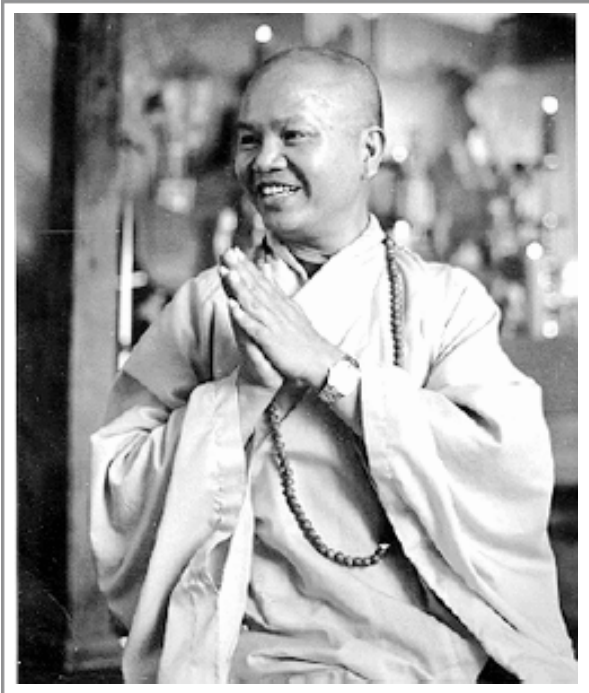




Thich Tien-An



Dr. Thich Tien-An was my ordination teacher, Patriarch of Vietnamese Buddhism in the United States. His International Buddhist Meditation Center sponsored many famous Zen masters and Tibetan teachers. He hosted the Dalai Lama when the latter first came to the United States. Other Tibetan teachers hosted were Trungpa and Sakya Tenzin; the latter the head of the Sakya sect, one of the four main Buddhist schools in Tibet.

Tien-An was the gentlest teacher I ever met. He never had a bad word for anyone. He was as quiet as Robert. He would spend hours in the Temple garden, tending to vegetables, which would go into the Saturday communal soup. He was extremely self-content and utterly patient.

He founded the International Buddhist Meditation Center (I.B.M.C.) in 1968. By 1976 the center had buildings all over the block. Everyone loved him. He built a

college attached to the center, the "College of Buddhist Studies." We worked hard to get it formally accredited through the Western Regional Association. When it became obvious that the hoops were too high to jump, he did an end-around and founded his own Buddhist accreditation organization, which, of course, accredited our college.

He also hosted many great teachers at that time, including Dr. Ed Wortz, who used to teach a weekly group, his own version of Gestalt Therapy. Ed would have his students sit or lie down while he had them analyze their here and now thoughts, feelings and percepts while running through some past, traumatic, life-changing event. He made us realize that the here and now is not the there and then. He also made clear that what we think is going on in the here and now is conceptual. I always looked forward to his Thursday night group.

I later formalized his analysis protocol for working through memories of events as well as expanding the analysis to include all here and now sensations and concepts, and called it "Microanalysis," or "Wortzian Microanalysis" after him. I still think this is a useful exercise because you can literally "see" through the perceptual and conceptual forms that are our "apparent" reality. Space permeates all forms and the space can become a more fundamental percept than the forms it contains. Of course, later, one discovers that not even space or emptiness is fundamental.

All the great traveling Buddhist, and many non-Buddhist, teachers from around the world would stay and teach at I.B.M.C., including the Dalai Lama, Sakya Tenzin, the Karmapa, Hsun Hua, Kozan Roshi, Seung Sahn, Trungpa, Douglas Harding, Leo Pruden and a dozen others whom I can't remember at this moment. Later, the Center, under Karuna and an impish monk from Sri Lanka, Ratanasara, would be the focal point for an attempt to build a nationwide congress of Buddhist organizations and temples. The attempt began to falter with Ratanasara's health. It was also clear that there were too many doctrinal, cultural and language differences to make it work back then. Each temple was an isolated national-cultural enclave. Now the various Buddhist traditions are better coming together because Los Angeles has truly become a world melting pot, and no religion or philosophy seems out of place or radically, culturally different.

Dr. Tien-An ordained me as a novice monk in 1972 or 73, along with my Dharma Sister, the Venerable Karuna, now master of IBMC. I spent 4 years at this center, where I taught meditation and helped build the College library. However, most of my time was spent meditating, because at that time, I felt it

the only true way to enlightenment. The examples of Zen Masters Joshu and Hakuin, as well as Milarepa, colored my mind to expect and not accept anything less than an H-bomb enlightenment experience.

I did not care for Tien-An's gentle kindness. I felt he treated Buddhism only as a philosophy and he only talked about peace, understandable, since the war was raging in Vietnam. I wanted more. I never saw any lightning coming from him. I was not ready to take what he had to give.

I did not know then that enlightenment was seeing through and through the fundamental misconception of reality brought on by thinking. All the meditation Samadhis and blissful chantings cannot, by themselves, undo that fundamental error in thinking. In fact, too much meditation dulls and slows the mind. More important than any practice is the presence of a good teacher who has attained, and also who one trusts.

However, and this is a big caveat, I am absolutely convinced that if one does not practice long and hard to see the Truth, the absolute, God or enlightenment, generally, that any understanding one does attain is mostly thinking and is definitely ephemeral.

Tien-An's father was one of the four Vietnamese monks who self-immolated to oppose the Diep regime.

Zendo



This is the Zendo where I spent countless hours meditating, teaching classes on Zen meditation, as well as leading 3 and 7-day retreats, during the period from 1972-76.