



ZEN &
PEACEMAKING
Bonn

MY PROJECT:

Everything Is Training!

**Questions and Answers to Socially Engaged Buddhism Training
(SEBT) February 2021 – February 2022**

Final assignment of the one-year-training offered by talks and in collegial meetings by Dharma-teachers and scientists at Upaya-Zen-Center, headed by Joan Jiko Halifax

Zen Peacemaker. Socially engaged Buddhist.
Zen practice. Small Zendo Bonn.
Publicist. Interactive poetry and bibliotherapy (Lutz von Werder and others).
Group work in circles (TZI: Ruth Cohn). Council.
Dialogue (Michael Lukas Moeller).
Non-violent communication (Marshall Rosenberg)
Spiritual accompaniment

Monika Jion Winkelmann
Eduard-Otto-Str. 4
53129 Bonn
Tel. 0228/443939, 0163/2695423
www.winkelmann-seminare.de



MY PROJECT: Everything Is Training! Questions and Answers to Socially Engaged Buddhism Training (SEBT)

- **Final assignment of the one-year-training offered by talks and in collegial meetings by Dharma-teachers and scientists at Upaya-Zen-Center, headed by Joan Jiko Halifax**

"When I see that a human being is falling, then I see I am this person. Therefore it is quite natural to help her." (Bernie Glassman in an interview with the magazine "Cause & Effect (represented by Dr. Paul Köppler) in 2011, in our apartment in Bonn)

Introduction

December 31, the exact deadline for this project, I was deeply unhappy with the five pages I had written. So I called my younger sister Sabine, aged 65, and shared my feelings and thoughts. Suddenly she said, wait, wait, what you just said was so interesting for me! I said, what did I say? She answered, what you said about training, and that every retreat before today was a training for you, and every sesshin and everything. I asked her, what is it that it gave to you? Sabine replied, I have to think about it, I only noticed that I got really excited and started to understand something.

And then she added, I see you in this, you are a teacher.

I was moved and said, perhaps this is the reason why I would have preferred to give a talk on it instead of writing. I understand, she said, but you can imagine the people to whom you are talking, in the hall, in front of you. I got silent and sad. That is an important point, Sabine, I am only able to imagine them on screen, I have seen only Joan and some of the others three dimensionally...now, I have it. I will talk to you, Sabine. Do you have more questions? Silence. I understood: It can really mean inner work to investigate the question we are seeking the answer to!

On the stage in Frankfurt, together with the Dalai Lama, Anselm Grün, Bernd Scobel, Bernie, whom I experienced for the first time "in person" AND on the huge screen in a huge hall, responded to a question put by the moderator Bernd Scobel: "Yes, I know and everybody in this place will know. But my question is, what about all the people in the world who do not hear the message?" After these words I started to cry and, in a way, have not stopped crying until this day, living, at the same time, with more and deeper joy than ever before.



Sabine: What is Socially Engaged Buddhism?

Great question, thank you. Yes, what is it? Is it the same as zen peacemakers are doing? I am feeling really challenged by this question. IS it the same? I am not sure. I have certainly met zen peacemakers who were more Jewish than Buddhist, I was together with a Sufi, a Lakota man and his friends, some Palestinian attendants, Christian fathers, and I am pretty sure that humanist atheists have also been accepted as zen peacemakers, if they were willing to run a basic training in a peacemaker circle and accept the Three Tenets: Not Knowing-Bearing Witness-Loving (Compassionate) Action (In the eleven years of my path with zen peacemakers I have seen a variety of how the Three Tenets were worded and translated and how zen peacemakers called themselves as a body (From "Family to "Order", to finally "Community").

I would rather answer, it is more specific than the term Zen peacemakers or peacemakers (these two variants allowed much space, but were also confusing), and asked for a Buddhist commitment. I can imagine that there might be companions on the path of this last year, who found or will find to a deeper commitment to Buddhism through the door of this training, which I will call as from now SEBT. This same movement happened to me, that I, already a Buddhist (this might mean different things to diverse people) found my way to Zen through the door of zen peacemakers, or rather through our founding teacher Bernie!

This is already a long introduction to a short answer, but from my standpoint, not long enough there would be much more to say.
How is it for you, Sabine?

Sabine: Got it. But what about the Social Engagement as such? I thought that Buddhists are all caring people...

I think you are right, and also not. Which means that it is worthwhile to have a deeper look on this, and this look might reveal some aspects about us which are not comfortable to acknowledge. Are we caring and loving enough to express the following in a language of respect and modesty?

For me it is all about relationship. I could also have titled this text saying "All is Relationship". And I add, as the teacher, by nature, I am: And relating must be trained, can be trained. And not only with human beings, this is very important, but also with, let us say: Mother Earth, Buddhism. Zen. Religion. How is your relationship to "religion"?

How is our relationship to "comfort?" To "home"? I often think, this is not enough looked at. For some humans it was and is easier to leave "home" (partners, family, children) than for others. People have totally diverse comfort-zones, and some fear relationships whereas others fear far more not living in close relationships.

Actually, for me it makes total sense to ask people to commit to Buddhism in their ways (it is an unbelievably wide field) as a ground or foundation for social action. Maybe, it is because I am German and I have suffered a lot of our collective trauma as perpetrators and as war children and descendants suffering from war related trauma and from individual trauma in our families. We have talked a lot about this and helped each other to look at our wounds and try this and that medicine so that it might close neatly and heal. It has been a fascist education system, your therapist said to you, and I already knew something about that and the effects on us children and the relationships. Fascism has as one characteristic brutal, sadistic behaviour towards so called weak ones, mainly children, old or disabled people, or people who are in much terror and deprived of necessities such as privacy, safety, hygienic and medical basics, water and food, clothes, protection of the newborn, and very young, of mothers, of aged, sick and dying people. So it is very easy to dehumanize humans by taking away those basics. When people are already intimidated, dirty and starving, it seems to be easy to regard them as OTHER. By extended mind training and sitting practice we learn to realize, there is no other.



Everybody has heard about “good deeds” done by Nazis, even in the camps, isn’t it so? And some came to the conclusion that people are never only good or only bad., which is true. But something was missing. What I suffered from as well as many I have seen in my groups and read about, is the lack of empathy, of warmth, of genuine gentleness. With empathy I mean to feel in: Into our own suffering as a baby (which is very, very hard, and most of the time, if accessible at all, is avoided), in the suffering of so called OTHER.

Now let us turn back to Bernie and the quotation. Because Bernie has a surprising take as well on peace as on empathy and compassionate action as on social engagement and healing: He is always talking about ONE BODY. All beings, One body. So, if the child in front of us runs to the big street, we do not hesitate a second, because it feels as if our one hand is injured or will be injured in a moment, and we stop what we are doing and turn to the child (run after it) or hold the injured hand and stop it from bleeding more.

The question is: What makes us overcome hesitation and fright? The answer is: Training. My answer is: Buddhism, in dealing with the variety of aspects, is giving us the means to not look at our own body alone, at our home alone, our friends and our nation. (Which is sometimes hard enough): No, we learn to expand our mind and heart, and let it be open or remain open, towards the OTHER. I truly have not encountered a more appealing, logical, more necessary and more delighting vision and path as offered by Buddhist mind training and by Zen sesshins.

Sabine: You mentioned before that Desmond Tutu had made a famous quotation, a very short one, which sounded like “If everybody does one small good act a day, all these good acts add to transforming the world.” It felt as if you were missing something...

A yes, thank you. Let me try. I would like to add “doing good deeds towards everybody, particularly the stranger, and let us include, please, animals and plants...”, because, I think, we white so called Christian Europeans, have had and still have tremendous difficulties towards people who look differently, practice daily life and religion (birth, death, birthdays, holidays, arguments, transgressions, music, language, eating, drinking, community...) differently than we are used to. When I look at the slaughter-houses of animals, I find these places prepare humans to also kill and slaughter their fellow-beings. The feeling of power over must be far bigger than the empathy for the suffering being, which would make us cry and want to protect the animal. The whole Nazi-ideology was based, as any racist ideology, on: WE and US are more worthy than THEY and THEM. The learning and de-learning has to start from kindergarten to school and school-books and how conflicts are encouraged and resolved. Our sense and definition of harmony, joy, happiness, wealth, belonging and so on has to be, and can really be, re-defined – of course, a long breath is necessary, which consists of: generosity, patience, wisdom, right speech, right livelihood and so on. And as far as I know, only Buddhism offers the EIGHTFOLD PATH (I have only named here six of the eight practices) as a path to liberation, offering at the same time the means to get there! I think, this is outstanding! Is your question answered?

Sabine: Yes. It would be really helpful to talk more about that

I would prefer now to get back to the point, we have talked this morning about. You had asked me, why have you registered for the Auschwitz-Bearing-Witness-Retreat so fast after you had listened to Bernie Glassman. I think I was, deeply within, devastated. I am witnessing how hardhearted and clueless some teachers and parents nowadays react to the suffering at the European borders, on the Mediterranean, in the refugees’ asylums and containers in and outside of our cities and towns. The unfathomable numbers of already dead and still dying black Africans is so terrible, that one feels shattered and powerless, so that the obvious facts have to be denied or distorted and to be put in a narrative that blames others: the refugees themselves, those that help them, the politicians here and there... We think perhaps: “They MUST have done something bad in order to run such risks, in order to be shot, to starve, in order to be neglected, put into prisons, negated. Because it would make no sense to think otherwise”. It was the same as with Jewish and Sinti and Roma and others deported, persecuted and put into the camps! Those who are risking their lives to rescue from sea emergency are criminalized. But fortunately there are grass-root-movements, human rights campaigns or communities who care deeply, in our country, in the countries close to the sea. I would love to



see more Buddhists, more interfaith groups with ordained persons, as in Standing Rock, to fully commit to this cause. I find Bernie's, but also Alan Senauke's approach and that of Joan Halifax and Paul Lederach so refreshing and uplifting to really thoroughly collaborate with the people of Nepal, as an example, and offer oneself, time, logistics, complex journeys and equipment for better health, clinics or clinical care and teach girls and women about hygienic measures. And, whenever it is possible to repeat those journeys. We can imagine the effects on the people we wish to serve!

What I have seen and experienced on a small scale with one person or one family may be extended to a large and more complex project: It is about giving worth, being available, listen wholeheartedly, respond in maybe surprising, helpful ways. I have seen people bloom if she or he feels greeted as we would greet our mother or child. And these are Buddha's teachings and ways to change our minds. How to overcome tiredness, aversion, even disgust: I experienced this in the streets with people. I did not know that I was disinterested in bad smells or dirt. Of course, I do not want to romanticize that, because we only stayed four or five nights outside. But we were completely honest to those without shelter as to those we asked for donations, and almost everybody appreciated our experiment, and felt uplifted. Yes, this is also important to mention: The effect of loving actions on witnesses is tremendous, even, if they only hear about such things happened! So, please never underestimate any action of – unexpected – kindness, goodness.

Excuse me, please, when I am getting too long, in this or other points or if I even fail in my attempt to take you with me. It is so important to reflect about our actions and also inspire each other, and learn from each other. Did I tell you that those wanting to attend a street retreat are collecting money to give it back to the streets? It sounds interesting and weird somehow, but after the retreat you understand the beauty and importance of particularly this point. When we are picking up damaged fruits from the ground, around a market. Or when we are begging there: We are taking what does not belong to us. We take it from those who live there, literally. So the collected money, everybody brings in an equal amount, asking friends and relatives, we decide in a council, to which place or institution caring for homeless we want to give the money. And people are so glad they are also seen and appreciated in their daily work.

The importance of ethics cannot be emphasized enough I find, and while I am talking to you, Sabine, and to my known and unknown friends and readers, I deeply feel to commit far more on ethical training and share about it. If we did not get any ethical training that could give us orientation, how would we be able to make this step and offer understanding, a hand, something to eat, risk our comfort in meeting refugees, homeless in our towns.? We would not want to be friends with seemingly (!) criminals (although we should consider this, too). We want to protect our ways of getting along, protect our children from dangers. Feed our families and friends before we think of others, if at all. And with doing all of this, we do not really feel happy, satisfied, we feel somehow terrible even. Why? Because if half of our body or even more is affected by fear, terror, sickness, how can we be happy? We can be happy for a while, this is Okay, but we cannot be deeply happy, we want to know the scope of our lives, don't we?

Another thing that came to my mind: I was traumatized, as many were, in my age-cohort, born some years after end of WWII. As a teenager, I must have seen a film about the camps, how the survivors and the killed ones looked like after the liberation. I was so extremely shocked, that the memory went "underground", exactly as all experiences, our system cannot hold, are going "underground". Deep therapy, such as both of us went through, helps to retrieve what is sending signals from that hardly accessible place, until we are capable to free the experiences and learn to hold them, together with loving OTHERS, therapists, teachers, very good friends. Until we ourselves become the loving OTHER. And until we get aware that there was always a loving, radiant nature in ourselves (as in others), only wrapped up in layers of protective, but narrowing energies, for which we pay a price.

In Auschwitz-Birkenau these processes have manifested to its worst. As in the descendants of war-children the worst has been encapsulated: terror, fear, shame, guilt, anger, distrust, disappointment, disgust, but also longing, love, grief. Perhaps we asked ourselves: Could it be possible to release that, to show our love as Germans, our repentance, our deepest concern and care?



The point "relationship" has to be mentioned, when you are asking why I, and some others were returning to the Auschwitz-retreats. The relationships in such places tend to be stronger than in other places, when death and silence, ceremony and deepest grief are around. I think, we Germans wanted to be seen as human beings! I at least wanted to be regarded as an ordinary good and sometimes bad, often failing, but loving compassionate person! That my ancestors have been misguided, seduced, terribly ignorant to their deeds (my grandfather had, as far as I know (there are many lies and much toxic silence about such actions, deeds, sins, 600 slave workers in three factories), and that I was in despair until today! I wished to be the voice of many others who had lost their voices for whichever reasons or just were not present, or ready to apologize and grieve and connect. But the ceremonies, the chants, the services and prayers made me also happy in profound ways, hard to describe.

Socially engaged Buddhism: For me it is seeing and creating the Zendo – in an act of courageous imagination and creativity, faith, ritual and ceremony - the temple, everywhere we are, and particularly in such uncared for places.

Every time I returned home from the retreat in Poland in November, I was somehow sick, not always visibly, and this used to last until March. From mid-November until March I almost promised to not go another time, I felt so terrible, why had I ever wanted and even struggled to be there, at the place of utmost horror and extinction, of hate and shame for us Germans, of endless suffering of numberless human beings. I would never go back. But there was much more to experience and to learn, for example about friendship between Jewish and non-

Jewish, particularly German people, about grieving together and holding each other, about loving and solidarity, about art, religion, heroism and heroic acts, and much, much more.

Time went by, and pilgrimages, other bearing. Witness-retreats called or for attendance or to be created. The quintessence of all bringing the insight that zen-training on the one hand was necessary for my balance and health, and that on the other hand I would continue to make space for this particular availability as a single person or a group "in the field", called service. And yes, we are able to train our sensitivity, receptivity, vulnerability, intuitive mind and quite some subtle skills which all work magically together, as we are called.

Sabine: Everything is training, you are saying. So what is it exactly you trained?

How is it that one is motivated to – finally – make a leap out of one's comfort-zone? We talked about that this morning, because the same is true for arts, in my case, for writing, and for formal meditation practice. But to jump up will be as easy as other steps when the time is ripe, and or despair, surrender or compassion are strong enough.

We might imagine circumstances when our hearts are contracting, and the muscles around it harden - or they soften, under other conditions. This really happens. By practice, or training we may think of a starving prisoner or a totally overworked worker in a factory or a woman in war, and do not only connect to him or her, which is already much, but our capacity and also readiness to feel in, has increased. And this without causing despair! How can this happen, you wonder. By gradual training or a sudden shocking experience. Bernie, with his „plunges“ created a field of sudden and gradual shocks. But we were all very well hold, much better than any other visitor to the former extinction camps. Like in a sesshin we are getting introduced, getting orientation, information, experiences of belonging, silence in order to go deep, walking-meditation to get grounded, council in order to experience group wisdom, connectedness, understanding.

All these ingredients are fostering happiness, because joy and love and understanding and connection can only grow and stabilize with an open heart, which is a loving heart.

We may see and feel and be in awe how bodily experience and mind experience go hand in hand.

Repetition is the key to training. Which is also the key of art and the religious experience.

I believe, if we would take the time to explore this deeper, we would find out that we already know this but forgot about it. Contemplative practices are reminding us, as the wonderful Dharma-talks ta during this year



reminded us, as well as they nourished and motivated us. They are in themselves an expression of love. Practiced love. There are so many ways of practicing love. I am so extremely grateful.

One way I love is repeating to go to the same places. To deepen friendships with places, with themes, with people. I have committed to offer hospitality, to be hospitality. And to solidarity with marginalized beings, who are also suppressed. Denied issues. So, love of truth, friendship, hospitality and mercy are the four, which I go for, and I hope to use a language everybody is capable of understanding (that can also be silence).

Bernie repeated the loving actions as the bearing-witness-retreats, and it made so much sense to us, didn't it? Before children trust, particularly abused or much disappointed children, they need, for quite some time, a loving person and a stable setting at their side, with a number of same rituals. So, we acknowledge the importance of safe containers, and the bearing-witness- retreats offer this kind of container. Containers of love and compassion. Of grief and repentance. Of celebration and ceremony. Of healing, restoration and transformation. Of true and deep encounters with reality.

Sabine: This is really moving. I notice that I have not as many good group experiences as you have. Did you not also train in council?

I was not aware of it, good to remind me. But how does this point fit into the intent of this final paper? I really don't know.

I might write more about it in another place. I love council and think it is a wonderful safe container and it is so democratic! I really think, that what we tried in this interfaith and intercultural council with Luis and Abdullah and also in Bosnia, supporting a peacebuilders' project, was at the same time harvesting – e.g. from this enormous online SEBT- input! - and sowing fresh seeds into hopefully fertile soils.

With this I want to thank you, Sabine, for your inspiration and patience with me, as well as to the kind readers. We faced some technical difficulties with system overload at the end of the year, and with my ignorance and modest skills. Not at all sure I have fulfilled my own vision I had for this year of SEBT, and whether my intent was clear and adequately brought across. Long-term social engagement, ethically informed, as well as flexibility to respond whenever necessary in our surroundings, aware of the cries of our Mother Earth, aware of the reality of death, aware of the violence of poverty and discrimination, we hope to inspire with friendship, hospitality, solidarity, mercy, and a good portion of joy.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The following information will be available:

- Dharma workshop on Thích Nhat Hạnh teachings on socially engaged buddhism
- report about the Council-training for young Muslim men, written by Luis Padberg and me
- notes about the Bosnia trip to the Peace Farm at Sanski Most
- Hints about two outstanding Muslim peaceworkers and writers who give their creativity, comfort and strong faith to understanding between Jewish and Muslim people in Germany
- notes about the life of the Syrian Kurdish family whom we met in Greece in 2016 and who has now been living some years in Germany...
- and a couple of good surprises!



ZEN &
PEACEMAKING

Bonn

Questions? Remarks? Want to collaborate, plan a retreat?

You may write and/or look at my website. There is a site in English „For my English-speaking friends“. It's a work in progress. :) Never „perfect“ as this „final assignment“ also is, and has become, something, I had visualized in quite a different way.

Thank you VERY much for your attention. For your love, your own loving projects! May all beings benefit.

Yours truly,

Jion