AN ANALYSIS OF ZEN BUDDHIST RITUAL

BY

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Introduction

According to Gallup poll, one of the key trends in religion in the United States in the 1980's will be the "intensive spiritual search and a desire for inward and individual spiritual growth (Gallup, 1979). This will be accompanied by the proliferation of religious groups to answer these spiritual needs, a blurring of boundaries between faiths, and a growing interest in interfaith dialogue.

Durkheim suggests that religion functions to order life on an individual and societal level. Religion balances the interior and exterior worlds visibly through ritual (Westley, 1978). Ritual is thus the physical form of religion that gives structure to the life of the individual. Bellah (1968) believes that these rituals are produced historically by social and cultural trends. These religious symbols are "the most general model which an individual or group has of itself and its world" (Ducey, 1977).

Michael H. Ducey in Sunday Morning: Aspects of Urban Ritual states that the crisis of our culture stems from the weak authority of institutions. Institutions lack the ordering, meaning-giving, and moral authority for which they have previously been responsible. The newly evolving forms of ritual attempt to regain relevance, belief, and authority in the life of modern man. Alternative religions and rituals are therefore quests to regain meaning not supplied by tradition.

Ducey proposes two ritual options available to Western culture today: Mass and interaction ritual. The difference between them is structural. Mass ritual consists of traditionally structured rituals with designated leaders moving the participants as a unit or mass instead of as individuals. Interaction ritual involves the social interaction and role rotation of all participants in a communitarian understanding of meaning and moral
authority. Interaction emerges as the hope for the present and near-future of religious rituals. This paper shall apply Ducey's research to the meditative ritual of Zen Buddhism to see if mass and interaction describe its ritual option.

**Mass and Interaction Ritual**

The structural differences can be found at three levels of meaning: the exegetical, operational, and positional (Turner, 1967). The exegetical meaning is the official verbal description of the ritual or segment. The exegetical meaning is what the lay person and clergy say that the ritual means. The operational meaning is what can be inferred from what the people do in ritual as shown in their physical movements. The positional meaning is what can be derived from the position of ritual elements in spatial arrangements. To reiterate, the positional meaning is the relationship of the sacred objects to the participants, the leaders, and each other in space.

When we classify rituals by their structural differences, we treat them differently from the conventional classification system, which starts by distinguishing among rituals according to whether they are Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jewish. This classification technique can extend to other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Occultism, and so on. Such classifications are important, but the structural classifications which distinguish between mass and interaction ritual cuts across these lines of affiliation. (Underlining added), (Ducey, 1977).

Buddhism can therefore be studied ritually in the same context as Ducey's
original study from the perspective of structural differentiation.

Mass ritual in Ducey's typology is the response of a people acting in unison, as a mass, in response to the initiation and direction of clergy to the sacred symbols. The leader's role is to translate meaning and moral authority to the mass. The individual worshipper says exegetically, operationally, and positionally--"I do not have sacred authority." Interaction ritual is described as the communitarian interaction of all persons in a role rotation fashion. The location of meaning and moral authority is shared. Participants in this structure express that--"I have sacred authority, as much as anyone else."

Mass ritual can be characterized on five dimensions. The first dimension is the role of the individual in the ritual. In mass ritual the role is usually permanent and involves specialization by function. Clergy and lay roles are distinct in the performance of ritual. Their roles are differentiated by the clothing, positional arrangements, motor activity, and most essentially the initiation of sacred actions or utterances. A second dimension is the determination and ordering of ritual segments and operations. In mass ritual, tradition or the clergy's decision determines the ritual segments and their order. Dimension Three is linguistic style. The linguistic style of mass ritual is traditional, formal and sometimes archaic. The musical dimension, Dimension Four, utilizes both traditional instruments and songs in the performance of ritual. The spatial dimension projects the concepts of sacred and profane through positional arrangements of the clergy and the laity. This positioning is shown through processions, recessions, and seating arrangements. This last dimension demonstrates the value of the space. These dimensions contribute to the unified behavior of the lay participants to the initiation and direction of
the designated clergy towards the sacred symbols.

(INSERT TABLE ONE)

Interaction ritual is the obverse of mass ritual. It is primarily characterized in Dimension One by the lack of distinction between roles of clergy and laity and between the sacred and profane. The primary focus is upon the sharing of the meaning and moral authority and the communitarian interactions of all participants. The elements of ritual, Dimension Two, are determined by democratic selection. Dimensions Three and Four show a nontraditional orientation that favors contemporary musical and linguistical styles. In the spatial dimension, the positioning of clergy and laity blends together and the recognition of sacred and profane blurs. These factors merge into a multiplex role for the involvement of all participants.

Methods

This study uses the major tools employed in Ducey's study, participant observation and interviews of the leaders and lay participants. Observations were conducted on exegetical, operational, and positional levels. They were supplemented with interviews and publications of the group. The ritual was observed more than ten times within a year. Interviews were conducted with all leaders and with several lay participants. Several visitors also shared their impressions of the ritual with me.

The Chicago Zen Temple

The Chicago Zen Temple was selected for several reasons. First, it is located in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago where Ducey did his research. Second, Ducey suggests that his structural classification extends across religious boundaries to Buddhism. Third, the Chicago Zen Temple is the closest Zen temple in the Midwest to Ball State University.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION 1</th>
<th>MASS</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clergy Roles</td>
<td>Permanent, specialized roles</td>
<td>Role rotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laity Roles</td>
<td>Respond to clergy's actions as a mass</td>
<td>No specialization, democratic</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION 2</th>
<th>MASS</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determination of Ritual</td>
<td>By clergy and tradition</td>
<td>By democratic selection</td>
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<tr>
<th>DIMENSION 3</th>
<th>MASS</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Style</td>
<td>Traditional, formal, archaic</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
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<tr>
<th>DIMENSION 4</th>
<th>MASS</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musical Style</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>DIMENSION 5</th>
<th>MASS</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Space</td>
<td>Clergy and laity demarcated</td>
<td>Equal use of space by all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Space</td>
<td>Sacred and profane spaces clearly distinguished</td>
<td>All space is equally sacred</td>
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The quarterly of the temple, Diamond Sword, published the statistical results of their mailing list survey. Conducted in 1977, the survey showed the following composition of their Zen community.

(INsert Table Two)

The largest group is found at 24 and 25 years of age. The ages range from 19 to 70. 20 percent are married and only a small percentage have children. Occupationaly the group was portrayed as: One-third professional, one-fourth in business, one-fourth as artists and tradesmen, and the remaining 10 percent are students. Among those answering the survey, 79 percent had college degrees, 12 percent Ph.D.'s, and 9 percent had a high school education or less. The racial composition is primarily native born Caucasians. There are no Orientals that attend rituals regularly or that are disciples. One black visited the ritual during these observations. Two of the eleven disciples are black. The group composition is 80-90 percent male. One disciple is female (Smyers, 1977).

At the temple is a hierarchy of leadership and authority based upon achievement in Zazen. The ranking from top to bottom is: Roshi, Reverend, Disciple, Member, Participant. The Roshi is the most advanced in Zazen practice having already passed through the lower ranks. The Roshi serves as teacher and initiator of all major functions. Reverend is a leadership role above the disciple but under the Roshi. Reverends may officiate at major functions in the absence of the Roshi as demonstrated at the Zazen service. Disciples are members who have made a commitment to develop their Zen Buddhist practice and to study under the Roshi. Part of this commitment involves Zazen attendance and leadership, another deals with manual responsibilities such as preparing the zendo, brewing tea, or cleaning up after the service. Members have made a public confession of Zen Buddhism as their faith in a membership ritual.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF COMMUNITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-30 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40 years</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 or more years</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants is the term referring to those who just attend or visit the ritual. (In this paper participants will refer to the collective group and attendants to those who just attend the ritual.)

The Ritual Space

The basic space used by the ritual participants and leaders consists of: A) a foyer, B) the zendo where most of the ritual occurs, C) a kitchen, and D) a dining room.

(INSET DIAGRAM ONE)

The zendo is where meditation and the collective ritual take place. The altar is located at the west end of the space and is adorned with many ornate statues and pictures of Buddha. Candles and flowers are arranged on the altar for special occasions. The altar space is the most colorful and decorated spot in the enclosure. Zafus, black cushions used during meditation, are placed around three walls of the room prior to each Zazen session.

The Ritual

The purpose of the ritual according to the Roshi is to set a tone, a tone conducive to meditation. The exegetical meaning of the Zazen service is elaborated in this excerpt from the Roshi's prepared lecture.

A Buddhist religious service does not pay homage to a god, or to the Buddha as if he were a god, but enters into that spirit which will enable us to be Buddhas ourselves. A Buddhist does not worship the Buddha, but only admires his enlightenment and resolves to follow his Way. To enter into the spirit of the Buddha, he follows the way of the Meditating Buddha and sits silently in meditation. This is our
A - Foyer
B - Zendo
C - Kitchen
D - Dining Room

- Roshi
- Participants
- Disciples
Soto Zen Meditation—sitting with empty minds, erect posture, facing the wall, entering into the world of enlightenment (Langlois, no date).

The ritual centers on the individual's modeling of the Buddha's meditation to reach unity of self, a unity of body and mind.

The Zazen ritual consists of ten segments. The ten segments I have distinguished by the operational behavior of the leaders and participants. I have labeled these segments as:

I. Personal Meditation and Preparation
II. Call to Meditation
III. Collective Meditation
IV. Meditation Period I
V. Walking Meditation
VI. Meditation Period II
VII. Collective Meditation Postlude
VIII. Announcements
IX. Recessional
X. Tea

I. Personal Meditation and Preparation. Participants enter the temple through the vestibule to the foyer. In the foyer shoes are removed and placed in the racks provided. A disciple usually meets newcomers here and begins explaining the Zen customs. Persons previously instructed in this gassho as their single means of interaction with the disciples and other participants.

The gassho, the most common form of interaction in the zendo, consists of raised palms held together accompanied by a forward bend of the trunk at the waist. A gassho is the Zen way of observing respect. Gasshos are
performed towards the greeting disciple, the wall where one meditates, during segments of the ritual when instructed, towards the Buddha in the recessional, and to the Roshi before leaving the Temple. The Western custom of verbal salutation is replaced by the behavioral operations of the gassho.

During this time a disciple orients newcomers with a brief overview of the ritual and a detailed explanation of the meditation posture. The physical posture forms the basis of Zen as one strives to reach a unity of body and mind.

Concurring with this orientation regular participants have quietly positioned themselves upon individual zafus that support the meditational posture. Disciples are busy arranging cushions, brewing tea, and preparing the ritual space.

II. Call to Meditation. The call to meditation begins with the striking of a gong three times by a disciple. This ends the segment of preparation and sets a tone for collective preparation. The participants are instructed en masse to face the front of the zendo by the Roshi. The Roshi is located positionally in front of the altar.

III. Collective Meditation Preparation. A disciple, instructed by the Roshi, distributes sutra cards for the collective chant to each participant. A gassho is performed by the disciple and the receiver of the card. After all cards are handed out, a disciple strikes a gong and begins this gutteral chant. The sutra is conducted in unison Japanese. The chant is marked by the periodic beating of the fish, a wooden Japanese instrument, that sets the tempo of the sutra. The chant is nonotonous in tone, gutteral in pitch, and rhythmic in tempo. Although the chant is in Japanese, Japanese is not the native language of any of the participants.

Following the chant, the cards are collected by the disciple. This exchange is acknowledged with a gassho between the disciple and the individual
participant as he hands him the card. When all cards are gathered, each participant situates himself in the spatial area and physical posture where he will remain during the first session of meditation. All participants sit squarely facing the wall.

IV. Meditation Period One. The duration of both meditation periods varies from 30 minutes to an hour according to the decision and choice of the Roshi or presiding leader. At the beginning of the period the Roshi and disciples may circulate around the room checking postures, adjusting the room temperature, and later in the session by administering the kyosaku or aid of assistance.

The kyosaku is a wooden stick resembling a narrow paddle. It is administered by request as signalled by an individual's gassho during meditation. A disciple then slaps the right and left shoulders of the participant with the kyosaku. The kyosaku makes a shocking, alerting noise in the silent zendo. The effect of the aid of assistance is reported by participants and leaders to be a clearing of wandering thoughts from the mind. After the administration of the kyosaku, the disciple returns to a position at the center front of the room where all gasshos can be seen.

V. Walking Meditation. The walking meditation, kinhin, functions as an interlude to stretch muscles without disrupting the tone of meditation. The proper form of the walking meditation is to maintain the body in constant motion. At the beginning, the leader instructs the group in the number of times that the group will circumambulate the zendo and the pace of the walking. Each individual rises and walks as instructed, in pace with the others, and returns after the revolutions to his zafu. Then one stretches and situates oneself for the second period of Zazen.

VI. Meditation Period Two. The second period is similar in form and function to the first period. Occasionally it is shorter in duration.
The second meditation period ends with the striking of the gong.

VII. **Collective Meditation Postlude.** The Roshi tells all to rise and face the altar. A disciple distributes the sutra cards used previously in the ritual and the sutra is chanted in a like manner. The cards are collected.

VIII. **Announcements.** The Roshi in this segment relates the upcoming temple events such as special services. If many newcomers are present, he may read his prepared lecture entitled "The Nature of the Zen Buddhist Service." If there is a tea held afterward, which there usually is, then it is announced at this time that all are invited.

IX. **Recessional.** The Roshi instructs the participants in the form used to show reverence to the Buddha. Showing reverence consists of physically approaching the shrine, offering incense and donations, a departing gassho, and then exiting to the next room. Individuals show respect to Buddha beginning with the Roshi, the disciples follow with the exception of one disciple who aids the newcomers, and the participants follow the example of those before them in the order of their proximity to the altar.

X. **Tea.** Tea usually follows the Sunday morning Zazen service. Exegetically the Roshi states tea is informal with the stated purpose of getting acquainted with the participants. Operationally and positionally the tea is as formal as the official ritual. The tea setting has informally marked spaces for the Roshi or leader and disciples to sit. The Roshi always sits at the head of the table. The Roshi begins and controls all conversations. At all times the Roshi remains the initiator and focus of the conversation. The Roshi is served first and, following his approval of the tea, then other participants are served. When one is ready to leave, whether disciple or participant, one must expressly tell the Roshi or leader that one is preparing to leave. When the Roshi is ready to have you leave he will make some closing comment. All disciples, even those
busy in the next room, ask permission from the Roshi before leaving. Disciples do not bade each other farewell.

Analysis

Is the Sunday morning Zazen service a mass or interaction ritual? Clergy and laity distinctions clearly exist. This differentiation is visible in the ceremonial costumes worn by the disciples and the Ho-hi. The degree of elaboration on the garments shows the achievement and ranking of the wearer. Non-member participants wear street clothes. Members of the temple, initiated by the Tokudo ceremony, wear street clothes and a wagesa, an article resembling a dark pouch, suspended from the neck, and hold ojuzu beads. Disciples wear long black robes adorned by a wagesa and ojuzu beads. The apparel of the Roshi is a long, black robe with a white scarf framing the neckline, a brightly colored and embroidered wagesa over this, with the hand held ojuzu beads.

The motor activity suggests some elements of mass ritual as demonstrated in the corporate chanting and the recessional. In the corporate chanting, the leader instructs a disciple to distribute the cards. After this, a disciple leads the sutra while the participants follow his tempo set by his punctuation and tone. In the recessional, the leaders depart before the participants in a rank order. These activities show distinct motor patterns for the clergy and laity roles.

The determination of segments and operations of the ritual including the content and duration, Dimension Two, is made by the clergy and follows the traditions established by the oriental founder of the temple. The duration of each meditation period is a decision of the Roshi or presiding disciple. Within the ritual structure there is no provision for interaction of the participants or for their verbal response to the events.

The Linguistic Style, Dimension Three, features traditional Japanese
in the sutra chanting and Japanese words and phrases to supplement the Zen vocabulary. The printed sutra cards facilitate the use of Japanese. The first line of each stanza shows a phonetical pronunciation of the Japanese, the second line contains the English translation or paraphrase of these words, and the third line has the original Japanese characters. Both sides of the card are printed in this manner for each sutra.

The Musical Style, Dimension Four, exemplifies the influence of traditional Japanese Zen. The fish and gong are the only instruments used in the ritual. The precise use of these instruments was derived from the patterns established by the founder of the temple many years ago.

The positional meaning, Dimension Five, shows characteristics of a mass ritual and of a non-mass ritual. Exegetically the priest reports that all parts of the zendo are equally respected by the participants and leaders. The altar, however, serves as a centerpiece in the zendo. The leaders stand here at the beginning and ending of the service to conduct the corporate chanting and to announce temple news. This altar area is not exclusively a clerical spot, an important demarcation of the profane according to Ducey. Each participant enters this space a minimum of two times per ritual in knihin and during the recessional. In the recessional, one not only approaches the space but touches it and places incense upon it.

Following from Ducey, these dimensional elements should synthesize the collective group into a mass of participants and initiating leaders. It does not. The group does respond to the direction of the clergy but identity in the ritual has little connection with this. The mass ritual idea blurs all concepts of individuality and stresses the unity of the participants. This Zazen ritual does not. The tone of the ritual is set for the individual practitioner's benefit. The longest segment of time
centers upon the individual's own personal experience in meditation. The mass ritual concept does not fit because it does not capture the philosophy and operation of the ritual, to help the individual. The leader does not serve as the meaning-giver or moral authority. Zen requires no mediator.

Ducey's alternative to this ritual would be a interaction group. However, interaction is discouraged throughout most of the Zen ritual. Exegetically interaction is discouraged by the Roshi. Political and religious discussions in the 1960's among participants at tea led at that time to the abandonment of the tea custom. The solution to the interaction took the form of the tea's cancellation and stricter controls on the participant's conversations amongst themselves. The result of this was twofold. The Japanese families that came here with social needs left the group and have not returned. The other result is when special events or suppers are held after special ceremonies, members do not know each other by name or face. Disciples may barely be acquainted with each other.

Note the orientation of the participants in meditation. During this time each meditator faces the wall. This seating arrangement excludes all others, leaders and participants, from view. The altar is hidden. 80 percent of the ritual time is spent in such a posture. The gassho signalling the kyosaku stick is the only means of communication. When it is administered, the back of the receiver is turned to the disciple. Interaction is impossible, except for the administration of the kyosaku. Individuality to the level of privatism is facilitated. Interaction in Ducey's terms of the social location of meaning giving and moral authority is absent.

In mass ritual the clergy initiates action, the mass responds. The participant exchanges a sense of "I" for a sense of the corporate "we." In Zazen ritual the sense of "I" is encouraged and the group sense is discouraged. The strength of the individual coming from the unity of his
body and mind is taught exegetically. Operationally the individual has the most control and power in the ritual when he is meditating—the same time that all others are cut off from him.

The purpose of the service as stated by the Roshi is to facilitate the individual's meditation. This is the rationale for the collective group practice. A tone is created to enhance the action. The idea seems reminiscent of a classroom's environment facilitating learning. The environment is to reinforce the meditative and learning experience. The intensity of meditation is a function of the individual's discipline arising in a meditation session.

Discussion

Morton Kelsey (1977) suggests that Christian or Western meditation requires both a vertical relationship to the divine and a horizontal relationship to fellow man. The term relationship shows the personal and interacting pattern conceptualized. Eastern meditation stresses an encounter with a cosmic force located inside a person. Relationships horizontally with fellow men are not stressed because of the location of this cosmic force within. Leaders in Eastern meditation are those who have encountered or achieved more with this force; they are examples for other individuals. The force remains within but one can look to others for means of tapping this force.

(DIAGRAMS 2, 3, 4, 5)

Ducey's framework can be improved by Kelsey's distinction. Mass and interaction ritual are Christian concepts with a two-dimensional, mutually exclusive presupposition. They are represented visually in Diagrams Three and Four. These forms of mass and interaction ritual are ways of collectively relating to this external second dimension. Mass ritual, represented in Diagram Four, relates the appropriate one-dimensional
DIAGRAM TWO: TRANSCENDENT MASS RITUAL

- Transcendent
- Leader
- Participant
DIAGRAM THREE: TRANSCENDENT INTERACTION RITUAL

- Transcendent
- Leader
- Participant
DIAGRAM FOUR: NON-TRANSCENDENT MASS RITUAL

DIAGRAM FIVE: NON-TRANSCENDENT INTERACTION RITUAL

- Leader
- Participant
plane of reality in this world view. The emphasis is placed upon the individual and not the group, the internal and not the external. Interaction is minimal. The immediate environment of the individual is the domain to which he tries to relate. As the Roshi has state, "We seek nothing outside ourselves. The idea in Zazen is just to sit. It offers a form for a training in life" (Langlois, 1976). Elements detached from the direct experience of the self are irrelevant or unattainable. In this Eastern world view a two dimensional framework is meaningless, the frame must be one-dimensional. "Reality withdraws into the realm of the private" (Middelmann, 1974). One deals with the concrete elements of existence—this moment and the "I." Interaction in this religious ritual framework takes the same form as TM groups or Lazurus group therapy.

Conclusion

Zen Buddhist ritual and belief orders the life of the individual in a one-dimensional sphere of reality. Reality is confined to a personal and immediate interior world. Ritual manifests this world view as an ordering of the individual's life experience in a concrete and formalized expression. The growth of Zen could be explained as an expression of the increasingly privatized world of modern men as the Gallup poll suggests. Private lives seek private rituals.

Ducey's framework applies to Western religions but must be compressed from a two-dimensional realm to a one-dimensional to fit Eastern religions. Interaction ritual may well be the most valid religious ritual for believers with a transcendent orientation. However, for those who believe only in their own objective or subjective experiences, the one-dimensional mass ritual, such as Zazen, may demonstrate for them the greatest religious meaning.