

Chapter Six

No-Self

No-self (Jap. 無我 *muga* = selflessness²⁴) is the fundamental expression of the living of Zen psychology. Fukushima Roshi asserted this: “One of the fundamental principles so to speak, basis of Buddhism, is that of no ego or *muga*” (January 23, 2002, p. 4). He said that *muga* is “a way of living without ego” (January 23, 2002, p. 4). It is phrased negatively, but the meaning is positive. The negative phrasing refers to the absence of the “small self” that Nakajima Roshi spoke of. This “small self” is variously referred to as the ego, the I, the self-nature, or the egotistic self. Fukushima Roshi explained, “In terms of a kind of ontology we can say that this *muga* means that there is no self-nature. All things are empty of self” (January 23, 2002, p. 4). The negative phrasing also refers to the lack of those psychological activities that are the activity of the “small self,” particularly ego attachment and illusion.

Believing that one has a substantial self-nature is considered to be the fundamental cause of suffering in life. This is the basic psychological illusion that Zen tries to address. Tanaka Roshi called this “the first mistake” (July 17, 2001, p. 5). Harada Roshi said, “The fundamental problem, that’s the self, thinking that there is a self” (May 17, 2001, p. 3). Yasunaga Roshi said that people tend to cling to the ego as the “most important thing” (November 21, 2001, p. 3).

This self-nature is considered to be the base or root of mind, to be the source of ego attachment. Fukushima Roshi explained, “We can say as long as there’s the ego naturally attachments arise in relation with the ego. So we can say the basis for all attachments, including illusion, would be the ego” (January 23, 2002, p. 3). Following this way of understanding the self Tanaka Roshi described his experience:

From my experience before I became a monk I had thought if I keep my way of being of ego, *jiga* (Jap. 自我 = self, ego). It was a centric way of life, egocentric thought. If we keep that base we are able to do anything our attitude should contain a lot of problems. Because the base is egocentric. So we should change the base. So radical mental revolution. (July 17, 2001, p. 4)

In this same way Nakajima Roshi spoke of “killing” the small self: “In Zen preaching it is a very common theme that first you kill your self completely and then after killing your self you re-originate again, rebirth, reborn” (June 26, 2001, p. 4).

The positive meaning of *muga* is the living of what Nakajima Roshi referred to as the “great self,” that which is born when the small self is killed. This is the person who understands the “gray area” that Harada Roshi spoke of and the “*mu* 無” that Fukushima Roshi spoke of. Actually, it is more than understanding, it is living and experiencing this “gray area” or “*mu* 無.” This is non-separation from causality, being or becoming causality as oneself, as one’s identity. Fukushima Roshi explained, “We can say it is the self which has cut off ego that is functioning, that is alive. There is a very simple expression in

Japanese, it's the self of "mu 無," which might sound strange in English, but it's very natural in Japanese" (January 23, 2002, p. 4).

The English translation tends to emphasize the negative aspects on *muga*. "Mu 無" is translated as "no" or "nothing", which are not generally understood in English to have a positive meaning. This is why Fukushima Roshi prefers to use the words "mu 無" and *muga*, which have both positive and negative connotations. He explained:

I like just to use the term "mu 無" or in this case *muga* rather than to translate it as no ego because there are many misunderstandings that can arise. It's not just a negative meaning. It means that there is no ego. There is no self-nature. All is empty of self and yet you can say by cutting off the ego there's a way in which the way you are living, the way in which you're living without ego, but it's actually a very positive thing. It's a way of living without ego. (January 23, 2002, p. 4)

I will follow Fukushima Roshi's lead and use *muga* instead of no-self for the balance of this report.

What is very significant for this report about *muga* is that it is "a way of living without ego." It is an experience, a lived reality, not just something that is theorized or debated about in academic writings or romanticized in Western New Age culture. This chapter will attempt to explicate the psychological aspects of this living of *muga*.

Experiences of No-Self

The following are the primary ways that the *roshis* described their living of *muga*:

Nakajima Roshi: Talking in terms of the experience it is difficult to explain by words. Like this food you can tell the taste of a dumpling as long as you eat it. It's something like this. So only you experience the same experience you will understand it. (June 26, 2001, p. 6)

Nagashima Roshi: In doing the Zen meditation practice, of course a certain--I felt non-emotional, not clear movement, the neutral, I experienced the neutral conditions of mind, but at the same time I also experienced certain visions coming up like the water coming out of the spring. However, I didn't pick out one vision out of all of the visions. Just throw them away, the water, the river goes downward. So one expression says just get rid of the certain pails, so the bottomless pails, this is the activity of the mind. So of course the mind activates all the time while we are living, so we cannot stop the activities of the mind. What is important is how to let everything flow away. (February 20, 2001, p. 25)

Yasunaga Roshi: Turning or ... I don't speak English so well. A burst, explosion. Like a balloon, if you concentrate on one thing and one thing, one after one, I mean like if you blew air into this balloon, this balloon will be called *samadhi*.²⁵ So something happens from outside, at that time it will be burst. ... Maybe it's the burst of your old ego. (November 21, 2001, p. 2)

Tanaka Roshi: But I tried to sleep for two hours to rest my body and throat, but I couldn't sleep because my cough continued without gap. So they (the other monks) talked I should be died because I couldn't sleep anymore, but my state of mind at that time, my pleasure grew up more and more, grew up more and more. So one day when I reflected myself I recognized my I couldn't find myself. My small ego was disappearing completely, completely. Yes. That is a kind of complete experience. I couldn't find myself. I seeked to myself, but I couldn't find. A great pleasure grew up, occurred. (January 18, 2001, p. 5)

Harada Roshi: Well, in my case, I heard the question, then I thought the question to myself, so I could say that, if we say in terms of six senses it happened through the thought of consciousness, thinking, but, well, the other five senses were there too. It's not as if only the thought process is liberated and the others are somehow not. It's happening all at once. ... In case of consciousness it's through consciousness that we actually understand things, which is to say, as in my case, by just one thought, it's all connected there. If you become that one thought, everything else comes with it. (November 14, 2000, pp. 6-7)

Fukushima Roshi: I can see from my first Zen experience as I go through and get older and older the way that it deepens and matures. It should be that way. It's no good if it doesn't continue to deepen. ... The real, the height or depth of this *satori* would be

where one forgets it completely. There's not even any trace of it. There's that kind of depth to the *satori*. (January 23, 2002, p. 2)

Limitations of the Intellectual Mind

Nakajima Roshi spoke of the difficulty in describing his experience of *muga*. He said that *muga* couldn't be understood intellectually, but only by actual experience. Any attempts to describe it fall short of the mark. Regarding other aspects of Zen experience he said the same thing. For example, when speaking of “*mu* 無,” he said, “We have to transcend the thinking and the not thinking. We call it empty, *ku* (Jap. 空), nothingness. This statement, emptiness or nothingness, cannot be grasped by words” (June 26, 2001, p. 7). The words that he used to describe life, as was discussed in chapter two, reflect this way of thinking that Zen experience cannot be understood intellectually. An example of this was his description of life, which was quoted in chapter two: “Number one, impossible to think, impossible by the intellectual approach. The second, impossible to explain, and the third, impossible to measure the value, immeasurable” (July 10, 2001, p. 1). He asserted that this was because “the life can't be explained. Life is beyond our human mind, human intellect, and any wisdom we have” (July 10, 2001, p. 4).

Nakajima Roshi was asserting a belief in the limitations of the intellectual mind. This is a common belief among Zen practitioners. Fukushima Roshi expressed the same belief when he said, “Zen is not simply denying the intellect. There is value in understanding it, but also a limit that must be made clear” (January 23, 2002, p. 3). Fukushima Roshi is in a unique position to evaluate the

intellectual mind, because he has completed the requirements for a Ph.D. from Otani University in Kyoto. He asserted, “Modern man, modern people, are so wrapped up with the intellect that there’s a real tendency to think that they can completely grasp something intellectually. In this case (Zen practice) it doesn’t work” (January 23, 2002, p. 2). Tanaka Roshi explained that thinking has its value:

We Zen Buddhists, Zen masters, never want to deny, refuse human thinking. We Zen masters, the ultimate concern of a Zen master, is to use human thinking so easily, so naturally. So if we attain to true enlightenment, like Zen master Joshu,²⁶ our expression of thinking becomes an expression of beyond thinking, expression of no mind. (April 26, 2001, p. 4)

Harada Roshi asserted that not only does thinking have value, it needs to be exercised:

Some people hear that it’s not possible to understand things by means of thinking so they say, well, I’m just going to give up thinking. No, I say no, the brain, it’s like a muscle and it needs to be exercised to keep it healthy. Otherwise it atrophies. (November 14, 2000, p. 8)

Zen practitioners understand the intellectual mind as being a tool of discrimination. It distinguishes the differences between things. What it distinguishes is the form of the phenomenon distinct from other phenomena. Tanaka Roshi said that one of the limitations of this function of mind is that it tends to concretize the forms it distinguishes. He said while talking about the table between us, “The essence, the true essence of this, is very difficult to utter, to say. Because if we say with a word, we’ll fix it. Because it is changeable” (April 26, 2001, p. 2). This is the tendency to believe that phenomena are substantial when in reality they are not. This is particularly relevant to

psychology and the tendency to identify with a substantial self. People tend to believe they know who someone is or who they are. Harada Roshi asserted that fundamentally this is not possible. He talked about someone who has committed a crime:

Things are always changing. That's why we say that it isn't possible to say that person in the sense that you categorize them as being a certain way. Even someone who has committed a crime, let's say he did it yesterday, now that person has changed, he's no longer the same person he was yesterday. That crime itself no longer exists, so if you're really living in the moment you can say that. That's why we can't really say that this person is a good person; this person is a bad person. You cannot say absolutely. (November 14, 2000, p. 13)

A second limitation is that people tend to believe the separation from things that they perceive through discrimination as being an ontological reality. Again, while talking about the table, Tanaka Roshi said, "Because of our thinking we separate our mind from the thing itself. For example, if we call this a table, we separate ourselves from this. ... So this is a problem of human thinking" (April 26, 2001, p. 4). This is the problem with perception that was discussed in chapter two. Through perception and discrimination separation is understood to be ontological. Harada Roshi explained:

In Buddhism everything is one, so there is only consciousness we could say, but it's the self that perceives consciousness, which then starts to think about, well, it's situated here and there and then all kinds of discussions arise. Then there are two things. (November 14, 2000, p. 7)

An example of this understanding of the intellect in practice is the following interchange I had with Yasunaga Roshi when I was trying to understand a point he had made:

Reggie: It's very interesting. I understand what you're saying.
I'm just

Yasunaga Roshi: Digesting.

Reggie: Digesting it, yes. Now as I'm thinking ...

Roshi: Do not digest, just feel.

Reggie: Just feel it. Thank you.

Roshi: Isn't that right? (May 8, 2001, p. 17)

Both of these limitations of the intellect, the tendency to substantiate or reify what is discriminated and the tendency to perceive things as being separate from the perceiver, reflect a tendency of the intellect to try to understand in a black and white way, this and not that, rather than the "gray" way that Harada Roshi spoke of. Zen acknowledges the complicated aspect of mind. Zen asserts that mind cannot be said to be absolutely this or that. Rather than trying to define mind, Zen focuses on trying to be sensitive to mixed nature of mind. *Muga* as defined by Fukushima Roshi both is and is not. Unconsciously it is possible for a person to both love and hate something. Intellectually it doesn't make sense, but that is the nature of mind and of life.

Nakajima Roshi strongly emphasized that experience and not intellect was necessary for understanding. He said about his explanation of "*mu* 無," "In Zen language we say this statement cannot be understood by words. Only your own experience is the way" (June 26, 2001, p. 7). Fukushima Roshi said the same thing:

It's important for people who are not going through the experience themselves not to mistake some understanding, conception they have in their mind about what "*mu* 無" is with the experience itself. They're not the same thing. So it's completely different, thinking what "*mu* 無" is and the experience that "*mu* 無" is. Thinking "*mu* 無" and being "*mu* 無" are completely different. (January 23, 2002, p. 2)

Harada Roshi emphasized this also. When I was asking him questions about his enlightenment experience, he responded at one point, “In any case, I can say that I returned to the origin, but even if you think and think about that, that’s not something that you can understand I think” (May 17, 2001, p. 2).

Tanaka Roshi expressed this viewpoint when he spoke of an academic scholar who came seeking to understand Dogen, the founder of the Soto Zen sect in Japan:

He asked me to explain for him about Dogen thought. But I said to him, to understand Dogen experience it’s very difficult for you without Zen experience, Zen training. So even if you are able to understand Dogen thought in your head, what does it mean?
(July 17, 2001, p. 3)

Tanaka Roshi often answered my questions by turning me to my own experience when he thought I was becoming too intellectual. One example is this response to some questions about the nature of mind: “But this I think is most important. You should attain your own experience. Form your own experience. You should understand everything. This is the way of the true religious person. True way of thinking” (July 17, 2001, p. 3). I asked him in our first interview how he recognized the disappearance of his “small self” and he responded, “If you attain to that place, you could recognize that experience naturally. ... Without that experience you cannot recognize. ... A man who has a good experience can recognize immediately” (January 18, 2001, pp. 1-2). Thus, Tanaka Roshi responded to my questions in a very similar way to that of Nakajima Roshi. Both refused to try to describe their experience of *muga* and instead urged me to try to my own *muga* experience.

Bernard Faure writes very critically about this anti-intellectual and experiential tendency of Ch'an masters. For example, Faure writes:

Chan substituted its own empty space for the multiple and hierarchized places of the 'sacred space' of local cults. In similar fashion, it affirmed the 'unlocalizable' character of no-thought against the structures of thought or consciousness, by essence localized and localizing. Thinking is actually *taking place*--a lot of place. Consequently, to think is to be assigned to a specific place. ... As soon as he (the Chan master) takes refuge in nonthinking, nonabiding, that is, in his true unlocalizable nature, however, he becomes unpredictable, properly *aporetic*: no path leads to him anymore. (1991, pp. 68-69, italics in original)

Faure is asserting that the anti-intellectual and experiential tendency of the *roshis* is actually just another form of thought and that Zen masters have not acknowledged their own humanity in this way. Rather, he asserts that what Zen masters have done is to use this way of talking for their political and social advantage:

He (the Chan master) has left behind all ontological or psychological structure and remains (in his nonabiding way) in the undifferentiated (absolute?) realm. Ironically, this capacity to pass beyond (or rather to bypass, since passing beyond still implies a gradation) the entire hierarchy of being (and nonbeing) is what ensures him his eminent position in the social hierarchy. (p. 69) In such strategies, the master is sufficiently assured of his position in the hierarchy to be able to deny the hierarchy, thus cumulating the profits tied to the hierarchy and its symbolic denial. (Faure, 1991, p. 20)

I don't doubt that Zen priests have engaged in this type of activity historically. However, to dismiss the entire validity of the Zen tradition as Faure appears to do, as in the following passage, I think is a mistake:

The asymmetry between the terms sudden and gradual is striking: Chan theory gives an inverted image of reality (which is the very definition of ideology), to the point where one could speak of a 'linguistic taboo' concerning gradualism: it is never discussed,

although it remains unchallenged in actual practice. The entire Chan tradition seems to hinge on this scapegoat mechanism. (Faure, 1991, p. 49)

While I think it is important to be aware of the limitations of Chan and Zen, to assert that “the entire Chan tradition seems to hinge on this scapegoat mechanism” I think is an exaggeration. Faure (1991) writes about Chan, “the technical (and later aesthetic) specialization served to impose an elitist character” (pp. 20-21). I agree that Chan and Zen have had an elitist history. Hierarchical organization, as in the distinction between the enlightened Zen master and his unenlightened students, has been an integral part of Chan and Zen. However, this does not invalidate all of Zen. The *roshis* have testified to the validity of their experience. Furthermore, their willingness to participate in this study indicates their willingness to make themselves available and to address the elitist history of Zen. I think it is important to understand that both while the anti-intellectual and experiential orientation of Zen can be used for self interest and egotistical purposes, this orientation also has great value. This value is what I am trying to describe. Ironically, Faure, while criticizing the elitism of Chan and Zen, himself writes in a very elitist way. His intellectual style of writing is very difficult for an ordinary person like myself to comprehend fully. I have to read his writing with a dictionary in hand. In this specific context, that of the anti-intellectual and experiential orientation of Zen, while this can be used for self interest and egotistical purposes, there is also great value in this orientation. This value is what I am trying to describe.

This dissertation clearly falls within the limitations of the intellectual mind that these *roshis* are speaking about. I am writing on the basis of the *roshis*' descriptions of their experience. My methodology, by trying to return to the *roshis*' experience itself and include my own Zen experience, is designed to limit intellectual errors. However, basically this dissertation is still an intellectual endeavor and the limitations of this as the *roshis* understand it need to be clear.

The Stream of Consciousness

Nagashima Roshi in his quote at the beginning of this chapter was describing his experience of what he called “unconditional life” (February 20, 2001, p. 11) during Zen training. He described here his experience of the “flow of life” that was discussed in chapter two and of the non-attachment that was discussed in chapter three. About his Zen training he said, “I was trained in how to wash away or, how do I say, how to throw away the so-called delusions in my mind. So I don't have the deep integrations” (February 20, 2001, p. 26). He was trained to let go, not to consolidate. Integration was not necessary. That appeared naturally when he let go of his personal self.

This is how Nagashima Roshi understood *muga*--being in harmony with the “flow of life” or being one with causality and living non-attachment. He expressed the essence of this when he said, “So of course the mind activates all the time while we are living, so we cannot stop the activities of the mind. What is important is how to let everything flow away” (February 20, 2001, p. 25).

Mind is always active. It is never a void. Feelings and thoughts are continually appearing in consciousness. Personally I have always been impressed by how this activity never stops. Even when I am very sleep deprived, this activity continues.

There are some Buddhist expressions that reflect this understanding of mind. One is *hachi-oku-shisen-shi*, (Jap. 八億四千思), which Sonja Arntzen translates as “eight hundred million four thousand thoughts ... It conveys the irrepressibility and limitless of thoughts” (Arntzen, 1986, p. 165).

This understanding of mind as a stream of consciousness is basic to Abhidhamma and Yogacara thought. For example, Vasubandhu (4th century/1984) wrote in the *Trimsika-karika*, verse 16, “The co-arising of a mental consciousness takes place always except in a non-cognitive state, or in the two attainments, or in torpor, or fainting, or in a state without citta” (p. 187). This means that the cognitive operation of mind functions at all times like a stream, with the exception of the five states of mind that Vasubandhu cites here.

This idea is not foreign to Western psychology. William James (1890/1961a), for example, wrote in *The Principles of Psychology* about the stream of thought. He wrote that consciousness is continually changing and that the same state of mind is never had twice. He also stated that there is continuity to this process so that there is an impression of duration, but that change still occurs.

Nagashima Roshi is asserting that what he wants to do is not to stop thoughts, not to detach, as this is impossible to do. Rather, what he wants to do

is to not interfere with the natural functioning of causality, to let causality be as it is, to let thoughts occur naturally. He thus lets the activities of mind arise and then lets them pass away.

Nagashima Roshi did speak about an active role in this “flow of life.” Regarding making decisions he said he tries very hard to make good decisions. This active role, however, he understands within this “flow of life,” as was discussed in chapter two. His active role is thus always within this greater “flow of life.” This is his “way of living” *muga* – participating actively, but always letting go and paying attention to that of which he is a part.

Realization of No-Self

Yasunaga Roshi in his quote at the beginning of this chapter spoke of how Zen practice serves this realization of *muga*. He said that when a practitioner concentrates in Zen meditation, something happens “from the outside” and the old ego “bursts” or “explodes.” In chapter two this “something happens from the outside” was discussed. This is the belief that a person has to do their best, but that realization of the “big self” occurs through conditions and circumstances outside a person. Yasunaga Roshi said, “So your active effort is in vain. However, you have to do it” (May 8, 2001, p. 20). In this chapter I want to focus on this “bursting” or “exploding” and the realization of *muga*.

Yasunaga Roshi described the “old ego” as a shell or container that surrounds the self. He said, “In this case the balloon, the shell balloon is ego” (November 21, 2001, p. 2). Generally this “old ego” is understood and

experienced as an existence, as a substance. However, from the perspective of *muga* it is a phenomenon, something that exists through conditions and attachment without an enduring separate self. Yasunaga Roshi said, “I told you ego is not existence. It’s phenomena. We tend to think of ego as a fixed existence, but this is not true from that perspective” (November 21, 2001, p. 2).

Yasunaga Roshi said that this ego fixed substance is a “subject,” the psychological place from which all experience is understood. Everybody operates in life from this subject, so in this sense everyone has an ego. However, this subject is not a substance, as is commonly believed, but a construction and an activity. Yasunaga Roshi explained, “Ego is not consciousness. Ego is something which you build up by yourself. A kind of subject. ... this ego that is a product of old habits and thoughts” (November 21, 2001, p. 2). When this subject, this ego, is lived as a substance, then this is the “old ego” that he refers to.

Muga according to Yasunaga Roshi is the realization that the “old ego” is an illusion. He explained about the “old ego”:

Maybe you try to find out the meaninglessness. We tend to cling to the concept of ego. We try to keep this, protect this. But this is not such a valuable thing, because this is a phenomenon. We all human beings cannot keep one phenomena forever.
(November 21, 2001, pp. 2-3)

When the “old ego” is understood to be meaningless, experientially according to Yasunaga Roshi a “burst” or “explosion” occurs. He said that during a person’s Zen practice this “bursting will take place three times or four times or five times, not just one time” (November 21, 2001, p. 4). He explained

that this “bursting” was a turning to wisdom, a moment of deep understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena. He said, “So this is *samadhi*,²⁵ so therefore like one paper, you turn – the flip side would be called *prajna* (Skt., Jap. *chi-e* 知恵), wisdom. So this moment of wisdom, turning moment, will be called *satori* experience” (November 21, 2001, p. 1).

Muga is the experience of one’s self as a phenomenon without substance. Yasunaga Roshi said, “*Muga* is one of the phenomena. So, as I told you before, *muga* is a kind of situation” (November 21, 2001, p. 1). *Muga* is not a solid existence. The experience of this is one in which the sense of a solid self “bursts.” This is the experience of not-knowing that other *roshis* spoke of. Therefore, he explained:

We only understand the meaning of *muga* after that moment of *muga*. So you cannot say now I am in *muga*. You cannot tell this, because at the time ... (Reggie: Because of the nature of consciousness?) Yes. Other times you are not in total *muga*, no, not at all, you see? So in this case *muga* is the preparation of the *satori* experience. (November 21, 2001, p. 1)

Here he speaks of *muga* as a situation in which all of the separative faculties of mind, such as discrimination and thinking, cease and a person is then able to experience the unity of everything. This is the *satori* experience. This is a different way of speaking of *muga* than that of the other *roshis*, who spoke of it as a way of living rather than an experience. However, I think the result is the same. *Muga* is the dropping of the “old self” for Yasunaga Roshi and his life was changed after that experience.

Nakajima Roshi also spoke of the “small self” as a shell that limited the “great self” and needed to be broken. He said:

Of course the self is an absolute. Self is absolute. Even though the self is absolute, we have to break the shell of the self that covers up the inner self. Then you will find out the real working or activity or the life itself. (July 10, 2001, p. 3)

However, rather than speaking of the “small self” bursting, he spoke of “breaking” or “killing” the “small self,” as he was quoted earlier in this chapter. Rather than the self expanding to the universe, it vanishes and is replaced by a new self. He said, “In order to awake the great self the small self should be killed, be perished” (June 26, 2001, p. 4). The metaphors are slightly different, but I think that in practice what they are describing is the same.

Tanaka Roshi spoke of how his small ego disappeared. Actually it is probably more accurate not to use the word disappear because the small ego is not a substance, but an illusion. He explained, “In fact there is no ego. So this is not an exact expression. Not disappeared” (July 17, 2001, p. 6). It would be more accurate to say the illusion of the small ego disappeared.

Tanaka Roshi said that one day he just realized that his small ego was gone. This was something that he understood intuitively and did not need verification from others. I asked him how he recognized this in his students and he responded:

I have my own experience, so I can recognize immediately, directly. ... Religious intuition. Intuition. But in fact if my disciple attains true, to abandon attachment, they know themselves. They don't have to meet my So as long as you need my testification, that means you don't attain to the last state of mind. (April 26, 2001, p. 7)

Tanaka Roshi said this was not something that he tried to make happen. He said it occurred “naturally and unexpectedly” when a he “became” “*mu* 無:”

Then a mental pleasure grew up naturally, unexpectedly. ... I didn't try to get that kind of pleasure. I didn't try to cut my ego. ... I tried to become a “*mu* 無,” a simple “*mu* 無” itself. I never think about “*mu* 無” itself. I only try to become “*mu* 無” itself and fulfilled my body and mind to “*mu* 無.” My small body and mind disappeared and my whole energy spread out to the whole universe. (July 17, 2001, p. 10)

He emphasized that a person should not worry about their small ego, illusions, ego attachments, etc., nor should they to be *muga*. He said, “Never try to get purpose, or, never think about the result” (January 26, 2001, p. 22). Just focus on “becoming” “*mu* 無.” As Dogen was quoted in chapter three, “If you wish to attain “suchness,” practice “suchness” immediately” (1227/1998, p. 116).

This “becoming” “*mu* 無” is I believe essential to understand. What does “becoming” something mean psychologically? Tanaka Roshi gave some hints in his descriptions. Previously he was quoted, “My whole energy spread out to the whole universe.” Another description was about a train ride:

One time when I was riding the train I concentrated on “*mu* 無.” The woman who was sitting beside me, she laughed at me, but for me that was no problem. I concentrated my mind more and more. My mind become pure and pure and pure. My small self disappeared. Everything become clear, clear. (January 18, 2001, p. 1)

When his small self disappeared, mentally he became very clear. The sense is that self delusions disappeared and his mental functioning improved. A third description was given while talking about a poem:

One of the greatest Japanese Zen masters, Daito Kokushi, made a *kanshi* (Jap. 漢詩 = Chinese poem), the content of it is this: The attitude of the master Nansen and his dharma disciple Joshu is so natural, like a river stream and white cloud. I like this poem. All their attitudes were very natural. ... Very natural, without human

thinking. ... Without attachment, without consciousness. This is what I want to be. (April 26, 2001, p. 3)

Without consciousness and without human thinking means without the point of view of the small self, being not conscious of a separate self.

Tanaka Roshi explained what he meant by “naturally”: “Not consciously, naturally. That is most important. Naturally means from my own experience. If I continue my mind this simple “*mu* 無” naturally as a result I forget time” (July 17, 2001, p. 10). In other words, his experience of his small ego dissolving is not something that happens in his conscious mind. It is not a mental construction. His conscious mind is involved through concentration, but his conscious mind does not make his small ego disappear. He explained, “The eminent Zen masters never try to attain that kind of eminent mental state consciously” (July 17, 2001, p. 10). Rather, he asserts that *muga* occurs naturally through experience when he engages a simple mental activity, concentration on an object, and “became” this object, “*mu* 無.” He gave the example of how he came to not sleep during *sesshin* meditation periods, which last one week:

My concentration no break. Naturally I forgot sleeping. At that time I never think of sleeping, try to do sleeping, and never worry about the lack of my sleeping. Then a mental pleasure grew up naturally, unexpectedly. I was filled with a lot of pleasure. (July 17, 2001, p. 10).

“Becoming” “*mu* 無” is something that happens naturally and experientially. It is not something that is a mental construction or something that is only within the conscious mind. It is working with the root of mind as was discussed in chapter three. When his small ego disappeared or, using Yasunaga

Roshi's words, the shell of his small ego burst, his "energy spread to the whole universe." Tanaka Roshi explained how he became "*mu* 無": "I tried to concentrate my whole being on one point and my mental energy spread" (January 26, 2001, p. 8). Prior to his small ego disappearing, he was "separate from the simple act of concentration, simple act of "*mu* 無" concentration" (April 26, 2001, p. 5). He is saying that during the use of his conscious mind as attention to "*mu* 無," the separation between himself and "*mu* 無" disappeared. Attention is an ordinary activity of mind. However, usually it is engaged in a separative way, as in I attend to that. Separation is one of the basic activities of the small ego, separating oneself from other things and asserting I am this and not that. "I am this" is what one identifies with. "I am this" is one's identity. When one becomes something, one identifies with it. And when the separation disappears between oneself and one object, then the separation also disappears between oneself and all other objects. Thus, Tanaka Roshi's "mental energy spread."

Harada Roshi spoke of this becoming something in great detail. In his opening quote of this chapter he spoke of his experience of the moment when his small ego disappeared. He verified this understanding of this experience in our second interview. I asked him, "This experience that you're talking about, could this be considered the death of the ego?" He answered, "That's right. You can say that" (May 17, 2001, p. 2). This I think is quite radical. Most people would not even consider such an experience to be possible.

The part of this opening quote that I want to focus on is the last sentence, “If you become that one thought, everything else comes with it” (November 14, 2000, p. 7). When he “became” a simple thought that he had, his small ego died. All of us are thinking all the time; it is a very ordinary experience. Somehow in the midst of this ordinary experience through “becoming” a thought fundamentally Harada Roshi’s psychological experience changed.

Tanaka Roshi also described a simple and ordinary experience, attention to an object. Both of these *roshis* asserted that their “mental revolution,” as Tanaka Roshi called it, occurred in very ordinary activities of mind. Certainly some of the practices they engaged, as in Tanaka Roshi’s not sleeping during *sesshin*, were not ordinary, but the faculties of mind they were working with were very ordinary. At other times, not during these interviews, I have heard Harada Roshi speak of his own unordinary practices, such as meditating on the top of a flagpole in order to confront his fear. However, the “death of his ego” occurred during a very ordinary conversation when he was having tea with another Zen practitioner and when he was engaged in a very ordinary mental activity, thinking.

This is the Zen tradition. The reports of practitioners over the centuries of the moment when their “ego died” commonly describe very ordinary experiences. Such reports include the moment of seeing some peach blossoms, hearing the sound of a rock hitting a stick, or being hit by a fist or a stick (Wu, 1989, p. B-7). The Buddha was awakened when he saw the morning star.

Harada Roshi wrote that awakening always occurs through one of the six senses, mind being considered the sixth sense (Harada, 1998, p. 71).

In chapter two Harada Roshi was quoted describing this experience as his experience of *en*. When his small ego died, that is when he truly experienced causality. He talked about what it meant to “become” *en*:

It’s not really a matter of becoming *en*, but more like a matter of realizing that you always have been one, right? ... At that time it’s not a realization of having become one, it’s a feeling or sensation shall I say that everything has disappeared. ... And then a little bit later there’s a realization, ah, there’s no longer any separation between me and other things. But, if I say it in words it’s like that but, if I say that’s becoming *en*, I say it in words like that, but it’s also realizing that you never have been separate. (November 14, 2000, p. 6)

So when a person “becomes” something, the previously perceived separation between that thing and the person disappears. What is important is the realization or awakening to what is already priorly the case. Becoming something is not doing something, but rather being aware of something, non-separation, that one was not aware of before.

Harada Roshi described the process of becoming something as:

It’s no different than seeing the morning star or seeing a flower or hearing a sound, where two things that do not have substance melt together. ... That’s the self or the thing hearing it and the thing that was heard. Both things have no substance. So in that instant those things became one. If there is a thought that there is a self on this side, it’s just not possible for that to happen. Otherwise, if you went to sleep and then you woke up, you could say that is awakening, but that’s not how it is. We think that there is a self here on this side, so this merging does not happen. (May 17, 2001, pp. 3-4)

Harada Roshi is saying that when two things make contact, because all phenomena are non-substantial the two things in the moment of contact “melt

together” and merge. So, for example, when I hear a sound, at that moment of hearing the sound and I merge and I become the sound. This merging, however, is not a fixed state. It is just a moment. In the next moment through causality something else occurs and this merging changes.

Harada Roshi said, however, “we think that there is a self here on this side, so this merging does not happen” (May 17, 2001, p. 4). The ego self blocks this merging, blocks this becoming, blocks this awakening. He said that the problem is that “inevitably the ego can only think in dualistic terms” (May 17, 2001, p. 1). The ego self separates itself from other things and perceives a gap or distance between it and other things. All of the functioning of the six senses is filtered through the ego self as it is considered to be the root of mind. The functioning of the senses is influenced by the preferences and values of the ego self. This interference occurs when a person separates them self from other phenomena and perceives phenomena through this separate self that they have created. They then, rather than “purely responding in accord with conditions,” respond according to their ego self. Harada Roshi said, “Perception means there is a distance and so whatever is perceived is perceived by the ego” (May 17, 2001, p. 1). Separation is one of the fundamental activities of the ego self.

This separation is true not only of perceiving external reality, but of mind also. Thus, prior to the experience that Harada Roshi described here he was separate from his thoughts. He identified with his ego self, asserting I am this and not that. The emphasis was on “I”. Prior to the death of his ego self, his condition could be described according to Rene Descartes’ famous saying, “I

think, therefore I am.” However, when his ego self died, he became his thought. Thus it could be said that Descartes’ saying was reversed to: “The thought is I.” There no longer was a separate identity having a thought.

Tanaka Roshi spoke of this saying of Descartes: “As Rene Descartes said, all thinking is I think. I think. So we should abandon this kind of I, ego” (July 17, 2001, p. 2). This is an interesting view on Descartes. He is often referred to in humanistic psychology circles as one of the principal creators of the Western mind-body split. However, in the Zen way of thinking he is spoken of by Tanaka Roshi as having clearly identified the split between I and everything else.

Harada Roshi spoke of how to overcome the intellectual limitations of mind that were discussed earlier in this chapter. He said, “It’s not a matter of understanding, (or) not understanding. It’s really when you don’t understand not understanding or really become one with not understanding, then you understand” (May 17, 2001, p. 2). If one tries to understand from the intellectual position of objectivity, one will never truly understand. It is only when this objectivity disappears and one “becomes” the object that one understands. Psychologically the ego self and the thought merge and then true understanding is possible. Prior to that it is only theory. This could be said to be the basis of Zen epistemology. Experience of non-separation is knowing.

Harada Roshi asserted that the ego self is not a reality, but a false self, a created self. It is just a “thought” that has no substantiality to it. He explained, “This idea which something exists which in fact doesn’t, this is the central problem” (May 17, 2001, p. 2). People cling to this created self; they identify

with it. Therefore, “the usual everyday life that people live is mistaken perception or perception of reality” (May 17, 2001, p. 2). However, “if that thought of the ego disappears, then there is no gap or separation between you and things. So you can say that I am all things, or conversely, all things are me” (May 17, 2001, p. 2). When I become something, I am it. When I am something, there is no separation between it and I. There is no longer a separate identity. My core sense of self, the subject “I,” has expanded to include something else. This is what Yasunaga Roshi spoke of as “bursting.” Or, conversely, using Harada Roshi’s language of “disappearing” or Nakajima Roshi’s “killing the small self,” my core sense of self, my subject, has disappeared and a new sense of self, a new subject, has appeared. Either way it is this core sense of self, the subject of a person, that radically changed for Harada Roshi in the experience that he described.

Fukushima Roshi in his quote at the opening of this chapter spoke of his own enlightenment experience and also spoke of his practice after this enlightenment experience, after-*satori* practice (*gogo no shyugyo*). He said that a complete *satori* experience is when the person “forgets it completely. There’s not even any trace of it” (January 23, 2002, p. 2). This is complete oneness. There is no separate self and also no functioning of the discriminative mind. This is very similar to the way that Yasunaga Roshi described *muga* and Harada Roshi described his enlightenment experience. Harada Roshi said that a person asked him the question: ““Where is the Way?” I can’t even say how far I got through that question, but then suddenly things had disappeared” (May 17, 2001,

p. 2). Fukushima Roshi's way of describing what seems to be a very similar experience is using the words forgetting and no trace.

Fukushima Roshi called his *satori* or awakening experience his "Zen experience." He said, "The basis of the Zen experience can be said being oneself "mu 無"" (October 21, 2001, p. 4). His understanding of "mu 無" was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Being "mu 無" means experiencing oneself as both being and non-being, the gray area that Harada Roshi spoke of, and allowing the complicated or mixed nature of life to be as-it-is. Fukushima Roshi explained what this meant in terms of the Buddha's realization:

If we look at it in terms of *Shakamuni* Gautama Buddha's awakening, we can say that enlightenment experience was one in which he realized that there is 'I have no self nature.' That is, emptiness, I am empty of self. With that realization, and that is of course directly connected with having cut off the ego, which means letting go of all attachments and illusions connected with it. (January 23, 2002, p. 4)

The key to Fukushima Roshi's Zen experience was the realization of or the awakening to the reality that he was empty of self, of the ego self, of the small self. Realizing his true nature is cutting off or "killing" the ego self. In terms of his mind this meant that he had let go of all ego attachments and ego illusions. He is asserting that the ego self is composed of ego attachments and ego illusions. What is necessary for psychological health is to let go or cut all ego attachments and ego illusions and allow one's true nature to manifest.

Fukushima Roshi explained that his first Zen experience was not complete *satori*, but rather a partial *satori* experience: "Maybe that's the entrance, the gate to *satori* awakening. I'd rather call it awakening, but

essentially it's a gate" (October 21, 2001, p. 4). He said prior to that first experience a person only knows the experience of their ego self: "Up until the first Zen experience I talked about, yes, it is very difficult because you are constantly battling with your ego" (January 23, 2002, p. 11). However, "With that first Zen experience, awakening, the world is transformed. It's a completely different world, depending on whether you've had that or not" (October 21, 2001, p. 4). He described what it was like for him to walk through familiar streets after his first Zen experience: "Although I went to university and monastery right here in Kyoto walking through the same streets after having that experience it was completely different. It was the streets that I had never walked through before. It was completely new" (October 21, 2001, p. 5).

Fukushima Roshi said that after the first Zen experience practice is necessary to have a complete *satori* experience. He explained:

From there it's a long way to really complete *satori* itself, the depths, the further you go, the deeper it gets kind of thing. It doesn't just end there. In that sense you continue your practice as long as you're alive until you die. In that sense to continue to deepen the *satori*. (October 21, 2001, p. 4)

Psychologically the first Zen experience is the first time a person experiences "mu 無," or self without ego attachments and illusions. However, ego attachments and illusions still remain and further training is needed in order to cut all of them and have a complete *satori*. Fukushima Roshi said, "The first experience one has, after that if one is not careful, yes, the ego can arise again, so you do have to continue to practice and take care" (January 23, 2002, p. 9).

However, finally:

If they've really been cut off, those illusions, they don't return. So as I talked about my first Zen experience in part one, that you can consider the entrance into this path and then there's a long hard path, many, many years of further training onward until you can really get to that point where all of them are actually cut off. (January 23, 2002, p. 1)

Complete *satori* is the point at which all of the ego attachments and illusions of self are cut or let go of. Fukushima Roshi said, "It would take a good ten years even for a Japanese monk to go through all of that and that would be about when the ego should be completely extinguished" (January 23, 2002, p. 11). He asserted, "After some years it should be where the ego just doesn't, there is no more ego to arise" (January 23, 2002, p. 9).

Complete *satori* does not mean the end of practice. Rather, it can be thought of as the beginning of true practice, the living of *muga* in daily life. This is the after-*satori* practice that was written about in the previous chapter.

Fukushima Roshi explained:

Even though you've had this experience it's not something that comes to an end or final point. Using the example of looking at a mountain, that you deepen your experience yourself. You're able to express more and more deeply about that mountain. (October 21, 2001, p. 8)

He spoke of how deepening his Zen experience is one of his main purposes in life: "One purpose I can speak of since becoming a young acolyte monk at fourteen years of age until I die for the rest of my life to continue to deepen this experience" (October 21, 2001, p. 8).

Like Fukushima Roshi Harada Roshi also said that complete *satori* is the extinguishing of the ego self. It completely dies or is cut off. Harada Roshi said, "It happens once and it's continual" (May 17, 2001, p. 4). The implications of

this for psychology are very important. This is a potential that is possible for everybody. Psychologically each person can cut or see through the illusions and attachments of the ego.

The path leading to complete *satori*, however, is described differently by Harada Roshi than by the other *roshis*. Harada Roshi said that there is only one *satori*. It happens only once and it's complete at that time. The other *roshis*, like Fukushima Roshi, spoke of several partial *satoris* before the final *satori*. Yasunaga Roshi said about the "bursting" of the ego shell, "Bursting will take place three times or four times or five times, not just one time" (November 21, 2001, p. 4).

This difference to a certain extent represents the difference between the sudden or Southern *Chan* school and the gradual or Northern *Chan* school.²⁷ The gradual school asserts that enlightenment or awakening happens gradually in a step-by-step process. The modern vernacular for this would be that awakening is a growth process. The sudden school asserts that enlightenment happens unexpectedly and suddenly without any process leading to it. A person suddenly turns from ignorance to understanding, as in the American expression, "suddenly the light turned on."

This idea of partial *satoris* leading to complete *satori* could be said to represent the gradual path. However, each partial *satori* as described by the *roshis* is a sudden and unexpected *satori*. I had the following dialogue with Yasunaga Roshi about this:

Yasunaga Roshi: If you concentrate on one thing you will be in *samadhi*, a deep concentration. So this is *samadhi*, so therefore

like one paper, you turn – the flip side would be called *prajna* (Skt.), wisdom. So this moment of wisdom, turning moment, will be called *satori* experience. Do you understand?

Reggie: So if you're concentrating, then at some point based on circumstances?

Roshi: Yes, it's based on circumstances. For instance, hearing, smelling, touching,

Reggie: Some circumstance, this is cause and effect. Because of the cause of some circumstance then you turn?

Roshi: Yes, drastically turn. (November 21, 2001, p. 1)

What Yasunaga Roshi calls a “drastic turning” is the sudden change from ignorance to understanding. This is the actual moment of *satori*. This is similar to the way that the other *roshis* described the “death of the ego.” Understanding happens suddenly, but several moments of understanding are necessary before the ego self completely dies or disappears. Only Harada Roshi differed regarding this. He said *satori* “happens once and it's continual.” (May 17, 2001, p. 4) He was asserting you are either living on the foundation of the separate self-identity or you are living on the basis of “big self.” He saw this as a black and white situation, as in a woman is either pregnant or she's not. The other *roshis* gave more respect to the partial *satoris* as actual moments of having a glimpse of seeing through the ego self.²⁸

Bernard Faure (1991) writes that the gradual/sudden paradigm is the matrix of the Chan/Zen tradition: “The gradual/sudden paradigm, which functions as the matrix of the Chan/Zen tradition, can be seen as a dialectical tension between mediate and immediate understanding” (p. 4). This dialectical tension that Faure refers to means that the way understanding occurs can be either through some means or directly in experience without any intermediary. His opinion is that Zen has emphasized immediate understanding (and

emptiness) and marginalized mediation (and duality, the things of this world). Faure writes, “With the development of the “sudden” orthodoxy toward the eight century, the main tendency that was thereby marginalized was the notion of mediation and the various intermediary schemas that derive from it” (1991, p. 7). While I think this opinion is debatable and I will discuss it at more length in the next chapter, I agree about the importance of this dialectic for Zen. Another way of stating this sudden/gradual dialectic is that it is a constant tension of how to realize the formless when a person is always within form. It was awareness of this tension that motivated Dogen in his pre-realization time to practice. Harada Roshi (1998) describes Dogen’s fundamental question as: “The teaching of Buddhism is that this body itself is Buddha. Essentially, a human being is Buddha, the Dharma, and Zen. Why, then, is it necessary to practice?” (p. 156). Harada Roshi explains why it is necessary:

From the vantage point of the Dharma, everything is empty. ... We are already within that state of freedom. So why, then, can't you accept all phenomena as they are? ... It is because of the intervention of the ego-self that you cannot accept things as they are. (Harada, 1998, p. 156)

This statement can be read to have a specific psychological reference. It is because of attachment to self that a person fails to realize the formless within the form, or the sudden within the gradual.

Living No-Self

Yasunaga Roshi in the just previously quoted dialogue spoke of how this “turning” occurs in conjunction with the interaction of mind and environment

through the senses. This is an important consideration for understanding how mind functions without an ego self. About this Harada Roshi explained, “Let’s just take the first five sense functions. They are purely responding in accord with conditions, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling, cold and hot” (May 17, 2001, p. 5). If there is a loud sound nearby, I will naturally hear it without any effort on my part. This is how mind functions “naturally” in the way that Tanaka Roshi spoke of and how it is in harmony with the “flow of life” in the way that Nagashima Roshi spoke of. When mind functions this way, then the “merging” that Harada Roshi spoke of occurs. Mind “becomes’ the sound and the two melt together. In that moment of hearing there is no separation between the hearer and the heard.

This moment of melting together points to another way that mind functions naturally without the ego self. In that moment of melting the hearer becomes the heard, or as previously discussed, the thought is I. There is only that oneness of subject and object at that moment and nothing else. However, it quickly changes and in the next moment something else occurs. The significance of this for mind is that two of the *roshis* asserted that mind can only think one thought at a time, but that a thought quickly changes to another thought as mind is always changing. Harada Roshi said, “It’s not really possible to think two things at the same time” (May 17, 2001, p. 5). Nakajima Roshi explained:

In our daily occasions there are certain occasions that we can think two things at the same time, but from one instant, from the point of one instant, we can think just only one thing. It’s impossible to think two things simultaneously. It’s impossible. We can think continuously one moment by moment. (July 10, 2001, p. 11)

Mind in its natural state changes very quickly, much more quickly than can be perceived, but in each moment, each instant, it is only one thing. This one thing has to disappear before the next thing can arise. Mind is constant movement. About this Harada Roshi said, “This is happening at a very fast speed, that’s why we cannot say that it’s one thing. It’s continually changing. Because it’s moving so quickly, that we end up thinking that it’s one thing” (November 14, 2000, p. 18). There is a Zen saying that in the time that it takes to snap your fingers there are 900 cycles of birth and death. (Harada, 1998, p. 85) Thus, the gap between one thought and the next one is thought to be extremely minute.

This constant movement should not be mistaken for not being anywhere in particular, for being vague or unclear. Mind is both formless and form. In each moment mind is something and it is functioning. Again, Harada Roshi explained, “When I say the mind is always moving, that’s what I mean, that it has different functions – perception, thought, emotions. ... At that instant there’s only that function” (November 14, 2000, p. 17). Mind is understood as an activity, functions that are always interacting and changing. This is distinct from understanding mind as an entity, neither having some kind of container nor having some kind of center that controls or regulates.

Nakajima Roshi explained that because of this movement the focus of mind changes continually. He said, “Zen emphasizes not to think, moment by moment changing the subject in mind” (November 14, 2000, p. 17). When people think, there is a tendency to hold onto what is being thought about and to not change as mind changes.

I think it is important to understand what is being referred to as a thought or thinking. It is not just thoughts in the Western sense of thinking. Western thinking is understood to be a mental activity, distinct from emotional activities, unconscious activities, or other activities of mind. Thoughts in the sense that these *roshis* are speaking can be emotional, mental, conscious, unconscious, or any combination of these. The meaning of thoughts is that of an activity of mind. When I asked Daigaku-san, Harada Roshi's translator and student of twenty-seven years, about this, he responded, "Oh, yes, emotions are thoughts. It's complete" (July 9, 2001, p. 2).

Mind in its natural activity is thus understood to both be something completely and not to be fixed or attached anywhere in particular. This is the "*mu* 無" that Fukushima Roshi spoke of and mind as a phenomenon, not an existence that Yasunaga Roshi spoke of. About the latter, Harada Roshi said, "Always foster the mind that doesn't dwell anywhere" (November 14, 2000, p. 14). Don't attach to anything. Allow mind to change naturally. Allow all of the complexities and nuances of life to be present. About the former, to be something completely is to become it. This is the no gap between the thought and the thinker that was discussed earlier in this chapter.

As mind is constantly changing, it is impossible to say exactly what it is. Harada Roshi said, "It's impossible for the mind to remain constant in any one condition. So that means it's impossible to say, we can't say the mind is like this" (November 14, 2000, p. 15). Mind can't be said to be exactly this or that. It is much too complex. This refers back to the opening quote of this dissertation

from Harada Roshi regarding mind: “It cannot be decided. We can only decide that it can’t be decided, and that’s why it’s difficult. ... There is something mysterious, but it’s important, there is something and it’s mysterious” (November 14, 2000, p. 18). There is mind, but we are not in a position to know what it is.

In chapter two this not knowing was discussed in relationship to causality. A person is not in a position to know all the causes that are contributing to the present effect. Not knowing also is very relevant to the condition of the self. Fundamentally human beings are not in a position to know who they are. Knowledge requires consciousness. Yasunaga Roshi asserted, “But consciousness cannot be conscious of consciousness itself” (May 8, 2001, p. 19). I believe this is a critical consideration for Zen psychology. Yasunaga Roshi is saying that all consciousness is intentional and that it can only see other things, not itself. By virtue of its structure, it cannot know itself. He continued, “So consciousness is a function of your ego. So when your consciousness is conscious of your consciousness, that consciousness is not your own real consciousness” (May 8, 2001, p. 19). Yasunaga Roshi is saying that a person cannot get outside his or her own consciousness. They can only be their consciousness. They can only be their subject. They cannot look at or separate from their consciousness.

It is this attempt at separation that is the focus and foundation of Zen psychology. Yasunaga Roshi said in this last quote, “consciousness is a function of your ego” (May 8, 2001, p. 19). Zen psychology believes that consciousness

appears at the root of mind through the ego. This root of mind was discussed in the previous chapter in terms of attachment. Ego is a natural function of mind that everyone has. In Zen terms ego is the constellation of functions that results in the subject of mind and can be either good or bad, healthy or delusory, depending on how it is lived by the person. One of the fundamental characteristics of the ego is that a person cannot be outside it. One can only be it. However, people commonly separate from this natural ego and create a false ego.

This points to the issue of identity that I have referred to on occasions in this dissertation. Identity is what a person is. In the context of this discussion identity is the ego. Identity functions at the root of mind. When a person “becomes” something, that thing becomes a part of their identity and there is no separation any longer between the two. Because a person cannot get outside their identity, because they can only be their identity, to work with one’s identity requires doing so on the inside, within who a person is, within their ego, within their subject.

When a person awakens or realizes their true self, their identity changes. Before they identified with their false ego-self. This identity vanishes when what they really are becomes clear. A person does not develop or make their true self. Rather they discover or find their true identity. Within themselves, on the inside, they find who they are. Awakening is the appearance of a person’s inherent self. This is fundamental to the Zen methodology and is something that I believe is very applicable to and very important for Western psychology.

The realization of what I am calling the inherent self is *muga*. Because it is inherent, it is natural. There were several ways that the *roshis* spoke of how to live this natural mind or *muga*, many of which have been mentioned previously in other parts of this dissertation. Being one with causality and living non-attachment are both expressions of *muga*. Specifically in terms of the activity of mind of particular note are Fukushima Roshi's discussion of the Zen idea of freedom, *jiyu*, and Harada Roshi's description of someone who has lost the self. Harada Roshi's description was: "They are no longer, shall we say, swayed or controlled by conditions. That's one thing. The second thing is that they're not attached to one thing in the sense that it limits their vision shall we say" (November 14, 2000, pp. 4-5). In other words, they do not have an emotional ego attachment to what occurs and their mental faculties are not fixated on anything, so they can perceive things clearly, as-they-are. Having a clear mind, one that functions without ego self interference, is a great virtue in Zen.

Harada Roshi's words here are a good description of the *jiyu* that Fukushima Roshi spoke of. Fukushima Roshi explained that the free self is not just free from other things, but free to act, free to respond creatively according to circumstances. *Muga* enables a person to participate fully and creatively in life. Fukushima Roshi said that the literal meaning of the word *jiyu* comes from two Chinese characters, which "mean depending, relying, on oneself" (January 23, 2002, p. 6). However, this self that is relied on is not the small self, the ego self, but the great self. He said, "Of course the self that you rely on, this freedom, is not the ego" (January 23, 2002, p. 6). Relying on one's great self is living *muga*.

Another way that the *roshis* spoke of how to live *muga*, which has been discussed previously briefly, was to do something with one's whole body and mind. This is to do something with sincerity. Nagashima Roshi said about the duties at a monastery:

Any duty which is assigned to the disciples also have to do with the sincerity. The sincerity goes to the practicing, the training of the mind, the cultivating of the mind. ... What is important for the cooking is how much you devote yourself to do things. And this kind of devotion is training or cultivation of oneself. (May 8, 2001, p. 2)

Tanaka Roshi asserted that *muga* and sincerity were the same thing. He said, "The essence of the experience of Zen, the Zen experience, is *muga* or sincerity, the truth (Jap. 誠 = *makoto*), extremity of *makoto* called *shisei* (Jap. 至誠²⁹), we say *shisei*" (July 17, 2001, p. 1). When someone does something sincerely with his or her whole heart and mind this is a manifestation of *muga*. Tanaka Roshi spoke of his experience taking care of his master and his master's wife, both of whom were dying:

For us Zen monks not only *zazen*, but everything, every work, every job is very important. Because *zazen* is a kind of form. The most important thing is sincerity, *shisei*. It tried to do this kind of *shisei*, but I felt unsatisfied about my attitude, my taking care of my master and his wife. Unsatisfied forever. (April 4, 2001, p. 12).

He was unsatisfied because he always tried to do what he was doing more sincerely, more sincerely. Doing something with sincerity is to do something by the heart. *Muga* is not some kind of dry, emotionless, way of being. It is full involvement of one's whole body-mind.

This sense of Zen I think often gets lost in translation. Thoughts are not just mental events. *Muga* is not detachment, but aliveness. Without the heart and the manifestation of aliveness there is no *muga*. There are many references to this if one looks for them in Zen. For example, in these interviews Nakajima Roshi spoke of the heart of Zen, “The heart of Zen is to seek for the truth” (July 10, 2001, p. 1). He also said, “The mind of Zen can be said as the mind of life. The mind of life can be said as compassion. Compassion is the comprehensive affection to embrace everything” (July 10, 2001, p. 1).

The Ego-Self

When the ego self or small self arises, a person thereby interferes with this natural functioning of mind. The ego self is considered to be at the root of mind as was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Thus, all of mind appears or is manifested through the ego self. The natural functioning of mind is altered according to the personal ego self of each person. Harada Roshi said that the ego self “completely influences our whole life” (May 17, 2001, p. 1).

Everybody has an ego self. Yasunaga Roshi called it “human nature” (November 21, 2001, p. 3). It could be described as one’s base, the place from which one functions, the subject of mind, the root of mind. However, when one attaches or limits oneself to this base, then the false ego self arises. Nakajima Roshi said that the ego self or smaller self as he called it is necessary for development of mind: “You have to nourish and cherish the smaller self in the time of the growing period. ... We need to grow the smaller self first” (July 10,

2001, p. 3). The various functions of mind need to be developed. However, he said during this development people also get attached to this smaller self and it gradually becomes an impediment to growth:

The knowledges and the skills and any sort of accumulation of the acquired knowledges, turn out to be the attachment in the latter stage. Because when the knowledges and skills are acquired, at some point these are the main factors to make the person suffer. Sometime they become the obstacle for their own development. (July 10, 2001, p. 3)

The attachments and the illusions of the ego self that develop are what Zen psychology tries to eliminate. This eliminating is the “bursting” that Yasunaga Roshi spoke of and the “breaking” or “killing” that Nakajima Roshi spoke of that was discussed earlier in this chapter. It is this aspect of the ego self, the attachments and illusions, that is generally referred to in Zen. This ego self was described in the following ways by the *roshis*: Harada Roshi: a “thought” (May 17, 2001, p. 3), meaning the ego self is a psychological activity. “The fundamental problem, that’s the self, thinking that there is a self” (May 17, 2001, p. 3). “That ego does not exist. We simply think it exists” (May 17, 2001, p. 1). This ego self is not a real self, but a fictional or imagined self. “That thing which perceives consciousness is what in Buddhism we call the ego consciousness, which then tries to deal with that consciousness that it perceives and then all kinds of problems and debates arise” (November 14, 2000, p. 7). “Inevitably the ego can only think in dualistic terms” (May 17, 2001, p. 1). The ego self separates and then discriminates from that position.

Perception means that there is a distance and so whatever is perceived is perceived by the ego. ... I want to include perceptions in everyday life too. And that perceiving that is being

done just here, or in everyday life, that is done by the ego. (May 17, 2001, p. 1)

“If there is a thought that there is a self on this side, it’s just not possible for that (this melting together) to happen” (May 17, 2001, pp. 3-4). The thought of the ego self interferes with the natural interconnected activity of all things. “It’s only the ego which thinks, oh, I should do this, I should become stronger, I should this or that or anything. Fundamentally because there’s no substance here, there’s nothing to change” (May 17, 2001, p. 2). Trying to repair the ego self is a fruitless endeavor. Rather the thought of the ego self must be forgotten.

It could happen that I hear on this day at a certain time that this person is coming, but I don’t really want to speak to them, it’s too troublesome or whatever, so it would be possible to say I won’t be here or do something. That’s possible too. I do that sometimes. ... Even in that case we can’t say that it’s the ego that’s making that decision. No, we can’t, in that way we can’t say that this is the ego and this isn’t the ego, so isn’t it really the best just to say, well, we should just leave things as they should be or as they are? (November 14, 2000, p. 14)

Humans are not in a position to say what is the activity of ego and what isn’t. “It cannot be decided. We can only decide that it can’t be decided, and that’s why it’s difficult” (November 14, 2000, p. 18).

Yasunaga Roshi: “Ego is not consciousness. Ego is something which you build up by yourself. A kind of subject” (November 21, 2001, p. 2). The ego self is a subjective activity, the activity of identity. “This ego that is a product of old habits of thought” (November 21, 2001, p. 2). It is based on “false understanding and human nature I think” (November 21, 2001, p. 3). It is the “product of human nature” (November 21, 2001, p. 5). “We tend to cling to the concept of ego. We try to keep this, protect this. But this is not such a

valuable thing, because this is a phenomenon” (November 21, 2001, pp. 2-3).

“Ego is not existence. It’s phenomena. We tend to think of ego as a fixed existence, but this is not true” (November 21, 2001, p. 2). He distinguished between a phenomenon and an existence. A phenomenon is an activity that changes according to conditions. An existence is a solid entity that does not change.

Nakajima Roshi: “The small self is just thinking about the selfish concept. The great self is to share all. Everything is the same, is equal being” (June 26, 2001, p. 4). “The small self is the selfish concept, very self-centered concept. The great self is to think about others than oneself” (June 26, 2001, p. 5). This is the narcissistic orientation of the ego self that was discussed in chapter three. “The shell of the self which covers up the inner self” (July 10, 2001, p. 3). The ego self creates a false separation between oneself and the world.

Fukushima Roshi: “The ego tends not to really see what’s good and what’s bad, to not really see what’s there, but to see what’s good for me and what’s bad for me. It’s just the ego’s attachment and illusion” (January 23, 2002, p. 3).

This is the narcissistic activity of the ego self. “As long as there’s the ego naturally attachments arise in relation with the ego. So we can say the basis for all attachments, including illusion, would be the ego and through the ego being wrapped up in those attachments it’s not then able to really decisively say what is good and what is bad. (January 23, 2002, p. 3)

The ego self is the root of mind. “As long as there’s the ego, there’s that tendency to want to control, to want to have the result go your own way” (January 23, 2002, p. 4). “All human beings have an ego. I don’t know much

about Christianity, but I think that this having an ego is similar to what will be called original sin” (January 23, 2002, p. 5). “There’s also not only an individual ego, but also there can be a group ego. For example, the largest group would be like a nation, so there’s national ego as well” (January 23, 2002, p. 6). “So what’s the difference between a good and a bad attachment? Whether the ego is wrapped up in it or not” (January 23, 2002, p. 12). The ego determines whether attachment is natural or egoistic. “In Buddhism we can say that without getting rid of ego we cannot move on. I mean that’s the basis of it. It’s fundamental” (January 23, 2002, p. 6). The ego self limits personal development so a person is not able to fully develop as a human being. This is the goal of Zen psychology: “The real final goal of all human beings is to fully develop as a human being” (January 23, 2002, p. 12).

Nagashima Roshi:

For me the ego is self-attachment. For example, today I explained I have this kind of experience. When I have any kind of gathering or small meeting with the neighborhood, if someone strongly expresses his or her own opinion without regard to the majority of the assembled people, so in this sense if someone says his opinion strongly this feels that it’s a kind of example of ego. So for me, and maybe this is my personality, I don’t insist or I don’t hold my opinions strongly in the meetings. (May 8, 2001, p. 4)

“What we are talking about, the ego is not the evil. Without ego we cannot live” (May 8, 2001, p. 4). “The ego might be inborn nature of human being” (May 8, 2001, p. 4). Here he is agreeing with Yasunaga Roshi.

When the child is growing to adulthood this is also developing the ego. The ego is nothing to do with the evil concept. But in Zen ego emphasizes the evil side of when one is on the way, when one is in the process of going to the awakening, self

awakening, right? So if I say it another way, the ego is the state of mind when the wisdom, the Buddhist wisdom, doesn't work at all. (May 8, 2001, p. 4)

The ego, like attachment, has a natural function. The ego self being described in this part of this dissertation functions without the Buddhist wisdom, which is *muga*. "Zen doesn't emphasize eliminate the ego. Just approve the ego working in your self and accept the ego as it is. Zen emphasizes how to control the ego" (May 8, 2001, p. 5).

Not only before the birth, while we are growing up we also acquire the egos and self awareness. Along with this self development there is an attachment that follows. So the ego has these two parts. One is inborn and another is acquired. We acquire the attachment in the process of growing up and attachment is also an activity of the mind through the growing process. (May 8, 2001, p. 13)

This is a similar view of development as expressed by Nakajima Roshi.

Tanaka Roshi: "Always ordinarily we think at first our own self, this kind of thought. First our own self and from that point of view we think and act, but in fact there is no this kind of small ego" (July 17, 2001, p. 5). The ordinary way of mind is based on the illusion of the ego self. "Because of our thinking we separate our mind from the thing itself. For example, if we call this a table, we separate ourselves from this" (April 26, 2001, p. 4). The ego self is a separative activity. "Before that (before he lost his ego self) I've nothing but egoistic way of life and thought and attitude. I couldn't endure that kind of my egoistic way of life and thought" (July 17, 2001, p. 6). Tanaka Roshi's sensitivity to his ego self motivated him to enter the Buddhist way in order to eliminate this ego self.

Healing the Ego-Self

Tanaka Roshi talked about his experience of eliminating the ego self. The first thing was that he did not try to eliminate his ego self. He explained, “We don’t have to try to cut and try to attain to enlightenment” (July 17, 2001, p. 10). Such effort is just another form of the ego self. Rather, “The eminent Zen masters never try to attain that kind of eminent mental state consciously. Not consciously, naturally. That is most important. Naturally means from my own experience” (July 17, 2001, p. 10). If the result is in the conscious mind, then it is still within the ego self. What is necessary is to get to the root of mind, the root of the ego self, and realize what this root really is.

Tanaka Roshi said that the way he did this was by concentrating on the “*mu 無*” *koan*. He said:

I didn’t try to cut my ego. Naturally when I concentrated my mind to simple “*mu 無*”, to simple *koan*. ... So I tried to become a “*mu 無*,” a simple “*mu 無*” itself. I never think about “*mu 無*” itself. I only try to become “*mu 無*” itself and fulfilled my body and mind to “*mu 無*.” My small body and mind disappeared and my whole energy spread out to the whole universe. (July 17, 2001, p. 10)

The last sentence here refers to the result of years of practice. His practice was simply to “become” “*mu 無*,” to dissolve the separation, the gap, between his ego self and the object of his concentration. “You don’t have to think about “*mu 無*” or nothingness. You just become “*mu 無*”” (January 26, 2001, p. 21). He didn’t do this through the thinking mind, but rather by letting the thinking mind just be attention to his *koan*, which was “*mu 無*.” This is an important use of the

conscious mind, that of attention. Through attention the gap between ego self and perceived thing, subject and object, can be dissolved. Tanaka Roshi asserted, “We are separate from the simple act of concentration, simple act of “*mu* 無” concentration” (April 26, 2001, p. 5).

This dissolving occurs naturally – when the ego self disappears, *muga* arises of its own. A person’s inherently healthy mind manifests itself naturally. Tanaka Roshi said, “Never try to become non-ego. You should only concentrate the mind. This is the most important point. So naturally, unexpectedly – this is the most important point” (January 26, 2001, p. 22). If the separation between a person’s identity and an object disappears, then naturally the ego self vanishes. A person does not have to be concerned that there is an ego self or what this ego self consists of. Tanaka Roshi said,

In every *teisho* (Jap. 提唱 = a lecture on the way of the truth given by a Zen master to their Zen students) I emphasize you don’t have to try to cut your mind. Never mind if you are attacked by a lot of thinking. Never mind. You only concentrate your mind simple “*mu* 無” and become “*mu* 無” itself. (April 26, 2001, p. 6)

In a similar way he said, “Even if you are attacked from a lot of bad desires, never mind” (April 26, 2001, p. 6), and “In fact you don’t have to cut your attachment. If you concentrate your mind to one thing, every attachment will disappear, will abandon naturally” (April 26, 2001, p. 5). Don’t worry about the problem. Just focus on the solution. Tanaka Roshi used this analogy: “You don’t have to try to cut attachment. That is the shortest way of cutting attachment. So, in other words, if we conquer a dark room, the darkness of the room, we don’t have to erase the darkness. We only light a candle” (April 26,

2001, p. 5). In this way a person naturally forgets their ego self through realizing their true self. Tanaka Roshi described his experience, “I concentrated my mind more and more. My mind become pure and pure and pure. My small self disappeared. Everything become clear, clear” (January 18, 2001, p. 1).

Analysis and thinking are not helpful to this process. In fact they tend to reinforce the sense of the ego self. The Zen attitude towards thinking is quite opposite of that commonly expressed in the West. The Western attitude is generally that thinking and creativity are connected. In Western education people are trained to think. In Japanese education my observation has been that people are trained to pay attention.

At the beginning of this chapter the Zen understanding of the limitations of the intellectual mind were discussed. Zen asserts that to cut the ego self these intellectual limitations must be cut first. Tanaka Roshi said, “In the critic there is a kind of egoistic thinking. ... Because of our thinking we separate our mind from the thing itself. For example, if we call this a table, we separate ourselves from this” (April 26, 2001, p. 4). Therefore, “We should abandon our attachment to thinking. ... We should first cut our thinking if we try to attain true thinking” (July 17, 2001, p. 2). Tanaka Roshi asserted that the way to do this was to accept and not criticize. In talking about an old Chinese Zen master, Joshu, Tanaka Roshi said, “So you don’t have to think about, you don’t have to interpret the word of Joshu. You only accept it” (April 26, 2001, p. 3). He said, “We say *ma-uke* (Jap. 真受け = receive the truth).³⁰ *Ma* means accepting it completely. So one of the greatest Japanese Zen masters Dogen said, ‘You

disciple should accept completely about your master's attitude and word.' ... Think means criticize. ... Never criticize" (April 26, 2001, p. 3). Tanaka Roshi told me, "The most important thing for you is how to hear, how to accept my word, my opinion. Accepting completely" (April 26, 2001, page 7).

This certainly is not the Western way. It conjures up for me images of power and potential for abuse of power. In the history of Japan there are many examples of abuse of this kind of student-teacher relationship. One such example is what is conveyed in the Japanese phrase *messhi-hoko* (Jap. 滅私奉公), which is defined by my electronic Canon dictionary as "self-annihilation for the sake of one's country." About this Shoji Muramoto (2002) writes:

In the 1930s, Buddhism was mobilized into a national ideology in a nationwide campaign to justify the war of Japan with the West, as well as the invasion into other Asian countries. The Buddhist doctrine of no-self then degenerated into selflessness and self-annihilation in service of the emperor as a deity who would insure the victory of Japan. (p. 11)

However, when Tanaka Roshi described how he reads, a different sense is communicated: "For example, when I read the book about Munetada, the master Munetada,³¹ I accept his opinion completely and don't want to criticize his thinking. I only be moved" (April 26, 2001, p. 4). First he takes in what he is reading. First he receives it and experiences it. Then he sorts it out using what he refers to as his "natural" thinking mind. Rather than discarding the thinking mind, he gives it a secondary role. Experience first, then thinking. This is the Zen methodology. Several of the other *roshis* referred to this in other contexts. This is particularly true in their descriptions of their enlightenment experiences. Harada Roshi said his understanding came after his experience: "And then a little

bit later there's a realization, ah, there's no longer any separation between me and other things" (November 14, 2000, p. 6). Yasunaga Roshi in his previously quoted discussion of *muga* said, "Unfortunately we only understand the meaning of *muga* after that moment of *muga*" (November 21, 2001, p. 1).

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, thinking is not eliminated. It is rather given a secondary role to experience. Speaking again about a story about Joshu, Tanaka Roshi said, "That is not an expression of human thinking. That is an expression of no thinking. Natural thinking – thinking is human" (April 26, 2001, pp. 4-5).

Nakajima Roshi also spoke of the necessity to cut the intellectual mind.

He asserted this was necessary to resolve any mental difficulty:

When someone suffers from uneasiness or an uneasy feeling or a kind of troubles and sufferings in their mind, in our preaching we stop thinking. We stop logical thinking. Then something new appears. ... So when a person is suffering and also thinking himself by logical way this is the status, it's a situation that the person is closing up the door. When they stop worrying, then the truth coming towards you. (July 10, 2001, p. 2)

Thinking always operates within its limitations. It cannot discover what is outside its limitations. According to Nakajima Roshi this can only be done through intuition. He spoke of how a Zen master breaks through a student's ego self:

They are questioned; their answers are checked by the masters periodically by interview with the master. All the time the master breaks down the concrete concept that the disciple brings to the master. So the apprentice monk repeatedly refused by the master. So he is cornered so he does not know where to go. Actually loses his standpoint. From that moment when you lose your standpoint something new appears. At this stage the intuition starts working. (July 10, 2001, p. 5)

Thinking is always done from a certain perspective, the standpoint of the person's ego self. When this activity is stopped, then the possibility of the ego self disappearing is more likely.

I asked Nakajima Roshi if this was done through attention, with mind just paying attention to one's *koan*, and his answer was, "Yes, of course" (July 10, 2001, p. 10). He explained:

So in a sense our way is to make a rest of the mind. So do not think it. Do not analyze the *koan*. Don't pay attention to the *koan*. So in our system analysis is the result and the activity of the intellect. We just want to make a stop of the activity of the intellect. Just stop it. Make it stop. (July 10, 2001, p. 10)

Intellectual activity is stopped through concentration to a simple object so then one is open to a different approach. Then through intuition "it's turning to your own originality or just your own original point" (July 10, 2001, p. 10).

Concentration as described by Nakajima Roshi is a combination of mental attention and emotional feeling. This is the Japanese sense of thought that was described earlier. I understand it as feeling-attention. When mind functions as feeling-attention, then mind is more open to its intuitive faculties.

Nakajima Roshi spoke of how a Zen master uses intuition to recognize the mental state of a disciple:

The master understands whether the disciple is standing in the same level of the enlightenment or the same level of the certain approach by intuition. In our cliché we call it in Japanese *ishin-denshin*, which means delivered, transferred by mind.³² So in our language this *ishin-denshin*, transmission by mind, is a nodding. From my point nodding of the life. The nodding of the two lives. Absolute affirmation. The life of you and all of us is the same. (July 10, 2001, pp. 6-7)

Without words, without using the intellectual mind, a mutual experience of *muga* is acknowledged by two people through intuition and non-verbal communication.

Thinking is one of the primary ways through which the ego self interferes with the natural functioning of mind. As there is natural attachment, so there is natural ego. Each person has as his or her natural endowment a natural functioning of mind. This is *muga*. This is also the activity of causality. Zen puts great faith in one's natural mind. Nakajima Roshi said:

The suffering of the human being is just a small thing. If this suffering is observed from the wider point of view, from the point of the life, there's a certain way provided for the solution. Like the self-cure of the physical body, the mind has a certain cure ability. It's capable to cure itself. ... Lots of measures are provided by the schools and some civilian groups. So from my point of view if we leave them alone in peace condition they will cure themselves smoother. We would like to have more practical advice to make the natural cure ability generate or work in themselves. Otherwise those children are losing the patience. (July 10, 2001, p. 13)

Faith and patience in one's nature is necessary. Let things work naturally.

Harada Roshi spoke of the method used in Zen based on this understanding:

The method we use in Zen is that when a person comes with a question to throw the question back to them in a way that we try to get them to realize that the answer is within the person themselves who's asking. If I, you, simply give them an answer it's not their own and so it's a matter of getting them to realize that the answer is right in the question itself. (November 14, 2000, pp. 16-17)

A person already has the resources to solve any difficulty. They just need to be turned to these resources.

This is the art of letting one's fundamental or natural mind manifest.

Man is not in a position to know and control. Zen asserts that it is only through being fundamental mind that *muga*, one's inherent self, appears. Harada Roshi asserted that man should just let mind be as-it-is: "We can't say that this is the ego and this isn't the ego, so isn't it really the best just to say, well, we should just leave things as they should be or as they are?" (November 14, 2000, p. 14). Mind is forever mysterious. We live it, but ultimately we cannot know it. *Muga* is living this point of view.