

To Open the Hearts of People: Experience Narratives and Zenrinkai Training Sessions

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Recently folklorists and anthropologists have come to focus increasingly on the importance of studying experience. The reasons for this increased interest are numerous, as the following summary by Edward BRUNER suggests:

The anthropology of experience turns our attention to experience and its expressions as indigenous meaning. The advantage of beginning the study of culture through expressions is that the basic units of analysis are established by the people we study. . . . Expressions are the peoples' articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience . . . expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are expressed, and when the symbolism is most apparent. (1986, pp. 9–10)

A number of scholars interested in experience have begun focusing on the use of language in religion – testimony, prayer, song, preaching, teaching – to achieve clearer understandings of how such expressions are transmitted, learned, and used to influence or create a worldview (ANDERSON 1988; LAWLESS 1988a & 1988b; TITON 1988; TYSON et al. 1988).

The New Religions of Japan offer numerous research opportunities to scholars interested in experience and its manifestations in oral narrative.¹ One area in which the Japanese New Religions differ from the

* I would like to thank the staff and adherents of Zenrinkai for allowing me to study the oral narratives of personal experience presented in training sessions and Elaine Martin for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ Even though much of the recent research on Japanese New Religions (e.g., the *JJRS* special issue on Japanese New Religions Abroad [18/2–3], EARHART 1989, and HARDACRE 1984,

older established religious sects in Japan is in their very active proselytizing activities. While many scholars have commented on this activity by the New Religions, few have investigated in detail how the teachings are disseminated. One of the most commonly used forums for disseminating the teachings and recruiting new members of many of the New Religions is a two- or three-day training session. These training sessions generally contain two main elements: an explanation of the religion's teachings, and the oral presentation of the experiences of older members. As these activities are so ubiquitous and important in the New Religions, I have chosen in this paper to do a detailed study of a typical training session of a New Religion—an investigation which yields insights into the dynamics of recruiting members and disseminating the teachings. I have drawn my example of a typical three-day training session (*kōshūkai* 講習会) from Zenrinkai 善隣会 because of the detailed data that I collected during one-and-a-half years of fieldwork (1985–1986) with this group, and because of my belief that Zenrinkai training sessions are not untypical of training sessions of other Japanese New Religions. In this paper I will concentrate on the three kinds of narratives that adherents are encouraged to present during the course of the training session. I intend to show that the training session is structured around these oral narratives, which through their use and interpretation accomplish several tasks: they instruct both older members and prospective converts in the basic teachings; they outline precisely what benefits one can expect and how to receive them; and they lead from reflection on the past, through experience in the present, to a vision of the future.

Zenrinkai History and Teachings

Zenrinkai dogma states that it is a religion born from mountain worship and ascetic practices.² The founder, Rikihisa Tatsusai 力久辰斎 (1906–

1986), includes personal experience narratives, these studies usually do not fall within the area of research on experience as articulated by Bruner and others. A recent example is Earhart's study of Gedatsukai. In this study Earhart makes extensive use of *taiken*, but these *taiken* are very different from the ones I will discuss in this essay. Earhart's *taiken* were collected in interview situations and later edited or summarized for publication, but a detailed explanation of the editing is not given. Additionally, as with most interview situations we are not sure what was most important to the researcher and what was most important to the informant. Bruner's concept of research on experience addresses this problem by completely recording and transcribing activities and narratives as they occur for later analysis. The above comments do not imply that I think Earhart's study, and others like it, are in any way flawed or deficient. The collecting and editing of data are different, but both are valid and useful research tools.

² What follows is a brief summary of Zenrinkai history and teachings. For more detailed information see ANDERSON (1988, pp. 18–46), KOMIYA (1976), and RIKIHISA (1980, 1984, 1986).

1977), was born in Saga Prefecture, Kyūshū. Until the age of twenty he was not deeply involved in religious activity. In 1926 his father Rikihisa Tatsusaburō 力久辰三郎 (1861–1926), who had conducted ascetic practices in the mountains for years and founded a branch of Shintō Jikkōkyō 神道実行教,³ a form of Fujikō mountain worship, died. Tatsusaburō's followers felt that he had supernatural powers enabling him to predict and heal, and they looked upon him as a living god. The followers asked Tatsusai, who was in Kobe, to return to Kyūshū and lead the group. Tatsusai agreed and began twenty years of severe ascetic practice so that he could come to understand the sufferings of others and thereby help them. In the summer of 1946 the final great enlightenment came to him in a dream. In this dream he saw a dove, whose wing was injured so that it could not fly, and a dog, who was starving to death. Both appealed to Tatsusai for help—the dove for protection from the dog, and the dog who wanted to eat the dove so it could live. Tatsusai realized that helping either would be at the cost of the other animal's life. It was then that he came to understand that he must protect the dove and allow the dog to eat his own flesh, that is, he must be willing to sacrifice his body to help others.⁴ This dream eventually led to the creation of *osugari* おすがり, the most important healing ritual in Zenrinkai, which will be described in more detail later.

This revelation in a dream also marked the end of the twenty-year period of ascetic practice that Tatsusai (hereafter Kyōsosama) had vowed to undertake in 1926. At this time interest in expanding the group of believers increased, and an effort was made to set the practices and teachings on a firmer foundation. To this end a headquarters was established in 1947 and active believers began setting up *kyōkai* and *dōjō* in western Japan. In the same year, in a revelation that occurred in the midst of ascetic practices, the Kyōsosama received the *Zenrin no sono* 善隣の園, the basic religious text of Zenrinkai which, like a Buddhist sūtra, is chanted by adherents. In 1952 the group registered itself with the Japanese government under the name of Tenchi Kōdō Zenrinkai 天地公道善隣会. In 1954 the name was shortened to Zenrinkai.⁵

Over time the active believers who set up *kyōkai* and *dōjō* were gradually replaced by a younger, more educated priesthood. In 1961 it was announced that Ryūseki 隆積, the Kyōsosama's second son, would succeed him and be called Kyōshusama 教主様, which happened in 1977

³ For more information on Shintō Jikkōkyō see HOLTOM (1938, 216–23), and MURAKAMI (1963, 78–85).

⁴ There is a well-known Jataka tale which is very similar. Shakamuni in a previous existence as King Shibi was practicing Buddhist austerities when the gods Taishaku, in the form of a hawk, and Bishukatsuuna, in the form of a dove, tested him. To save the dove King Shibi offered his own flesh to the hawk to eat.

⁵ Zenrinkai officially changed its name to Zenrinkyō 善隣教 in October 1992.

when the Kyōsosama died.⁶ In 1970 the Kyōshusama's first son was born and he is now being groomed to succeed his father. Zenrinkai claims a membership of 600,000 people with *kyōkai* and *dōjō* throughout Japan, but the majority of members lives in Kyūshū and western Honshū. Current Zenrinkai ritual and teaching reflect both its historical development as a religion and the influence of the Kyōsosama's revelations.

In Zenrinkai ritual, as it is practiced at the headquarters and in private homes, worship is offered to four different gods or spirits. The first and most important is Goshinzonsama 御神尊様, who consists of two gods: Tenchiōmioya no kami 天地大御親祖之神, the god of heaven and earth who made all things and is the original spirit of the universe; and Shinnyoyugenjizai no mikoto 神如幽頭自在之尊, the Kyōsosama in his postmortal, deified form. The second spirit worshipped is the Kyōsosama in his human form (*ningen no kyōsosama* 人間の教祖様), that is, the person who underwent severe ascetic practices to help others. The third spirit worshipped is actually a group of spirits: the ancestors of all Zenrinkai members (*shinto no senzo* 信徒の先祖); and the fourth spirit is that of the individual believer (*tamashii* 魂).

Zenrinkai teachings have evolved over the years, but they can best be summed up in one of the Kyōsosama's great revelations: "The heart is the maker of fate and life is the factory where fate is made." Zenrinkai members believe in reincarnation, but completely reject the idea of karmic influence (*innen* 因縁) from their previous lives or those of their ancestors. If a person is experiencing a difficulty, the cause can be traced back directly to his/her actions in the present life. The most important manifestation of a problem is illness, which is interpreted as a sign that the person is not living correctly. Therefore the healing of illness is central to Zenrinkai, but is viewed as an expedient means (*hōben* 方便) to interest people in the teachings so that they may live better lives.⁷

Zenrinkai Training Sessions

Training sessions are one of the easiest and most important means used by the Japanese New Religions to gather members and prospective recruits together and transmit their teachings. The first training session at Zenrinkai headquarters took place in October 1950 and lasted nine days. Soon after this first session others were held on the fifth, fifteenth, and twenty-fifth of every month, each lasting five days. Since about 1978 the training sessions have been shortened to three days and are held on

⁶ Ryūseki is actually the Kyōsosama's first-born son. The Kyōsosama did not marry until later in life and his adherents were afraid that he might die childless and so they urged him to adopt a son, which he did. Ryūseki therefore is legally his second son.

⁷ Zenrinkai teaching does not oppose members seeking modern medical help.

weekends to accommodate people's work schedules. The effectiveness and appeal of the training session format are evidenced by the large number of sessions (1,867) that had been held through 1991.

While the length of the training sessions has changed, the content has remained remarkably fixed. I reached this conclusion after attending twelve training sessions over a one-and-a-half year period (1985–1986), and by comparing my observations both to those obtained more than thirty years earlier by a research team from Saga University (IKEGAMI et al. 1955), and to a report on a training session in February 1976 (SHIOYA 1978). Training sessions sometimes focus on a particular group of people, such as high school students or young wives, but at other times the focus is on a particular theme, like healing or world peace. In what follows I will give an overview of a general training session (i.e., one that did not focus on a group of people or special theme) that was held at the headquarters in Chikushino-shi, Fukuoka Prefecture. I describe the format of the training session in some detail because it provides the context in which the narratives are embedded, but my main interest is the three genres of oral narrative which I discuss more extensively later.

A Typical Training Session

The participants, who had preregistered, began to arrive on Friday morning and sign in. By eleven o'clock approximately two hundred of them had gathered in the main worship hall, where a teacher extended a welcome and gave a general explanation of the training session. The group consisted mostly of middle-aged or older people and was about equally divided between men and women. Participants were divided into eight groups with twenty to twenty-five members in a group. Each group was assigned two teachers for the session. For the next three days the members of each group did everything together: sleep, bathe, eat, clean the facilities, study, and worship. Among those in my group were five people who were attending their first training session and five others who had special physical problems. After a brief opening ceremony we ate lunch in the cafeteria, after which there were group meetings. In this meeting our teachers began explaining human fate and the cause of pain and misery in life. We were then instructed to form pairs and talk to our partner about life. My partner was a seventy-year-old man who was attending the session with his wife. He told me about being sent off to Manchuria during World War II with about one thousand other men; only about fifty returned alive. After this meeting all of the groups assembled in the main hall for a presentation of a *taiken* 体験. It began with the speaker being introduced by a teacher.⁸

⁸ In a formal presentation of *taiken*, such as this one, the person is selected in advance.

[Teacher] *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu.*⁹ Goshinzonsama, Gosenzosama . . . [?] . . . We will now have the presentation of *taiken*. *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu . . . Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu.* Thank you for coming. Excuse me, but please raise your hand if this is your first time here. Ah . . . there are a lot of you. Thank you for coming.¹⁰

It is now time to listen to a *taiken*. Some connection brought each of you to this teaching . . . will it really help those who have been sick and suffering for a long time or have a problem? . . . Can the teaching really help solve your problems? I think you came in the belief that you could be helped. There are many people who have been helped. Those of you who just raised your hands . . . you will agree with what I say after participating two or three times. As I just said you believe that you might be helped . . . now I will show you how you can.

Our speaker will tell us how she has been helped. This will increase your faith. If you can believe in the Goshinzonsama, in three days you will gain the strength to believe in the teachings. If you do this you can solve your problems and cure illness. This is the time to cultivate such faith. The *taiken* is not medicine talk [*kusuri banashi* 薬話, overinflated talk after which you have to pay money].

Because of the time we will have only one *taiken*. Please listen carefully to the speaker's condition before and after entering Zenrinkai. "Ah, so . . . if you live like this you get ill . . . because you live like this you have problems. . . ." When you notice this and solve these things you will have a very wonderful life. Such wonderful help.

Now the *taiken* will be presented to you. . . . Our speaker came from the city of Tsukumi, far far away. Her name is Tokuwaki Shizuka. For a long time she had rheumatism of the joints. She began to suffer from this in 1973 . . . afterwards she led a painful, painful life. She had a karmic connection and so on September 5, 1981, she attended her first training session. After this she cleansed herself through these teachings. It used to be difficult for

Many parts of the training sessions are recorded by the Zenrinkai staff for later use. This *taiken* and the *zange* which follow were taped by the staff and the tapes were generously made available to me. I thank Ôtsuki Takahiro 大月隆寛 for help in translating these narratives.

⁹ *Yarimasu* repeated three times is a formulaic opening and closing for most presentations in Zenrinkai. It is a vow to "do your best."

¹⁰ The texts in this essay have been translated from the oral Japanese verbatim. I have used the following conventions: [?] indicates that several words were inaudible on the tape, and an ellipsis, rather than indicating, as usual, an omission of text, in this case indicates a pause by the speaker. In addition, I divided the *taiken* into paragraphs to enhance readability.

her to walk . . . now, thanks to the teachings, she looks so well. Please look at her.

Now you will hear her *taiken*. Grasp what you can from it. As I said before, we came here to try to solve some problems. To do this requires a revolution of the heart. And so, through this *taiken*, if your only reaction when you hear her talk is, “Oh, that was nice,” you will never experience this revolution . . . please try to grasp something. “Ah, perhaps I have been mistaken somewhere.” I will say again: if you can believe in Goshinzonsama, you will definitely be introduced to the world of help. It is now time. [to the speaker] Please come forward. Please clap for her. [applause]

[Tokuwaki] *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu*. . . . As you have just heard, my name is Tokuwaki . . . and I come from Tsukumi in Oita Prefecture.

The person who led me to Zenrinkai was from the Hiroshima branch. Though I live in Tsukumi, I haven’t entered the Tsukumi branch. . . . I belong to the Hiroshima branch.

At first I . . . as the teacher said, at first I couldn’t walk. And so coming here was very difficult. I hate to bother other people . . . and I didn’t like religion very much . . . so I hesitated to come. Later I came and heard the teachings.

The family I married into believed in Fudō-san . . . so after I got rheumatism I went to worship Fudō in the hope of being helped. However, Zenrinkai is a belief that is different.

The cause of my illness was my own heart . . . it was the first time I was taught this. Until then I thought I hadn’t made any mistakes, but, after hearing the teachings I felt that everything I heard related to me. I felt that everything was caused by myself. I thought my worst point was that I was stubborn. I was too serious, and so I was not flexible once I decided on something. And again toward my husband and children I always wanted to have my way . . . so I was hot tempered. My husband was very kind. For over ten years I was a very bad wife, but he didn’t get upset even once. With such a husband I always got my way. When I realized this I thought I was very bad. Also, my relationship with my father-in-law wasn’t very good. Of course my father-in-law didn’t complain much – I didn’t speak to him very much.

Though living such a life, I wondered why I suffered from such a painful illness. I worked at a hospital and so I understand what the end is like for people with rheumatism. I thought only about why I had gotten such an illness. I didn’t realize that my own heart had made me ill. I couldn’t complain about getting ill, I led such a life

. . . That kind of life wasn't good, and I was fortunate that I came here. . . . I learned to change my condition by saying "I'm sorry."

At that time there weren't any other Zenrinkai believers in Tsukumi. The teacher said to me, "Come to training sessions ten times until you get faith . . . never give up until then. If you don't do this you won't be cured." I went to ten consecutive sessions. During that time the number of believers in Tsukumi increased.

In November my parents came to Zenrinkai to worship. My mother was deaf in her right ear; however, she was helped immediately (*sokketsu* 即決). My father . . . injured his lower back in a bomb blast during the war and it hurt constantly. He also received immediate help. After they were helped, my parents talked to a neighbor. Last year a teacher came from the headquarters twice. And so now the Tsukumi branch has about forty people. [applause]

Until now I always pushed people to do things my way; however, I now think I must make my family happy. I feel if I don't my illness will never get better. Sometimes I am away from the headquarters . . . I often get upset when my children don't listen to me. When I do my rheumatism immediately flares up. And so I truly think that my illness won't get better if I don't get a flexible and mild personality. Until now I am the one who has been helped, and so from now I will do my best to help others. *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu*. [applause]

[Teacher] *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu*. We have just heard Tokuwaki's wonderful *taiken*. Since she finished rather quickly I have a bit more time to talk.

Tokuwaki was a nurse. As she mentioned, she couldn't find help before and therefore became quite desperate. But she was very kind to others, as all of you know. She said she knew someone in Hiroshima. Someone from there was a patient at the hospital she worked at. She was very kind to this patient. That patient got a bit better and returned to Hiroshima. He remembered the kind nurse who had helped him and wondered how she was doing. When he thought this I understand he wrote a letter to her. He was informed by Tokuwaki that she had suffered from joint rheumatism for about three years. Even though he suffered from palsy he wanted to help this kind nurse. And so he went to Tsukumi from Hiroshima, telephoning, I understand, before he went. He took her to a training session, and that was how she started coming.

I was at that session. She couldn't stand up or sit down. She was really in pain . . . her face showed the suffering. Now she has a very wonderful face, but at that time it was full of pain. I was really concerned and worried. Why did god give humans such illness? Why

is god so unfeeling? When I saw Tokuwaki's pain I almost hated god.

I often came to sessions at that time and I clearly understood her condition. At that time I gave Tokuwaki some difficult advice. I went out of my way to speak to her personally, but she thought I was being a nuisance. However, when you see now how well she is, I think what I did was right. Now I feel sure that what I told her was useful.

In Tokuwaki's presentation I sensed she is a wonderful human being . . . don't you all agree with this? Don't we live thinking that we are such wonderful people? However, she came to a session and heard the teachings, and she tried to reflect on her life up until then. . . . She realized that there had been some mistakes. Tokuwaki thought, "Ah, I was mistaken." We tend to think that we live correctly. . . . The mirror of the teachings is the truth that is derived from the way of nature. If we look into this mirror we realize that humans are egocentric and others' affairs are secondary. And so we are unsatisfied. "Ah, others should let me do what I want." In such an inhuman-like life . . . the seeds of illness are hidden. . . . Wasn't it this that she was taught? Isn't it this that Tokuwaki wants all of you to understand?

All illness and unhappiness derives from the influence of the heart. She taught us that visible illness is derived from the unseen influence of the heart. In Tokuwaki's case what caused her problems was a bad personality. What was bad? She was narrow-minded, she said. Please raise your hand if you think you are narrow-minded. Ah . . . there are a lot of you. You understand yourself. And she explained her narrow-minded personality as being because she was too serious. If it was a normal degree of seriousness she could probably have led a good life, but since she was too serious it wasn't good. Such a person is never satisfied. Looking at things your own way you think you are correct and don't pay attention to other things. If you don't agree you don't say anything. Didn't she live such a life? She said so. She was rigid . . . she wasn't flexible. She had a personality such that she wanted everything to go her way. And she said she was not satisfied if she didn't get her way. That's so isn't it? Because of such a personality the joint rheumatism appeared on the surface. It isn't just illness . . . but such things appear in everyday life.

And so she cut the intimate relation with her husband, children, and relatives . . . and finally with her neighbors. In such a condition the seeds of unhappiness and illness are hidden. Do you understand? She didn't follow her husband . . . she wanted to control him. When she couldn't, she wouldn't talk to her husband for three or four days. She just told us this. People with joint rheuma-

tism never listen to what others say. She wanted to do things her own way, without listening to what others say.

And so finally she developed joint rheumatism. . . . This is a joint disease, and so the Goshinzonsama taught us that the cause lies with the relatives, not outsiders or others. . . . The Goshinzonsama taught us that relatives [flesh and bone] divide, relatives [flesh and blood] divide. . . . If there is strife between relatives [flesh and bone], there is illness. So if you solve your problems with your relatives, you will definitely be healed.¹¹

In this life we can solve the problems that we face and so you should feel easy. The Goshinzonsama taught us such things. In this life we create our own illness. If we have the ability to make our own illness, then this ability comes from god. Hence the power to heal ourselves is also given to us by god. Just hearing such words . . . don't you feel relieved?

For example, some things are beyond the ability of doctors. There are probably people here now with problems like this. The doctor as a human may give up, but god never does. As I said, your illness is created by you and so you also have the strength to heal yourself. And so believe me. You will have contact with this teaching for three days . . . I'll teach you the way to receive help through reflection and confession.

And so you must give your all. Because of Tokuwaki's speech, shall we all listen to this teaching? Even the serious joint rheumatism that she had got better. No one's illness is incurable. Don't you all feel like this now? In fact I was helped by this teaching with an incurable disease. There is no reason why I can be helped and you can't be. In these three days please listen carefully. Not just with your ears – everyone has a heart. More concretely, you all have a spirit . . . you should receive the words of the Goshinzonsama from the bottom of your spirit. Everyone please be serious – even if I don't explain, you will understand. We must be serious . . . I think we must have the feeling of doing our best. And so now I will leave feeling that everyone understands. Thank you very much. Do your best please. *Yurimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu.* [applause]

¹¹ The meaning of this paragraph revolves around a double entendre, which offers a common explanation of why people get rheumatism. The word for "relatives" or "family" used here is *kotsuniku*, but the two ideographs that make up this word *kotsu* 骨 and *niku* 肉 mean "bone" and "flesh" respectively. *Chiniku* is used as well here and can mean "relatives," but the two ideographs that make up this word *chi* 血 and *niku* 肉 mean "blood" and "flesh" respectively. The explanation hinges on these double meanings: if there is strife between family members (*kotsuniku*, *chiniku*) then there is strife (pain, rheumatism) between the bones (*kotsu*) and flesh (*niku*).

After the *taiken* we heard a lecture about the importance of “heart” (*kokoro*) to obtain relief from illness and suffering. This talk ended around five o’clock and was followed by dinner in the cafeteria. After dinner we all gathered in the main hall to worship and chant. Following this, each group went to a separate room to hear a talk from one of the teachers. Ours told us of the experiences (*taiken*) he had during one week of ascetic practices in the mountains that he had just finished. After this talk we once again assembled in the main hall for some announcements. We were then free to bathe and sit in our room with other group members and talk. The lights went out around half past ten.

Awakened by music at six o’clock, we put our sleeping mats away and washed up. Then all of the groups gathered in the main hall for morning worship and chanting. Each group was then assigned an area of the headquarters to clean. After breakfast we had some free time before the first lecture, so group members sat around in their rooms and discussed health problems and cures with each other. All groups then gathered in the main hall for the morning lectures on Zenrinkai teachings. We then divided into our groups to talk with our teachers about family problems—especially marital discord.

All groups reassembled once again in the main hall, where one of the head teachers discussed how the teachings of Zenrinkai can help in our lives and talked about the suffering that the Kyōsosama underwent for our benefit. The lights were slowly dimmed and the voice of the teacher rose and became more excited. This signaled the beginning of the *Goshinzon kaigen* 御神尊開顕 ritual and the healing ritual of *osugari*,¹² the high point of the training session and the two most important rituals of Zenrinkai. The teacher became more excited, and as the lights dimmed further he pleaded with the Kyōsosama for about five minutes to help us. Some people began to cry in anticipation. Accompanied by a loud blast of organ music, the front of the altar suddenly lit up, and the doors in front of the statue of the Goshinzonsama opened.

A general cry arose from the assembled participants and the Kyōshusama suddenly appeared. He stripped off his shirt and was led through the participants by a number of teachers who stood in front of and behind him. The people frantically touched his arms and body. When he had circulated through the whole crowd, he returned to the front, raised his right hand in a blessing, and quickly disappeared. The doors in front of the statue had only stayed open for a minute. Two or three teachers with microphones stood in front shouting out the *sokketsudori* 即決どり (sudden healings) that the participants and the teachers circulating among them shouted up to the front. Typical examples were: “I have been healed”; “The pain is gone”; “I can walk.” Complete chaos reigned for

¹² The word *osugari* comes from *suguru* 縋る, which means “to cling to,” or “to appeal to.”

a time, but the noise and excitement eventually subsided, and finally the lights were dimmed again and people began to chant. After this, lunch was served in the cafeteria.

Following lunch we all gathered in the main hall to see a film of the Kyōsosama and the ascetic practices that he undertook. An hour later the Kyōshusama talked to us about the teachings, circulated through the participants in a less emotional *osugari*, and then talked more about the teachings until about five o'clock. After dinner in the cafeteria we all lined up and marched to the Kyōsosama's grave, which is in another building connected to the main hall. In this large circular room we distributed ourselves around the grave, sat on the floor and listened to music. Then each person rose and offered a small piece of incense to the Kyōsosama. We next went into another part of this hall where believers can buy a small space to store the ashes of their ancestors. Following a short worship service, we all returned to the main hall, where the Kyōshusama held a special counseling session. We sat around him and anyone with a problem could discuss it and receive advice directly from him. After this counseling session the members of each group returned to their room, spread their sleeping mats, bathed, and sat around talking until the lights went out at eleven o'clock.

On the last day we followed the routine of previous mornings as described above. The first lecture of the day was from 8:30–10:00 and concerned the life of the Kyōsosama. Objects that he had worn or used while doing his ascetic practices were displayed. People were then asked to step forward, usually in groups of three or four. One of the people in the group carried the pack that the Kyōsosama wore when he did ascetic practices, and, facing the altar, gave the *zange* 懺悔 (confession, repentance) for the group. The following is a typical *zange*:

Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu. We are the Yamadas. We are very happy that we have been able to participate in this three-day training session. It has been a very good experience for us. Since joining Zenrinkai a few years ago and learning of the wonderful teachings of the Kyōsosama we have been trying very hard to live by the teachings and create a good family. Thanks to the kindness of everyone here, the teachers and the Kyōshusama, who have taught us many things, we hope to continue our efforts to make a happy family. We want to sincerely thank everyone. *Yarimasu, yarimasu, yarimasu.*

After a short break we assembled for the closing ceremony, at which the Kyōshusama first blessed various objects that had been sold to believers. The lights then dimmed, and the Kyōshusama began crying, pleading, and calling out “mother” numerous times, then “father,” “grandmother,” “grandfather.” Next the Kyōshusama lit a candle and

walked into the midst of the participants, and each participant turned on a small penlight. The pleading continued for the Goshinzosama, the participants' mothers, and others; when this ended, the penlights were extinguished, and the lights came on. People then lined up to pick up the objects that had been blessed at the beginning of the ceremony. The training session was then officially over and people said goodbye to new and old friends. It was early afternoon.

Analysis of Oral Narratives

The reporting of personal experience in both oral and written form has long been important in Zenrinkai. In the training session described above, three different kinds of oral narrative of personal experience were presented: *taiken*, *sokketsudori*, and *zange*. According to the Kyōshusama, all three narrative genres have the same purpose: to open people's hearts so that they can understand and accept Zenrinkai teachings. Each genre, which varies from the others in content and length, is presented on a different day of the training session—a scheduling choice that is clearly not accidental.

TAIKEN

Taiken are of central importance to Zenrinkai and many other Japanese New Religions. The word *taiken* can be used as both noun and verb, and is usually translated into English as “experience.” The word *taiken*, however, generally implies an experience that is both different and more important than an “ordinary” experience (*heiken* 経験). Zenrinkai, along with numerous other Japanese New Religions, uses *taiken* to designate narratives of personal experience whose dual focus moves from an initial recounting of the problems encountered in life before encountering the religion, to the benefits received after joining the religion and internalizing the teachings.

The *taiken* presented above illustrates a very common pattern in Zenrinkai *taiken*. The teacher, who introduces the speaker, immediately mentions the most common reason for attending the training session—the hope of many people there to receive help for some problem, usually of a physical kind:

I think you came here thinking that you could be helped. . . . now
I will show you how you can. This person will tell us how she was
helped.

The teacher also emphasizes that participants should pay attention to the “speaker's condition before and after entering Zenrinkai.” In this way the listeners can compare their lives—their present condition and

problems—to those of the speaker, and if they experience a “revolution of the heart” can receive the benefits of belonging to Zenrinkai, that is, healing and a happy life.

The speaker then presents her *taiken*, which also follows a very common pattern. She introduces herself and briefly mentions her problem—not being able to walk. She does not have to elaborate because the teacher has already mentioned this problem in his introduction. Then comes one of the central parts of a *taiken*, the statement of the realization of the cause of the problem which has been revealed through the teachings of the religion. In this particular case the speaker realizes that she herself was the cause of her illness: she was stubborn, too serious, inflexible, hot tempered, and a bad wife and mother. Through the teachings of Zenrinkai she has come to feel that happiness and health can be obtained only by effacing herself and serving her family.¹³

The teacher speaks after the *taiken* has been presented, making reference once again to her past suffering and the causes of her suffering. Finally he presents the central idea of Zenrinkai teaching, according to which we not only create our problems/illness through our own actions, but are therefore also able to solve/cure them through our own actions.

The *taiken* themselves—the longest and most detailed narratives of the teachings—are presented on the first day along with a summary of the benefits received from practicing the teachings. This first meeting of the three-day training session is intended to initiate prospective members (generally 10–20% of the participants), into the teachings, to explain the benefits that can be received, and to deepen the understanding of those participants who are already members. It is important that the participants be exposed to the teachings and its benefits as soon as possible, and a *taiken* related by a member is usually more emotional, dramatic, and easier to understand than an abstract explanation by one of the teachers. The emotional level of training sessions can rise dramatically during the telling of a *taiken*. Often speaker and audience are in tears and the listeners applaud at various points to encourage the speaker. At this time of increased emotion the participants, through feelings of empathy for a fellow human being who has suffered and triumphed over his/her suffering, can be most easily drawn into the spirit of the training session and into the circle of Zenrinkai believers.¹⁴

¹³ The idea of defining and accepting one's role is very important in many of the Japanese New Religions. Not accepting the proper role is generally what causes problems in life, while learning to accept is what the teachings of many New Religions revolve around. The importance of role and role acceptance for happiness is very well illustrated in *taiken*. I hope to explore this theme further in a future paper.

¹⁴ Sandra DOLBY-STAHN (1985) described this capacity of personal experience narratives to create a feeling of intimacy as one of their most important characteristics.

SOKKETSUDORI

The second type of oral narrative is the *sokketsudori*, the relation of sudden healing experience. These narratives are the shortest of the three, but are presented at the emotional and dramatic high point of the *Goshinzon kaigen* and thereby of the training session. They are important for two reasons. First, *sokketsudori*, like *taiken*, dramatically illustrate the benefits that can be received through Zenrinkai teachings and ritual. The *sokketsudori*, often combined with the dramatic physical movements of people, some of whom attend on crutches or in wheelchairs, comprise a very powerful aural and visual experience for all of the participants. Secondly, *sokketsudori* can become over time the basis for a *taiken*. A number of factors determines whether this more involved narrative develops or not, among them the individual's interpretation of the event at a later time, and the interpretations of family, friends, and Zenrinkai teachers. The *Goshinzon kaigen*, *osugari*, and *sokketsudori*, all of which occur on the second day, present and extend in much more emotional and physical terms the *taiken* presented on the first day. At this time people can personally experience healing or see others experience it.

ZANGE

Zange are very important in the history and development of Zenrinkai.¹⁵ In books and lectures members are repeatedly told about the Kyōso-sama, who, while pursuing severe ascetic practices, reflected (*hansei* 反省) on the human condition and repented (*zange*) in tears. In this way he received most of his major revelations (see e.g., RIKIHISA 1980, pp. 5–19).

There are two distinct forms of *zange* whose content varies according to the type of training session. One kind of *zange* is given by individuals, usually younger unmarried members; generally it consists of a confession of improper thoughts and/or actions, and an expression of thanks to Zenrinkai for helping them realize how to change and live a happy life. The other kind of *zange* is performed by a family with one person speaking for the group. Such *zange* tend to emphasize a vow to create a happy family and give thanks to Zenrinkai for teaching them how to do this. The *zange* presented above is obviously of this latter type.

Zange are told on the last day of the training session, usually in a rather quiet and subdued manner. The training session itself is nearing its end and the emotional level will not approach the *taiken* of the first day or the *sokketsudori* of the second day. The lowered emotional level of the training session and *zange* on the last day enable the participants to

¹⁵ For an excellent study of *zange* in revelatory tales see CHILDS 1987. It would be interesting to carry this study into the present by looking at *taiken* and *zange* published by the New Religions.

calmly reflect on their lives, on their experiences during the training session, and on their return home and the future. They also see others who, by presenting a *zange*, are making a commitment to Zenrinkai teachings and their future.

As explained above, the content and emotional level of the different narratives are important, as is the time when they are told during the training session, but the time frame of the narratives themselves is also significant. *Taiken* are reflections on past experience that bring the narrator and audience up to the present; *sokketsudori* are brief emotional narratives dealing with the immediate present; while *zange*, which may mention the past, emphasize and look to the future. These three different time frames therefore help to focus participants' minds—over the three days—on the past (problems and the possibility of their solution), the present (the immediate solution of problems), and the future (vows to live a life making the resolution of problems possible).

Conclusions

Active proselytizing is a trademark of most Japanese New Religions, and one of the most common forms of proselytization is the holding of training sessions. During these training sessions there are set times, usually of heightened activity and emotion, when participants are either selected to speak, or talk spontaneously of their experiences in life and with the religion. These expressions are, as Bruner stated, "not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are expressed, and when the symbolism is most apparent."

This study of three genres of oral narrative that occur in a three-day Zenrinkai training session has shown that the content of these narratives, the time that they occur in the context of the training session, and the time frame of the narratives themselves are all important. The content of the narratives focuses on problems one encounters in life, on understanding the cause of these problems, on the resolution of them through following the teachings, and on a vow to live by the teachings and thereby create a happy life. The three narratives occur on different days and lead the participants through a process that moves from hearing about the possible, to seeing and/or experiencing the possible, to vowing to seek the possible. At the same time, the time frame of the narratives leads the participant from the past, through the present, and ultimately to a view of and vow for the future. In these different ways the narratives help make entry into the group of members, acceptance of the teachings, and/or the deepening of commitment to the group an easy, logical, and step-by-step process.

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