

ZEN NEWS



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Readers are invited to submit items of news, articles, poetry, artwork, photographs and other material to be considered for publication. Opinions expressed in the items published do not necessarily reflect the editor's own views or the practice of the Tyneside Group. It is hoped that by sharing our experience and understanding we may learn to live together in a positive and harmonious way. In this way Dharma may flourish.

It is intended that Zen News will continue to be published at two monthly intervals. Please ensure that the editor is notified of changes of address. If you have a friend who would like to receive this publication, please send their name and address. No charge is made but your financial support is invited. Payable to; Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association.

Tyneside Zen Buddhist Association

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Editor's Notes

This issue is mainly devoted to an article on the Heart Sutra. The Heart Sutra, although a very popular text, it is widely translated and recited in both East and West, is I think one that is greatly misunderstood. I hope Stewart MacFarlane's contribution will throw some light on this important text.

If there are any questions or topics you wish to be discussed in article form, please feel free to write and let us know.

If you have any contributions however large or small, we are grateful to hear from you. To offer one's thoughts and experience to others without selfishness is an act of great generosity.

To Kanzeon our guide

Kanzeon, all compassionate,
Master of the bright clear Dharma,
Fill this world and all our passion
And make perfection absolute
Accessible to human mind.

Come be within us here and now,
If it's sorrow, if it's joyful,
If it's living, if it's dying,
In each moment we will find you
Freeing us from self enslavement.

Day and night we ask your meaning,
Seek your grace down deep within us,
Seek wholeheartedly to see that,
Every action, every detail,
Gives a glimpse of your reflection.

When we wake our thoughts are on you,
By our senses you can mould us,
Give our ears the sound of your voice,
Fill our eyes with forms of your form,
As you teach us pure acceptance.

Where we are you are protective,
As we act our strength is for you,
Meditation finds you with us,
Finds you move our hearts within us,
Gently, calmly guiding onward.

And so we train towards surrender,
When we can be quiet and listen,
When we can be calm accepting,
When we can just act unhindered
By the knots that tie our minds now.

Thus we seek you in our living,
Move toward you, move to join you,
Feel your great peace, feel compassion,
Feel your joy in living fully,
Oh Holly Kannon, wise and kind.

Thus we work to cease from evil,
Thus we try to do good only,
Cleanse our hearts, do good for others,
Find our refuge, find our true home
In eternal meditation.

Homage to the highest Buddha,
Homage to the perfect Dharma,
Homage to the joyful Sangha,
Homage to all friends and teachers,
Homage to Kanzeon, our guide.

The HEART SUTRA, Translation and Commentary

Introduction

The 'Heart Sutra' or 'Scripture of Great Wisdom' (Sanskrit:- Prajna-Paramita-Hridaya Sutra/Chinese:- Hsin Ching) has justifiably been described as one of the profoundest spiritual treatises of all time. The original sutra was composed in Sanskrit between the second and fourth centuries A.D., and it constitutes a summary of the 'Perfection of Wisdom' teachings (Prajna-Paramita) which consists of over forty texts extending over many hundreds of pages. The central concern of this literature is the elucidation and evocation of Prajna, ie. the transcendental wisdom or insight through which we see things as they really are.

The 'Heart Sutra' had a profound influence on Buddhism in China, Japan and Tibet, and it was translated into Chinese several times. My own translation is of Hsuan Tsang's Chinese version which was translated in 649 A.D. and is the version most commonly used in Japan and in the west. An interpretive translation of this text is to be found in 'Selling Water by the River', P223. I have inserted many of the important technical terms in Sanskrit between brackets as they are more easily recognised in this form.

Translation

When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Chin:-Kuan Yin/Jap:- Kanzeon) practiced the deep Perfect wisdom (Prajna-Paramita) he saw that the five skandhas were all empty (Sunya), and he overcame all suffering. Sariputra, form (Rupa) is not other than emptiness (Sunyata), emptiness is not other than form; form then is emptiness, emptiness then is form. Feeling (Vedana), perception (Samjna), volition (Samskara) and consciousness (Vijnana) are also like this.

Sariputra, all dharmas have the mark of emptiness, they are not born and not annihilated; they are not stained and not clean: they do not increase and do not decrease. Therefore in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, volition or consciousness. No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind. No form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mental objects (Dharmas). No realm of sight, and so on to.....no realm of consciousness. No ignorance and no extinction of ignorance, and so on to.....no old age and death and also no extinction of old age and death. There is no suffering (Dukha), no accumulation (Samudaya), no annihilation (Nirodha), and no path (Marga/Chin:- Tao). No knowledge and no attainment.

Because of this non-attainment the Bodhisattva relies on Perfect Wisdom and he has no mental hindrances (Citta-varana), and because there are no hindrances he has no fear. He is far removed from deluded views and finally (attains) Nirvana.

All the Buddhas of the three worlds, because they rely on Perfect Wisdom they attain supreme and perfect Enlightenment (Amuttana-samyak-sambodhi).

Therefore know the Perfect Wisdom, it is the great holy mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the highest mantra, the unequalled mantra. It can get rid of all suffering, and in truth it is no falsehood. I proclaim the mantra of Perfect Wisdom, and I proclaim it thus:- Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha.

Commentary

"When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practiced the deep Perfect Wisdom"

It is significant that the key figure in a text devoted to Wisdom (Prajna)

should be Avalokitesvara, the personification of Compassion (Karuna), who is rarely mentioned in the rest of the Prajnaparamita literature. The point being made here is that although they appear different, Wisdom and Compassion are in fact two aspects of the same reality. In Mahayana Buddhism it is the Bodhisattva who unifies these qualities in his own training. The Bodhisattva is a being who awakens Prajna and strives for Enlightenment, but postpones his entry into Nirvana in order to help others overcome suffering and attain Enlightenment.

"...he saw that the five skandhas were empty".

The sanskrit term 'skandha' literally means 'heap', and it refers to the five constantly changing elements which constitute the individual.

I said earlier that to see things in the light of Prajna or Wisdom is to see things as they really are, and in Prajna-paramita Buddhism this means seeing things as empty (Sunya). Emptiness here refers initially to the absence of a self (Atman), in the sense of a permanent entity or principle which characterizes the individual. It also refers to the absence of any 'own-being' (Svabhava), which according to Indian thought is the essential characteristic of a thing which makes it what it is and distinguishes it from other things. Emptiness is also an absolute term which denotes the liberation from and absence of the phenomenal world.

"...and he overcame all suffering".

This phrase is absent from the sanskrit version of the text, but it is relevant here. The central concern of the Buddha's teaching was the alleviation of suffering, dissatisfaction and anguish (Dukkha). He identified the cause of suffering as selfish craving or attachment, therefore liberation consists in the eradication of suffering through the removal of its causes. The Heart Sutra sets out to do the same thing in terms of an apparently radical restatement of Buddhist doctrine.

"Sariputra, form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form; form then is emptiness, emptiness then is form. Feeling, perception, volition and consciousness are also like this".

Here the five skandhas are outlined in their relation to emptiness. Form refers initially to the physical aspect of the individual, and indirectly to the material world in which the body functions.

In order to stress the insubstantiality and impermanence of the phenomenal world, and of our own existence in it, the Buddha developed two important teachings:- Anitya, which means that all things are subject to change, and Anatman, which means that no eternal, immutable self or soul can be identified in the individual. He analysed the individual in terms of the five skandhas and pointed out that a permanent self or soul could not be identified with any of these; and even if we were to postulate such a self it could never be known or apprehended and is therefore an empty concept. The Buddha realised that the idea of a permanent soul or self with its own characteristics and attainments militated against the possibility of achieving detachment and overcoming craving.

At a conventional level of understanding the statement, "Form is emptiness" seems meaningless, since it asserts the identity of the material world with the absence of the material world; or the identity of the material with the absolute, or Samsara with Nirvana. But in the non-discriminatory insight of Prajna this ceases to be a problem because the identity of form and

emptiness actually frees us from all problems. Since the things around us are empty of own-being or distinguishing characteristics, what is there to be attached to or worried about? We are quite literally free. Furthermore since we are without self, there is nothing to be attached or worried with. The Enlightened mind which sees all forms as empty of distinguishing characteristics, must also see them as identical, therefore the distinction between Samsara and Nirvana cannot be taken as absolute by such a mind. In the Pali scriptures there is an incident where the Buddha was asked, "How can one enjoy bliss (Nirvana) in the absence of a self to enjoy it?" The Buddha replied, "The absence of the self is itself bliss".

As we have seen, most of our problems and distractions arise from our attachment to the things around us, and to our one-sided viewpoints. When seen in the light of Prajna these things are no longer as concrete or as permanent as they once appeared. Our ideas and opinions can no longer be seen as eternally fixed truths around which we try to mould our lives. The insight of Prajna, which can be realised in the activity of 'just sitting', gives us the opportunity to let go of our opinions and attachments lets 'reality' be, just as it is, without distortion. It is important to realise that the idea of emptiness itself can become an object of attachment, and if misunderstood the teaching of emptiness can lead to the dangerous attachment to nothingness or vacuity. The one-sided attachment to the statement, "Form is emptiness", and its annihilationist implications is like the attempt to suppress thought in meditation. The attempt to reduce thought to nothingness is a form of negative attachment which ignores the fact that thoughts are 'real', in the sense that they are genuinely experienced in our minds. They are 'unreal' in that they have no independent existence outside our minds. The thoughts are neither wholly real nor wholly unreal, therefore we must take the middle course between the two extremes, between suppressing them and grasping after them. Neither the Buddha nor the Prajnaparamita teach the complete annihilation or non-existence of the external world or the self. Hence the statement, "Form is emptiness", is qualified by the equally important statement, "Emptiness is form".

"Sariputra, all dharmas have the mark of emptiness".

The word 'dharma' may be defined as an ultimately real fact or event. The philosophically inclined monks in the Hinayana schools analysed the whole of reality into its basic elements or dharmas. In order to demonstrate the impermanence of all things they followed the procedure of the Buddha who, as we have seen analysed the individual in terms of the five skandhas in order to show the absence of a permanent self. The number of dharmas resulting from this analysis varied according to the school. The Sarvastivada school identified seventy-five dharmas, including Nirvana. But by treating these dharmas as the ultimate constituents of reality, with their own existence and characteristics the Hinayanists were in fact undermining the insubstantiality and impermanence which they were attempting to express. Therefore the Prajnaparamita school found it necessary to point out that these dharmas themselves are insubstantial and empty of any particular characteristic which makes them what they are. According to this redefinition, dharmas are seen as nominal or provisional entities with no underlying substance or permanent reality.

The monk/philosopher Nagarjuna who founded the Madhyamika school, which is the systematic and logical development of the ideas of the Prajnaparamita, pointed out that according to the Hinayanists a dharma, in order to exist at all must be a completely independent entity, it must be dependant only on its 'own-being'. It cannot arise from or be produced by anything else, and neither can it be destroyed by anything else, since this would make it dependant. If

it can neither be produced nor destroyed then it must be eternal; furthermore since it is without cause or effects we cannot know anything about it; so the concept of an eternal, self-existent entity is self-contradictory. Nagarjuna also pointed out that the notion of a self-existent dharma contradicts the fundamental Buddhist tenets that all things are subject to change, and that they arise, change and are destroyed due to preceding causes and conditions, i.e. the law of cause and effect. For a dharma to be causally conditioned it must exist in relation to the causes and conditions preceding it, and it must be 'empty' of any 'own-being' which could determine or condition it. Therefore for things to be part of a causal process at all they must be entirely relative or empty. In the words of Nagarjuna, "When emptiness works, everything in existence works. If emptiness does not work, then all existence does not work".

"They are not born and not annihilated; they are not stained and not clean; they do not increase and do not decrease".

Here all the characteristics usually attributed to dharmas are denied in the interests of emptiness. Things are just as they are, without adding to, or taking anything away from them.

"...in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, volition, or consciousness".

In other words, where there is emptiness all the characteristics which distinguish one dharma from another and which make it what it is, are seen to be absent. It will be noticed that this statement appears to flatly contradict the previous statement that the skandhas are all empty. I will leave readers to grapple with this for themselves.

"No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind. No form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mental objects. No realm of sight...and so on to...no realm of consciousness".

Traditional Indian philosophy identifies six senses, and here they are outlined along with their corresponding activity and spheres in which they function.

"No ignorance and no extinction of ignorance, and so on to...no old age and death, and also no extinction of old age and death".

This refers in abbreviated form to the cycle of 'Conditioned Co-production' (Pratitya Samutpada), which is a traditional Buddhist analysis of the human condition in terms of ignorance, grasping and its resulting suffering, which binds men to the round of birth, death and rebirth.

"There is no suffering, no accumulation, no annihilation, and no path".

These are the 'Four Noble Truths' of Buddhism, expressed in Chinese terms, and denied.

"No knowledge and no attainment".

Knowledge (Jnana) here refers specifically to knowledge and understanding of the above list of items, which is a necessary achievement for the Hinayanist. But the Prajnaparamita says that since all the above items are absent as permanent identifiable characteristics, then the knowledge of them must also be absent.

In the above passages the central doctrines of traditional Buddhism are systematically denied. Yet this sutra still purports to be Buddhist, and furthermore it claims that if its teachings are evoked and followed they will lead to enlightenment. How can this be so?

We have seen that the central concern of the Buddha's teaching is the alleviation of suffering through the removal of its causes, which are attachment and grasping. Prajnaparamita Buddhism reaches the conclusion that all dharmas are empty and wisdom consists in seeing this, and in the ability to deal with dharmas without becoming attached to or dependant on them. But emptiness and non-attachment must also be applied to the central doctrines and goals of Buddhism itself. On practical grounds alone this may be seen as necessary, since the attachment to or craving for Nirvana or one's own Enlightenment or to one's own ideas of them, is clearly among the most dangerous forms of craving possible; and this is the inevitable conclusion which we draw from the Buddha's own teaching. It is perfectly expressed by the Chinese Zen Master Huang Po (Obaku Kiun). (1)

"If students of the way desire to become Buddhas they need not desire study anything whatsoever of the Dharma. They should only study how to avoid seeking for, or clinging to, anything. If nothing is sought, the mind will remain in its 'unborn state', and if nothing is clung to or known, the mind will not go through the process of destruction.....Relinquishment of all delusions leaves no Dharma on which to lay hold. If the student of the way wishes to understand the real mystery, he need only put out of his mind attachment to anything whatsoever, especially his own opinions and criticisms".

"Because of this non-attachment the Bodhisattva relies on Perfect Wisdom and he has no mental hindrances, and because there are no hindrances he has no fear. He is far removed from deluded views and finally (attains) Nirvana".

To rely on Perfect Wisdom or emptiness is of course not relying on anything. By letting go of any idea of his attainment, paradoxically Nirvana is 'attained'. We have seen that Prajna is a non-discriminatory insight in which emptiness and form, or Nirvana and Samsara are not separate. Therefore to go out and look for Enlightenment outside this world or anywhere other than in the 'here and now' is in effect to lose it. Because of this Soto Zen teaches that one doesn't train meditate and keep the Precepts in order to become a Buddha; one does these things because one is a Buddha. Unfortunately this teaching is usually misunderstood and it is probably better left well alone. It is also expressed in the mondo between the third Patriarch Seng-ts'an and his successor Tao-hsin.

Tao-hsin: "What is the method of liberation?"
Seng-ts'an: "What binds you?"
Tao-hsin: "No-one binds me."
Seng-ts'an: "Why then should you seek liberation?"

The effort of a Bodhisattva, like the effort in meditation, must ultimately be effortless effort, without thought of a goal or end. Uchiyama Roshi describes the effort in Zazen as aiming without even knowing whether one hits the target. By relying completely on emptiness one has the capacity to 'let go' of all discriminatory thoughts and emotions, even one's cherished delusions. The emphasis in the Sanskrit text of the sutra implies that the

1. Abbreviated from "The Zen Teaching of Huang Po" Trans. J. Blofeld (Rider)

Bodhisattva is without fear despite the absence of thoughts. This seems a credible interpretation since it is frequently the fear of letting go of one's thoughts and opinions which makes people abandon training and meditation.

"All the Buddhas of the three worlds, because they rely on Perfect Wisdom, they attain supreme and perfect Enlightenment".

This refers to the Buddhas of past, present and future, who were Enlightened through their reliance on emptiness.

"Therefore know the Perfect Wisdom, it is the great holy mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the highest mantra, the unequalled mantra. It can get rid of all suffering, and in truth it is no falsehood. I proclaim it thus:- Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha."

Like the appearance of Avalokitesvara, the use of a mantra in a Prajna-paramita sutra is unusual and unexpected, and the identification of supreme and Perfect Wisdom with a mantra seems almost heretical.

In the tantric traditions, Buddhist and Hindu, a mantra is a magical phrase or formula which when repeated correctly and mindfully has the power to invoke its appropriate power or deity. In this text the spiritual power which is invoked is Perfect Wisdom itself. We have seen that the evocation and cultivation of Prajna does lead to the cessation of suffering and Enlightenment; and the invocation of Perfect Wisdom may be seen as the final stage in this miraculous process.

The mantra itself is not translated, but merely transliterated into Chinese characters; the sound values of which come fairly close to the sound of the original Sanskrit.

gassho

- Stewart McFarlane

A Question

A newcomer to the meditation group at Durham, asked whether the purpose of meditation is tranquility. To those who have pursued intellectual activities for some years, the first contact with meditation can bring immense relief from the continual agitation of the mind by reason and logic.

This condition is similar to stirring impure water in a glass, the mud does not settle and the water remains cloudy. So just to stop stirring the mind for an instant brings the startling revelation that it starts to clear, and becomes receptive.

Added sensation from outside stimuli can be gained from this heightened awareness. Sights, sounds, smells gain new intensity. For a while the world can seem transformed. The danger at this stage might be to think the purpose of zazen is to revel in the senses. But those who do will feel a slight uneasiness that all is not as it seems.

This is because the heightened awareness brought about by zazen also enables us to be more aware of what we are doing, and the effect it has on ourselves and others. A feeling of being trapped in a pattern of behaviour may arise. For instance, if someone has been inconsiderate or rude to us, we may have been rude in return. Anyone asking our motivation would probably receive the answer that it was caused by his rudeness. This is delusion. If we persist in meditation we become aware of the freedom that is associated with Zen, the freedom not to react thoughtlessly or to be caught up in the drifting wandering world where we have no choice. Meditation increases

awareness of this choice. It is a choice; each of us is entirely free to choose our own actions.

Zen is not difficult. It is just going on, taking one step at a time. Always going on beyond what you once thought was the limit of possibilities. But this process is nothing special. It can be achieved by the optimum awareness of the present: our own life in the present. Meditation increases awareness of every instant of our lives so that we can each be a positive force both here and now. Someone who is fully alive in the present. What more can we ever hope to be?

Constant meditation each day, perhaps 30 minutes, is the key to this treasure house. Always willing to go on. Never be complacent and sit back to admire what we have done. This what is meant by living in the present. As the present unfolds, so we must change with it. Where there is life there is possibility of change.

But time is short. We must all die sometime. Thus Dogen Zenji, the 13th century Zen patriarch who brought the essence of Zen from China to his own Japan, constantly stressed the necessity for great energy to be expended in meditation. If we were immortal, we could act as if we had all the time in the world. In reality, our life is very short. Do we have time to spend our whole lives in tranquility? Or can we afford to spend our lives making an endless series of mistakes which cause pain and death to others? No, neither the neutral nor the negative approach to life is enough. Zen teachings stress the positive approach to life. To being joyful and living a full life which spreads joy and added zest for life to others. In this way the life of Buddha increases, for ultimately our minds see no distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Every person, every animal, every plant, every stone is Buddha.

- Robert Dunnett

News

Jiyu Kennett Roshi is ill and Rev. Daiji Strathern is leaving for America at the end of August. We on Tyneside and all who are connected with Throssel will miss Daiji's influence and guidance. This offers good opportunity for self training since we will not be able to rely on him for some time. The priory are appealing for contributions towards his travel expenses. If we wish for someone to replace Daiji, about £640 will be required in all, of which £320 would be required by September to cover Daiji's fare across, and the return passage of whoever was to replace as Prior. Contributions should be sent to Throssel Hole Priory, Carr Shield, Nr. Hexham, Northumberland, stating clearly the purpose to which it is intended.

Due to Daiji's departure, the week sesshin Aug 28 - Sept 4 has been cancelled. No further sesshins are arranged but there will be some week-end retreats during autumn.

A series of lectures are planned in Durham entitled, 'Explorations into Religious Outlook' for between October and December. Run by the University of Durham Extra Mural Dept. and the Workers Educational Association, the lecturers are mainly from Durham Zen Group will deal with such topics as; Comparative Mysticism, Prayer and Meditation, The Problem of Evil & Suffering in Buddhism & Christianity, Religion and Culture. There will be opportunity for discussion and questions. There is a small course fee. Contact; Univ. of Durham Extra Mural Dept. or Stewart MacFarlane, School of Oriental Studies, Elvet Hill, Univ. of Durham.

It is good to hear that Anne Ward has recovered from skull fractures incurred

from a cycling accident in June. Her wedding to Stewart MacFarlane is on August 21, lets hope fortunes improve.

Dorothy Bailey has sent the following news item:
Reverend Daiji Strathern conducted a weekend retreat at 41 Barclay Rd, Warley, on 11, 12, and 13 June. It was well attended by people not only from the Birmingham area but also from Worcester and Torquay, and Gikko and Mary Kublicic and Ryuge Prince joined us from Nottingham. We all greatly benefited from Daiji's presence and guidance and put in a lot of hard work. It was good to be training with him once more. We'll never be the same again. Thankyou Daiji.

Meetings

Aberdeen Weekly meetings. Contact Chris Roberts, 5 Richmond Terrace.

Edinburgh Contact Richard Zahler, 8 Starbank Road, Edinburgh 6 (031 552 1975)

Tyneside Wednesday meetings as follows:

16 Sunderland Rd., S. Shields	Aug 4	Sep 8	
7 Mardale, Albany Vill., Washington	Aug 11	Sep 15	Oct 20
31 Grafton Rd., Whitley Bay		Sep 22	Oct 13
20 High Shaw, Prudhoe		Aug 25	Sep 29
15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth	Aug 18	Sep 1	Oct 6

Wednesday meetings include periods of meditation, reading of texts on zazen, informal discussion and refreshments. Beginners are welcome and basic meditation instruction is available.

There will be intensive evenings on Tuesday September 7 at 16 Sunderland Rd, South Shields between 7-10.30pm and Friday October 14 at 20 High Shaw, Edgewell, Prudhoe, between 7-12pm. The proceedings are as above but without discussion.

For further information/organising lifts, contact Robert Darnett, 7 Mardale Albany Vill, Washington(466294), or Rychard Apps, 15 Hallington Mews, Killingworth (682610).

Durham Holidays in August. Meetings resume on Mondays 8pm from September 6 at 26 Victoria Street, Sacriston. (See News)

Cleveland Contact Mrs. Joyce Shaw, 103 Overdale Road, Middlesbrough.

Bradford - Leeds Contact Helen Percival, 31 Harrogate Street, Bradford.

Nottingham Meets every Monday at 8pm at 26 Millicent Rd, West Bridgeford, Nottingham. Contact Alan MacGormick at the same address (815351).

St Annes - Blackpool Information from Charles Fletcher, 107 Blackpool Road North, St Annes-on-Sea, Lancs.

Warley Meets on Thursdays with a programme of; 7pm Zazen, 8pm Tea and discussion, 8.45pm Zazen, at 41 Barclay Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands (021 429 4080).

North Staffordshire Information on meetings in Newcastle, Staffs from Alan Clayton, West View, Blackenhall, Nantwich, Cheshire.

South Staffordshire Information from Nick Churchill, 154 Netherstone Lane, Litchfield, Staffs.

Northampton Weekly meetings at 95 Lutterworth Road, Northampton. Contact Mrs. Carol Cooley of the same address for information.

Dublin Current information from Moira Jones, c/o I.S.P.C.C., 20 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

At all the above groups it is possible to practice Soto Zen meditation. This does not necessarily mean that all the groups follow this practice exclusively.