

NO SIDES!

NO SIDES!

By

Ming Zhen Shakya, 2000

Edited by YXS, 2018¹

¹ Original Title - Zen, Justice, and the Martial Arts

PART I



Sometime during the last score of years the Lion of Buddha on our Zen ensign has switched its stance from couchant anti-crime to rampant anti-punishment. A self-serving corps of creative people has morphed the image of Zen clerics from mystical guides to radical activists; and now, every time anyone cries "Mercy!" we are all expected to rise with our dukes up ready to champion the cause of indolent justice for anyone convicted of serious felony.

Ming Zhen Shakya, 2000



It used to be that priests led people to safety - preferably before they got into trouble with the law; but now, not a week passes but we are asked to intervene in death-row rescues or other penal "inequities" or, worse, to demonstrate support for a variety of causes that anyone, except the petitioners, would find patently inconsistent. All too often the same people who seek to abolish the death penalty also promote abortion on demand and euthanasia - or who attack our citizens' right to bear arms also agitate for the support of foreign insurgencies and revolutionary movements. It gets curiouser and curiouser.

There was a time when being an American Buddhist gave a person either/or choices: when meditating, we faced either the wall or the room; and when chanting, we followed either Japanese or Chinese. We all valued simplicity and ink: words and drawings satisfied a common esthetic sensibility. We were perceived to be quiet, introspective types; and while nobody equated us with slugs, nobody, except zealots in our own *sanghas*, actually *expected* us to get out and demonstrate about government policies. Being fed-up with government *anything* was usually what brought us to Zen. Besides, protest was a hot medium, and we were medium cool.



The Zen Ideal - and indeed, the image Zen sought to convey - was Samurai-at-rest or Wushi-at-ease, *couchant*...not some wuss rearing up in a hissy-fit. (The Samurai and Wushi ever ready to



meet what comes). So how did we manage to find ourselves summoned to stand and involve ourselves in all this political conflict?

The problem became noticeable when other schools of Buddhism arrived and flourished in the U.S. We found this gratifying; but we also saw that a selection of these Buddhists began to stand out and deliberately to attract attention. They walked our streets with their Public Relations' people and sat in our restaurants with their Public Relations' people and appeared on television with their Public Relations' people; and this would have been fine but for the importance given to their utterances and for their lofty use of the Imperial "we". For when they spoke it was as the Queen speaks: she says "we" and means a whole country. They said "we" and annexed Zen.

We began to hear rumors of a "Buddhist Coalition" - one in which Zen's former hegemony was nowhere in evidence; and the names of Zen clerics - like it or not - began to appear on servile solicitation lists. And now we regularly get letters and calls from desperate parents or eager members of Social or Political Action Committees. The organizations say they want justice but ask for money. The individuals want only justice.

The mystery is how Buddhism and the criminal justice system were conjoined in anyone's mind in the first place. Buddhism and *samsaric* justice, at least, have nothing to do with each other. It's not that they're antagonists. They're not. They are simply two different species. Religion and politics seldom produce a worthwhile hybrid. Not easily would we have accepted a "Pat Robertson Roshi" into our ranks.

The first "call for justice" I received came a few years ago after some of these imperial Buddhist spokesmen indicated that Texas was going to be made the object-lesson of a drive to abolish the death penalty. The mother of a man sentenced to death wanted my help. The call was difficult to take. Anytime we speak to a parent about a troubled child - no matter how old that child is - we know that we're talking to someone who is acting out of love and pain and, yes, guilt. These are no chats about the weather.



And so we listen, not wishing to seem unsympathetic to the plea; but especially if we're experienced in prison ministry we're prepared for the course the conversation usually takes. All too often the source of the child's societal problems can be detected there in the parent's speech.

Shrapneled with racial and sexist epithets come charges directed against incompetent lawyers and vindictive prosecutors and prejudiced juries and judges; and then, once we get past the trial and into the nature of the crime, it is, inevitably, the victim who was to blame for the crime.

My first caller assumed that I was raring "to get behind this Buddhist movement" and would therefore write to Austin, Texas to ask the Governor to commute her son's death sentence to life imprisonment. I knew nothing about the case or the Buddhist war on the Texas judicial system and so, more baffled than anything, I listened to her version of the crime. Her son *had accidentally* shot someone and now Texas was going to execute him. She so stressed "accidentally" that I foolishly asked, "Was he hunting?"

"Well, no, he was actually holding up a convenience store."

I was asked to understand that he was desperate because he was behind in his child support payments and he needed the money for his kids. He never meant to kill.

"Whom did he accidentally kill?"

"Some clerk and an underage kid who was trying to buy beer."

"So he accidentally shot two men?"

"The clerk should have just given him the money - that's what he was *supposed* to do. Instead he made a quick move as if going for a gun and her boy naturally flinched and his gun went off. It was the same with the kid buying beer... he butted-in and made a threatening gesture. If he had done as he was told and just froze there by the freezer, he'd be alive today. It was all a terrible mistake."

From there, the conversation, which was already going downhill, plunged into incomprehensibility. I thanked her for calling, wished her well, and wrote no letters.

A few days later I received another call from a desperate mother who wanted me to write to Austin to have a life sentence commuted to time served. I said that I was sorry but I did not write letters for prisoners I did not personally know; but she, too, wanted justice. Her son had been



convicted of something that shouldn't have been considered a crime in the first place. It was self-defense. A man had started a fight with him and the bartender told them to take it outside. Once there, the man tried to sucker-punch him and he had to shoot to protect himself. Yes, he was carrying a concealed weapon and no, he had no permit to do so. But he had a good reason for carrying the gun: his car-door wouldn't lock and he didn't want to let the gun fall into wrong hands...kids might get it.

"Why, if he was concerned with safety, didn't he unload the weapon?"

Silence.

It never occurred to her that someone might ask such questions. She had sat through her son's trial; but like the mother who watches an army on parade and says, "Everybody's out of step but my son John," she saw and heard only what she was prepared to see and hear. That her son illegally brought a concealed and loaded weapon into a public place and then under the pretext of engaging in a "fair" fist fight, went outside and shot and killed an unarmed man had not registered with her. That she expected me to champion his cause because I was a Buddhist was as unsettling as the thought that she and the other justice seekers had been cynically conned into expecting that letters from Buddhist clerics could or even should try to negate the judicial process. How much support had these petitioners given the proponents of this unrealistic quest?

Just how confused the public's perception of Buddhism's attitude toward crime and punishment had become was evident when I was called to Jury Duty. As chance would have it, my name dropped out of the Keno ball scrambler and I became Prospective Juror Number Ten. The *Voir Dire* process began. It was a criminal case and the prosecutor and defense counsel both asked me my stats and the usual questions. When it came to occupation, the prosecutor harvested the information from me that (gasp!) I was a Zen Buddhist priest. (I was not wearing clerical garments.) "Just how serious a Buddhist priest are you?" she asked. And I guessed that on a Serious Scale of one to ten I was probably a ten. When twelve of us were seated, the preemptory challenges began and Prospective Juror Number Ten was first on the prosecution's hit list. As I rose to exit the jury box, the judge interrupted the proceedings. Would I mind answering a few questions? He wanted to glean some information that the prosecutor had not garnered. Had I ever sat on a jury before in a criminal matter? "Yes, three times." Without telling him the nature of the verdict, did those juries all *reach* a verdict? "Yes." He thanked me for my cooperation and I left



the courtroom, leaving more than a few citizens to consider conversion to Buddhism as a good way to get out of jury duty and the judge to mull over the daunting possibility that Buddhists don't automatically hang juries because they just can't bring themselves to punish a defendant.

Issues such as vegetarianism versus meat eating used to inform discussions about non-violence, health, and personal sacrifice. It amused us that in Buddhism's somewhat tortured taxonomy we could not even agree on what constituted an animal. Buddhists from Sri Lanka, for example, do not consider fish to be animals and so eat a great deal of sea food while rigorously obeying the no-meat proscription.

A few months ago animal rights activists protested at a nearby lake, intending to halt fishing there since that activity so obviously constituted cruelty to animals. A non-local Buddhist group planned to join the protest and a very self-righteous individual called to summon me to participate. I said that my being a vegetarian didn't give me cause to prevent other people from fishing; and then, because I didn't appreciate his attitude, I added - with more pleasure than I should admit to, "Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

My caller quoted one of these Imperial Buddhist Spokesmen who had evidently put his imprimatur on the no-fishing edict and added that if I were a real Buddhist (as I professed to be) I would have felt privileged to help. Then he hung up. My ranking on the Serious Buddhist Scale had dropped into negative numbers... (Humbled, I could only wonder why converts to vegetarian non-violence always seem to regard with such venomous disgust meat and meat eaters - whose loathsome ranks they once so happily filled. Ah yes, overnight they join a more sensitive and refined class of beings. It is as if knighthood had been conferred upon them.)

And then, just a few weeks later, while yielding to an uncontrollable impulse to paint my den, there came a knock at the door. A monk wearing Vajrayana robes asked me to contribute to the Free Tibet donation box he carried *and* to sign a petition to repeal the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution. ("A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.")

"Why would I want to do either?" I asked, astonished by this pairing of goals.

He was vehemently against all guns - rifles, shotguns, handguns, howitzers. It mattered not. If it went "bang" he wanted it outlawed. I asked him how he proposed to Free Tibet without somebody getting shot.



In fact, since the 1950s when China rightly or wrongly exercised its territorial claims to Tibet, two generations of Chinese civilians have been born and raised in Tibet - while a dwindling generation of childless Buddhist clergy has been in exile. "What should be done with these Chinese families?" I asked.

"Send them back to China!" he said.

The point is, that's where they think they are and where we, too, think they are. The U.S. established full diplomatic relations with China *after* the Tibetan takeover which means that we regard Tibet to be part of China. "And what if the Chinese don't want to leave their homes?" I asked. "What will you do then? Starve them? Bomb them? What?"

"The Chinese committed atrocities and must be brought to justice!" He seemed certain of this.

At the risk of having paint dry on my roller - a catastrophe in the fine art of wall painting- I asked how preventing American citizens from bearing arms ever got tied to a peaceful solution to the Tibetan situation. Had he never witnessed the pathetic spectacle of third-world revolutionary armies of conscripted, peasant farmers... men who never held a gun who were now required to kill with them?

He countered that we weren't Third World and that we now had a large standing militia and that I had obviously misread the 2nd Amendment: The Constitutional Framers intended it for wars in which we had no regular army. I reminded him that we had a regular army *then* when our Republic was founded - George Washington, himself, was a General of that Army.

As I held the door open for him and he sidled past my cocked roller, I asked him to consider the possibility that it was because the Framers so appreciated the Minutemen - Citizen Soldiers who were used to handling weapons - that they wrote the 2nd Amendment. Perhaps they knew the obvious: the best shots in the wartime infantry are invariably the best shots in the peacetime woods.

Then, if these were not enough of an assault upon Buddhist common sense - and it certainly should have been - I received yet another epistle from an enterprising group that had seen the wisdom of linking Buddhism's name to profitable crusade.

And so I learned that now enlightened people believe in euthanasia. As an enlightened Buddhist, I was expected to be moved to join... at a level of membership commensurate with the



size of my contribution - an organization which would put me on an elite "availability list" for people to contact in their time of need. I would surely be rewarded for helping to mitigate their sorrow and/or for helping a physician to make a difficult decision. Meanwhile, there were books that I could purchase. The letter left me wobbly and fearful of needing a physician myself.

So, people who can think of ten thousand ways to spend the money they'll inherit from Grandpa - providing they can consign him directly to the Sweet Hereafter and not let him detour through expensive nursing homes - have suddenly become so bereft of imagination when it comes to accomplishing this economical transit that they'll beg - of all people - a physician to make the hit for them, with a priest acting as some cheery Igor, yet. And all the time they'd be speaking so glowingly of the peace and dignity they wished to bestow on Pop-Pop that we'd wonder how they restrained themselves from dueling for the right to dispatch the old guy.

In more civilized societies they'd ask their Don to put a contract out on him; and every beneficiary would have an air-tight alibi for the night Gramps got whacked.

It began to bother me. How had it happened that Buddhism was getting involved in all these controversial subjects? And I resented, too, the false hope that was given to people who wanted me to write those letters of protest to Texas. Their grief had been used merely to paint an aura of beneficence around the heads of a few P.R. clients. I also began to think about that odd "Free Tibet/Anti-gun" agenda.



PART II



So how did the Lion of Buddha on our Zen escutcheon go from rest to attack? Two reasons suggest themselves. Money is, of course, an obvious answer; a soldier who is at ease can enjoy quiet contemplation; but a soldier who rises to fight when he's not defending what's his, is, in one way or another, a mercenary. The other reason is not so obvious. It requires us to appreciate that it is the "soldier" who is resting. Let's look first at the damage the money problem creates.

If there were only a few Buddhist pirates out there and if they targeted only a specific and limited source of booty, we'd have amusement or embarrassment but not discomfort. The problem is that the pirates are increasing in number and the stricken targets, in falling, strike others.

When clever professionals obtain donations for their dubious causes, money that might routinely have gone to support someone's local Zen Center not only is diverted to these expensive promoters, but, in enriching them, provides for even more funding campaigns. Many small, independent Zen Centers, struggling to escape financial ruin, can attribute at least part of their distress to this appropriation of charitable dollars.



It's an old story: a well financed and unscrupulous business opens across the street from an established competitor. It lowers its prices and spends much on decor and advertisement; and the competition, despite years of honorable service, is abandoned. Once the old supplier collapses, the newcomer's got the only venue in town. And if it's Buddhism that's being sought, what might anyone expect from an institution that resorts to such tactics? Not the Dharma, surely.

The "Free Tibet/Anti-gun" marriage presents us with an interesting case history of lost or impractical causes, both of which, however, bring considerable dowry to their union.

Years ago Tibet had allies in Senator Jesse Helms and the Fundamentalist Christian Right who were fiercely opposed to Communism. (The friend of my friend is possibly my friend but the enemy of my enemy is definitely my friend.) That Tibet hated China made Tibet a wonderful hot-button issue to American anti-Communists.

But then we established diplomatic relations with China and began to trade in Chinese goods... and we understood foreign policy in terms of the domestic mantra, "It's the economy, Stupid!" The Berlin Wall came down and with all the talk of Perestroika we suddenly heard no more about Tibet versus Communism.

And so the emphasis was switched from politics to religion. China was charged with persecuting Tibetan Buddhists. But the Christian Right wasn't interested in saving Buddhists, Tibetan or otherwise, and funds had to be raised by pushing new emotional buttons the way the anti-Communist button used to cry out for massage. (Of course, it is also possible that the Christian Right finally learned the meaning of the word "theocracy". One Pope in the universe was already one Pope too many for most of them.)

Soon everyone was trying to milk the cash cow. Old sources of income from selling books, supplies and garments, and from guest accommodations and membership fees, began to run dry as Buddhist organizations competitively multiplied; and soon we had enterprising souls solicitously pulling for a variety of causes.

We know that the best fund-raising techniques are either prestige-based or empathy-based. (Occasionally we can shame a person into giving; but, unless it is inspired by blackmail or the deeds that prompt a Remittance Man's check, shame is rarely a reliable source of income.)

We may give because we seek honor, fame or power, or because we want to associate ourselves with persons known for their philanthropy or righteous sacrifice; and we may also give



because we are empathizing. This latter good quality is the one most reprehensibly exploited. It is human nature to pity and identify with someone who is in pain or fear and then to try to alleviate his distress. For the fund-raisers it then becomes a simple matter to palpate generosity in order to touch those individuals who are so moved by the plight of the struggling person and so inflated by the heroic quest to save him that they will contribute much money or labor to the cause of his salvation. Always at the heart of every fund-raising campaign we can expect to find the ventricles of suffering.

And so, messages of misery come via Internet, phone and postman as wound upon wound is delivered to some Buddhist leader's psyche: the homeless; the incarcerated; the terminally ill; the earthquake, flood and wind victims; the soon-to-be capitally punished; the war ravaged, the peaceless and so on and on. Prominent Buddhist leaders are hemorrhaging from so many orifices while begging someone...*anyone*... to staunch the bleeding with wads of dough that, with all the gnashing of teeth and rending of flesh, they've become oddly comical. (This is Itchy and Scratchy Zen which, if taken seriously, loses its redemptive value.)

Fund-raising strategies, by their use of pathetic victims with whom there can be emotional identity and an aroused heroic impulse, additionally create what is probably the most pernicious result of such greed. There being neither point nor profit in saving proud heroes, it becomes a dramatic expedient to use these non-pitiable citizens as foils... and so we denigrate those who are entitled to our approbation and respect. Has there ever been a Veterans' Day Parade in which some Buddhist organization marched? (I know of none.) There are Christian Veterans' groups and Jewish Veterans' groups but no Buddhists. In our new Buddhist "holier-than-thou" views men who defended their country are seen as violent thugs. Good Buddhists are pacifists and do not touch guns. On the other hand, a fellow sitting on Death Row for having murdered with one is somebody we will go to the mat for. The longer he sits there the more we empathize with his fearfulness, the more we become involved in his fate, and the more determined we are to save him. Once saved, of course, he will be forgotten. This, no doubt, explains why Richard Speck is no longer the Poster Boy of Death Penalty Abolitionists. This... and a few other things...

The veteran, the man who has fought to preserve the civilization we all enjoy, is brushed aside, an embarrassment. The only time we find Buddhists near military installations is when they are protesting our possession of nuclear weapons.



The second cause of the problem is that American Zen is an incomplete institution.

The zendo, as a meditation hall, exists for only one-half - the introspective, mystical half - of a unique Buddhist/Daoist synthesis. The dojo, as a martial arts' center, exists for the other half - the extroversive, active and politically concerned half. The Wushi are the ones who avenge wrongs; the Samurai are the armored knights who defend the helpless. The lion rampant is the lion poised to fight; and to this end the Wushi and the Samurai practiced their skills in the dojo; but it was to the zendo, unarmed and peaceful, that traditionally the warriors came to strengthen and renew their spirits and to receive, by way of the Dharma talk, refined instruction in Zen ethics.

We can see the effects of this schism between Zen and the martial arts in the non-family nature of the Zen center. Were Zen complete, with both zendo and dojo, we would have accommodations for children or young adults. We have neither. The zendo, alone, was never meant to accommodate children; but then, insofar as it was not functioning as a hermitage, the zendo was never meant to function independently of a variety of other training facilities, either.

In American Zen, if a priest has the civil authority to marry members of his congregation, he, alone, among the world's clerics, has no ecclesiastical function to "baptize" their offspring. The zendo was intended to be an extension, a tangential training-ground of mystics, or, at the very least, the upper end of the gamut of cradle-to-grave Buddhist experience. As a single unit, the zendo is merely the setting of an adult club. The Zen Center doesn't function at all until a member is at least old enough to go to college.

In terms of religion, our children are split off from us; and unless they are the children of Asian immigrants and have ethnic temples to visit, they don't know what they are or who we are. There was a time that they would have attended a dojo associated with our zendo. The teachers of those dojos would have had clerical rank and would also be martial arts' senseis and sifus, fully appreciative of their ecclesiastical role. They would be members of a clerical governance body, and they would be vital rungs in the ladder that led up to Zen Buddhism's mysticism. The Dharma talks of the zendo would be elaborations of principles learned in the dojo.



Without this foundation and preparation, American Zen teachers seldom speak of advanced principles at all, but instead must simplify their message until it is childish drivel or Buddhist gaga.

It was - and still is - in the dojos that the real task of instilling Zen Buddhist virtue is fulfilled. Youngsters, energetic and bereft of philosophical appreciation, begin their grooming by learning disciplined effort, self-reliance, good manners and ethics. In every training session in the dojo the young are formally reminded to avoid a "them versus us" mentality and to cultivate conciliatory responses to potential aggressors. They are instructed in the ways of respect - not only of another person's property, but his differing beliefs and customs, too. (I personally have heard senseis and sifus give singularly insightful talks to their students, talks that were far more nourishing to the spirit than the pap served up, by design or by default, in most American zendos.)

Traditionally, when these students were sufficiently mature, they were admitted to the meditation hall with all due ceremony. But always, the dojo was there... a place in which anger and aggression could be vented.

In every group we find internecine strife. Members will cast their "enemy shadows" upon each other; and especially when there is no physical release of individual hostility, leaders find themselves forced to use the tactic of gathering all the individual shadow impulses together and projecting them out of the group onto some malignable target. This preaching of contempt is what the dojo is designed to avoid. In fact, most people who attend American zendos simply have neither the physical nor the intellectual habit or means to dissipate negative energy or aggressions.

In a dawn-to-dark sedentary existence, folks sit on their couches, in their cars, at their desks and dining tables, and then, risking morbid lividity, they come to their zendos and sit some more. This is not how Zen was ever intended to be. It is the reverse of this strategy that occasions both the workouts in the dojo and the Dharma talks of the zendo.

And it is this second vital element the absence of which causes so much trouble within our Zen community. A master's role is to turn a devotee's attention inwards upon itself and, when contentious issues present themselves, to explain them in terms of their karmic inevitability and to counsel understanding and forbearance, the approach of wisdom. It is through these



compassionate insights that we learn to become less judgmental and more detached. It's two-lane blacktop. When we crusade for a cause, we do not have the road to ourselves. There are always the oncoming traffic's headlights shining in our eyes, blinding us to that other way of looking at things. Zen training requires that we become self-aware and realize that when we stand to criticize others we are usually projecting our own shadow content upon them and, by that projection, are purging ourselves of our own culpability. It isn't that we consciously absolve ourselves of the sin we accuse others of committing; it is that we are oblivious to the fact that we ever sinned at all in such a way. All memory of any past event that might mitigate our criticism is erased so that we can concentrate our critical gaze upon the "other" culprit. This is the psychological blindness that the Dharma Talk, given by an enlightened leader, is intended to cure as it opens our eyes to alternative views - to that other way of looking at someone. Then, in our reflections we may see both an issue and ourselves more clearly.

We might, for example, see that there is something terribly wrong with Americans objecting to China's abuse of a religious group while the vision of U.S. Army tanks surrounding exploding houses at Waco is still spray painted on our memories like so much indelible graffiti. Wouldn't propriety demand that we first ask our Justice Department to explain to us how it happened that we ordered all those innocent children to be burned alive? We needn't search Asia for atrocities. If Waco wasn't an atrocity, what is an atrocity?

In like manner vegetarians may become less sanctimonious when they become more aware of the violence done to creatures whose habitat is destroyed in the course of growing vegetables. They might also consider the Mississippi delta's dead-zone, an immense area in the Gulf of Mexico in which run-off fertilizer has caused the death of every living thing in its flowing path. Responsible hunting and fishing for food are not violent in any definition. And no lofty Buddhist spokesmen can make them so. "Non-violent" vegetarians need also to be reminded that the cows that furnished the leather for their shoes and belts did not commit suicide.

The death penalty, too, is not necessarily a matter of morality. Inconsistency ever being a symptom of hypocrisy, arguments for the absolute sacredness of human life require that the proponent of its abolition be similarly opposed to abortion, euthanasia, self defense - either personal or national - or actions taken in defense of the helpless. It requires, in short, Zombie indifference.



Since the death penalty is currently the object of so much Buddhist consideration, let's look more closely at this issue. The Undead aside, we would all agree that if a father came upon his child being murdered by a man, he may kill that man with impunity. All civilized human beings would understand his rage and condone the effects of it. Indeed, we should all be critical if he did not use all necessary force to save his child.

But what if the killer escapes? We need also to understand that this father's grief does not vanish in the interval between the murder and the conviction. This father deserves our pity and concern. But so skewed in its values have Radical Zen become that, like the veteran; this man can be made the object of vicious rhetoric.

Only a few other unfortunate parents can identify with him; and with his righteous anger and the force of law behind him, he does not qualify for heroic interventions. It is the condemned man who constellates our hero complex; and in our irrational emotional reaction to *his* cause we will castigate even the victim's father. It is sad to see Buddhist groups join death penalty protests to preserve a killer's life while cruelly calling the parents who are awaiting lawful closure to their personal tragedy, "blood thirsty" or "cold blooded" - the deluded exponents of Old Testament vengeance.

For these parents no execution may callously be said to be 'in cold blood'. (And they do not consider the score to be "evened" by the execution of their child's killer. This is no 'eye for an eye' swap.) Equally reprehensible is the assertion, "Two wrongs don't make a right." The crime of murder and the punishment of death are not equal factors on either side of a Justice equation that will cancel each other and leave the field in a neatly balanced *status quo ante*.

Of course, if we really look at the issue, it is not the killer's death that concerns us. It is "killing once-removed", in time and in agent. And it is, sad to say, the publicity attendant upon the killer that captivates us and creates an emotional linkage between his life and our own. A kind of Stockholm Syndrome takes over, and it is then that we become enthusiastic hostages for fund-raisers.

Sanghas need to be guided to understand that all men err and are entitled to repent and be forgiven. But to the Zen practitioner, this entitlement is granted through divine justice. If the grieving parents can find it in their heart to forgive the killer, they are to be commended for their



wisdom. But no one has the right to *expect* such magnanimity from them or to berate them for their lack of it.

Naturally we should fear condemning an innocent man; but this fear is better addressed by assuring that prosecution is fair. When prosecutors, negligently or from self-serving motives, use the legal system to injure the innocent, they should be charged with a criminal act. And if that crime results in death, that charge should be murder.

And yes, we should perhaps trace back the killer's Karmic trail and discover why and where he got off the track and went so very wrong. Perhaps as a child he suffered disease or injury which rendered him unable to conform his behavior to societal standards of right and wrong. In Karma we can find reasons for everything; but reasons are not always excuses. And, of course, that same Karmic network, those same complex and ineluctable events in that infinite network of causes and effects, gives society some rights and reasons, too, which create its reactions to the trauma of crime.

Zen is and always has been a discipline of awareness and detachment. It is our emotional ties to the material world that we need to recognize and break. When we do intervene and act in the material world, it is with a calm and steady sense of duty... Dharma. And always we need to appreciate the traffic in that other lane and those oncoming lights that blind us to our way.

Zen is supposed to be opposed in every way to acquisitiveness, to aggression, and to emotional arousals of every kind. Indeed we strive to attain the contrary stance of repose and renunciation. Our goals are interior ones. We require no placards.

Perhaps we ought to give serious thought to rapprochement, to remarrying the divorced couple. Zen and the Martial Arts belong together and it is evident that a certain urgency attends the reunion. The marriage, i.e., the balance of two halves, would provide the contemplative man with needed dojo activity just as it would provide the martial artist with needed spiritual enrichment. The Zen Center needs to be more of a family affair. Including our children in our spiritual path, providing for them in ways that do not interfere with our own meditations, will foster a sangha's growth and well-being. What is necessary is that the persons in whose care we entrust our children are clerically responsible for their development. Old Master Po (character in Kung Fu TV series) was, after all, a Zen master.



Zen is a path to nirvana, a magical mystery tour in which we turn our attention away from the chaotic opposites of right or wrong, good or evil, and we turn our attention away from the chaotic opposites of right or wrong, good or evil, and meritorious or unmeritorious action. By visualization, by sound, or perhaps by picking up a sutra's line and tracing it back into its source... we go deeper into ourselves, into the magic and the mystery. We follow the inward path that leads into the Buddha's Refuge; and, there, our back to the temporal opposites, *couchant*, in the tranquil Sanctuary, we repose in the Eternal One. 

