

Knowing by unknowing:
Zen/ Sŏn Meditation and Contemplative Prayer
in the teaching of the Korean Buddhist Master Pojo Chinul (知訥, 1158 – 1210)
and the anonymous English text ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’ (circa 1370).

Introduction

“But now you will ask me, ‘How am I to think of God himself, and what is he?’ and I cannot answer you except to say ‘I do not know!’ For with this question you have brought me into the same darkness, the same cloud of unknowing where I want you to be!”¹

Korean Sŏn meditation and Christian contemplative prayer may at first sight seem worlds apart. The mystifying dialogues between Sŏn masters and their disciples, the shouts and physical gestures indicating a non-verbal expression of the enlightened mind seem far away from the serenity of Gregorian chant or the pondering of the sacred text in *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading) which have customarily led Christian contemplatives into the silent ecstasy of union with God.

In Sŏn, any attempt to use words spoken from the rational mind is thrown back at the disciple in an encouragement to enter the depths of the ‘great doubt’ that is needed to precede the experience of awakening. This doubt can be summed up in a single phrase such as ‘What is this?’ (Korean: *이 뭐꼬?* *Yi Mok Ko?*) repeated by the trainee with each out-going breath, or the simple use of the word ‘*Mu*’ (Korea: 무, 無), literally meaning ‘No’. Such

¹ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, translated into modern English with an introduction by Clifton Walters, (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p.59.

phrases or words are taken from stories of dialogues between great Sōn masters or words spoken to their disciples. This 'hwadu', a Korean word meaning a particle or literally 'head' of speech, are used to sum up the whole tradition, and the whole search of the trainee. Pouring him or herself into this one word, the disciple seeks to go beyond all words into a direct experience of the non-dual emptiness that is not just in all things, but that is all things. The sheer incomprehension of the word, the great ball of doubt that cannot be swallowed, is complemented by the simultaneous necessity of Great Faith (that one truly possesses the Buddha Nature and so can indeed attain enlightenment as the Buddha and others have done before), and Great Determination, sometimes translated as great anger that one has wasted so much time and not yet realised the great matter of life and death by breaking through the doubt to reach realisation.

Yet in the teaching of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, there is a similar emphasis on the importance of a kind of doubt, the placing of oneself in the 'cloud of unknowing' that veils the presence of God from the understanding of the trainee in contemplative prayer. This doubt is not something to be avoided, but to be plunged into with all the energy of heart and soul and mind. Although the author of the *Cloud* can have known nothing of the tradition of Sōn, it seems that he (or she) has come across a startlingly similar way of prayer that unlocks the mysteries of the divine presence. For him (or her) also there is the need for great faith (that indeed the knowledge of God is possible through the grace of a heart enkindled with love for God) and great determination that will not give up until the end of the path has been reached: 'Strike that thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of longing love, and on no account whatever think of giving up.'²

This essay will therefore will primarily examine the work of Chinul, a great master of the Korean Sōn tradition, while taking sidelong glances from time to time to compare his

² *Cloud*, p.60.

teaching with that of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. The object of this exercise will not be to say that the two traditions are identical, or that one is better than the other. Such value judgements are in my view impossible, as there is no impartial point from which to view both traditions equally. Following the lead of the later Wittgenstein, and the application of ideas concerning 'language games' to the field of inter-religious dialogue by John Hick, Paul Knitter and others, I believe that to say that one religion is better than the other would be like saying that one language is better than another. One can certainly assert that in Korean one can say things in a different way than in English, even that certain concepts can only be adequately expressed in the language in which they arose, but this does not necessarily lead to the judgement that religious truth itself can only be expressed in one religious language or another. A variant of such exclusivism can be found, in narrative theologians such as Alasdair MacIntyre or George Lindbeck, who say that truth can only be expressed within the narrative of a particular tradition, the over-arching story which makes sense of each particular element within that tradition. Thus there is no possibility of commonality, no shared truth beyond language. I would not go so far, believing rather that there are commonalities between all traditions, if only in the common narrative of the human experience of life, death and the attempts at communicating the non-verbal experience of transcendence. In the writings of Chinul, and in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, I believe there are sufficient commonalities of expression and underlying experience to justify not just a continued exploration of how such expressions illuminate each other, but also how individuals may learn from and practice the respective disciplines of meditation in each tradition in order to discover at first hand what it is that has brought these historically disparate traditions to such similar expressions of insight.

Chapter One

Chinul

'Once, in ancient times, when the World-Honoured One [the Buddha] was at Mount Grdhrakūta, he twirled a flower before his assembled disciples. All were silent. Only Mahā-kāśyapa broke into a smile.'³

This, according to Zen tradition, was the first transmission of the Dharma, the passing on of the teaching of the Buddha without relying on words and phrases. In a single gesture, the essence of thousands of sutras was communicated, and the transmission of Zen that eventually reached China, Korea and Japan was begun.

Ch'an Buddhism (禪 Korean: *Sŏn*; Japanese: *Zen*), flourished in China during the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 CE), although its roots in China go back to teachers such as Tao-an (312-385 CE) and Hui-yuan (334-416 CE) who emphasised the practice of absorption in silent meditation (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*). In later 11th century Chinese sources, an Indian monk called Bodhidharma is credited with the introduction of Ch'an in the year 520 CE.⁴ His method of mission was to spend nine years in deep meditation facing a wall in a cave near Lo-yang in the Northern Wei kingdom. Eventually his fame spread and he became the first in a series of Ch'an patriarchs in China, transmitting his teaching to his disciple Hui-k'e. A central theme of Bodhidharma's approach to Buddhism was the transmission of the teaching from mind to mind: 'Everything that appears in the three realms comes from the mind. Hence buddhas of the past and future teach mind to mind without bothering about definitions... This mind is the Buddha.'⁵ This teaching shows the influence of Taoism on Ch'an Buddhism, with the use of

3 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier, The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*. (New York: North Point Press, 1991) p.46.

4 Ch'en, *Buddhism in China : a historical survey*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p.351.

5 From the *Bloodstream Sermon*, in *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, trans. Red Pine (New York: North Point Press, 1987), p.9. A popular four line stanza has been attributed to Bodhidharma in Zen tradition. Although probably formulated in the T'ang dynasty, it is often used as a summary of the teaching of the Zen school: 'A special transmission outside sutras; no dependence on words or phrases; directly pointing to the

the term 'mind' (心 Chinese: *hsin*, Korean: *shim*) drawing from the resonances of the term 'Tao' (道), the 'Way' that underlies all things, the source and foundation of all multiplicity.⁶ The True Mind (真心 Korean: *chin shim*) is a key term also in the teaching of Chinul, as will be seen below.

A crucial moment in the history of Ch'an came with the succession of the sixth patriarch, Hui-neng (638-713), who criticised the teaching of gradual cultivation leading to enlightenment proposed by some strands of Buddhism. The record of Hui-neng's teaching, *The Platform Sutra*, which was put together by his disciple Shen-hui, split the Ch'an school into Northern and Southern branches, and became a foundational document for the ascendant Southern school of Shen-hui. According to the teaching of Hui-neng, the essence of mind is intrinsically pure and free from delusion: all that is needed is to awaken to this essence by the practice of focussed non-attached stillness (Sanskrit: *samādhi*, Korean: *chǒng*, 定), which in turn is expressed by the natural and spontaneous function of wisdom (Sanskrit: *prajñā*, Korean: *Hye*, 慧). These terms are found frequently in the writings of Chinul in Korea, who drew much inspiration from the Ho-tse school of Ch'an founded by Shen-hui in order to perpetuate the teachings of his master Hui-neng.⁷

human mind; seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.' Trans. D.T. Suzuki, quoted in Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, p.254. See Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) p.67; and Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p.15f, for critical evaluations of the historicity of this stanza.

- 6 *cf.* the *Tao Te Ching*: 'Something mysteriously formed./ Born before heaven and earth./ In the silence and the void./ Standing alone and unchanging./ Ever present and in motion./ Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things./ I do not know its name./ Call it Tao./ For lack of a better word, I call it great.' *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Feng and English, (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 1973) chap.15. Wright lists a number of themes in Ch'an Buddhism influenced by Taoism: 'the distrust of words, the rich store of concrete metaphor and analogy, the love of paradox, the bibliophobia, the belief in the direct, person-to-person, and often wordless communication of insight, the feeling that life led in close communion with nature is conducive to enlightenment', *Buddhism in Chinese History*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959) p.78.
- 7 The historicity of the Ch'an documents from the T'ang and Sung Dynasties has been largely questioned by recent scholars. Yampolsky, for example, says that 'While Shen-hui was raising Hui-neng to the recognized status of the Sixth Patriarch, either perpetuating an old legend or creating a new one, other Ch'an schools were busy building "histories" of their own lineage, as well as of Ch'an as a whole. The legend of the Ch'an Patriarchs continued to develop, and new versions began to appear.' Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, (New York: Columbia, 1967) p.38. See Ebrey and Gregory, *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, pp.1-45, for the relationship between T'ang and Sung Buddhism, and the creativity of the

Buddhism first came to Korea from China some time in the fourth century CE.⁸ By the end of the seventh century, many of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures were known in Korea, as evidenced by the vast scholarship and commentarial work of the Korean monk Wŏnhyo (617-686). His universalistic and syncretic approach to Buddhism show the Korean tendency to both systematise and harmonize the various schools of Chinese Buddhism. As well as his scholarly work, Wŏnhyo popularized the Pure Land form of Buddhism, based on faith in the power of Amida Buddha's vow to save all sentient beings and the practice of the repetition of the Buddha's name. The Śn school was introduced in the seventh century, and formed nine lineages known as the Nine Mountain sects of Sŏn, each based on a teacher who had travelled to China to practice meditation and be authorized as a master in the tradition.⁹ Periodic attempts to harmonize the Sŏn and scholastic approaches to Buddhism were made over the centuries, most notably by Ŭich'ŏn (1055-1101), but this polarity of meditation and study (Korean: 禪 *sŏn* and 教 *kyo*) remained one of the continuing debates of Korean Buddhism.

Chinul was born in 1158 during the Koryŏ Dynasty. By this time Buddhism had been the state religion for several centuries. Buddhist monasteries, like the Christian monasteries of Western Europe, wielded considerable political and economic power. Still, it was a time of great uncertainties, with a series of invasions from Chinese states to the north, and factional disputes at the Koryŏ court. From his youth, Chinul, the Buddhist name by which he was later known, suffered from various illnesses. His father vowed that if he was cured, he

latter as the real 'golden age' of Ch'an.

⁸ See Lee and de Bary, *Sources of Korean Tradition*, vol.1, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p.34f.

⁹ See Buswell, *The Korean Approach to Zen (KAZ)*, (Honolulu:University of Hawaii Press, 1983) p.9 and Mu Soeng, *Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen – Traditions and Teachers*, (Cumberland, RI: Primary Point Press, 1987 (revised 1991)) *passim*..

would offer his son for ordination as a monk.¹⁰ Soon afterwards, he was cured, and entered the monastery at the age of seven, taking the precepts of a monk at the age of fifteen.

Preliminary Practices

After nine years, wanting to go further in his practice, Chinul made a pact with ten companions in the year 1182, as recalled in his earliest work, *Encouragement to Practice*, written in 1190:

After the close of this convocation we will renounce fame and profit and remain in seclusion in the mountain forests. There we will form a community designed to foster constant training in *samādhi* and *prajñā*. Through worship of the Buddha, recitation of sutras, and even through common work, we will each discharge the duties to which we are assigned and nourish the [self-] nature in all situations. We vow to pass our whole lives free of entanglements and to follow the higher pursuits of accomplished and true men. Would this not be wonderful?¹¹

Here we see Chinul wishing to dedicate himself to the reform of monasticism, away from the distractions of wealth and privilege. As Keel says of the inclusion of manual labour in this charter, 'there is hidden in it a protest against the contemporary wealthy monasteries where monks led a semi-aristocratic life surrounded by temple serfs. Thus it was unmistakably a call to poverty as the essential virtue of a monk.'¹² This paragraph brings out the simultaneous practice of *samādhi* and *prajñā*, going right back to the Buddha in India, but

10 Buswell, *KAZ*, p.20.

11 Chinul, *Encouragement to Practice*, *KAZ*, p.99.

12 Keel, *Chinul*, (Berkeley: Center for South and South East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1984) p.20.

reinforced in the early Zen teaching of Hui-neng. It also shows the background of preliminary practices encouraged by Chinul: contrary to the impression sometimes received that Zen is only about silent meditation. Veneration of the Buddha, chanting and study of scriptures, and recitation of the name of the Buddha were all practices that Chinul encouraged, even if he saw them as representative of the beginning of the spiritual path.

These preliminary practices were seen by Chinul as a means to prepare the mind for the arduous of Sōn practice. They include repentance for evil deeds done in the past: 'If our bodies and minds are not at peace because we have many worldly responsibilities, are troubled with the pains of illness, or are frightened by perverse *maras* [demons] and evil spirits, then before the Buddhas of the ten directions we should repent earnestly. In order to remove these heavy obstacles, we should worship the Buddha and recollect his name.'¹³ In his *Admonitions to Beginning Students*, a novice manual still in use in Korean monasteries today, Chinul talks of phenomenal and noumenal repentance.¹⁴ The former refers to the practice of repentance in ritual situations of chanting and asking for forgiveness, invoking the Buddha's name; the latter refers to the absolute repentance of directly realising the intrinsically void nature of all things and actions, thus more effectively letting go of all that has hindered one in the past. This is one way of making use of both 'self-power' and 'other-power', and so being able to 'partake of the Buddha's majestic power and be able to dissolve all karmic obstructions.'¹⁵ If repentance were simply phenomenal, then this could lead to a reinforcing of the ego as a distinct entity either better or worse than others, whereas noumenal repentance allows all dualistic reinforcement of the ego to dissolve. Although these preliminary practices are most important at the beginning of the path, nonetheless, 'from

13 Chinul, *Encouragement to Practice*, KAZ, p.101.

14 KAZ, p.136. (Korean: 事懺 사참 *sach'am* and 理懺 이참 *ich'am*).

15 Chinul, *Encouragement to Practice*, KAZ, p.118. cf. the words of St. Paul in the letter to the Phillipians 2:12f: 'Therefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, ...'

beginning to end, none of these practices should be neglected'¹⁶ To simply practice silent meditation and nothing else would lead one astray, whereas the keeping of the precepts, and practices of loving-kindness and forbearance, are the foundation of all religious practice.¹⁷

Chinul wrote a separate treatise on the practice of the recitation of the name of the Buddha. In this he recommends ten kinds of recollection of the Buddha: while curbing the body in refraining from immoral actions, while curbing the speech and mind, in all activity and stillness, while speaking and silent, with 'no-mind' in the effortless absorption of *samādhi*, and in 'suchness', when 'the great wisdom of complete enlightenment becomes perfectly bright and it alone is the holiest of all things.'¹⁸ Through the recollection of the Buddha using the phrase 'Praise to Amitābha Buddha' (Korean: *Namu Amida Bul*), 'every day and at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining, [then] the true essence of Amitābha Buddha will secretly appear before you... [and] at the time of your death, he will personally welcome you to the land of ultimate bliss...'¹⁹ But this, according to Chinul, is a teaching for a degenerate age. He recommends it only because people's faculties are dull, and they may not be capable of the short-cut of Sōn meditation. Nevertheless he does not see the two practices as necessarily opposed to each other.²⁰

16 KAZ, p.118.

17 Chinul, *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection*, KAZ, p.316.

18 Chinul, *Essentials of Pure Land Practice*, KAZ, p.193ff.

19 *Essentials*, KAZ, p.196. Examples of devotion to the Buddha are found in the poems of the 10th century monk Kyonyō-jōn. E.g.: 'May this body which bows/ Before the Buddhas whom I draw/ With the mind as my brush/ Go forth and pervade the Dharma realm. / And so may the Buddhas who fill the Dharma realm/ in which I meet them/ In all the Buddharealms within every dustmote/ Be venerated throughout the nine periods of time./ Ah, this I earnestly strive to achieve,/ Untiring in deeds of body, speech and thought.' Buzo and Price, *Kyonyō-jōn: The Life, Times and Songs of a Tenth Century Korean Monk*. (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993), p.43.

20 Heng-ching Shih says of such a tendency in Chinese Buddhism: 'To the Chinese mind, if theoretically there is no obstruction between theory and practice (*li-shih wu-ai*), and between practice and practice (*shih-shih wu-ai*), then practically speaking, there should be no obstruction between Ch'an and Pure Land or any other practices. All kinds of practices can be harmonized in a totality without contradiction. Thus, the rationale of Ch'an – Pure Land syncretism is based not only on the theory of non-duality of one's nature and the Buddha Nature, but also on the non-obstruction between everyday phenomena (in this case, Ch'an meditation and Pure Land *nien-fo* [Kor: *nyom bul*].' *The Syncretism of Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p.26.

Turning briefly to the Cloud of Unknowing, we see a similarly graduated approach to the spiritual life. There are ‘four states or kinds of Christian life, and they are these: Common, Special, Solitary and Perfect. Three of them may be begun and ended in this life; the fourth, by the grace of God, may be begun here, but it goes on for ever in the bliss of heaven!’²¹ The Common life is life ‘in the world’, the Special life that of a religious monk or nun, the Solitary that of an enclosed religious, and the Perfect that of one wholly given over to the longing for God. Although speaking to one who is perhaps a Carthusian monk, the author himself may have been simply an independent hermit or even a secular priest with a knowledge of the religious life perhaps gained through spiritual disciples. Like Chinul, however, he sees the value of the monastic life, and particularly the silence and solitude that it can provide for those who seek such an environment. But he also believes that this work of contemplation is not something that negates more basic forms of spirituality. He assumes that this is not a vocation for all, but rather a particular calling beyond the practice of vocal and mental prayer, which of itself does not make the recipient of the call any holier than anyone else. As such the foundation of psalmody and meditation on the Scriptures is assumed, and this silent prayer is seen as an addition to the disciplines already practiced over a long period of time.

In particular, the author praises self-assessment of one’s failings and earnest repentance: ‘Pause for a moment, you wretched weakling, and take stock of yourself. Who are you, and what have you deserved, to be called like this by our Lord? How sluggish and slothful the soul that does not respond to Love’s attraction and invitation!’²² Here is the Great Determination of the Zen tradition, ‘the earnest purpose of amendment’ in the phrase of the English archbishop Thomas Cranmer.

²¹ *Cloud*, p.51.

²² *Cloud*, p.52.

Also, the practice of devotion implicit in the recitation of the Buddha's name is something that the author of the *Cloud* sees as a life-long practice. Indeed it could be said that his whole teaching is an elaboration of a European Christian form of Pure Land Practice. 'Longing' is a key word in his vocabulary, in a way that Chinul would perhaps have frowned upon. Emotional energy is not often encouraged in Zen, the emphasis being more on dispassion, on equanimity and realisation beyond the ecstasies of devotion. Zen is more of an intellectual awakening than an emotional catharsis, though it retains elements of both. This is not to say that it is merely about rational process, such a misunderstanding being one of the fundamental obstacles to enlightenment. Nonetheless, the emphasis is more epistemological than affective: it is more about seeing and knowing than simply loving. *The Cloud* puts it like this: 'All rational beings, angels and humans, possess two faculties, the power of knowing and the power of loving. To the first, to the intellect, God who made them is forever unknowable, but to the second, to love, he is completely knowable... This is the everlasting miracle of love... To know it for oneself is endless bliss; its contrary is endless pain.'²³ But here we must be careful of too simplistic a dichotomy. The 'knowing' referred to here is the objective knowledge of the intellect, which Zen would also deny as ultimately able to comprehend the Buddha Nature. Discriminative awareness, downgraded by *The Cloud*, is similarly put out of court by Zen. Chinul would say that the knowledge of awakening goes beyond all forms of dualism, whether noetic or affective: Buddha is not something other than oneself to be either known or loved: it is the True Mind itself.

Faith and Awakening: The True Mind

²³ *Cloud*, p.55.

In Chinul's own practice, although the community of practitioners that he had tried to found had not come to fruition, he had his first awakening at Ch'ongwon sa in the far South West of Korea, as recorded on memorial stele composed in 1211:

'By chance one day in the study hall as he was looking through the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, he came across a passage which said, "The self-nature of suchness gives rise to thoughts. But even though the six sense-faculties see, hear, sense, and know, it is not tainted by the myriads of images. The true nature is constantly free and self-reliant." Astonished, he was overjoyed at gaining what he had never experienced before and, getting up, he walked around the hall, reflecting on the passage while continuing to recite it. His heart was satisfied. From that time on, his mind was averse to fame and profit; he desired only to dwell in seclusion in the mountain ravines. Bearing hardship joyfully, he aspired to the path; he was obsessed with this quest.²⁴

The first thing to notice here is that Chinul's awakening came through the reading of a scripture. Although words and phrases were often the trigger of such experiences – Hui-neng the Sixth Patriarch, for example, being enlightened on hearing a phrase from the Diamond Sutra being chanted by a passing monk – they normally occurred while under the direction of an established Zen master, or had to be approved by such a master subsequently. Chinul learnt directly from the scriptures and his own experience: a fact used against him by his opponents later on, but evidence of the importance of the written word even in a tradition such as Sōn which ostensibly did not rely on words, but on the mind-to-mind transmission of master to disciple.²⁵

²⁴ KAZ, p.23.

²⁵ Chinul is here following the lead of Kuei-feng Tsung-mi (780-841), the 5th Patriarch of the Hya-yen scholastic tradition and Patriarch the Ho-tse line of Ch'an. Gregory says of Tsung-mi: 'Ch'an was famous for its claim to embody a special mind-to-mind transmission whose authority did not depend on the textual tradition. In his Ch'an-Preface, Tsung-mi contends that, since both the scriptural corpus and the Ch'an tradition equally derive from the Buddha's enlightenment, each complements the other, and neither can be disregarded. Indeed, he argues that the canonical writings are necessary to validate Ch'an's insight.' *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.78.

What Chinul has awakened to here is 'the true nature', which 'is constantly free and self-reliant'. Not that this made him complacent: he advocated extreme urgency in one's practice, recognising that 'the triple world is blazing in defilement as if it were a house on fire. How can you bear to tarry here and complacently undergo such long suffering?'²⁶ But the way out of the suffering of the world is to awaken to the mind which is the 'true nature'. In order to explain what this 'true nature' is, Chinul quotes the Chinese Ch'an master Tan-hsia Tzu-ch'un: "These hundred bones will crumble and return to fire and wind. But One Thing is eternally numinous and covers heaven and earth." Of this 'One Thing' Chinul goes on to say: "This "formless thing" is the dharma-seal of all the Buddhas; it is your original mind. Since this Buddha-nature exists in your body right now, why do you vainly search for it outside?"²⁷ The original mind is that which is able to see, hear, sense and know, but it is not just the mind of sense-consciousness. "Those who have recognized it know that it is the Buddha-nature; those who have not call it soul or spirit."²⁸ It is a realization that the ordinary mind is itself the Buddha mind; there is fundamentally no duality between delusion and realization, as both are characterized by emptiness or voidness (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*, Korean: 空 *kong*):

'Since all dharmas [things/events] are like dreams or phantoms, deluded thoughts are originally calm and the sense-spheres are originally void. At the point where all dharmas are void, the numinous awareness is not obscured. That is to say, this mind of void and calm, numinous awareness is your original face [the true Self]... Since it has no limitations, it cannot have inside or outside. Since there is no inside or outside,

26 Chinul, *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*, KAZ, p.140.

27 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.140, 141.

28 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.142, quoting the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* compiled by Tao-yuan.

there is no far or near. As there is no far or near, there is no here or there...²⁹ It is not the same as insentience, for its nature is spiritually deft. This is your pure mind-essence of void and calm, numinous awareness (Kor.: 空寂靈知 *kongjŏk yŏngji*).³⁰ This pure, void, and calm mind is that mind of outstanding purity and brilliance of all the Buddhas of the three time periods [past, present and future]; it is that enlightened nature which is the original source of all sentient beings.³¹

This True Mind (眞心, *chin shim*), as Chinul calls it elsewhere, is not the mind as opposed to the body, or even a soul or eternal self with which one might identify. It is the 'numinous awareness' that goes beyond all dualities, particularly that between subject and object. The realization of this Mind is the purpose of all religious life, not as a personal attainment, because the personal is completely relinquished in the process, but as the awakening of Buddhahood which enables the compassionate action of leading all beings out of suffering to enlightenment (or rather to discover enlightenment in the midst of suffering, *nirvāna* within

29 The words of Jesus in Luke 17:20f spring to mind: 'The Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.' Having said this, of course this may be merely a verbal parallel if the verse is interpreted purely in terms of a realized eschatology.

30 'Adopted by Chinul from Tsung-mi, "numinous awareness" refers to the fundamental quality of sentience, which, perhaps not so figuratively, "shines" on sense-objects, illuminating them and allowing them to be cognized... This inherent radiance of the mind does not merely illuminate the world of sense-phenomena, however; as the mind's natural brightness is restored through meditation practice, it comes virtually to shine *through* objects, exposing their inherent voidness (*sūnyā*). Hence, numinous awareness is the quality, common to all "sentient" beings, that constitutes their ultimate capacity to attain enlightenment; it serves both as the inherent faculty that allows meditation to develop and the quality of mind consummated and brought to perfection through that meditation.' Buswell, *Chinul's Systematization of Chinese Meditative Techniques in Korean Sŏn Buddhism*, in Peter N. Gregory, ed. *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*. (Kuroda Institute; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986) p.214.

31 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.145,147. Gregory says of the related term 'intrinsic enlightenment' (本覺 Chinese: *pen-chüeh*, Kor.: *bon-gak*), that such terms provide 'a Chinese elaboration of the Indian Buddhist idea of the potentiality for enlightenment inherent in all sentient beings. This doctrine was developed in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*) into a monistic ontology based on the mind as the ultimate ground of all experience. Although this text purports to be a Chinese translation of a treatise by the venerable Indian master Aśvaghōṣa, modern scholars are generally agreed that it was an apocryphal work most likely composed in China during the third quarter of the sixth century. Whatever its provenance, the *Awakening of Faith* was surely one of the most influential texts for the development of the distinctly Chinese forms of Buddhism that became the matrix for the subsequent development of Korean and Japanese forms of Buddhism as well.' *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, (Kuroda Institute; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p.8.

samsāra). For there is neither more nor less of this Mind in the saint than in the ordinary man or woman, it is simply that the saint is able to dwell within this awareness without interruption.³²

This awakening to the True Mind involves faith and understanding: 'If you believe me to the point where you can suddenly extinguish your doubt,.. if you know its taste for yourself, arrive at the stage of self-affirmation and gain understanding of your true nature, then this is the understanding-awakening achieved by those who have cultivated the mind. Since no further steps are involved, it is called sudden.'³³ Doubt is not a problem in itself: the arousal of doubt is a significant part of the process of Sōn meditation (see below on *hwadu* investigation), but the breakthrough of enlightenment is a sudden collapse of doubt and resurgence of faith in the True Mind. Faith is initially in the teacher ('If you believe me...'), but it develops into a faith that the Buddha-nature really is within grasp, indeed that it is one's own essential nature. It is through this radical faith in the Buddha-nature that one is eventually led to personal experience of the Mind, and understanding of the truth:

Once we have given rise to right faith, we must add understanding to it. As Yung-min [Yen-shou] said, "To have faith but no understanding increases ignorance; to have understanding but no faith increases wrong views." Consequently, we know that once faith and understanding are merged, entrance onto the path will be swift.³⁴

32 'Question: What is the normal mind?

Chinul: All men possess a point of numinous brightness which is still like space and pervades every region. When contrasted with mundane affairs, it is expediently called the noumenal nature. When contrasted with formations and consciousness, it is provisionally called the true mind. As it is without a hair's breadth of differentiation, when it encounters conditions it is unobscured and free from even one thought of clinging or rejection: whatever it encounters, it accepts. It does not follow after the myriads of objects. Even though it follows the flow and reaches the marvel, it never leaves the stillness of its abiding place. If you search for it, you should know that you will not be able to find it. This indeed is the true mind.' *Straight Talk on the True Mind*, KAZ, p.181.

33 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.147.

34 Chinul, *Straight Talk on the True Mind*, KAZ, p.162f. Or as St. Augustine would say, it is a matter of 'faith seeking understanding'. Park comments: 'For Chinul, as well as Augustine, the type of understanding established by faith is not only an intellectual understanding, but also a kind of 'inward illumination.' Augustine's [and Bonaventure's]faith is a divine illumination, reflecting a theory of knowledge derived from neo-Platonism.' *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983) p.17f.

Understanding here is not about an intellectual process, but a direct experience of the radiance of the True Mind within. It is not about faith in something, or understanding of something, because such dualities are swept away in the enlightenment experience. Indeed, in order to guard against the reification of the True Mind, Chinul at times speaks of it as No-Mind (Kor.: 無心 *musim*) or Thoughtlessness (Kor.: 無念 *munyŏm*).³⁵ But in as much as language can be used in this situation, it is an overwhelmingly positive experience, a place of marvel and sanity. The apophatic is still balanced by a kataphatic use of language, faith does lead to understanding rather than to an undifferentiated void.³⁶

For the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the work of contemplation is something that can be fulfilled in a moment: 'Indeed, it is the shortest work that can be imagined! It is no longer, no shorter, than one atom, which as a philosopher of astronomy will tell you is the smallest division of time. It is so small that it cannot be analysed; it is almost beyond our grasp... It is always a sudden impulse and comes without warning, springing up to God like some spark from the fire.'³⁷ This is truly a moment of awakening, a realisation that comes when one does not expect it. It is sudden rather than gradual, overwhelming rather than incremental.

The proximate cause of union is the simple longing for God, beyond all thoughts of what God might be: 'It all depends on your desire. A naked intention directed to God, and himself alone, is wholly sufficient.'³⁸ This can be seen as the Cloud's definition of faith: simply directing oneself towards God without any use of the discriminating intellect, but rather, putting a 'cloud of forgetting' between oneself and all thoughts about God, even about

35 However: 'When I said no-mind, I did not mean that there is no mind-essence. It is only when there are no things in the mind that we use the term no-mind. It is like speaking of an empty bottle: we mean that there is no thing in the bottle, not that there is no bottle. We do not say that it is empty to express the idea that it is made of no material... we refer to the absence of the deluded mind, not to the absence of the true mind's sublime functioning.' *Straight Talk*, KAZ, p.169.

36 On kataphatic discourse in Chinese Buddhism see Gimello, *Apophatic and kataphatic discourse in Mahayana: A Chinese view*, *Philosophy East and West*, 26.2, 117-136.

³⁷ *Cloud*, p.54,57.

³⁸ *Cloud*, p.61.

the kindness and mercy of God or the Passion of Christ. There is some difference of emphasis here when compared with Chinul: for the latter, faith is the assurance that arises after the experience of awakening, the certainty that one's own mind is indeed not other than the True Mind. The Cloud stresses the precursor to such an experience of union, in the form of the naked intent directed towards God. But even this is seen not as something achieved by the individual soul, but as a gift of grace. It is fundamentally passive rather than active, resultant rather than causative in 'this work of grace'.

Samādhi and Prajñā

The relation of faith and understanding in the spiritual path is illuminated by Chinul's second awakening, in 1185 at Pomun sa on Haga Mountain in South East Korea:

I reread the Elder Li T'ung-hsüan's explanation of the first level of the ten faiths in his *Exposition of the Avatamsaka Sūtra*... Thereupon I set aside the volume and, breathing a long sigh, said, "What the World Honoured One said with his mouth are the teachings. What the patriarchs transmitted with their minds is Sōn. The mouth of the Buddha and the minds of the patriarchs can certainly not be contradictory."³⁹

On one level this passage shows the resolution within Chinul of the dichotomy between meditation and study, represented by the Sōn and Kyo sects of the Buddhism of his day. This resolution became the hallmark of Korean practice, but it found its most cogent exegete in Chinul. His combination of Śn/Zen practice with the philosophical base of Avatamsaka Buddhist philosophy enabled the reformation of both sects, and their ultimate unification in the Chogye sect of the present day. In Chinul's words, the mind (Śn) and the mouth (Kyo) of the Buddha are not contradictory.

39 Chinul, *Preface to Excerpts from the Exposition of the Avatamsaka Sūtra*, KAZ, p.24f.

On another level, this passage is a statement about the point in the spiritual path at which enlightenment occurs. Li T'ung-hsüan says that this awakening occurs at the 'first level of faith' in the path of the Bodhisattva (a being on the way to enlightenment) instead of at the end of the tenth level as was normally taught in the Avatamsaka (Kor.: Hwaõm) School. This means that awakening is at the beginning of the path rather than at its end. Such a teaching of sudden enlightenment was common to various schools of Ch'an in China, and so is not an innovation of Chinul.⁴⁰ What is characteristic of Chinul, however, is his insistence on the necessity of continued cultivation after the initial awakening experience. The Hungchou school of Ma-tsu (709-788) in China, which by Chinul's day had become the dominant Ch'an school, taught the doctrine of 'sudden enlightenment, sudden cultivation' (Kor.: 頓悟頓修 *tonno tonsu*), in the belief that the sudden realization that Mind is Buddha, enabled by the paradoxical expressions or actions of the masters, released the Buddha-mind to function freely without constraint. Chinul, on the other hand, felt that this practice was open to abuse: either the basic moral precepts could be forgotten, or the 'spontaneous' expressions of enlightenment employed by such teachers could themselves be grasped and relied upon, substituting the outward form for the inward understanding, and losing the realization of emptiness itself. Chinul taught instead the doctrine of 'sudden enlightenment, gradual cultivation' (Kor.: 頓悟漸修 *tonno chõmsu*). He recognised that sudden cultivation was possible, but believed this was only a path for those of the highest faculties, who had in fact practised cultivation over many previous lives.⁴¹

40 'Q.: What is sudden illumination? A.: Sudden means ridding yourself of deluded thoughts instantaneously. Illumination means the realisation that illumination is not something to be attained... When wrong thinking ceases, that is *dhyāna* [*ch'an*]; when you sit contemplating your original nature, that is *samādhi*, for indeed that original nature is your eternal mind (無生心 Kor.: *mu saeng shim*).' Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai* [8th century CE, China], (London: Rider and Co., 1962) p.43ff..

41 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.143. The debate over subitist/gradualist understandings of enlightenment and cultivation continues vehemently in Korea today. A major opponent of Chinul's approach in recent years has been T'oeong Sõngch'õl (1912-1993), who was Supreme Patriarch of the Korean Chogye Order. For studies of the arguments involved see Park, *On the Subitist/Gradualist Debate in Korean Buddhism*; Mueller,

Chinul describes the two processes of awakening and cultivation in his *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*:

'First let us take sudden awakening... If in one thought [the ordinary person] follows back the light [of his mind to its source] and sees his own original nature, he will discover that the ground of this nature is innately free of defilement, and that he himself is originally endowed with the non-outflow wisdom-nature which is not a hair's breadth different from that of all the Buddhas. Hence it is called sudden awakening.

Next let us consider gradual cultivation. Although he has awakened to the fact that his original nature is no different from that of the Buddhas, the beginningless habit-energies are extremely difficult to remove suddenly and so he must continue to cultivate while relying on this awakening. Through this gradual permeation, his endeavours reach completion. He constantly nurtures the sacred embryo, and after a long time he becomes a saint. Hence it is called gradual cultivation.'⁴²

Awakening here is likened to the tracing back of the light of the mind to its source. Buswell says this practice 'is an essential element of the processes governing all types of meditation practice as Chinul interprets them;...' He gives various synonymous expressions used by Chinul, including: 'trace the radiance back to one's own mind' (Kor.: 返照自心, *panjo chasim*); 'in one thought-moment, trace the light back and see one's own original nature' (*illyŏm hoe'gwang kyŏn chabonsŏng*); 'contemplative reflection' (*kwanjo*) or 'introspection'

Sŏngch'ŏl's Radical Subitism Seoul Journal of Korean Studies, Vol.5 (1992) pp.105-126; and Yun, A *Methodological Reflection on the Subitist/Gradualist Debates Regarding Sŏngch'ŏl's Sŏn Soteriology. Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, vol.8 (1995) pp.107-125. Put briefly, Sŏngch'ŏl states that the term 'sudden enlightenment' (Kor.: *tonno*) refers to 'realisation awakening' (Kor.: *chŭng-o*) after which no further cultivation is necessary.

42 *Secrets*, KAZ, p.144.

(*naejo*).⁴³ Contemplation for Chinul is a matter of eliminating discriminative thoughts from the mind so that one returns to the source of consciousness, the True Mind which is naturally radiant and pure. One could say it is found within the ordinary mind, but as Chinul points out (see above), there is no 'inside' or 'outside' in this experience, so the nearest one can come is to say that it is a returning to the heart of existence itself, the source of all being, discovered in the 'radiance' of all things.⁴⁴

It must also be pointed out that Chinul talks of two kinds of awakening: understanding-enlightenment (Kor.: 解悟 *haeo*) and realisation-enlightenment (證悟 *chŭngo*).⁴⁵ The former is the initial understanding of the non-duality of the ordinary mind and the Buddha-nature; the latter is the ultimate awakening after the maturation of cultivation.

The practice of gradual cultivation involves constantly guarding the mind, like someone herding an ox (Chinul called himself Moguja, the ox herder). By letting go of all thoughts and not following after them evil is gradually eliminated from the mind, although on the basis of the original enlightenment, one knows that all evil has no intrinsic existence anyway, so it could be called 'elimination without elimination' or 'cultivation without cultivation'.⁴⁶ This understanding is essential because otherwise the cultivation could be simply a matter of repression: 'Some people do not realize that the nature of good and evil is

43 Buswell, *Chinul's Systematization of Chinese Meditative Techniques in Korean Son Buddhism*, p.213f. In his analysis of the *Treasure Store Treatise*, a work quoted by Chinul in his *Straight Talk*, Sharf describes something of the Taoist background to such terms. Of the related term 'light of the spirit' (神明, Kor: *shin-myong*), he says that "The term became important in later Taoist *nei-kuan* (內觀,) (inner discernment) practices, exercises that were aimed at discerning the interior of the body and cultivating inner radiance, known as *shen-ming*, or the "light of the spirit". Through inner visualization and illumination one could come into contact and nourish the spirits residing within.... The notion of the light of the spirit is analogous to the Mahayana [Buddhist] understanding of consciousness or mind as fundamentally identical with buddha-nature. According to this reading, the "true mind" is the enlivening force within all sentient beings, which is both the object and ultimately the subject of Buddhist discernment practices.' Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, (Kuroda Institute; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002) p.158f.

44 In his Prologue to the *Itinerarium*, the 12th Century Franciscan Bonaventure speaks of 'the flash of insight by which the mind turns most directly and intently toward the rays of light' which proceed from 'the First Beginning, from whom all illuminations descend as from the Father of Lights' (Cousins, *Bonaventure: Classics of Western Spirituality (CWS)*, (New York: Paulist Press 1978) p.55,53).

45 See Chinul, *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection*, KAZ, p.288.

46 cf. Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching* 48: 'In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired./ In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped./Less and less is done /Until non-action is achieved./When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.' tr. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English.

void; they sit rigidly without moving and, like a rock crushing grass, repress both body and mind. To regard this as cultivation of the mind is a great delusion.⁴⁷ True cultivation involves the awareness of the essential voidness of all thoughts. All that is needed to diminish them is simple awareness of each thought as it arises in the mind; in this way all thoughts eventually vanish.

The process of cultivation is described by Chinul in terms of *samādhi* and *prajñā*. The ideal is to be always spontaneous, without effort acting with 'void and calm, numinous awareness' in all situations. Such a person is unconcerned with clothing or food, is the same regardless of speaking or silence. He or she is detached in all situations: not in the sense of being absent, but of being fully present and unperturbed, with no greed, desire or delusion in the mind, being naturally at peace. However, such a state is not easy to attain or maintain, and cultivation is required to bring the mind back to its dwelling place in the True Nature. Chinul describes the process as follows:

If restlessness and agitation are blazing forth, then first, through *samādhi*, use the noumenon to absorb the distraction. For when the mind does not respond to the environment it will be in conformity with original calmness. If dullness and torpor are especially heavy, use *prajñā* to investigate dharmas critically and contemplate their voidness, and allow the mirror of the mind to shine without disturbance in conformity with the original awareness. Control distracting thoughts with *samādhi*. Control blankness with *prajñā*.⁴⁸

Using the technical terms of Chinese philosophy, Chinul describes *samādhi* as the essence (Kor.: 體 *ch'e*), and *prajñā* as the function (Kor.: 用 *yong*) of the enlightened mind. In their

47 *Secrets, KAZ*, p.149.

48 *Secrets, KAZ*, p.151.

relative application, *samādhi* focuses on a particular object, such as the breathing or a mental image, to bring the mind to a state of absorption; *prajñā* investigates *dharmas* (things/events), to see their characteristic nature of non-self or emptiness. But this relative approach is still operating on a dualistic level which assumes there are objects on which to concentrate or defilements to be removed. Chinul, following the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, recommends rather the simultaneous practice of *samādhi* and *prajñā*, such that they indivisibly inform each other. In this way, absorption does not remove one from normal consciousness, nor investigation set up a duality of observer and thing observed but constitutes more of a bare awareness of the voidness of all things as arising from the non-dual nature.

In the Christian tradition, two aspects of prayer that are often described are the active and the contemplative life. The author of *The Cloud* follows this tradition, seeing the two aspects revealed in the Gospel story (Luke 10:38–42) of the sisters of Bethany, Mary and Martha: ‘Martha represents the active life, Mary the contemplative.’ The Cloud goes on to describe two stages of the active life: ‘the physical works of mercy and charity’, and ‘good spiritual meditations on our own wretchedness, on the sufferings of Christ, and on the joy of heaven’⁴⁹. But it is the contemplative life, the putting of the active life under a cloud of forgetting that constitutes ‘the best part’ praised in the example of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. It could perhaps be said that action and contemplation here are the structural equivalents of *prajñā* and *samādhi* respectively. The former actively discerns the truth of things based on the meditative stability of the latter. This may be stretching the terms beyond their cultural relativity, but still it can be seen that both quiescence and investigation form part of the spiritual path. Here is no ‘quietism’, to use the term applied to later 18th Century French

⁴⁹ *Cloud*, p.80

forms of contemplative prayer that contemporaries thought dangerously vacuous. The mind of enlightenment is acutely aware, not lost in an undifferentiated or insentient void.

Hwadu

Chinul's final awakening occurred in 1197 at Sangmuju am, on Mount Chiri:

Since I came from Pomun sa [to Kōjo sa], more than ten years had passed. Although I was satisfied with the diligence of my cultivation and did not waste my time, I had not yet forsaken passions and views – it was as if my chest were blocked by something, or as if I were dwelling together with an enemy. I went to live on Mount Chiri and found [a passage in the] Records of the Sōn Master Ta-hui P'u-chüeh which said, "... If your eyes suddenly open, then [Sōn] is something which exists inside your very own home." I understood this passage. Naturally, nothing blocked my chest again and I never again dwelt together with an enemy. From then on I was at peace.⁵⁰

Ta-hui (1089-1163) popularized the practice of Hwadu meditation in China, in the generation immediately before Chinul. This form of Ch'an takes a 'head-word' or 'apex of speech' from one of the stories of an encounter between a Ch'an master and disciple (a *koan* in Japanese, or *kong-an* in Korean), and uses that word as a focus of meditation to banish all other thoughts from the mind, and lose all preoccupation with the separate self. All discriminative tendencies in the mind are stripped away, as the doubt engendered by the word focussed on in meditation, and indeed in all activities day and night, consumes the mind. The doubt focuses not on the meaning of the word or saying (the 'dead word', Kor.: 死句 *sagu*), but simply on

⁵⁰ KAZ, p.28. The full quotation from Ta-hui reads: 'Sōn does not consist in quietude; it does not consist in bustle. It does not involve the activities of daily life; it does not involve logical discrimination. Nevertheless, it is of first importance not to investigate [Sōn] while rejecting quietude or bustle, the activities of daily life, or logical discrimination. If your eyes suddenly open, then [Sōn] is something which exists inside your very own home.'

the word itself (the 'live word', Kor.: 活句 *hwalgu*).⁵¹ Eventually the student breaks through the doubt with the aid of a realised master, and directly enters the non-dual awareness of awakening: 'That the doubt about the *hwadu* is broken and in an instant he activates one moment of realization means that he has a personal realization of the unobstructed *dharmadhātu*.'⁵² It was this 'short-cut' Sōn which Chinul discovered towards the end of his life, and which he came to prize beyond all others. It remains the most common form of meditation practice in Korean Sōn to this day.

It is here, with respect to *hwadu* practice, that *The Cloud* speaks so reminiscently of Korean Sōn:

'A naked intention directed to God, and himself alone, is wholly sufficient. If you want this intention summed up in a word, to retain it more easily, take a short word, preferably of one syllable, to do so. The shorter the word the better, being more like the working of the Spirit. A word like 'GOD' or 'LOVE'. Choose which you like, or perhaps some other, so long as it is of one syllable. And fix this word fast to your heart, so that it is always there come what may... With this word you will suppress all thought under the cloud of forgetting. So much so that if ever you are tempted to think what it is that you are seeking, this one word will be sufficient answer.'⁵³

51 Jin Y. Park draws a comparison between the doubt raised in *hwadu* meditation and the anxiety of Abraham about to sacrifice his son, as interpreted in the writings of Kierkegaard: see *Zen language in our time*, Philosophy East and West, 55.1, 80-98. Sung-bae Park, however, points out the necessary practice involved in *hwadu* investigation: 'In contrast to Kierkegaard's and Tillich's model of dynamic faith, however, the Mahayana Buddhist model becomes manifest through a specific practice, namely *kong-an* or koan meditation. Through the active questioning process of *kong-an* meditation, the faith-doubt dialectic is activated and brought to its extreme limit, culminating in the enlightenment experience of "brokenness."' *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*, p.73.

52 Chinul, *Observing the Hwadu*, KAZ, p.49.

53 *Cloud*, p.61f.

Here we have many of the elements of *hwadu* practice: the focus on one word, here 'God' or 'Love'; the fixing of attention to this word regardless of what thoughts may come; and the refusal to enter into rational discursive thought concerning that which one is seeking; and the continual practice of the meditation in all situations even until the practice has come to fruition. This is a practice of 'not-knowing', of going beyond thought to the certainty of that which remains beyond and before thinking. Everything necessary can be expressed by the one word, with all the energy, determination and urgency of a heart full of love.

Conclusion

Chinul eventually established a training monastery at Susŏn-sa (now Songgwang-sa) in the south of Korea, where he handed on his teaching to many followers, including his chief disciple Hyesim. In 1210 he died, and received posthumously from King Hjong the title National Master Puril Pojo ("Buddha-Sun Shining Universally"). Chinul is still regarded by many as the 'founder' of Korean sŏn, not because he was the first to practice sŏn in Korea, but because his teaching has so clearly framed its practice even up to the present day. His commitment to practice and sense of urgency remain inspiring still:

'Whenever we become discouraged or indolent, we should always look to the future.

In one instant we might happen to lose our lives and fall back into the evil bourns where we would have to undergo unspeakable suffering and pain. At that time, although we might want to hear one phrase of the Buddha-dharma, and would be willing to receive and keep it with faithful devotion to ease our misfortune, how would we ever encounter it there?.. Do not forget to reflect upon this as if you were trying to save your head from burning. Death is fast closing in. The body is like the morning dew. Life is

like the twilight in the west. Although we are alive today, there is no assurance about tomorrow. Bear this in mind! You must bear this in mind!⁵⁴

Abstract

Korean Sōn / Zen meditation and Christian contemplative prayer may at first sight seem worlds apart. The mystifying dialogue between masters and their disciples, the shouts and physical gestures indicating a non-verbal expression of the enlightened mind seem far away from the serenity of Gregorian chant or the pondering of the sacred text in *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading) which have customarily led Christian contemplatives into silent union with God.

This essay will primarily examine the work of Chinul (1158-1210), a great master of the Korean Sōn tradition, while taking sidelong glances from time to time to compare his teaching with that of the anonymous mystical treatise of 14th Century England, *the Cloud of Unknowing*. The object of this exercise will not be to say that the two traditions are identical, or that one is better than the other. In the writings of Chinul, and in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, however, it will be argued there are sufficient commonalities of expression and underlying experience to justify not just a continued exploration of how such expressions illuminate each other, but also how individuals may learn from and practice the respective disciplines of meditation in each tradition in order to discover at first hand what it is that has brought these historically disparate traditions to such similar expressions of insight.

After a brief overview of the position of Chinul in the tradition of Chinese and Korean Zen Buddhism, the life and enlightenments of Chinul will provide a structure for the essay. First there will be an examination of the preliminary practices common in much of East Asian Buddhism. Then there will be an analysis of Chinul's first awakening experience of the True Mind, and the role of faith in the understanding gained. The way this experience was deepened by the practices of meditation and wisdom/insight (*samādhi and prajna*) will then be explored, taking into account the sudden/gradual debate in respect of the nature of awakening experience and practice and Chinul's distinctive contribution to that debate. Finally, a brief look at the practice of *hwadu* Zen meditation, discovered by Chinul towards the end of life, will show what he seems to have felt was the means to the culmination of the spiritual path.

Key words : Zen, meditation, Korean Buddhism, Franciscan tradition,

54 *Secrets, KAZ*, p. 155.