixteen hours of tapes on fifteen-minute reels, with complete translations, transliterations and descriptions, was not completed until 1959.

Dr. Hisamatsu and Dr. Suzuki lived in Cambridge for about six months, during which time the Association came into being. A room was arranged as a Western-style zendo, with zabuton and zafu but no tatami, which would have been inappropriate in an historic Cambridge house of the Federal period. Every Sunday, Dr. Hisamatsu and the Rev. Fujiyoshi conducted a zazen meeting which was attended by students and others in the Boston area. Dr. Hisamatsu lived at the Continental Hotel, about three-minutes walk from the Association. He gave unsparingly of his time and attention to those who wished zazen instruction and assistance. At the end of their six-month stay, Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Hisamatsu permitted copies of their taped lectures to be made for the Association. Some of these recordings are still played after zazen meetings, as a sort of teisho.

After the departure of the two Zen philosophers, the task of developing the library and conducting the zazenkai was taken over by the Rev. Chimyo Horioka, a Shingon priest and graduate of Koyasan University, and Professor Shoren Ihara of Kyushu University, with the help of Kodo Matsunami, a graduate student at Harvard. The Association was legally incorporated in 1959, and Dr. Suzuki accepted the presidency at that time. Later, Professor (at Hokkaido University) and Mrs. Kotatsu Fujita lived at 3 Craigie Street and

took charge in Mr. Horioka's absence, followed a few years after by Miss Misato Toda from Tokyo University. Without the efforts of these individuals, only one of whom belongs to the Zen sect, but all of whom believe in the desirability of a Buddhist Center in Cambridge and the importance of Buddhist meditation, the Association could never have continued its activities. Kodo Matsunami, for some years in charge of the library, initiated our annual list of recommended and reviewed books and articles.

Between 1958 and 1964, many peregrinating Zen monks and masters visited the Association for varying lengths of time, leaving behind them gifts of calligraphy as well as an imposing array of kyosakus. At one point, the Association had in its possession more kyosakus than there were sitters in the zendo! Actually, we have always followed the custom of Antai-ji, and the kyosaku is not used in our small zendo. In 1961 and '63, Hakuun Yasutani Roshi, accompanied by two young monks from Ryutaku-ji, held two short sesshins in our summer house on Cape Cod. About seventeen people attended the first sesshin. The second sesshin was limited to twelve and was attended only by individuals with zazen experience.

In 1964 Shunryu Suzuki Roshi agreed to join the Association and to become our advisor. His subsequent visits to Cambridge for zazen and teisho, as well as advice, were a source of great encouragement and help to the zazenkaï. Suzuki Roshi has made America his home, he has learned English and has made every effort to understand the kaleidoscopic phenomenon that is the "American Way of Life", all of which particularly endears him to Westerners who wish to live a Buddhist life.

In 1965, Fred Duston came to us from the London Buddhist Society. He and his wife, Judith (a professional librarian), completely recatalogued the library, which now in 1969 includes about fourteen hundred books in English, French, German, Japanese and Korean. The library is open to the public and anyone may take out any book; out of print, reference and special art books excepted. We have sent library books to all parts of the United States, to Canada and to Europe as well. Another service of the library is the distribution of complimentary copies of certain books, of special interest, to people on our mailing list, or in the case of some expensive volumes (such as *The Buddhist Revival in China* by Dr. Holmes Welch, present vice-president of the Association), to libraries, educational institutions and Zen centers.

The Association has published three short pamphlets: *The Way of Zazen* by Rindo Fujimoto Roshi; *A Buddhist Guide for Laymen*; and *The Chain of Compassion* by Daisetz Suzuki. The latter was sent to us by Dr. Suzuki shortly before his death and is a translation of a compilation of several articles originally published in Japanese. Annually, a review of books and articles is distributed on request, as long as the supply lasts. All of these undertakings have been possible thanks to the many generous donations, large and small, from people on our mailing list, some of whom have been corresponding with us, receiving our publications and using the library for eight or nine years.

Since the advent of the two well-publicized Vatican Councils, "ecumenical" efforts, both sincere and superficial, have seemed a necessary development of Western karma. In 1967, Dom Aelred Graham, retiring prior of the Portsmouth

Priory in Rhode Island, requested us to arrange an itinerary for a pilgrimage to Buddhist temples and teachers in Japan. A schedule was worked out by Miss Misato Toda and me, introductions effected and translators found. Beginning in the late summer of 1967, Dom Aelred spent many months traveling around Japan meeting lay people and monks of many schools of Buddhism. The fruitful results of these congenial meetings were published in 1968 by Harcourt, Brace & World as *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist*. In these conversations Dom Aelred, with enthusiasm and wisdom, managed to draw out his companions in such a way as to convey to the reader a many-sided and intimate perspective of Buddhism as it is actually practiced in Japan today, a very worthwhile antidote to the present over-plentiful supply of dogmatic tracts, fabricated by adherents and denigrators alike.

In the summer of 1968, we undertook to arrange a roughly similar itinerary for Fr. Thomas Merton with whom we had been in correspondence, and who was a subscriber to our review of books. However, the proposed trip to Japan was not to be; and Fr. Merton's sudden death in Bangkok ended the pilgrimage of a Christian Bodhisattva.

Buddhism is a way of life and a faith. It is best taught and transmitted in temples and in communities like Tassajara, where its traditional reverence for all forms of life can find expression amongst people living, working and meditating together. A religious institute like the Association is at best a synthetic development, a stop-gap arrangement. Our hope is to see Buddhism in America evolve to the point at which our existence will no longer be necessary.



*The Reverend Chimyo Horioka, the President of the Cambridge Buddhist Association since the decease of Dr. Suzuki in 1966, in the zazen room at 3 Craigie Street. The other current officers are Holmes Welch, the author of *The Parting of the Way* and *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, Vice President; John Mitchell, Treasurer; and Misato Toda, Secretary. The zazen meetings are held regularly on Tuesday evenings at 7:30.*