

V. ZEN BUDDHISM

Zen Buddhism is a Chinese-Japanese branch of Mahayana Buddhism. It has had a particular appeal in the west. On a pop level there have been books such as **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance**, **Zen in the Art of Helping**, **The Zen of Seeing**, **Zen in the Art of J. D. Salinger**, **Zen and the Birds of Appetite**, and **Zen and Creative Management**. On a serious level Alan Watts and others have sought to disseminate it, and with considerable success in the intellectual world. Why this appeal?

Zen had special appeal to Carl Jung, Erich Fromm and Karen Horney in psychology, and Martin Heidegger in philosophy.

1. **Founder:** Bodhidharma, a iconoclastic missionary from India who came to China in about the 6th century A.D.

Mythology says Emperor Wu-ti of China residing at Nanking, himself a buddhist, summoned Bodhidharma to a private audience.

- 1.1 After reciting all the temples he had built and the meritorious acts he had performed, he asked Bodhidharma what merit all this hard earned him. Without a moment's hesitation, Bodhidharma replied bluntly, "No merit whatsoever!"

Meaning:

- First, an antipathy of lengthy verbalism.
- Second, he rejected the 'doctrine of works or merit', suggesting that overattention to forms, rituals, images and scriptures would never bring liberation.

- 1.2 The astonished Emperor asked which of all the teachings was the First Principle of Buddhism. Bodhidharma replied, "Vast Emptiness and nothing holy."

Meaning:

- He denied the existence of a God or realities other than this phenomenal world. The result is pantheism, or rather true atheism.
- He stressed the doctrine of the nondualistic eternal Void, that fullness without boundaries from which all life emerges and must be personally experienced to grasp life's true meaning and significance. Emptiness is a positive rather than a negative concept.

- 1.3 The Emperor inquired, "Who are you who thus replies to me?" Bodhidharma answered, "I do not know."

Meaning:

- Zen training stresses "Empty the Mind." The aspirant is advised to "Take as thought the thought of No-thought." He/she should not seek Truth but begin by "ceasing to cherish opinions."
- He reinforced Buddhism's basic teaching that in the vast Oneness of the Universe there is truly no-self (**anatman**). This is also an example of a **koan**.

- 1.4 Then he left and symbolically traveled upright on a floating reed to a distant cave to undertake a 9 year

Meaning:

- Bodhidharma's act symbolizes the heart of Zen: a return to **what**

Buddha did rather than what he said. Buddha's tenants lie outside the scriptures, and are to be found in meditation the way Buddha found them.

2. **Method** At core, Zen is a **method**, not a set of doctrines. It is a return to Buddha's emphasis on meditation, and to his teaching, "Look within, **thou are the Buddha,**" and his death-bed teaching that all seekers of the way **must make the effort themselves.** Personal effort is at the core of enlightenment.

2.1 **Kensho** or **Satori**: the opening into the world of enlightenment. This is the goal. One must be connected with the deep unconscious in order to know who one really is. The Void is the "source of infinite possibilities" (D.T.Suzuki).

2.2 **Zazen**: sitting meditation done at specific times daily, with longer and more intensive periods on special occasions.

- preceded by use of bells, wooden clappers and eschange of formal bows.
- practitioners sit facing a wall or the center of the zendo, depending upon the tradition of the sect or the presiding master.
- the person sits in the full or half lotus position.
- hands are in front, the back of the left in the palm of the right, the thumbs slightly touching.
- the eyes are not closed, but gaze downwards, a little in advance of the sitter.
- other positions are possible, but 1) one must keep the back as straight as possible, and 2) the knees must never be higher than the hips or the strength will flow from the **hara** (vital center of the body located between the navel and pelvis) to the knees.
- the session is terminated with the sound of wooden clappers, the ringing of the bell three times, and the chanting of the Four Great Vows.
- period of sitting may be interspersed with walking meditation (**kinhin**). This must be done with concentration - slowly circling of the **zendo** or briskly walking outside.

2.3 **Meditation and Zazen**: Meditation is thinking about something. **Zazen** is to **stop thinking.** It is to actualize the Boddha nature: or one's own 'true nature'.

- Roshi writes: "If you think you will get something from practicing zazen, already you are involved in impure practice. . . . When you practice zazen, just practice zazen. If enlightenment comes, it just comes. We should not attach to the attainment. The true quality of zazen is always there, even if you are not aware of it. **Just do it.**"
- Zen literally means unambivalent concentration or absorption. In zazen one is to concentrate not simply in thought or in the head but **with one's entire being.**
- We overemphasize the head. Life's hidden treasure not lost during the evolution of consciousness lies in the **hara** or belly - the center of being.
- Richard Baker writes, "Zen meditation develops the clarity and calmness that llows one to meet and absorb the suffering and distractions of our life. . . . [It] is the continual effort to at

first note and later to just be one with the immediacy of one's situation: to break the adhesive of one's constant train of conceptual thought ... and to bring oneself with clarity to the touch and consciousness of the present."

2.4 **Decentering:** One must simply learn to be one with the universe.

2.41 **Rational thought, discussion and argument cannot give conclusive answers.**

- It only reinforces the ego. It reinforces our notion of separation, discrimination and the division of "this" from "that", so making it impossible to see life's wholeness, and one's relationship to it. So one must overcome it's bonds.
- One does this using **koans** - irrational conundrums that confuse the mind, sending it into circles of illogical progression, and so freeing one from its control.

2.42 **Emotions cannot give conclusive answers.** They too reinforce one's sense of being a separate entity. The goal is an emotional detachment from reality.

2.43 **Value judgments cannot lead us to enlightenment.** They involve us in helping others with attachment which leads us to a sense of autonomous being.

2.44 **One must simply be and let happen.** An archer must let the arrow shoot itself through you the archer. One learns this by 'sitting practice'. This is summarized in a poem attributed to Bodhidharma:

"A special tradition outside the scriptures,
No dependence on words,
A direct pointing at man,
Seeing into one's own nature and the attainment of wisdom."

2.5 **Koan:** - the term comes from the Chinese **erm kung-an** meaning a precedent-establishing formulation in a legal sense. It is a dynamic bursting of restrictive bonds, a spontaneous desire to be rid of lifeless religious dogma, to discard empty ritualized formulas, and instead, to be carried "by the storm of the spirit." **Koans** are a deliberate attempt to throw the mind off its accustomed track, to detach it from its familiar habits of classification, division, and comparison, and to plunge it into the vast sea of indescribable "Isness." They "break asunder the mind of ignorance and open the eye of truth."

- Examples: "What was your original face before your parents were born?" "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "Has a dog Buddha Nature?" Or simply the single word **Mu** on which one is to sit and hatch like an egg without thinking about its meaning or asking question.

2.6 **Kano:** At core Zen is veneration for nature and life - the development of an unflinching awareness and constant attention to everything. **Kano** is an exclamation mark. The person is to wonder in amazement at such things as a flowering weed!, a little blossom!. Plants, trees, and

rocks have 'feelings' and react to how they are treated (cf. 'pet rocks'). Therefore in making a garden a rock must be considered before placing it so as not upset the spirit of the rock.

- the goal is awareness and harmony.
- the laughter of surprised approval is encouraged: eg. under the picture of a frog is the title, 'If you think by sitting, you can become a Buddha...'
- A monk came to Ma Tsu to solve a koan he had been given. The master told him to bow before proceeding. Then the master kicked him in the rear and this resolved the murky irresolution in which the monk had floundered, and he understood.
- Sekkyo asked a monk to take hold of empty space. The monk tried, and the master said, "You have not got anything." Asked by the monk how to do it, Sekkyo grapped the monk's nose and pulled. The monk cried out, "You are hurting me." "That is how you have hold of empty space." the master said.
- Two ragged carefree saints are Kanzan and Jittoku who poke fun at the formal piety of their brethren.
- Ultimately enlightenment (satori) occurs like a ripe fruit falling from a tree. Even this is a process, not a goal.

2.7 **Roshi:** Master or guru. A disciple must be led by a master. Teachings are to be trasmitted directly from mind to mind, without recourse to words. Words undermine the process.

2.8 **Monastic life:** Monastic life is one of hard discipline and self-control. A novice must sit outside the wall for five days in humility before admission. Daily routines start at 3:30 a.m. After washing with a few cups of water they go quietly to the Buddha-hall for a service of chanting. At the end are the four vows:

However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them.

However inexhaustible the passons are, I vow to extinguish them.

However immeasurable the dharmas are, I vow to master them.

However incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.

Then follows tea and more chanting in the zendo or meditation hall; breakfast; walking through town for donations for three hours; eating; chanting; teachings; doing monastery tasks; then sleeping.

3. Zen in Japan

3.1 Buddhism, particularly Zen, reached Japan and Korea in the sixth century during a time when Japan faced a power struggle between rival clans and rival claims of Shintoism. Buddhist missionaries were caught up in the political intrigue, claiming that a certain Buddha image had power to arrest a plague then sweeping the country.

3.2 Soga Yumako, member of one of the clans, became in effect the ruler of Japan, and, for political reasons, one of Buddhism's strong supporters. Under his intrigue, Suiko (his niece) became the Empress, and she became its patron.

3.3 Its outstanding patron was Shotoku Taishi (A.D. 574-622), a Prince Imperial whom the Empress had named Regent. He was a fervent Buddhist, and promoted the building of a great temple complex at Horyuji, and

translated many writings. He started an asylum, a hospital and a dispensary. In 604 he promulgated the first Japanese constitution in which he wrote that the rulership of a single monarch implied the equality of all people, just as faith in the unique personality of the Buddha presupposed the intrinsic value and destiny of every individual in communion with him. He said, "Harmony is to be valued, and discord is to be depreciated."

3.4 With the coming of Buddhism, the indigenous faith came to be known as Shinto - The Way of the Gods, to distinguish it from The Way of the Buddha. Shinto had more to do with life here on earth, Buddhism with eternity. It is said, at death everyone is a Buddhist.

3.5 Japan already had a very refined sense of aesthetics. The aristocratic elite lived in settings famed for their beauty, and communicated by means of mannered expressions in art, poetry, letters, flowers, scents and details of dress. The highest form of art was calligraphy or 'brushwork'.

During the 11th and 12th century Zen infiltrated the entire fabric of Japanese life from popular schools to civil service, commerce, military and statesmanship and arts.

This method played a key role among the Japanese samurai who took on its emphasis on self-discipline and overcoming the fear of death.

3.6 Eisai (1141-1215), a Japanese Zen master trained in China, introduced the koan school to Japan - known as Rinzai Zen. In this the teacher defines the student-teacher relationship, chooses the student's koan and directs his zazen practices.

3.7 Dogen (1200-1253), another Japanese Zen master trained in China introduced the zazen approach known as Soto. In this the student chooses his own koan and methods of breathing, and suggests them to the teacher.

- He taught that "The Way is attained through the body, through the unity of mind and body."

- The assuming of the zazen position itself stills the passions and composes and empties the mind, and not only is a prerequisite to enlightenment, but already constitutes the beginning of enlightenment.

3.8 Zen has found express in the arts: The No drama, the tea ceremony, the arranging of flowers, architecture and gardens, ceremonial swordsmanship, judo, etc.

- In painting a few lines focus the viewer's attention on the background and what is not there, rather than on what is there, and to see the oneness of all things. Space is not something to be filled, but a quality existing in its own right.

- In No drama, there is silence and a dance with barely any movement at all. The slow raising of a white clad foot makes us aware of the interrelationship of space, form and void. It is not the action that conveys the deepest meanings, but rather the pauses and silences.

- Space is prior to form - it is filled with a potential or 'waiting' energy not yet visible although perceptible to those who have through proper concentration become acutely aware of its presence.
- Enlightenment, or awareness of it, can come through the most commonplace events: the breaking of a tile, the holding of a flower.
- The haiku is an abbreviated verse of 17 syllables with the simplest of everyday observations:
The scent of plum blossoms on the mountain road
— suddenly sunrise.

Sitting quietly doing nothing.
Spring comes. Grass grows by itself.

On a withered branch a crow has settled
— autumn nightfall.