

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZEN

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The Buddha's words were passed down orally for about five hundred years. They were then codified in written form, some in Pali and some in Sanskrit, about 60 CE, more or less contemporaneous with Mahayana Buddhism's migration from India to China.

Around 500 CE, the legendary Bodhidharma brings *dhyana*-based Buddhism to China, where it merges with meditative Taoism, giving birth to *Ch'an* Buddhism. Around 1200 CE, *Ch'an* travels to Japan, where it blossoms into what the Japanese call *Zen*.

Zen means meditation. It is the Japanese translation of the Chinese *Ch'an*, which translates the Sanskrit *dhyana*. Zen also means wordless transmission from heart-mind to heart-mind; the transmission of *bodhichitta*: heart-wisdom – beyond scripture and beyond words.

Zen also has a certain spirit about it. Zen is a way of being-in-the-world. It has been called “the artless art,” at the intersection of passion and detachment. Athletes call it “being in the zone.”

Think “Zen and the Art of Archery;” the martial arts; tea ceremony; calligraphy; “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.” Think spontaneity and impeccability.

Zen is a branch of reformist, northern, *Mahayana* Buddhism, migrating across northeast Asia into Tibet and China, down into Korea and northern Vietnam, and across the water to Japan. *Theravada* Buddhism – the “southern branch” – takes root in Sri Lanka and spreads across southeast Asia into Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam.

Zen Buddhism traces its origin to the Buddha meditating beneath the Bodhi Tree, sitting in the lotus position. “Right meditation” is the eighth step on The Eight-fold Path, and Zen begins by taking meditation as number one; or rather, as the logical consequence of number one, “right thinking.” Right thinking includes the meditative practice of not-thinking: clearing the mind of habitual dispositions, so as to “cleanse the doors of perception” and make space for the recollection that is awakening.

Zen's commitment to the silent and the ineffable overlaps into wordless transmission from teacher to disciple. Zen tracks its lineage back through six Chinese and twenty-eight Indian “Patriarchs.” John Blofeld tells the story in his “Introduction” to *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*:

Gautama Buddha ... picked a flower and held it up for the assembled monks to see. Mahakasyapa, who alone understood the ... meaning ..., responded with a smile. Later the Buddha called this disciple to him in private and mystically transmitted to him the wordless doctrine, or 'with Mind transmitted Mind'.

Mahakasyapa, in his turn, mystically transmitted the Doctrine to Ananda, who thus became the second in the line of twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs. The last of these was Bodhidharma, who traveled to China in the sixth century A.D. Here, he became the First of the Chinese Patriarchs, who continued the transmission down to Hui Neng (Wei Lang), the Sixth and last.

(Grove Press; 1958; p. 10)

The history of Zen can be sketched in a sequence of sixteen meditation masters: five Indian, seven Chinese, and four Japanese. Sixteen story-tellers, teachers and poets:

Indian:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------|---|
| 1. Buddha | 531 BC | <i>Dhyana</i> /meditation; <i>Moksha</i> /enlightenment. |
| 2. Mahakasyapa | 500 BC | 1 st Zen Patriarch |
| 3. Ananda | 480 BC | 2 nd Zen Patriarch |
| 4. Nagarjuna | 200 CE | 14 th Patriarch. <i>Madhyamaka</i> |
| 5. Bodhidharma | 500 CE | 28 th Indian & 1 st Chinese Patriarch |

Chinese:

- | | | |
|---------------|--------|---|
| 6. Lao Tzu | 550 BC | <i>Tao Te Ching</i> ("Tao is empty.") |
| 7. Chuang Tzu | 350 BC | <i>Inner Chapters</i> (A butterfly dreaming?) |
| 8. Sengcan | 600 CE | <i>Xinxinming</i> . <i>Dhyana</i> + <i>Tao</i> = <i>Ch'an</i> |
| 9. Hui-neng | 700 CE | 6 th Chinese Patriarch. "Mind is moving." |
| 10. Huang Po | 825 CE | <i>Ch'an</i> master & teacher of Lin Chi. |
| 11. Lin Chi | 850 CE | Founder of <i>Rinzai Ch'an Buddhism</i> . |
| 12. Joshu | 860 CE | <i>Mu</i> |

Japanese:

- | | | |
|------------|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 13. Eisai | 1200 CE | Brings <i>Rinzai Zen</i> to Japan. |
| 14. Dogen | 1227 CE | Brings <i>Soto Zen</i> to Japan. |
| 15. Basho | 1680 CE | Major poet, story-teller & pilgrim. |
| 16. Hakuin | 1760 CE | Rinzai master: "One hand clapping." |

Soto Zen is associated with gradual enlightenment and *shikantaza*: "just

sitting.” Rinzai Zen is associated with koan use and sudden enlightenment.

A koan is a riddle with no intellectual answer: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” “What was your original face before you were born?” “Does a dog have Buddha nature?” “Where is the bull’s tail?” “Where does the hole go when the cheese is gone?”

A Western philosophy professor comes to Japan to learn about Zen. He visits a temple. He has tea with the Zen master. The master keeps pouring into the professor’s cup. It overflows. The professor shouts, “No more will go in!” The master says, “So, too, your mind. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha inaugurates the Zen lineage. Around 500 BC, Siddhartha transmits to Mahakashyapa – who smiled at the flower sermon – the unsayable wisdom of Zen.

After the Buddha’s death, Mahakashyapa transmits this Zen illumination to Ananda, who becomes the second in a lineage stretching through Nagarjuna, the 14th, to Bodhidharma: the 28th and last of the Indian Zen Patriarchs. Bodhidharma is also the first of the Chinese patriarchs.

Around 500 CE, Bodhidharma sails from southernmost India to southern China. According to legend, he spends nine years meditating in a cave. He migrates north. He visits the imperial palace and blows the emperor’s mind. The emperor asks, “What merit do I deserve for building so many Buddhist temples?”

Bodhidharma replies, “No merit.”

The emperor asks, “What is the ultimate truth of Buddhism?”

Bodhidharma replies, “Vast emptiness and nothing holy.”

The emperor asks, “Who are you?”

Bodhidharma replies, “Don’t know.”

Bodhidharma retires to a Shaolin temple high on a remote mountain.

In a later Zen story, when the emperor asks a visiting Zen Master, “What is the essence of Buddhism?”, the sage pulls a flute from his pocket and blows a single note. This is celebrated in Zen history as “One Note Zen.”

The sixth and last Chinese Patriarch is Hui-neng, an illiterate woodcutter who achieves his first enlightenment on hearing a single sentence of *The Diamond Sutra*. Hui-neng receives the symbolic bowl around 700 CE, and is told to flee for his life, his teacher saying in effect: ‘Your Zen has too much power; the students’ heads will explode!’

The teacher, Hung-jen, *The Fifth Zen Patriarch*, was retiring as head master of the monastery to which Hui-neng had come, situated on Mount Huang-mei. Hung-jen perceived Hui-neng’s potential, and skillfully put him to work splitting firewood and assisting in the kitchen.

The teacher announced that the next master would be whoever wrote a poem best expressing the essence of *Ch'an*. Only the head disciple had the confidence to write a poem and post it on the board. In my free translation, here's what happens next. The poem says in effect: *The body is a Bodhi tree; the mind a mirror bright, from which dust keep free.* That night, Hui-neng hears a co-worker recite the poem. Hui-neng composes a response:

*There is no tree, nor mirror bright.
Since all is empty,
where can dust alight?*

Hui-neng's co-worker writes the response anonymously next to the original. Shock and confusion reign among the students the next day. Come night again, the master, Hung-jen, calls Hui-neng to his room, confirms him as *The Sixth Zen Patriarch*, gives him a robe and a bowl symbolizing the lineage, and tells him to flee into south China. Hui-neng does, emerging at a monastery fifteen years later. Famously, this is what happens there. Two students are sitting in a yard. One says, "Flag is moving." The other says, "Wind is moving." Hui Neng, passing by, whacks each student with a cedar stick and says, "Not flag; not wind. Mind is moving!"

Hui-neng authored the Zen classic *The Platform Sutra*, the only Chinese text honored with the title *sutra*. (Also called *The Altar Sutra* and *The Sutra of Hui-neng*.) Hui-neng is famous for founding the Southern School of *Ch'an*, emphasizing sudden enlightenment: the mind-exploding experience of intuitive leap. The Northern School of *Ch'an* takes a more relaxed and gradual approach to enlightenment, encompassing philosophy, debate, and study of the sutras.

These two schools are the fertile Chinese soil from which Rinzai and Soto Zen will bloom. We should of course also note the irony: Hui-neng writes the only Chinese Buddhist text accorded the status of *sutra*, and what does he say? "Forget sutras! Meditate!"

In the background of *Ch'an* Buddhism's emergence are, of course, the twin pillars of Taoism dating back a thousand years: Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

Lao Tzu begins *The Tao Te Ching*: "*Tao named is not the Tao.*" He also says: "*Who would prefer the jangle of jade pendants if he once has heard rocks growing in a cliff?*" Chuang Tzu asks in *The Inner Chapters*: "*Am I a butterfly now dreaming I'm a man?*"

Perhaps the first flower of Bodhidharma's influence is Sengcan, the 6th century Chinese author of the revered Zen poem *Xinxinming*. *Xinxinming* means *Trust in Mind*. Equally excellent translations are *Trust in Heart-Mind* and *Trust in The Way*. The poem famously begins: "*The Great Way is not difficult for those*

who have no preferences.” It continues: “*The Way is perfect, like vast space; nothing missing, no excess.*”

To recapitulate: we thus come from Buddha, Mahakashyapa and Ananda through Nagarjuna to Bodhidharma. Then, thanks to Bodhidharma, *dhyana* Buddhism travels to China in the sixth century and blossoms into *Ch’an*, fructified by Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Sencan and Hui-neng.

We shall soon meet Huang Po, Lin Chi, Joshu, Eisai and Dogen. Also Basho and Hakuin.

Although Hui-neng is the last official Patriarch, *Ch’an* Buddhism continues to flourish. Bodhidharma in 500 leads to Sengcan in 600, leading to Hui-neng in 700, leading now to Huang Po in 800. Huang Po’s student, Lin Chi, is usually given credit for founding the Rinzai school of *Ch’an*, but some consider his teacher the true father of koan-inspired, epiphany-sparking zazen.

In his little treatise on *The Transmission of Mind*, Huang Po – named after the mountain on which he long resided, and called *Obaku* in Japanese – begins by saying: “*All the Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but the One Mind, beside which nothing exists. This mind, which is without beginning, is unborn and indestructible. ... It is like the boundless void which cannot be measured or fathomed.*” (Blofeld, p. 29) He also says: “*You are fundamentally complete in every respect.*” (p. 30)

The Chinese word *hsin* translates as “mind” but also means “heart,” “soul,” or “absolute.” Huang Po, in speaking of the One Mind, is speaking of the Heart-Mind mystically transmitted from one Zen Patriarch to another, all the way from Buddha to Hui-neng, and from one Zen master to another thereafter. Huang Po’s “Mind” is Buddha-nature, Buddha-dharma, reality, “suchness” itself. As “boundless void,” it sounds very much like the Tao.

Huang Po, like Sengcan, is mixing Taoism with Buddhism, and in the process giving birth to *Ch’an*. Huang Po says further: “*When at last, in a single flash, you attain to full realization, you will only be realizing the Buddha-Nature which has been with you all the time.*” (p. 35)

Echoing Buddha’s doctrine of *anatman* – “no self” – Huang Po asserts: “*The ‘self’ is not an entity.*” (p. 38) “Not an entity” means not an Aristotelian “substance” or essence. Not self-subsistent. Not “fixed” in its “nature.” Buddhism, Taoism, and *Ch’an* are *process* philosophies. Huang Po continues:

*Nothing is born, nothing is destroyed.
Away with your dualism, your likes and dislikes.
Every single thing is just the One Mind.* (p. 44)

While not denying the reality of the everyday world – the moon is, after all, the moon, and it does reflect in the pond – Huang Po is suggesting that we see each thing-event as a manifestation of The One. *The Diamond Sutra* echoes in Huang Po’s teaching, just as it did for Hui-neng. *The Diamond Sutra* says: “*Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world: A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightening in a summer cloud, a flickering lamp, a phantom and a dream.*”

Huang Po concludes: “*Mind is transmitted with Mind. ... In fact, however, Mind is not Mind and transmission is not really transmission.*” (p. 50)

Huang Po’s student, Lin Chi, is called *Rinzai* by the Japanese, in homage to the sudden-enlightenment *Ch’an* school he creates in ninth century China. Lin Chi is, of course, building on his teacher’s tutelage. Koans become an official part of Rinzai practice only *after* Lin Chi’s founding of the Rinzai lineage.

Another 9th century *Ch’an* master is Joshu Jushin. A contemporary of Huang Po and Lin Chi, Joshu lived 120 years (778-897). After decades of meditation and wandering, Joshu settled at the age of 80 in a *Ch’an* temple in the small Chinese town of Chao-chou. Just as Huang Po was named after the mountain on which he lived, Joshu is also affectionately called “Chao-chou.” Three hundred years after Joshu’s death, the great Japanese Zen Master Dogen reveres him with the title “Joshu, the old Buddha.”

Joshu’s most famous contribution to *Ch’an* Buddhism is his koan “*Mu*.” Asked by one of his students at Chao-chou if a dog has Buddha-nature, Joshu replied, “*Mu*.” *Mu* is the Japanese translation of *wu*. In context, it really means “No and Not-no.” Joshu’s “*Mu*” is often taken to be the ultimate koan. It negates even itself.

In 9th century China, more or less contemporaneous with the emergence of Rinzai, *Soto Zen* also appears, founded by two *Ch’an* masters: Tung-shan Liang-chieh and his student Ts’ao-shan Pen-chi. Their *Soto* style Zen emphasizes gradual enlightenment, multiple mini-enlightenments, *shikantaza* (“just sitting”), and *dokusan* (teacher-student dialogue).

Rinzai and *Soto Zen* are rigorous disciplines, involving long hours of meditation. Each is committed to the three virtues of living in a *zendo*, a Zen temple: cleaning, chanting and meditating. The distinction between the two schools should not be too sharply drawn. *Soto Zen* masters are not averse to judicious use of koans.

The ninth century founders of *Soto Zen*, Tung-shan and Ts’ao-shan, lend the first syllable of their names to the Chinese term for their school: *Ts’ao-tung*. *Ts’ao-tung* translates into Japanese as *Soto*.

About 1200 CE, the Japanese meditation master Eisai travels to China and becomes a devotee of Rinzai practice. Eisai brings *Rinzai Ch’an Buddhism* back to

Japan, where it becomes the first major school of Zen.

Some twenty years later, Dogen arrives at Eisai's Japanese temple. Eisai recognizes in Dogen a kindred spirit. Eisai sends Dogen to China. Dogen's Chinese pilgrimage, ironically, disenchanting him with the competitive spirit of koan practice. He finds a spiritual home instead in the only other thriving school of *Ch'an* Buddhism: Soto. Dogen brings *Soto Ch'an Buddhism* back to Japan. As the bridge from China to Japan, Dogen is considered the father of *Soto Zen*.

Dogen's *Shobogenzo* begins: "*To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened.*"

Five hundred years later, in the latter half of the 17th century, we find Matsuo Basho roaming the mountains of Japan. Afflicted by ill health and living only 50 years, Basho was a Zen master and a scholar deeply versed in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Japan's native spiritual tradition: Shintoism. His writing is simple, elegant, earthy. Basho is famous for his travelogues – *Narrow Road to the Interior* most notably – and he became Zen's most famous haiku poet.

Haiku is a *Ch'an* invention: a 3 line, 17 syllable poem with a 5/7/5 structure. Here's an American haiku:

*Sitting on the couch,
a shoe hits me in the head.
Oh! It clears my mind.*

Here's a selection from Basho:

*Every day is a journey,
and the journey itself is home.*

*Summer grasses:
all that remains of great soldiers'
imperial dreams.*

*The orchid's perfume
clings to the butterfly's wings
like temple incense.*

*Even that old horse
is something to see
this snow-covered morning.*

*The bee emerging
from deep within the peony
departs reluctantly.*

*Crossing long fields,
frozen in its saddle,
my shadow creeps by.*

*On Buddha's birthday
a spotted fawn is born –
just like that.*

*Like the buck's antlers,
we point in slightly different
directions, my friend.*

*My ears purified by incense,
now I can hear
the cuckoo's cry.*

*This water's too cold –
you'll not get a moment's sleep, Mr. Seagull.*

*Between our two lives
there is also
the life of the cherry blossom.*

*O bush warblers!
Now you've shit all over
my rice cake on the porch.*

*At the ancient pond
a frog plunges into
water. Plop!*

*Somehow not yet dead
at the end of my journey –
this autumn evening.*

(Narrow Road to the Interior – and Other Writings;
translated by Sam Hamill; Shambhala, 1998.)

In the first half of the 18th century, Rinzai Zen master Hakuin authored the most famous Japanese koan: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Hakuin was a poet, painter, sculptor, calligrapher, and iconoclastic commentator. His paintings are still revered as Zen treasures. In his outrageous commentary on *The Heart Sutra*, Hakuin compares the Tao to a turtle with painted eyelids.

Hakuin meditated deeply on Joshu’s “*Mu*,” endured years of rigorous Zen practice, and though he never officially received confirmation, he is regarded as his teacher’s rightful *dharma* successor. Hakuin systematized koan use, and he insisted on three essentials in addition to zazen: great faith, great doubt, and great resolve. Zazen is the Japanese word for meditation.

In *Zen Words for the Heart*, his commentary on *The Heart Sutra*, Hakuin says:

Don’t ask a snail to plow a rocky field.

*On the zazen seat, in the dead of night, cold as steel.
Moonlight through a window, bright with shadows of the plum.*

*Who clapped chains on you?
Who’s holding you back
Lift up your left hand –
you may just scratch a Buddha’s neck.*

*The tail on the sacred tortoise
sweeps all her tracks clear.
But how can the tail
avoid leaving traces of its own?*

All the myriad worlds are Mu.

*Inside the Dharma gate
where form and emptiness are not-two,
a lame turtle with painted eyebrows
stands in the evening breeze.*

*A crying shame, when you draw a snake,
to add a leg.*

*A wooden hen sits
perched on a coffin
warming an egg;
A clay mare
sniffs the breeze
and canters
back to the barn.*

*Otters will be catching fish in trees
long before a Buddha
is enlightened
by relying on something.*

*Yesterday you were only
a snow-covered tree,
today your boughs are starred
with blossoms!
What cold and suffering have you weathered,
queen of the flower realm?*

*A yellow bird chortles
ecstatic strains of "White Snow."
A black turtle clambers up a lighthouse, sword in belt.
Any person who wants to join in their Samadhi
must prepare to pour rivers of white-beaded sweat.*

He's confusing a pheasant for a phoenix.

*When hearsay and book learning
satisfy your needs,
the patriarchal gardens
are still a million miles away.*

(Translated by Norman Waddell; Shambhala, 1996.)

Rinzai and Soto Zen flourish in Japan. Their influence ranges from tea

ceremony and calligraphy to poetry and the martial arts. In the 20th century, Zen arrives in Europe and the Americas. Here's a story from *The Book of Equanimity*:

*One day, while Ungon was sweeping,
Dogo said, "You are working, hard."
Ungon said, "Sure am. But it's nothing."
Dogo said, "Buddha-Dharma has two side?"
Ungon turned the broom upside down and said,
"Which side is this?"
Dogo put his palms together, and bowed.*

ZEN PARABLES AND POETRY

- 1 – Zen Mind, No Mind
- 2 – Rinzai and Soto Zen
- 3 – Dogen and the Work of Zen
- 4 – Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas
- 5 – Wisdom and Virtue
- 6 – Poems from Turtle Island
- 7 – Te-shan's Tea
- 8 – Parables

1. ZEN MIND, NO MIND

*Is it the fault of the sun and the moon
that the blind cannot see them?*

Vimalakirti Sutra

“Zen” is the Japanese translation of the Chinese word *Ch'an*, which translates the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, which means “meditation.” *Dhyana* is the Buddhist continuation of the long history of meditative practice in Hinduism known as *raja yoga*. *Raj* means “royal.” *Raja yoga* is considered the “the royal road to enlightenment,” because meditation, done properly, cuts through illusion faster and more directly than any other method.

Perhaps the potency of this “cutting through” is equaled only by a near-death experience, after which a person clears the life-plate of all clutter, becomes media free, and treasures each day, each hour, each moment. Enlightenment is another word for “liberation,” because wisdom eliminates the ignorance that causes suffering.

Freedom from is freedom for. Freedom *from* ignorance is freedom *for* bliss-

wisdom-grace. Enlightenment is the liberating *gnosis* (“knowledge”) at the heart of mysticism. The gnostic spark shines in traditions stretching from the Hebrew prophets through Socratic philosophy to the poetry of Huang Po, Rumi, Wordsworth and Tagore.

Yoga is the Sanskrit root of the word “yoke,” meaning unite, link, hold together. Its essential meaning is “awaken.” Despite the vast array and often contradictory schools of Hinduism, the core notion of all Hindu philosophy is the awakening that realizes *tat tvam asi*, “that art thou.”

This is another way of saying “Atman is Brahman.” Atman is true self. Brahman is the ultimate deity of which all other gods and goddesses are emanations, like the light rays of a diamond.

In Hinduism, Atman is called “diamond being.” “Atman” is the Sanskrit root of the word “Adam,” meaning first, original, primordial.

Since Atman *is* Brahman, Atman and Brahman are already “yoked.” The function of yoga, then, is to yoke ego to Atman; to “awaken” everyday, contingent, relative, provisional, personal consciousness to the inner sublimity, luminescence, wisdom and power of the divine ultimate, the cosmic absolute, the universal truth within and beyond all perishing forms.

Yoga has the same root-meaning as the word “religion.” “Religion” means “the linking thing.” The Latin roots are *res* (thing) and *ligio* (link). *Ligio* is the root of the word “ligament.” A ligament links muscle to bone.

Ligaments hold muscles in place. “Religion” links a person to deity, holds a person in divine ambience, keeps a person in a place of grace.

Buddhist sutras – or “wisdom books” in general, East and West – strengthen our conscious connection to grace, joy, divinity, sublimity; not as something outside us, but as that which is our true nature, original essence, Adamic being. While meditation is the royal road to enlightenment, philosophy too, when done in the proper spirit, has a liberating function.

The root meaning of philosophy – *philos-sophia*, love-wisdom – dates back to the Greek sage Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE. Pythagoras was teaching in Italy around the same time Buddha was teaching in India. For both Pythagoras and Buddha, philosophy is the journey from the love of wisdom to the wisdom of love. In Hinduism, philosophy is *jnana yoga*. Study, dialogue and debate emancipate. Philosophy is an *upaya* – a “skillful means,” an “expedient method” – for linking normal, everyday, egoic consciousness to wisdom consciousness.

Buddhism has always insisted on the importance of dialogue and debate. Meditation is superb. Meditation is irreplaceable. But the insights emerging from meditative stilling of “monkey mind” must always be checked against the insights of other practitioners. This is the only way to make sure, for example, that one is

not lost in the “ghost cave” of *samadhi* (tranquility, peace), mistaking the cooling shade of a porch for the luminous enlightenment palace to which it leads.

There are many traps on the spiritual path, and meditative practice is no exception. Every “Aha!” experience is but the prelude to depths as yet unexplored.

Even in Zen, where the silence of meditation is the Dharma-gate to truth, there is a long and necessary tradition of *teisho* and *dokusan*. In a *teisho*, a Zen master delivers a commentary on a passage which might be philosophic: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.”

It might be poetic: “The orchid’s perfume clings to the butterfly’s wings.”

It might be a story: “One day, while Ungon was sweeping, Dogo said, ‘You are working, hard.’ Ungon said, ‘Sure am; but it’s nothing.’”

Dokusan is the one-on-one private meeting of student with Zen master. A question is posed; answer given; bell rung. Nice and simple. No excess. With all the elegance and rigor of a tea ceremony, and the spaciousness of a rock garden.

When ego “opens” to Atman, it remembers Brahman. This is Hindu philosophy overlapping with Plato and Buddha, for whom enlightenment is “recollection” – *anamnesis*: the opposite of amnesia.

Egoic consciousness is necessary; but its destiny is to transcend itself. Ego operates in the field of samsara, trapped in a kind of dream. The dream is ontologically real. It has ontological thickness, and psychological and metaphysical purpose, i.e., value; but it is not the ultimately real. When the dream is taken as the ultimately real – as the final and absolute truth – ego is in a state of *maya*: mistaking provisional truth for ultimate truth.

Enlightenment – freedom, liberation, wisdom, awakening from the dream-like state – is learning to see provisional reality as the dance and play of ultimate reality. Conventional and ultimate are held in nondual balance. In Chinese terms: the yin and yang of Tao. In Mahayana Buddhist terms: The Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*).

Ego’s opening to Atman is reinterpreted by Shakyamuni Buddha as opening into *anatman*: no-self (in Pali: *anatta*). For Shakyamuni, the Hindu notion of Atman is still too much a solid, substantial, independent, separate, self-sustaining thing. Shakyamuni reinterprets Atman as an opening; an open window; a “Dharma-gate.”

Dharma means reality, truth, law, doctrine, duty, being, pattern, holding, teaching, order, destiny, fate. Its root meaning is continuity or pattern; holding in place; providing order and regularity.

Dharma is the context within which *karma* (creativity: action and reaction) occurs. Spelled with a small “d,” a *dharma* is a thing, object, being (also called *sattva*).

In Buddhism, when ego opens to its inner, Adamic core, it doesn't find a thing, not even the "diamond-being" Hinduism calls Atman. It finds an open space which allows for the true linking of ego to universe.

In virtue of the universal linking through this Dharma-gate, ego is able to recognize its unity with all other beings. Since all other beings are brothers and sisters, their suffering is also our own, and we feel a natural inclination to heal and assist. This "natural inclination" might also be called "instinctive duty," just as mother and father instinctively care for the wellbeing of their children.

The bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism is the building of a "large raft," a "great vehicle," a *maha-yana* to carry all beings across the river of illusion, from samsara to nirvana, from suffering to freedom.

Buddha was a bodhisattva. In Christ-like fashion, a bodhisattva takes on the pains of humanity in order to show the way to peace. Humanity's root collective illness is excess desire emerging from ignorance.

Out of ignorance comes grasping, craving and clinging. With their grasping, craving and clinging, humans are self-trapped in dualism: in the separative thinking that fails to recognize universal brother-sisterhood.

Failing to recognize their familial unity, humans think in terms of Us-versus-Them, instead of I-and-Thou. Entangled in the illusion of separation, humans become fearful. Entangled in fear, humans become hostile. Entangled in hostility, humans succumb to the temptation of cruelty. Entangled in cruelty, humans create suffering. He who creates suffering will in turn suffer. He who harms another harms himself. This is the pedagogical, unbreakable law of karma.

In the *Vimalakirti Sutra: Emancipation Beyond Comprehension*, Vimalakirti says: "A bodhisattva loves all living beings as if they were his children. I harbor no attachment to ego. Once one has understood the origin of illness, one does away with the thought of I or ego. The thought of others [as separate from oneself] disappears. What is meant by the source of illness? It means having troublesome entanglements. If one ceases to grasp at anything, there will be no more troublesome entanglements. What is meant by realizing there is nothing to grasp at? It means having done with dualistic views. Manjushri, this is how the ailing bodhisattva should go about regulating and controlling his mind. By doing so, he eliminates [the causes and conditions of] suffering."

2. RINZAI AND SOTO ZEN

*Do not think that you will necessarily
be aware of your own enlightenment.*

Shunryu Suzuki, quoting Dogen

In Soto Zen, zazen is *shikantaza*: “just sitting.” Just sitting is just breathing. Nowhere to go; nothing to attain. Putting the body in meditation posture, *shikantaza* is clearing the mind. Clearing the mind is calming the mind. Calming the mind is letting clouds of confusion drift away. Clouds of confusion drifting away, the light of the sun shines unobstructedly.

It is not the fault of the song that the deaf cannot hear it; nor is it the fault of the sun and the moon that the blind cannot see them. Zazen opens our eyes and ears.

The two major traditions of Zen are Rinzai and Soto. The most famous Rinzai master is the Chinese koan-emphasizing Hakuin. The most famous Soto master is the Japanese *shikantaza*-emphasizing Dogen.

Rinzai is crisis Zen. When the crisis reaches a critical breaking point, one explodes into enlightenment. Satori – enlightenment – is the goal. One goes from samsara to nirvana. Soto is quiet Zen. No strategy. No tricks. No crisis. No explosion. In Soto Zen, the lotus posture is itself enlightenment. This is what Shunryu Suzuki says. Shunryu is quoting Dogen.

The two major traditions of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana. Theravada is based on Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. The Fourth Noble Truth is The Eight-fold Path. The Eight-fold Path is a Way from samsara to nirvana, from appearance to reality, from suffering to freedom.

The Theravadan ideal is the *arhat*; the one who crosses the river of illusion. One could say that Rinzai Zen has a Theravadan flavor. It is goal-directed. The goal is satori. Zazen and koan-use are the raft for crossing the river.

Mahayana Buddhism is based largely on *The Heart Sutra* and *The Diamond Sutra*. Mahayana collapses the distinction between samsara and nirvana. It is nondual. Nirvana is here, now, always. In Zen terms, nirvana is everyday life.

The Mahayana ideal is the *bodhisattva*. For a bodhisattva, enlightenment is synonymous with a life of compassionate service (*bodhichitta*). One could say that Soto Zen has a Mahayana flavor. No crisis to resolve. No river to cross. No emphasis on satori. No division between here and there. There *is* here. Just relax. Just be. Everything’s OK.

Zen is a subset of Mahayana. Thus Rinzai Zen and Soto Zen are part of the Mahayana tradition. However, it is useful to note Rinzai’s affinity with the Theravadan emphasis on crossing the river, and Soto’s affinity with the Mahayana emphasis on no river, no raft, no crossing.

Rinzai and Soto both agree with Buddha that we are already enlightened at

the very core of our being. But Rinzai Zen urges us to *become* enlightened. Soto Zen says that the lotus posture *is itself* enlightenment. Rinzai stresses methods for passing through the Dharma Gate. Soto says shikantaza is the gate.

Rinzai is often called the “sudden enlightenment” tradition, because it stresses the breakthrough experience of sudden, spontaneous, mind-exploding, epiphanic satori. Soto is often called the “gradual enlightenment” tradition. Just sitting quietly in shikantaza, awakening happens naturally and gradually. The satori experience is hardly mentioned.

Rinzai is famous for the quirky stories which exhibit sudden enlightenment. In Rinzai stories, satori can happen at the whack of a stick, the holding up of a finger, a master’s shout, the sound of a gong, a birdsong, the plop of a frog in a pond. But this happens only after years of strenuous effort.

Soto, being a more subdued approach, is gradual awakening through just sitting, with no special measurement of progress, no emphasis on *before* and *after*.

However, the terms could be reversed, and might thus be more accurate. Soto Zen may be considered “sudden” in the sense that shikantaza is awakening itself, happening moment by moment, in the here and now, with each inhalation and exhalation.

Here, the emphasis is on the suddenness, the “suchness” (*tathata*), of immediate presence; nowhere to go, nothing to achieve.

Rinzai Zen may be considered “gradual” in the sense that, working on one’s koan, one gradually moves closer and closer to satori. And even after one satori – or, more accurately, *kensho* – one is given another koan; and the process repeats itself at a higher level, in a kind of spiraling progress toward Buddhahood, each kensho a step on the path toward ultimate satori, passing through one Dharma Gate after another.

In Soto Zen, shikantaza *is* the Dharma Gate. There is only one gate, and the lotus posture is it. Nothing to worry about; no koan to cling to; no puzzle to solve; no progress to measure. In the unspoken and unspeakable beauty of *this* moment, right now, the clouds of confusion dissipate, the emotional knots untangle, the body relaxes, the heart unclenches, the mind resides in peaceful alertness.

In Soto Zen, “realization” simply happens, and it happens simply. It is “nothing special.” It is truth ever-present: the diamond of love-wisdom shining in the lotus of the heart.

Rinzai Zen is like a battlefield. The Rinzai practitioner goes to war. One has to *conquer* illusion. Soto Zen is like a quiet picnic. In the clearing in the forest, there is no hurry, nothing to conquer. The clearing is like the sky: no excess, nothing lacking. This is “Zen mind, beginner’s mind.”

Dogen practiced Rinzai Zen for ten years before settling into the Soto style

which he brought from China to Japan in 1227. For Dogen, the Rinzai student is like the man riding his ox in search of his ox. Thus Dogo recommends “the step back.” Stepping back, one discovers that there is nothing to seek, because nothing has been lost.

Nagarjuna, a 2nd century Indian sage, founded the Middle Way school of Mahayana Buddhism. Building on a line from *The Diamond Sutra*, Nagarjuna introduces the distinction between “conventional truth” and “ultimate truth.” Dogen shows his own Middle Way Soto style in the following prose poem:

*The realization that is neither absolute nor relative
penetrates without conscious intent.
Clear water soaks into the earth;
the fish swims like a fish.*

3. DOGEN AND THE WORK OF ZEN

*To what shall I liken the world?
Moonlight reflected in dewdrops
shaken from a crane’s bill.*

Dogen

Dogen is the 13th century founder of Japanese Soto Zen. He was a precocious and gifted child, able to read poetry and Confucian classics by the age of four. Born in the year 1200, he came from an aristocratic family. He was raised amidst the trappings of the Japanese imperial court. Like Siddhartha Gautama, Dogen had a princely upbringing. But life was soon to impress upon Dogen the fact of impermanence. His father died when Dogen was two; his mother died when he was seven.

Thus Dogen experienced at an early age the core Buddhist doctrine of *anicca* – “all is change” – called in Japanese *mujō*. Dogen’s mother left him with her dying wish: “Please become a monk.” At the age of twelve, Dogen abandoned his life of relative leisure, as Siddhartha did at the age of 29. Dogen soon took up residence in a Tendai temple.

Tendai practitioners, through constant chanting, hope to be reborn in the celestial heaven of Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land. Thus Tendai is also called Pure Land Buddhism. Dogen felt something vital was missing in this devotional practice based mainly on hope and mantra repetition. He moved to another monastery, but still felt dissatisfied. His new teacher sent him to study with Eisai, the Japanese monk who had brought Rinzai Zen from China to Japan in 1191.

Eisai had also practiced Tendai. Dogen felt he had finally found a teacher who understood him, and whose practice offered what Dogen was seeking.

Eisai died the following year. Dogen practiced Rinzai for the next nine years under Eisai's successor, Myozen.

Myozen took Dogen to China, so that they could study with *Ch'an* masters in the Rinzai tradition. *Ch'an* is the Chinese word pronounced "Zen" in Japanese. In China for two years, Dogen gradually became disenchanted with Rinzai methods, which emphasized koans and "sudden" enlightenment.

Then he found a teacher in the *Ts'ao-tung* tradition with whom he felt a natural affinity. The teacher's name was Joshu Jushin. *Ts'ao-tung* is the Chinese name for what translates into Japanese as "Soto."

Joshu – famous for his "*Mu*," a negation meaning "not yes, not no" – was perhaps the greatest *Ts'ao-tung* sage, and Dogen is certainly his most famous student. In his writings, Dogen fondly refers to Joshu as "the old Buddha."

For several months during his sojourn to China, Dogen was quartered on a ship, where he took his evening meals, studied and slept. One afternoon in the marketplace of the city by the bay, Dogen encountered an elderly monk who had come to buy mushrooms for his temple sangha.

The monk's temple was nearly a hundred miles from the city. Dogen invited the monk to sleep on the ship for the night.

The monk declined, declaring his need to return to the monastery.

Dogen expressed surprise that such an elderly monk assumed responsibility for such "menial work" as obtaining mushrooms. Younger novice monks could make the journey with more vigor.

The old man replied pleasantly: "You understand neither words nor work."

In his autobiography, Dogen says this experience made a lasting impression. It greatly influenced Dogen's approach to Zen, and the rules he made for monastic living. Had he been deceived by words?

Yes, he thought; the distinction between "honorable work" and "menial work" is an aristocratic bias; and this bias, he thought, permeates Chinese and Japanese culture, and still clings to my bones. The elderly mushroom-monk had been a shocking and enlightening exception, expressing the essence and humility of Zen.

Returning to his native island in 1227, Dogen founded his own Soto temple, Eihei-ji, in north central Japan, in 1243. North central Japan is known for its bitter winters. Eihei-ji students, practicing Dogen's Soto Zen, would need much discipline and great, uncomplaining endurance. Eihei-ji became one of Japan's three most famous Zen centers.

Thanks to the mushroom-monk, Dogen abandoned the last traces of

differentiating “honorable” from “lowly.” In Dogen’s Soto style Zen, all work is noble, and life itself is Buddha-work. No distinction between sitting, chanting, cleaning, plowing, planting, harvesting, cooking, eating, or brushing teeth.

In Eihei-ji, rice is “noble rice,” soup is “noble soup,” bowl is “noble bowl,” spoon is “noble spoon,” broom is “noble broom,” simple clothes are “noble clothes,” and the bathroom is “noble shithouse.”

Two great sages in Buddhist history – Hakuin and Tsongkhapa – provide a contrast and a parallel to Dogen.

Hakuin provides the contrast. Tsongkhapa provides the parallel.

Hakuin was an 18th century Japanese Zen master.

Tsongkhapa was a 14th century Tibetan scholar-monk and Tantric yogi.

Hakuin is the most famous of all Rinzai Zen masters. He is known for his koan “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

In his early years, Hakuin had practiced the *shikantaza* – “just sitting” – of Soto Zen, but he felt dissatisfied.

He felt that Soto’s *shikantaza* was too quiet, too passive, too *yin*. Hakuin needed something more dramatic, more forceful, more *yang*. When he made the transition to Rinzai, Hakuin felt “This is it!”

Hakuin was a torn soul, perhaps even a tortured soul. Temperamentally, he needed crisis practice: shouting, kicking, whacking; something more conducive to explosive breakthrough. He was sometimes ill to the brink of death.

Living psychologically on the edge of a precipice, Hakuin sought the intensity of koan practice: a time-bomb disguised as a conundrum; a mind-blowing riddle that would either drive him over the edge or launch him into transcendental insight.

Dogen’s character was quite different. Dogen was naturally calm, centered, balanced, equanimitous. Dogen sought wisdom for its own sake, not because he was driven to it by demons.

Dogen was a charming fellow; a friendly chap; the kind of person with whom you’d be glad to spend all night having a fireside chat.

Although they lived 500 years apart – Dogen in the 13th century, Hakuin in the 18th century – one can imagine them as contemporaries, passing each other on a moonlit country path. Dogen is leaving Rinzai for Soto. Hakuin is leaving Soto for Rinzai.

Unlike Hakuin – the haunted, scathing, outrageous, “crazy wisdom,” iconoclastic, stick-wielding, koan-demanding taskmaster – Dogen was naturally poised. He was gifted with a steady temperament.

Whereas Hakuin’s questions were born from a life-and-death struggle with the meaning of existence, Dogen’s endless curiosity emerged from a deeply

searching mind grounded in a personality at ease in the world.

For Hakuin, life is a battleground. The Zen student must “shatter” illusion with the power of a Kung Fu fist.

For Dogen, for whom hard work is equally important, life is best approached as a precious playground, to be enjoyed moment by moment, with a smile.

Dogen says: “Meditation is the Dharma Gate of sweet repose.” Hakuin recommends: Meditate on your koan until your head explodes!

Tsongkhapa, the late 14th century Tibetan scholar-monk and Tantric yogi, belonged to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that gave rise to Zen in China, Korea and Japan.

As an infant, Tsongkhapa babbled incessantly and incoherently. His parents feared he was either crazy or retarded. A visiting adept from India, hearing about the curious infant, went to the family’s hut, listened to the child’s chatter, then declared Tsongkhapa a highly evolved soul who was speaking perfect Sanskrit. By the age of three, Tsongkhapa was writing and teaching.

As a young man, Tsongkhapa established himself as one of the most gifted teachers in Tibet, with invitations to visit multiple monasteries. Also, Tsongkhapa was telepathically communicating with Manjushri, the celestial Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

One day, Manjushri advised Tsongkhapa to go on a five-year meditative retreat, high in the Himalayas. Manjushri said to Tsongkhapa: “You still think that when you meditate, having a blank mind is the clear light of wisdom. It is not. You think emptiness is nothingness. It is not. You think you have mastered meditation and Tantra. You have not. You are the greatest scholar in the land, yet all your book-learning has left you witless. You are the most revered teacher in Tibet, yet you leave your students dazed and confused, even though they think they have made giant strides toward wisdom. Tsongkhapa, you must go on retreat.”

Manjushri continued: “Take eight of your closest disciples. Climb the mountain to the high plateau where the triangular lake reflects the snowy peaks. Leave your students there. Ascend to the cave closest to the gods. Spend five years in meditative and yogic solitude. When you return, only then will your teaching-words have the force of lightning bolts.”

Tsongkhapa took his closest eight disciples and trekked high upon the sacred mountain to the lake plateau. Leaving his disciples, and dressed in light clothing and carrying a small bag of books, he then climbed higher still.

He found a cave near the snowy peak, and spent the next five years in meditative isolation, using a Tantric technique called *tummo* to generate the body heat that kept him alive amidst the freezing winds and snowstorms.

Toward the end of his retreat, while reading a text by Nagarjuna – the

Indian, Mahayana, 2nd century founder of Middle Way Buddhism (*Madhyamaka*) – Tsongkhapa had a visionary experience.

Buddhism speaks of a “Tushita heaven,” presided over by Maitreya, the Future Buddha. Tushita includes a study-palace. In this celestial study-palace and library, the most enlightened Buddhist scholar-monks congregate after death to discuss the Dharma-teachings of Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni Buddha.

In his vision, Tsongkhapa found himself in the Tushita study-palace, on the outskirts of a circle of discoursing adepts. Maitreya floated above the circle. The adepts were debating *shunyata*, the core Buddhist notion of emptiness. Emptiness implies impermanence.

Impermanence implies lack of underlying, independent, self-sustaining substance. *Shunyata* implies *anicca* and *anatta*: ceaseless change and no abiding selfhood.

Tsongkhapa listened closely to the conversation. He was enraptured to be in the presence of the greatest sages of India and Tibet.

Maitreya floated over to Tsongkhapa and tapped him lightly on the head with a book. Tsongkhapa awoke in his cave.

His finger was touching a sentence in Nagarjuna’s text on The Middle Way. Tsongkhapa reread the words: “The self is not the body-mind organism, nor is it other than the body-mind organism.” At that moment, he experienced enlightenment.

Having entered nirvana, Tsongkhapa was surprised to find himself still totally immersed in samsara, with all its obligations and duties. Everything had changed, yet nothing had changed. Between nirvana and samsara, *ji ji mu ge*: no difference.

Tsongkhapa remained in his cave for several weeks, absorbing the impact of this revelation. Although he had “mastered” Buddha’s sutras, and the writings of the most enlightened adepts of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa was shocked to discover that his innermost secret feeling – that nirvana would be absolute bliss, problem-free, truly another shore – was mistaken.

Tsongkhapa left his cave, descended to the lake plateau, gathered his eight disciples, and returned to everyday life.

Tsongkhapa resumed his teaching and writing. Tibetans still consider him an incarnation of Manjushri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom

I suggest that Tsongkhapa is a Tibetan version of Dogen, in the sense that Tsongkhapa’s enlightenment mirrors the “clear light” of Dogen’s insight.

For Dogen and Tsongkhapa, nirvana is nothing other than “this *saha* world” of samsaric duties and struggles. *Saha* means endure, enduring, endurance.

The Buddha taught for 45 years after his enlightenment under the bodhi tree,

enduring the petty squabbles of the sangha, opposition from other religious leaders, and assassination attempts from one of his most envious disciples.

The Buddha continued to meditate throughout his teaching career, as did all great Buddhist adepts and monastic abbots of India.

In 500 CE, a thousand years after the Buddha, Bodhidharma brought zazen from India to China. Bodhidharma meditated in a Chinese cave for nine years before emerging with the right teaching-words for Taoist and Confucian monks, and for Buddhist monks as well.

Buddhism had entered northern China, from the Silk Route across central Asia, seven hundred years earlier.

Dogen and Hakuin continued to meditate throughout their teaching careers, as have all Zen masters throughout the history of Zen. Thanks to Bodhidharma's visit, Zen begins with the merging of Taoism and meditative Buddhism in 6th century China, giving birth to *Ch'an*.

Zazen is continuous practice; ever deepening, ever cumulative; even for Buddha and Bodhidharma. Thus Dogen says: "For playing joyfully in *samadhi*, the upright sitting in meditation is the right gate."

Samadhi is peace of mind and joyful heart. Samadhi is equanimity amidst this saha world of samsaric impermanence, fraught with folly, beauty, comedy and tragedy. Returning to the Dharma Gate of zazen is daily duty.

Tsongkhapa's enlightenment shows the underlying unity of Tibetan Buddhism and Zen.

Although Tsongkhapa's satori had the kind of breakthrough quality we associate with Hakuin, Tsongkhapa's teachings are in the spirit of Dogen. Tsongkhapa would agree with Dogen's Soto approach to the essence of Buddhism. Dogen says: "Impermanence is Buddha-nature." ("*Mujo bussho*.") Brushing his teeth, Dogen says: "I vow to have teeth strong enough to chew through all illusions." Dogen declares: "Birth, death, life itself in all its details – this is the Buddha-field." Tsongkhapa would agree with Joshu Jushin's famous Soto Zen proclamation: "After eating, wash your bowl."

For Dogen and Tsongkhapa, life itself is the ultimate koan, the ultimate haiku. Every star is a twinkle in Buddha's eye. Every birdsong is the chanting of *The Lotus Sutra*. Every dawn is the sun of Dharma.

Dogen says: "Be mindful of the passing of time."

He says: "The sound of running water is the Buddha's great speech."

Shunryu Suzuki says: "Every sitting is a good sitting." He says: "The lotus posture is itself enlightenment." There is nowhere to go, nothing to achieve, no illusion to conquer.

Unlike Hakuin's Rinzai battleground, Suzuki's Soto Zen is playful, cheerful,

equanimitous. Yet it also requires great discipline. It includes rigorous and persistent *shikantaza* (“just sitting, just breathing”), conscientious temple cleaning, washing your bowl, fetching water, chopping wood, fixing the roof, sweeping leaves.

The Soto attitude never forgets that every day, all our lives, all we have is each moment; so let go, be relaxed, be detached, do your best, and savor the flavor of nirvana in each moment of this saha world called samsara. We should also note, however, that this attitude is inherent in Rinzai as well. It is the basic attitude and mood of all schools of Zen, tracing its heritage back to the precious jewel of the Buddha’s calm, silent smile: the core teaching behind the Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel.

Distinctions are *upaya*: “skillful means,” “useful methods.” Buddha made distinctions. If he didn’t, there would be nothing to talk about: no schools of Zen, no Buddhist traditions, no Buddhism.

After his enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama was tempted to remain silent. He knew that words can and do confuse. But he also knew that humans are linguistic tool-users; knowledge seekers; walking question marks. So the Buddha started simply, with The Four Noble Truths, showing the path from suffering to non-suffering. Then he deepened and developed his doctrines, choosing his words to suit the emotional and mental development of his listeners.

Buddha, Tsongkhapa, Dogen, Hakuin: they all agree there is a difference between ignorance and wisdom, folly and virtue, laziness and effort, cruelty and kindness. It is important to distinguish between sloppy and alert. The word Buddha means “awake.” Yet it is also folly to cling to distinctions, to absolutize them, to push them too far. Dogen had as much irony and wit as Hakuin.

The distinction between Dogen and Hakuin collapses when Dogen says: “A Zen master’s life is one continuous mistake.” And Dogen would have smiled with glee at Hakuin’s assertion: “The Dharma is a lame turtle with painted eyelids, slowing crossing the courtyard.”

Soto Zen masters sometimes employ koans, and emphasize what Hakuin calls “great doubt.” Some Rinzai Zen masters hardly ever use koans, emphasizing what Dogen calls “great faith” in “Buddha-nature now.”

Rinzai embraces the Soto notion of Buddha-dharma right here; no need to explode through the veil of illusion to nirvana’s “other shore.” Hakuin says: “Sentient beings are intrinsically Buddha. This very place is the Lotus Land, this very body is Buddha.”

Lin Chi, the founder of Rinzai *Ch’an* in China, expresses a very Soto sentiment: “The way of Buddhism admits of no artificial effort. It only consists of doing ordinary tasks without fuss.”

Like Buddha – like any great teacher – Zen masters employ different methods to suit the needs of different students. Underneath the differences between Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, there is only Buddhism. Underneath the differences between Rinzai and Soto, there is only Zen.

Dogen – in his autobiographical, monastic and philosophic masterpiece, the *Shobogenzo* – exhibits the essence of Zen when he defines Buddhism in the simplest possible terms. Buddhism, he says, is “the work of everyday of life.”

4. BODHISATTVA-MAHASATTVAS

The Mahayana Context

We say in the zendo, after giving homage to all Buddhas in the ten directions and three times: “All honored ones, all bodhisattva-mahasattvas.” One might wonder: “What *is* a bodhisattva-mahasattva?”

Bodhi means wisdom, and has the same root as the word Buddha, which means awake. Sattva has two meanings. It signifies “being.” It also signifies the Middle Way. A bodhi-sattva is wise-being. A bodhisattva is wise because walking the path with heart called the Middle Way.

Middle Way is another name for equanimity. Equanimity is both the root and the fruit of loving kindness, unconditional compassion, and sympathetic joy.

Maha means great. Great means spacious. Spacious means not-clinging. The sky is great – spacious – because it does not cling to the birds or clouds that drift through it.

In zazen, our minds (heart-minds) become spacious, great, expansive, as we cease clinging to the thoughts that all too frequently emerge (and then multiply in a process of spontaneous association). When there are no more thoughts, our minds are as vast as the sky.

This is implied by the term emptiness (*shunyata*). When our minds are *shunya* – empty – of all thought-forms and emotional disturbances, our minds become fully open to the innate *bodhi*, the wisdom, that is the core truth of our being. As Buddha says: We are already enlightened.

Empty also means free. Freedom from is freedom for. Free *from* clinging, we become free *for* enlightenment.

Becoming *empty*, we become *full* of the “clear light” of wisdom. This is the paradox at the heart of Zen. Free of self-preoccupation, we become full of compassion.

Why does Buddha smile? He is enjoying the paradox of emptiness-fullness.

Becoming empty, we no longer cling to the distinction between ourselves and others. Everyone, every creature, is our brother and sister. Their pain is our

pain. Therefore, we get up off the *zafu* – the meditation cushion – and return to our daily lives with the *intention* of making the world a better a place. We hope to spread rainbows of joy. We seek to alleviate suffering in whatever way we can.

This takes skill. We need “skillful means” – *upaya*. The Middle Way is a way – an *upaya* – for alleviating suffering in ourselves and others. Not saying too much; not trying too hard. Sometimes just being there is sufficient. Silent presence can often be enough.

The two wings of Buddhism are wisdom and compassion (*prajna* and *karuna*). The two go-together in what is called *bodhichitta*.

Chitta is a word for mind. *Bodhichitta* is awakened mind. Awakened mind is compassionate. *Bodhichitta* is the chief attribute of a bodhisattva.

Mahayana means “great vehicle, spacious raft.” Zen was born from the merging of Mahayana Buddhism and meditative Taoism in 6th century China.

The Mahayana reform movement was originally called *Bodhisattvayana* – vehicle, path or way of the bodhisattva.

The Bodhisattvayana had its beginnings with the Second Buddhist Council, at Vaishali, around 380 BCE, about a hundred years after the Buddha’s death. It gained momentum with the Third Council around 250 BCE, at Rajagriha, convened by King Ashoka, who temporarily united the Indian subcontinent in a single empire.

Ashoka – newly converted from his death-inflicting, militaristic empire building to Buddhist pacifism – enormously helped the spread of Buddhism in India, as well as its expansion into Central Asia, moving west through Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey toward Greece (magnifying the Indian-Hellenistic subcultural fusion begun with Alexander the Great seventy-five years earlier) and east along the Silk Route toward Mongolia and China.

The majority members of the Third Council reconfirmed the conservative, arhat-centered orthodoxy of the Theravadan “school of the elders,” and Ashoka embraced that decision.

The reform splinter group, more liberal in its interpretation of Buddha’s teachings, called itself the Mahasanghika, the “spacious sangha” or “universal assembly,” which itself branched into several “schools” of Bodhisattvayana.

Although not “officially” sanctioned, the Mahasanghika were tolerated with the spacious generosity that befits Buddhist practitioners. Thus the Mahasanghika continued to teach, evolve, expand.

Scholars date the origin of Mahayana doctrinal distinctiveness to the two hundred year period between 100 BCE and 100 CE.

The Buddha’s sermons finally achieved written form about the year 60 CE, recorded in Pali and written on palm leaves. This is known as the Pali Canon, the

main source for all subsequent Theravadan development. Needless to say, the Pali Canon is treasured by all Buddhists. Mahayana practitioners refer to it frequently, as do scholars of whatever persuasion in the field now known as Buddhology.

The Buddha's sermons were thus first recorded in written form about 500 years after his lifetime.

Siddhartha spoke a regional dialect no longer existent. His sermons, stories and conversations were translated into Pali and Sanskrit down through the centuries.

The Western parallel is of course Jesus, who spoke Aramaic and whose teachings were first recorded in Greek. When it comes to remembrance of the words actually spoken by two of the greatest sages in history, all is translation.

According to traditional sources, Siddhartha died around 486 BCE. In the First Buddhist Council in the rainy season shortly after Siddhartha's death, Kashyapa (short for Mahakashyapa) presided.

Various monks (*bhikshus*, there being no *bhikshunis*, female monks, in attendance) recited from memory Gautama's words.

Among these *bhikshus* was Ananda, Siddhartha's personal attendant for the last 25 years of the Buddha's life. Ananda was known for his prodigious memory.

During, or after, each recitation, other monks offered critical suggestions to that particular recollection of the Buddha's words. The alternatives were then debated among the assembly until consensus was achieved on the most precise and accurate version.

Unlike Jesus, whose teaching career spanned a few short years – perhaps three in total, almost exclusively to a small group of disciples, and in a relatively confined area around Jerusalem – Siddhartha Gautama taught for forty-five years, walking large distances, conversing with numerous folk in all classes of Indian society, switching from one set of ideas to its opposite depending on the needs, temperament and level of development of his listeners.

Buddha's teaching corpus was thus vast indeed, often containing paradoxes which seemed like contradictions to those unfamiliar with his pedagogical methods. Like Jesus in Jerusalem about 500 years later, Siddhartha Gautama often used story-telling and metaphor to convey his message.

Very few monks in the First Council had enough skill to remember the words of all the Buddha's sermons. A tradition quickly grew in which certain monks became adept at the accurate recollection of particular sermons. "Sermon" translates *sutra*, which means "discourse."

As a result of group cooperation and organizational effort, a basic canon of the Buddha's pedagogy was preserved and passed down orally for centuries. Sutras typically begin with "Thus have I heard," indicating oral transmission.

Largely thanks to the consolidating influence of King Ashoka in the mid-third century BCE, Sanskrit increasingly became the universal language of India, especially among merchants and royalty. Siddhartha Gautama was undoubtedly adept at multiple dialects, so it would of course be a mistake to think that he spoke exclusively in the regional linguistic format in which he was born and raised, in the northeast portion of India now southern Nepal.

Mahayana Buddhism largely takes its literary inspiration from the Sanskrit sutras which burst upon the scene shortly after the establishment of the Pali Canon.

By the mid-second century CE, Nalanda Monastic University – which soon grew to over ten thousand monks, and with one of the largest libraries in the world – became the primary locus for Mahayana’s greatest scholars, teachers and yogi-adepts, speaking and writing mostly in Sanskrit. Nagarjuna – founder of Madhyamaka, the Middle Way school of Mahayana philosophy – was one of the first and greatest abbots of Nalanda. As Nalanda grew, and other monastic universities with almost equal stature emerged, the Pali Canon was translated into Sanskrit for wider dissemination, and many new sutras appeared.

These new sutras, written in Sanskrit, inspired the rapid growth of the Bodhisattvayana movement, later called Mahayana. The heart of these newly composed Sanskrit sutras goes by the name *Prajnaparamita* – “perfect wisdom” or “perfection of insight.”

Written by various authors, some known and some not, these Sanskrit sutras were largely viewed with skepticism by Theravadan devotees of the Pali Canon.

New Bodhisattvayana sutras continued to appear for several centuries. Among the texts most famous in the Prajnaparamita literature are *The Avatamsaka* (“Flower Garland”) *Sutra*, *The Heart Sutra*, *The Diamond Sutra*, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, and *The Lotus Sutra*. The Prajnaparamita sutras beginning with “Thus have I heard” borrowed the traditional opening of Pali sutras. This convention seeks to convey that when the Buddha’s conversation begins, these are in fact the words of the Buddha and his dialogue partners.

Or, for example, in the case of *The Heart Sutra*, it sometimes suggested that the dialogue between Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara is telepathically inspired by Siddhartha. Siddhartha was a *mahasiddha* – a great-power yogi, with the ability to inspire Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara to discourse on his behalf.

The Mahayana tradition claims that Buddha transmitted “secret” doctrines to select, highly evolved adepts. These doctrines were then orally transmitted down through the ages to equally evolved adepts. According to this tradition, Buddha felt that Indian society in general, including many thousands in the Buddhist sangha, would find these teachings too confusing, too paradoxical, too transcendental.

It was part of Buddha's missionary pragmatism to keep his teaching relatively simple for the vast majority of his listeners, endlessly restating the Four Noble Truths, emphasizing virtue, discipline, simplicity, humility, generosity, meditative self-exploration; in short, simple methods of liberation from the causes and conditions of suffering. In the Mahayana tradition, Buddha felt it would be a long time before members of Indian society, including many Buddhist practitioners, were mentally and emotionally ready for the psychological depth, and logical and metaphysical complexity, of his Prajnaparamita teachings.

After the passing of about 400 years, Bodhisattvayana practitioners, feeling constrained by Theravadan orthodoxy, felt the time was ripe. Prajnaparamita sutras exploded into the Indian marketplace of ideas. The way of the bodhisattva – articulated with Mahayana's majestic imagination – became a great new tree of enlightenment, reaching all across India, sprouting new roots in Central Asia, then moving into Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, and northern Vietnam, blossoming into, for example, Tantra, Zen, and Tendai (Pure Land Buddhism).

The Heart Sutra and *The Diamond Sutra* date to about 350 CE. As noted, they occupy a central position in Prajnaparamita literature.

However, they make no mention of the term *Mahayana*, even though the bodhisattva path – vowing to attain enlightenment for the sake of “saving all sentient beings” – is the underlying theme of both. This argues for the late invention of the term Mahayana as an umbrella concept encompassing key features of the evolving Bodhisattvayana.

Distinctive attributes highlight the difference between Theravada and Mahayana.

Theravadan Buddhism emphasizes the humanity and ordinariness of Siddhartha Gautama. It retains a distinction between samsara and nirvana. It concentrates on arhat-enlightenment as complete and lucid insight into the individual psyche. On the one hand, it often emphasizes memorization at the expense of critical reflection; on the other, it multiplies categories and minute distinctions, gradually moving from ascetic discipline to scholastic debate, without, however, Mahayana's imagistic and poetic creativity. If Theravadan Buddhism is, in the words of Mu Soeng, *psychological*, Mahayana Buddhism is *visionary*.

These are, of course, sweeping generalizations.

Soeng shows that despite its increasing scholasticism, Theravada retained an emphasis on the *ascetic* lifestyle. In Mahayana's liberalizing approach, there was an “evolution” toward what might be called the *aesthetic*. This “evolution” – from ascetic to aesthetic – could rightly be viewed as a mixed blessing.

Meanwhile – and to borrow again from Mu Soeng, a contemporary Korean-American Zen master – there is no doubt that the Theravadan Pali canon is largely

analytic, whereas Mahayana's primary employment of Sanskrit opened the gates to a far more *poetic* approach to Buddhist philosophy. The poetizing language of Mahayana was later picked up and perfected in the Zen traditions of China and Japan.

It is necessary to remember that there are many similarities which cross the Theravada-Mahayana divide, and many differences in individual preference and practice within any so-called school or movement.

That being said, we may nevertheless point to some Mahayana innovations which contribute to the Theravada-Mahayana distinction.

Mahayana Buddhism introduces an emphasis on:

- 1) Buddha's yogic, paranormal, shamanic abilities
- 2) the coinciding of self-knowledge with cosmic knowledge;
- 3) the collapse of an ontological distinction between samsara and nirvana;
- 4) the centrality of "emptiness" as key to enlightenment, and, therefore, as key to an experiential comprehension of universal, holographic interbeing;
- 5) Buddha's divinity (and therefore our own) as essentially ingredient in his humanity;
- 6) a vast, cosmological multiverse of fantastic proportions, with innumerable Buddhas, beings and celestial deities;
- 7) The Middle Way paradox of detached engagement;
- 8) The Middle Way negation of all categories and concepts, thus employing words to point beyond words – again, a key feature picked up and perfected in the Zen tradition; and, of course,
- 9) the bodhisattva ideal of *collective* liberation from the suffering caused by ignorance and excess desire.

Mahayana Buddhism articulates ten stages – *bhumis* – on the path leading from bodhisattva to Buddha; from wise and skillful compassion to total freedom and awakening. A bodhisattva becomes a bodhisattva-*mahasattva* when he or she has reached the seventh stage on the tenfold path to Buddhahood.

The seventh stage is called *durangamabhumi* – the "far-reaching land." Having arrived at this *bhumi*, a bodhisattva-*mahasattva* is: 1) free from the cycle of death and rebirth; 2) a master of skillful means; 3) capable of manifesting in many forms (including back on earth, voluntarily). Accordingly, a bodhisattva-*mahasattva* is "far-reachingly" efficient in the skillful healing of suffering.

Free of karma, a master of upaya, and multi-manifesting, a bodhisattva-*mahasattva* assumes the most appropriate form; delivers the most appropriate

message; applies therapeutic healing in the most efficient fashion.

At the final stage – the tenth *bhumi* – a bodhisattva-mahasattva ascends to the Tushita heaven, also called Dharma Clouds. This is where Buddhas congregate, confirming the compassionate wisdom and omni-competent *upaya* of a fully evolved bodhisattva-mahasattva. In Tushita, there is no difference between a Buddha and a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are Buddhas-in-the-making; and all Buddhas are Mahabodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva-mahasattva translates the Sanskrit *bodhisattvair mahasattvaih*. We must now note an important caveat. The term bodhisattva-mahasattva is generally used in Mahayana sutras and mantras to signify bodhisattvas in general, not Mahabodhisattvas at the seventh *bhumi* on the ten-fold path to Buddhahood. Unless used in texts like *The Lankavatara Sutra*, where the “lamp of wisdom” guides the “cultivation of bodhichitta” through the ten *bhumis*, the word bodhisattva-mahasattva refers to any person who takes the bodhisattva vow to work for the good of all. Stage of development is irrelevant. What matters is heart-centered motivation.

Tibetans translate bodhisattva-mahasattva as “great spiritual hero.”

Just as the term *mahatma* (*maha-atman*), as in Mahatma Gandhi, means “great soul,” so the term bodhisattva-mahasattva indicates heroic devotion to spiritual maturation through practice of loving kindness and altruistic service.

Accordingly, when we chant “All honored ones, all bodhisattva-mahasattvas,” we invoke a triple inflection.

1) We are thanking the Mahabodhisattvas who have progressed to the seventh *bhumi* and beyond, including Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Maitreya, Vajrasattva, Amitabha, and, of course, Tara, Kwan Yin and Kannon (three in one).

2) We are thanking all bodhisattvas – everywhere, in all times, religious or secular, at whatever level of development – for their service and devotion.

3) We are paying homage to our own motivation; that is to say, we honor the opportunity to be of service, to perform good deeds, to extend our kindness and generosity. In sum, we honor all those who have inspired us; we honor even those unknown to us who have made the world a better place; and we honor our own commitment to enlightenment for the benefit of all.

In Buddhist iconography, the Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama – is often shown with a Mahabodhisattva on each side. On one side is Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, with his flaming sword that disperses clouds of confusion and cuts through all delusion. Manjushri’s sword signifies the “clear light” of illuminating wisdom.

On Buddha’s other side is Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, with his thousand arms and an eye in the palm of each hand. With his eyes he sees

our suffering, and with his arms he extends the most compassionate service in the most skillful way.

With his thousand arms, Avalokiteshvara is “far reaching.” He thus embodies in symbolic form the root meaning of “bodhisattva-mahasattva,” the seventh *bhumi*, the “seventh seal” of enlightenment. Able to manifest in any form, Avalokiteshvara appeared in Tibet as the goddess Tara. In China, Tara is revered as Kwan Yin; in Japan, as Kannon.

Perhaps there is a statuette of Kannon on your zendo’s altar. She holds a vase. From this vase – a never-ending Holy Grail cornucopia – she pours her blessings upon the world. As you sit in meditation, Kannon is lightly blessing you with the rain of her compassion. Sitting in meditation, have you ever felt your skin tingle?

Perhaps you have chanted the Kannon mantra. In this mantra we find the words “Kannon gyo.” *Gyo* means doing, in the sense of “deep practice.” In *The Heart Sutra* we find: “Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva gyoing deep prajna-paramita.”

Gyoing prajna-paramita is “practicing perfect wisdom.” What does this mean, “practicing perfect wisdom”?

It means resting “undisturbed in the clear light” of lucid insight. It is “seeing clearly into one’s own true nature.” It is surfing with perfect equipoise the unending vastness of *shunyata*.

This is Kannon, meditating deeply with our zazen, opening the lotus of heart-wisdom in the spacious center of our being as we sit in the upright position, letting-go, just breathing, becoming the Dharma Gate.

The Kannon mantra employs the term *Kanzeon* three times. *Kanzeon* is another name for Kannon.

Use of the word *Kanzeon* emphasizes the unity of Kannon with Avalokiteshvara.

Kanzeon (Kannon) is an emanation of Avalokiteshvara. She is the earthly embodiment of Avalokiteshvara’s infinite and unconditional compassion, showing his “far reaching,” Mahabodhisattvic ability to manifest in female form, combining terrestrial beauty with celestial grace.

In the zendo, meditating in the presence of Kannon, followed by chanting the Kannon mantra, we give thanks for her blessings. We are filled with her compassion.

Then, with open hearts and wise minds, we return to the daily work of being in the world. With patience and equanimity, we pour out to all those we encounter the sweet nectar of Zen: a kind word, a smile, a loving touch.

A bodhisattva-mahasattva is “far reaching,” able to appear in any form. Perhaps Kannon is your cat, or your dog. Perhaps Kannon blesses you with a

hummingbird; a butterfly; the song of a nightingale; the echo of a bell; a ladybug; a lightning bug; an owl's hoot; a halo around the moon; a hawk sailing on the wind.

Perhaps Kannon is the cricket who attends our seminar with his ceaseless mantra.

Omni-competent, Kannon is ever present, reminding us of what we are: bodhisattvas in the making. That is to say: baby bodhisattvas, on our way to becoming mahasattvas.

5. WISDOM AND VIRTUE - *Prajnaparamita* ***The Six Paramitas***

*Every day is a journey,
and the journey itself is home.*

Basho

Paramita means virtue, perfect, perfection, and crossing. It has the implicit meaning of practice. Practicing virtue is perfecting virtue. Perfecting virtue is bringing nirvana into samsara.

Prajna is wisdom. "Insight" is also an excellent translation. Insight is seeing into the truth of something. Seeing into is seeing clearly. Seeing something clearly is seeing into its nature, its suchness (*tathata*). The truth, nature or suchness of something is its impermanence: its continuous dependent co-origination. Dependent co-origination is interbeing. To be is to interbe.

The suchness of something is its emptiness of independent being; its absence of substantial (independently self-sustaining) selfhood. Regarding anything, there is no intrinsic nature apart from the streaming which holds it together as a pattern.

A pattern results from continuous process. Being is becoming; a continuous intersection of forces. Any being is like a cloud, a flame, a ripple.

Prajnaparamita is perfect wisdom, or the perfection of wisdom through the practice of seeing clearly the process that results in appearance. Appearance is diversity.

There are six paramitas. Practicing the paramitas is perfecting of virtue. Insight deepens practice. Practice deepens insight. In Buddhism, ethics and understanding are mutually reinforcing. To paraphrase Socrates: Virtue is the pursuit of virtue, and there is no difference between virtue and wisdom.

Impermanence and interbeing are mutually implicative. Recognizing interbeing breaks down barriers; it makes divisions porous, diaphanous, flexible, provisional. It undermines the absolutizing of separateness. Ethically, this leads to greater identification with others; greater sympathy, empathy, generosity, kindness;

a greater feeling of familial interbeing.

The six paramitas are dana, shila, kshanti, virya, dhyana, prajna. These may be translated in various ways. For example: altruism, ethics, patience, persistence, meditation, wisdom.

Dana means altruism, giving, generosity. More generally it may be translated as “wholesome conduct.”

The other five paramitas may be construed as variations and specifications of dana. Taken together, all six are the matrix of equanimity.

Equanimity is both the root and the fruit of wholesome conduct. Equanimity is *upeksha* in Sanskrit. The word *upeksha* has two roots: *upa* and *iks*. *Upa-iks* has the root meaning “looking closely” or “close consideration.” Close consideration leads to insight. Insight leads to virtue. Virtue leads to equanimity.

Equanimity is related to wholesome conduct in the basic Buddhist trinity “body, speech and mind.” Looking closely, we see the connection between wholesome conduct, instant karma, and the body-mind organism.

Everything one does, speaks and thinks has an instantaneous karmic effect on the body-mind organism. Wholesome conduct in body, speech and mind (thoughts, words and deeds) gives the body-mind organism a feeling of ease, spaciousness, tranquility.

Unwholesome conduct in body, speech or mind gives the mind-body organism a feeling of constriction, stress, tension, lack of tranquility.

Negativity and positivity – each is self-reinforcing. This is the essence of Buddhist psychology. Liberation from negativity – in body, speech and mind – is liberation from suffering. Liberation from suffering is freedom from anxiety. Freedom from anxiety is equanimity.

Shila is the general Buddhist word for ethics. It implies virtue. Its most explicit manifestation is kindness. Kindness and compassion toward oneself, this is wholesome conduct leading to kindness and compassion toward others. The two go together and are mutually reinforcing.

Kshanti means patience, tolerance, forbearance; resisting the temptation to become irritated; resisting the temptation to think, feel and act in negative ways.

If shila also means love, kshanti means practicing the patience that love inevitably requires. Kshanti implies endurance; specifically, the enduring effort to remain patient, loving, kind, unruffled, tolerant, empathic and sympathetic.

Virya means effort, vigor, vigorous action. Like kshanti, it implies persistence, patience, endurance, unbending intent. It also has the implication of joyous effort. Doing the work for the work’s sake; without clinging to expectations or hope of reward. Just doing the work because the work needs being done. Like washing the dishes or raking the leaves. Virya also implies doing the

work well. Making the effort with concentration; with a spacious, uncluttered, concentrating mind. Virya is unhurried effort, attentive and impeccable; resulting in the satisfaction of a job well done.

Dhyana means meditation. It specifically implies sitting meditation, for which we can use the words zazen and shikantaza: sitting in the upright position, just breathing, letting go of all thoughts and emotional disturbances as they arise. No clinging, no analyzing. Until one becomes what is called a Dharma Gate.

Assuming the position is itself the gate. Remaining still, and letting the mind become clear and spacious, is the practice of grounding oneself in equanimity.

However, dhyana can also mean the practice of a spacious, uncluttered, attentive mind in everyday life. In a way, we are meditating all the time; so we might as well practice the virtue of looking closely, keeping the mind free of clutter.

Dhyana also means taking the time to just relax, breathe deeply, take a break, count one's blessings, enjoy the beauty of the moment, experience the cellular and sensuous safety of the body's desire for ease and the body's joy at being at ease.

One can practice dhyana in multiple ways throughout the day.

Daily zazen is the most potent practice; yet there is just as much virtue in stopping to look at the clouds, taking a few deep breaths, relaxing the body, enjoying a flower, a bee, a tree, the sound of a cricket, the chirp of a bird, the murmur of a stream, the touch of a breeze, the slow fall of a bead of sweat, the glow of the moon, the hilarious song of the frog, the drumbeat of the Tao in rumbling thunder. As the fisherman said: "Sometimes I sit and fish; and sometimes I just sit."

Prajna, we have said, is wisdom, but how does one "practice" wisdom? Wisdom is the practice of looking closely, being attentive, thinking positive thought-forms, engaging in wholesome conduct. It is the practice of generosity, kindness, patience, effort, and meditation. To paraphrase Plato: Wisdom is the pursuit of wisdom. This is not, however, merely, or even primarily, a mental activity. In zen, yoga, tantra and shamanism, wisdom is letting the body-mind organism assume its "natural stance." In other words: Wisdom is in the body. When the mind is spacious and the body relaxed, the quantum knowledge of cellular consciousness emerges into the clear light of awareness.

The body itself is the Dharma Gate that opens the mind to enlightenment. The six paramitas might thus be summarized: Step back, go slow; the Dharma thunders through your heart like a buffalo.

6. POEMS FROM TURTLE ISLAND

The great void
is the sum
of all that is.
The small void is where we start.

Gazing at the blue lotus
bloom, my heart opens
to Brother Sun and Sister Moon.

Sitting quietly
in the hyacinth garden,
watching the rock grow.

Zazen is a cloud
drifting across the sky,
not asking why.

Zazen is riding
a moonbeam into a dewdrop
on the tiger's tongue.

Thinkest not
we are apart.
I gaze from the branch
overlooking
the moonlit pond
of your heart.

No loss, no gain.
Hoof-beats on the waves.
Midnight falls the rain.

The Three Jewels
shining in a moonbeam
break my heart with joy.

All tonight's birds are

chanting the Diamond Sutra
to my son's bamboo flute.

Across the Himalayan peaks
all the gods dance
to the drumbeat of the Tao.

Dogen sweeps leaves
in the howling wind
that blows his robe
to the moon.

When the heart is light
as a feather, the mind is
a dharma gate breeze.

Zen argonauts
sail shunyata
to Wudan Mountain.

Together, apart.
our love is an art, growing
in the womb of time.

Dogo to Ungon:
"Does a dog have ticks?"
Ungon: "If you wind it up."

Brothers and sisters,
please know: Buddha had
a sense of humor.

See the lily of
the field how it grows. Wait.
Did Buddha just wink?

Why did the monkey
fall from the tree? He got hold
of a, a not-branch.

Nowhere does Jesus say,
“Blessed are the shoppers.”
The moon twinkles in the pond.

Reading the Gospel
According to St. Bastard,
I am born again.

7. Te-shan’s Tea

Te-shan (Te-shan Hsuan-chien) was a 9th century Ch’an master who became one of the most illustrious sages in the history of Zen. This Chinese scholar-monk felt that Buddhist texts, Mahayana sutras in particular, were insufficiently appreciated in the Ch’an tradition of silent meditation, then about 300 years in the making. Te-shan spent twenty years studying *The Diamond Sutra* and writing detailed commentaries on this most koan-like text.

Dated to about 350 CE during the rapid expansion of the Bodhisattvayana – “Way of the Bodhisattva,” later called Mahayana – *The Diamond Sutra* is a short, classic, Middle Way dialogue, in this case between Subhuti and the Buddha. The sutra’s Sanskrit title is *Vajrachedika*, meaning “Diamond Cutter.”

Subhuti was one of Siddhartha Gautama’s ten principal disciples. He was known as “Foremost in Equanimity,” “Foremost in Loving Kindness,” and “Foremost in Insight (into Emptiness).” Subhuti enjoyed solitude. He often spent weeks in retreat, deep in the forest, meditating, and communing with nature. Whenever he rejoined the sangha, he was a delight to be around, because he was so peaceful and friendly.

The sutra that captured Te-shan’s fascination cuts like a diamond through any clinging to any concept. In the *Vajrachedika*, self is not-self, therefore it is itself. Dharma is not-dharma, therefore it is dharma. Beings are not beings, therefore they are beings. The Buddha teaches nothing, therefore his teachings are profound. Truth is not-truth, therefore it is has value. Enlightenment is no enlightenment, therefore it is enlightening. Bodhisattvas accrue the merit of no accruing and no merit. With the help of the dharma, Bodhisattvas carry sentient non-beings on the no-dharma no-raft across the river that isn’t there.

Woe to the bodhisattva who is not a bodhisattva because clinging to notions of true and false, bodhisattva and path, attainment and lack of attainment, samsara and nirvana. *The Diamond Sutra* deconstructs all distinctions. It empties them of anything to cling to, then warns against clinging to emptiness.

Te-shan hears of a southern school of Ch'an which claims that "one's own mind is Buddha," and where the students sit facing a wall. "Absurd!" he thinks. He packs up his commentaries on *The Diamond Sutra* and heads south to refute this misleading practice with its pernicious delusion.

Full of confidence after twenty years of scholarship, he makes his pilgrimage with his bag of books. Along the way, he stops at a tea house. The old lady who runs the tea shop takes his order. Seeing that he is making a pilgrimage, she asks about his purpose. Te-shan tells her that he is going to use *The Diamond Sutra* to refute a false claim about Buddha's teaching.

Refreshments at a tea shop are called *mou mou*. The phrase *mou mou* is a play on words. The characters for *mou mou* also mean "mind fresheners."

The old lady says: "I will ask you a question. If you can answer the question correctly, you may have free tea." Te-shan readily agrees.

The lady says: "In *The Diamond Sutra*, Buddha says, 'the past mind cannot be gotten hold of, the future mind cannot be gotten hold of, and the present mind cannot be gotten hold of.' Now, with which mind are you going to enjoy your tea?"

Te-shan is speechless. He cannot answer, because he knows no answer. It is the first moment of his awakening. Te-shan, the great scholar, has been humbled by this old lady who runs a tea shop. He is not offended; he is grateful. Yes, he is in a state of shock; but he is also composed. In gratitude and humility, he asks for guidance.

The old lady directs him to a Ch'an master for whom she feels great affection and respect. Te-shan thanks the tea shop owner, picks up his knapsack full of manuscripts, leaves the tea house, and sets his feet on the journey to the recommended temple where he hopes to be mentored by the Ch'an master.

Upon arriving, he builds a fire and burns all his manuscripts in the temple courtyard. The Ch'an master recognizes Te-shan's sincerity and accepts him into the sangha.

In due course, under Rinzai meditational rigor, the shock of many blows, and the epiphany of koan breakthrough, Te-shan experiences satori one night when leaving the Ch'an master's room. Te-shan had asked for instruction late one evening. The master consented; the two talked; hours passed. Then the master said: "It is late. Will you not retire?"

Te-shan rose, bowed, turned, lifted the drape across the doorway, and was about to step into the darkness. Then he turned again and said: "It is dark." The Ch'an master lit a paper torch. As Te-shan reached for it, the master blew it out. Te-shan's mind, light as a feather, was blown into enlightenment.

The following day, the Ch'an master tells the sangha that there is one among

them whose mind is sharp as a diamond cutter.

Te-shan leaves the temple, then retreats into solitude, hiding deep in a forest for thirty years. However, at the insistent request of the governor of the province, who has heard of this enlightened hermit, Te-shan finally accepts leadership of a monastery on nearby Mount Te-shan, from which his name derives.

Here, he becomes renowned for his meditational and stick-wielding severity, continuing the Rinzai tradition called “Shock Ch’an.”

Te-shan is known for his koan-style pronouncements. He is famous for exclaiming: “Thirty blows if you speak; thirty blows if you don’t speak!”

8. PARABLES

The Wisdom of Flexible Perfection

*If useless things do not hang in your mind,
any season is a good season.*

Mumon

Many stories illustrate the notion of upaya. Upaya – “skillful means” or “expedient method” – is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism. In response to the Theravadan tendency to rigidify Buddha’s teachings into unmodifiable doctrine, Mahayana Buddhism sees all of Buddha’s teachings as “relative truths.” These relative truths are pedagogical stimuli and therapeutic devices.

They function as a raft to carry one across the river of attachments to the shore of the ineffable.

This other shore is “beyond beyond,” and is indicated by words such as emptiness (*shunyata*), suchness (*tathata*), nirvana, cosmic womb (or Buddha-womb: *Tathagatagarbha*), and “ultimate truth” (*Dharmadatu*). It is only seemingly “other.” In fact, it is *this* shore; the invisible ground of the ground we stand on. Western philosophers refer to it as “the ground of being,” which manifests as “the great chain of being” in its constant becoming. Poetically, this ultimate ground of being is the Unfoundation.

Two of the most famous stories in Buddhist literature – illustrating Buddha’s liberative technique – are parables. The first is the parable of the burning house. The second tells the story of Kisa Gotami, a grieving mother.

The five ethical precepts of Buddhism – don’t lie, don’t steal, don’t kill, don’t abuse sex, don’t abuse intoxicants – provide the moral context for the burning house parable. This parable shows Mahayana’s flexibility with regard to the first precept in particular (don’t lie).

There are many ways to be compassionate. Different individuals and

different situations require different approaches. A bodhisattva must be skillfully adaptable.

The burning house parable tells the story of a rich merchant with three children. The three children are playing in the house, absorbed with their favorite toys. Outside, the merchant sees flames shooting up from the house. He yells to the children to come outside of the burning house. The children are too absorbed in their toys and game playing to be bothered with their father's command.

The father, knowing his children well, tells the first child that his fondest wish is waiting outside. The child has long wanted a horse cart. The second child has long wanted a goat cart. The third child has long wanted an ox cart.

The father tells the second child there is a goat cart waiting. He tells the third child there is an ox cart waiting. The three children run out of the burning house to be treated at last to their favorite wish.

Once outside, they see that there is only one cart, spacious and beautiful and yoked to a magnificent white ox. At first, of course, the children wanting a horse cart and a goat cart are disappointed. But the ox cart has room for all three; and the cart and the white ox are so dazzling that all three children happily dance for joy and quickly climb aboard.

The rich merchant has skillfully saved his children from the burning house. He has lied to two of his children in the process. This lie was a skillful means for acting quickly and compassionately. Being rich, the merchant had spoiled his children with toys, and the children were precocious enough to ignore his initial command.

With fatherly love and understanding, the merchant adapted his words to the situation. Rather than threatening his children with fear of punishment, he cajoled them with promises which played upon their desires. He achieved the necessary result: liberation from the flames.

Two Zen stories further illustrate the difference between ethical dogmatism and moral adaptability.

Two monks are on a pilgrimage. They come to river. A well-dressed lady wants to cross but doesn't know how. The first monk picks her up, carries her across, and sets her down on the other shore. The lady is dry, happy, grateful. The monks continue on their way. That night, the second monk asks the first: "How could you do that? You know we are not allowed to touch females!" The first monk says: "I left the lady at the river. Are you still carrying her?"

In another story, two monks are again on pilgrimage. Their route has taken them high into the mountains. The night is bitter cold. They find an old, abandoned hut. They take shelter in the hut. The first monk begins to build a fire in the fireplace. But there is little wood available. The second monk goes outside

and returns with some twigs. To his horror, the first monk has just thrown a small wooden statue of the Buddha into the nascent flames.

The second monk yells: “What are you doing?!” The first monk says: “What are you saying?!” The second monk is clinging to the idea that Buddha images are sacred icons. The first monk is assuring their survival; he uses the moment to shock his companion out of attachments. In one version, with a Zen flair for the dramatic, the story ends: “At that moment, the second monk achieved enlightenment.”

In the parable of Kisa Gotami, she is a mother whose only child has just died. Carrying the dead infant in her arms, she visits various sages with alleged shamanic powers and asks them if they can bring her child back to life.

Weeping, grieving, in turmoil and despair, she receives a negative answer, one after another. Finally she visits the Buddha. The Buddha tells her: “Yes, I will bring your child back to life, but on one condition.” Ready to do anything, Kisa Gotami agrees. The Buddha says: “Visit each house in the village. If you find a house where no person has died, bring me a few mustard seeds from that house.”

Kisa Gotami visits every house in the village. At each one, she is told of someone who has died: a mother, father, child, uncle, aunt, brother, sister, nephew, niece, grandparent. At last she returns to the Buddha.

She now realizes that death is part of life; that no one is spared; that her own grief has been experienced by many. She accepts her child’s fate, and her own. She embraces Buddhism, and becomes a devoted disciple.

Here are some additional parables, paraphrased from *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, compiled by Paul Reys and Nyogen Sensaki (Tuttle; 1957).

A Western philosophy professor visits a Japanese Buddhist temple in Kyoto. He is graciously received, then escorted to the Zen master’s simple office. After a short dialogue, tea is served. The professor holds out his cup.

The master fills it, then keeps pouring. The cup overflows. The professor exclaims: “No more will go in!” The master says: “This cup is like your mind. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

On another day, the governor of Kyoto visits the temple. He gives his card to the attendant, and asks for an audience with the master. While the governor waits, the attendant goes inside and hands the card to the master. The master reads it, then tells the attendant: “I don’t know this fellow. Tell him to go away.” The attendant retrieves the card, returns to the temple gate, and delivers the message. The governor takes the card, and crosses out the words “Governor of Kyoto” after his name. “Here,” he says to the attendant. “Please take this back to the master and ask again.” The attendant takes the card to the master. The master reads it

again. Then he says: “Oh, *this* fellow! Yes, I know him well. Show him in.”

A doctor visits a Zen master. The doctor says: “Please show me the essence of Zen.” The master says: “Treat your patients with kindness. That is the essence of Zen.”

In the early years of Zen in Japan, the Buddhist sutras were only available in Chinese. A Zen master decided to have them translated into Japanese, then copied and distributed. There were many sutras, and this was a tremendous undertaking, which would cost a lot of money. The Zen master collected donations for his project, and after ten years he finally had enough to begin. At that time, a great flood destroyed many crops and left many people homeless. The master used the sutra funds to help the people to feed their families, rebuild their homes, and plant new crops. Then he started his collection campaign again. After ten more years, he once again finally had enough to begin the translation program.

At that time, there was a great famine. There had not been sufficient rain; the crops wilted; people were destitute. The master used all his funds to buy food to feed the people. Then he began again, collecting donations. After ten more years, he had enough money to start the translation project. When it was finally completed, a Japanese set of sutras had at last come into existence. This original set is still kept in a monastic library as a national treasure.

People say the Zen master who originated the translation project made three sets of sutras, and that the first two surpassed the third.

A Japanese girl had a baby out of wedlock, much to the displeasure of her parents.

When quizzed about the father, the girl admitted that the father was Hakuin, the Zen master who lived on the outskirts of the village. The parents took the baby to the Zen master and gave it to him, saying: “This is yours!” Hakuin replied: “Is that so?” Then he took the baby and cared for it. Several years later, the girl confessed to her parents that the Zen master was not in fact the father. The parents went to the Zen master, who was playing with the child in the yard beside his hut.

The parents scooped up the child and said to the master: “This child is not yours!” Hakuin replied: “Is that so?” He bowed to the parents, who took the child back to their daughter. “Is that so?” has become a revered Zen saying down through the ages, and even today inspires Zen students to exercise patience, compassion and cheerfulness.

A student asked a Zen master: “What shall I do with my mind?” The master said: “Throw it out.” The student asked: “What if I can’t throw it out?” The master replied: “Carry it out.”

A Zen student was caught stealing. He was caught doing this many times. The other monks all complained to the master, and begged him to banish the

scoundrel from the sangha. The master called them all together one day and said: "You know the difference between right and wrong. But this fellow still does not. Who will teach him if I don't? You may leave, all of you, if you wish. But I am keeping this fellow here." The thief, hearing these words, wept openly, and never stole again.

A rich merchant came to a Zen temple and presented the master with a bag full of coins. The master received the gift. The merchant exclaimed: "Don't you say Thank You?!" The master replied: "The giver should give thanks."

A university student visited a Zen master and read some passages from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Included in the reading were the words "See the lilies of the field, how they grow," and "Knock, and the door shall be opened." The master replied: "Whoever said those words is not far from Buddhahood."

A platoon of Japanese soldiers on the march stayed one evening at a Zen temple. They were served the same humble meal that the monks ate. The platoon commander complained to the master of the temple, saying: "We are soldiers, ready to sacrifice our lives for our country!" The master replied: "We are monks, sacrificing our lives for the sake of all humanity."

The son of a samurai journeyed to Edo and served in the house of a high official. There, he fell in love with the official's wife, with whom he began an affair. One day the official discovered them embracing. In a fury, and with deadly intent, the official attacked the man.

As the son of a samurai, well skilled in the art of combat, the man killed the official. Thus guilty of a double crime, the man fled.

For many years he wandered from village to village, besieged by guilt and wondering if it was possible to somehow atone for his lack of virtue. With humility and simplicity, he did good deeds when the chance arose.

One day he was passing a very dangerous mountain path. Many people had fallen from this path on the side of the mountain. Some had been severely injured; others had died. The man decided to build a tunnel through the mountain. He obtained a shovel and some picks and set to work.

After many years of constant digging, the tunnel was large enough to walk through, but it was still only about a third of the way through the mountain. At that time, the son of the slain official at last found the man who had shamed his mother and killed his father. The man who was digging the tunnel was not afraid to die. He said to the son: "You may gladly take my life. I make only one request. Allow me to finish this tunnel through the mountain. It will save many people from injury and death." The official's son agreed. The man went back to work. After many weeks of waiting, the official's son grew tired of just sitting around. He picked up a shovel and joined in carving out the tunnel. Years passed. At last the

tunnel was complete. The man said: "My work is done. You may now take my life." The official's son, with tears in his eyes, said: "How can I kill my teacher?"

When a future Zen master was still a child, he often helped clean the room of his teacher. In this room was an old, delicate, priceless cup. Holding the cup, inspecting it, admiring it, the child accidentally dropped it. The cup fell to the floor and broke into many pieces. Then he heard his teacher approaching. Intercepting his teacher at the door, he asked: "Why do people have to die?" The teacher replied: "Nothing is permanent. All things pass away. It is the way of nature." The child held up a piece of the cup and said: "It was time for your cup to die."

A rich prince asked a Zen master to compose a few lines of calligraphy to help ensure his family's prosperity. This calligraphic work of art would be passed down through the years as a family legacy. The Zen master composed himself, dipped his brush in the ink, and wrote the following: "May you die before your son. May your son die before his son." The prince at first admired the artistry of the brush strokes, but when he read the words he was angry and perplexed.

He said: "Are you trying to insult me?" The master replied: "On the contrary. If your son dies before you, you will be much grieved. If his son dies before he himself passes away, he will be much grieved. But if each dies according to the rhythm of nature, this will be true prosperity."

A samurai approached a Zen master and asked: "Is there really a heaven and a hell?" The master asked: "Who are you?"

The man said haughtily: "I am samurai!" The master said: "You? You're no samurai. You couldn't even cut off my head with that dull sword of yours."

The man drew his sword and was about to strike when the master held up a finger and said: "Here open the gates of hell." The samurai froze in mid-motion, then sheathed his sword. The master said: "Here open the gates of heaven."

A teacher would sometimes fall asleep during class. When he awoke, the students asked: "Where have you been?" The teacher said: "In my dreams, I go to visit the old masters." One day the teacher had to leave the class to perform an errand. When he returned, the students were sleeping.

He woke them with a shout. Then he asked: "Where have you been?" The students replied: "In our dreams, we went to visit the old masters, and they said they had never seen you."

A novice monk, having just joined the sangha of the monastery, went to the Zen master, Joshu, and asked: "Please show me the meaning of Zen." Joshu asked: "Have you eaten?" The monk replied: "Yes." Joshu said: "Then wash your bowl."

At another time, a student asked Joshu: "What is the meaning of Zen?" Joshu replied: "Fetch water; chop wood."

The master of a Zen monastery was getting very old, yet he worked alongside the sangha in the garden every day. The monks felt sorry for their teacher, now so old and still working. So they hid his tools. When they brought food to the master that evening, he refused to eat. The same thing happened the next night, and the night after that. The following day they returned his tools. The master said: “No work, no food.”

Two monks were sitting in a courtyard watching a flag blowing in the wind. The first monk said: “Flag is moving.” The second monk said: “Wind is moving.” Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of Zen, was silently passing behind them. He whacked the monks with his cedar stick and said: “Not flag; not wind. Mind is moving!”

Bodhidharma was sitting quietly. A monk approached and said: “Please, sir, pacify my mind.” Bodhidharma replied: “Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it.” The monk said: “When I search for my mind, I cannot find it.” “There,” said, Bodhidharma; “I have pacified your mind.”