

Zen Buddhism

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Introduction

The viewpoint of Zen lies so close to the “growing edge” of Western thought that there has been an extraordinary growth of interest in Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism is a way and a view of life which does not belong to any of the formal categories of modern Western thought. It is not religion or philosophy; it is not a psychology or a type of science. It is an example of what is known in India and China a “Way of liberation,” and is similar in this respect to Taoism, Vedanta, and Yoga. A way of liberation can have no positive definition. It has to be suggested by saying what it is not, somewhat as a sculptor reveals an image by the act of removing pieces of stone from a block.

Watts (1957) believed that there is no need of “importing” Zen from the Far East, for it has become deeply involved with cultural institutions which are quite foreign to us. But there is no doubt that there are things which we can learn, or unlearn, from it and apply in our own way. Zen is above all an experience, nonverbal in character, which is simply inaccessible to the purely literary and scholarly approach. To know what Zen is, and especially what it is not, there is no alternative but to experience it, to experiment with it in the concrete so as to discover the meaning which underlies the words.

Perhaps the special flavor of Zen is best described as a certain directness. In other schools of Buddhism, awakening or *Bodhi* seems remote and almost superhuman, something to be reached only after many lives of patient effort but in Zen there is always the feeling that awakening is something quite natural, something startling obvious, which may occur at any moment. If it involves a difficulty, it is just that it is much too simple. Zen is also direct in its way of teaching, for it points directly and openly to the truth, and does not trifle with symbolism. Moreover, Zen tradition does indeed maintain that immediate awakening is not communicated by the *Sutras*, but has been passed down directly from master to pupil.

What Indian Mahayana Sutras state in abstract terms Zen does in concrete terms. Therefore, concrete individual images abound in Zen; in other words, Zen makes use, to a great extent, of poetical expressions; Zen is wedded to poetry (Suzuki, 1934).

Zen Buddhism has the special merit of a mode of expressing itself which is as intelligible – or perhaps as baffling – to the intellectual as to the illiterate, offering possibilities of communication which we have not explored. It has a directness, verve, and humor, and a sense of both beauty and nonsense at once exasperating and delightful. But above all it has a way of being able to turn one’s mind inside out. It is said that when Professor D.T. Suzuki was once asked how it feels to have attained *satori*, the Zen experience of “awakening,” he answered, “Just like ordinary everyday experience, except about two inches off the ground!” This state of consciousness described sounds not unlike being pleasantly drunk – though without the “morning after” effects of alcohol!

Historically, Zen may be regarded as the fulfillment of long traditions of Indian and Chinese culture, though it is actually much more Chinese than Indian, and since the twelfth century, it has rooted itself deeply and most creatively in the culture of Japan. As the fruition of these great cultures, and as a unique and peculiarly instructive example of a way of liberation, Zen is one of the most precious gifts of Asia to the world.

Terminology

The word *dhyana* (Pali, *jhana*) is original Sanskrit form of the Chinese *ch’an* and the Japanese *zen*, and thus its meaning is of central importance for an understanding of Zen Buddhism. “Meditation” in the common sense of “taking things over” or “musing” is a most misleading translation. But such alternatives as “trance” or “absorption” are even worse, since they suggest states of hypnotic fascination. The best solution seems to be to have *dhyana* untranslated and add it to the English language as we have added Nirvana and Tao (Watts, 1957).

As used in Buddhism, the term *dhyana* comprises both recollectedness and *samadhi*, and can best be described as the state of unified or one-pointed awareness. On the one hand, it is one-pointed in the sense of being focused on the present, since to clear awareness there is neither past nor future, but just

this one moment which Western mystics have called the Eternal Now. On the other hand, it is one-pointed in the sense of being a state of consciousness without differentiation of the knower, the knowing, and the known.

The origin of Zen

It is believed that Taoism, the original Chinese way of liberation, combined with Indian Mahayana Buddhism to produce Zen. However, the problem of historical Mahayana is of no very direct importance for an understanding of Zen, which as a Chinese rather than Indian form of Buddhism, came into being when Indian Mahayana was fully grown (see <http://www.moradnazari.com/mahayana-buddhism-as-opposed-to-pali-canon/>).

The traditional account of the origin of the Ch'an or Zen school is that the Buddha, in addition to his scriptures, possessed an esoteric teaching that was transmitted independently of written texts. This teaching he transmitted personally to one of his disciples, who in turn transmitted it to his own disciple. In this way, it was handed down until it reached Bodhidharma, who is supposed to have been the twenty-eighth Patriarch in India, and who came to China some time between 520 and 526, where he became the first *Tsu* (Patriarch, literally, ancestor) of the Ch'an school in China (Fung Yu-lan, 1966).

Zen and Indian Philosophy (definition of *maya*)

Maya is one of the most important words in Indian philosophy, Both Hindu, and Buddhist (see <http://www.moradnazari.com/buddhism-and-its-origins-in-brief/>). For, the manifold world of facts and events is said to be *maya*, ordinarily understood as an illusion which veils the one understanding reality of Brahman. Indeed, when Hindu and Buddhist texts speak of the "empty" or "illusory" character of the visible world of nature – as distinct from the conventional world of things – they refer precisely to the impermanence of its forms. Form is flux, and thus *maya* is the slightly extended sense that it cannot be firmly marked down or grasped. Form is *maya* when the mind attempts to comprehend and control it in the fixed categories of thought, that is, by means of names (*nama*) and words.

Maya is, then, usually equated *nama-rupa* or "name-and-form," which the minds attempts to grasp the fluid form of nature in its mesh of fixed classes. But when it is understood that form is ultimately void – in the special sense of ungraspable and immeasurable – the world of form is immediately seen as Brahman rather than *maya*. The formal world becomes the real world in the moment when it is no longer clutched, in the moment when its changeful fluidity is no longer resisted

This realization was the crux of the Buddha's experience of awakening (*Bodhi*) which dawned one night as he sat under the celebrated Bo Tree at Gaya, after seven years of meditation in the forests. From the standpoint of Zen, this experience is the essential content of Buddhism, and the verbal doctrine is quite secondary to the wordless transmission of the experience itself from generation to generation. For seven years Gautama had struggled by the traditional means of *yoga* and *tapas*, contemplation and asceticism, to penetrate the cause of man's enslavement to *maya*, to find release from the vicious circle of clinging-to-life which is like trying to make the hand grasp itself. All his efforts had been in vain. The eternal *atman*, the real Self, was not to be found. However, much he concentrated upon his own mind to find its root and ground, he found only his own effort to concentration. The evening before his awakening he simply "gave up," relaxed his ascetic diet, and ate some nourishing food.

Thereupon he felt at once that a profound change was coming over him. He sat beneath the tree, vowing never to rise until he had attained the supreme awakening, and – according to a tradition – sat all through the night until the first glimpse of the morning star suddenly provoked a state of perfect clarity and understanding. This was liberation from *maya* and from everlasting Round of birth-and-death, which goes on and on for as long as a man tries in any way whatsoever to grasp at his own life. Yet the actual content of this experience was never and could never be put into words. For, words are the frames of *maya*, the meshes of its net, and the experience is of the water which slips through.

Thus, from the standpoint of Zen the Buddha "never said a word," despite the volumes of scriptures attributed to him. For his real message remained always unspoken, and was such that, when words attempted to express it, they made it seem as if it were nothing at all. Yet it is the essential tradition

of Zen that what cannot be conveyed by speech can nevertheless be passed on by “direct pointing,” by some nonverbal means of communication without which the Buddhist experience could never have been handed down to future generations. In its own (probably rather late) tradition, Zen maintains that the Buddha transmitted awakening to his chief disciple, Mahakasyapa, by holding up a flower and remaining silent.

Many Buddhists understand the Round of birth-and-death quite literally as a process of reincarnation, wherein the *karma* which shapes the individual does so again and again in life after life until through insight and awakening, it is laid to rest. But in Zen, and other schools of the Mahayana, it is often taken in a more figurative way, as that the process of rebirth is from moment to moment, so that one is being reborn so long as one identifies himself with a continuing ego which reincarnates itself afresh at each moment of time.

Zen and Chinese Philosophy (definition of *hsin*)

What Chinese designates with the peculiar word *hsin* is so important for the understanding of Zen that some attempt must be made to say what Taoism and Chinese thought in general take it to mean. We usually translate it as “mind” or “heart” but neither of these words is satisfactory. The original form of the ideograph seems to be a picture of the heart, or perhaps of the lungs or the liver, and when a Chinese speaks of the *hsin* he will always point to the center of his chest, slightly lower than the heart.

The difficulty with our translations is that “mind” is too intellectual, too cortical, and that “heart” in its current English usage is too emotional – even sentimental. Furthermore, *hsin* is not always used with quite the same sense. Sometimes it is used for an obstruction to be removed, as in *wu-hsin*, “no-mind.” But sometimes it is used in a way that is almost synonymous with the Tao. This is especially found in Zen literature, which abound with such phrases as “original mind” (*pen hsin*), “Buddha mind” (*fu hsin*), or “faith in mind” (*hsin hsin*). This apparent contradiction is resolved in the principle that “the true mind is no mind,” which is to say that the *hsin* is true, is working properly, when it works as if it were not present. In the same way, the eyes are seeing properly when they do not see.

What the exponents of Zen later signified by *wu-hsin*, literally “no-mind” what is to say un-self-consciousness, is a state of wholeness in which the mind functions freely and easily, without the sensation of a second mind or ego standing over it with a club. If the ordinary man is one who has to walk by lifting his legs with his hands, the Taoist is one who has learned to let the legs walk by themselves.

All in all, it would seem that *hsin* means the totality of our psychic functioning, and, more specifically, the center of that functioning, which is associated with the central point of the upper body. The Japanese form of the word, *kokoro*, is used with even more subtleties of meaning, but for the present it is enough to realize that in translating it “mind” (a sufficiently vague word) we do not mean exclusively the intellectual or thinking mind, nor even the surface consciousness. The important point is that according to both Taoism and Zen, the center of the mind’s activity is not in the conscious thinking process, not in the ego.

Zen and Taoism

Although the name Zen is *dhyana*, or meditation, other schools of Buddhism emphasize meditation as much as, if not more than, Zen – and at times it seems as if the practice of formal meditation were not necessary to Zen at all. Nor is Zen peculiar in “having nothing to say,” in insisting that the truth cannot be put into words, for this is already the teaching of Lao-tzu.

*Those who know do not speak;
Those who speak do not know.*

Confucian and Taoist alike would be agreeable to the idea of an awakening which did not involve the extermination of human passions. However, not exterminating the human passions does not mean letting them flourish untamed. It means letting go of them rather than fighting them, neither repressing passion nor indulging it. For, the Taoist is never violent, since he achieves his ends by noninterference (*wu-wei*), which is a kind of psychological *judo* (Watts, 1957).

Here is one of the main links between Taoism and Zen, for the style and terminology of Seng-chao's book, the Book of Chao, is Taoist throughout, though the subject matter is Buddhist. The sayings of early Zen masters, such as Hui-neng, Shen-hui, and Huang-po, are full of these very ideas – that truly to know is not to know, that the awakened mind responds immediately, without calculation, and that there is no incompatibility between Buddhahood and the everyday life of the world (Seng-chao p384-414, cited by Watts, 1957).

Even closer to the standpoint of Zen was Seng-chao's fellow student Tao-sheng (pp360-434, cited in Watts, 1957), the first clear and unequivocal exponent of the doctrine of instantaneous awakening. If *nirvana* is not to be found by grasping, there can be no question of approaching it by stages, by the slow process of accumulation of knowledge. It must be realized in a single flash of insight, which is *tun wu*, or, in Japanese, *satori*, the familiar Zen term for sudden awakening. Hsieh Ling-yun in his discussion of Tao-sheng's doctrine even suggests that instantaneous awakening is more appropriate to the Chinese mentality than to the Indian, and lends weight to Suzuki's description of Zen as the Chinese "revolution" against Indian Buddhism (Zuzuki, 1934)

Traditional account of the origin of Zen

The importance of early precursors of Zen is that they provide a clue to historical beginnings of the movement if we cannot accept the traditional story that it arrived in China in 520, with the Indian monk Bodhidharma. Modern scholars such as Fung Yu-lan (1966) have cast serious doubts upon the truth of this tradition. They suggest that the Bodhidharma story was a pious invention of later times, when the Zen school needed historical authority for its claim to be direct transmission of experience from the Buddha himself, outside the *sutras*. For Bodhidharma is represented as the twenty-eighth of a somewhat fanciful list of Indian Patriarchs, standing in the direct line as "apostolic succession" from Gautama (for legends about Bodhidharma see: <http://www.moradnazari.com/roly-poly-the-japanese-daruma-doll-first-tea-plants-and-another-legend/>).

There Bodhidharma transmitted the esoteric teaching to Hui-k'o (486-593), who was China's second Patriarch (for the legend about Hui-k'o's *satori* see: <http://www.moradnazari.com/roly-poly-the-japanese-daruma-doll-first-tea-plants-and-another-legend/>). The teaching was thus perpetuated until we have Hung-jen (601-675), the Fifth Patriarch and here we begin to enter a more reliable chapter of history. Hung-jen was apparently the first of the patriarchs to have any large following, however, much overshadowed by his immediate successor Hui-neng (637-713), whose life and teaching mark the definitive beginning of truly Chinese Zen – of Zen as it flourished during what was later called "the epoch of Zen activity," the latter two hundred years of the T'ang dynasty, from about 700 to 906. His original *satori* (the Zen term for sudden awakening) occurred spontaneously, without the benefit of a master and that his biography represents him as an illiterate peasant. Apparently Hung-jen immediately recognized the depth of his insight, but fearing that his humble origins might make him unacceptable in a community of scholarly monks, the Patriarch put him to work in the kitchen compound.

Some time later, the patriarch announced that he was looking for a successor to whom he might transmit his office, together with the robe and begging bowl (said to have been handed down from the Buddha) which were its insignia. The honor was to be conferred upon the person who submitted the best poem, expressing his understanding of Buddhism. The chief monk of the community was then a certain Shen-hsiu, and all the others naturally assumed that the office would go to him and so made no attempt to compete.

During the night Shen-hsiu, posted the following lines in the corridor near Patriarch's quarter:

*The body is like unto the Bodhi-tree,
And the mind to a mirror bright;
Carefully we cleanse them hour by hour,
Lest dust should fall upon them.*

When Shen-hsiu came to the Patriarch, the following morning, in private and claimed the

authorship, the Patriarch declared that his understanding was still far from perfect. Then, on the following day another poem appeared beside the first:

*Originally there was no Bodhi-tree,
Nor was there any mirror;
Since originally there was nothing,
Whereon can the dust fall?*

The Patriarch knew that only Hui-neng could have written this, but to avoid jealousy he rubbed out the poem with his shoe, and summoned Hui-neng to his room secretly, by night. Here he conferred the patriarchate, the robe and the bowl upon him, and told him to flee into the mountains until the hurt feelings of the other monks had subsided and the time was ripe for him to begin his public teaching.

A comparison of the two poems shows at once the distinctive flavor of Hui-neng's Zen. Shen-hsiu's poem reflects what was apparently the general and popular view of *dhyana* practice in Chinese Buddhism. It was obviously understood as the discipline of sitting meditation, in which the mind was "purified" by an intense concentration which would cause all thoughts and attachments to cease. Taken rather literally, many Buddhist and Taoist texts would substantiate this view – that the highest state of consciousness is a consciousness empty of all contents, all ideas, feelings, and even sensations. Today in India this is a very prevalent notion of Samadhi. But our own experience with Christianity should make this type of literalism, even in high circles, rather familiar (Watts, 1957).

According to Fung Yu-lan (1966), Shen-hsiu's poem emphasized the universal mind of Buddha Nature spoken of by Tao-sheng, while Hui-neng's emphasized the Wu (Non-being) of Seng-chao. There are two phrases that often occur in Ch'anism (Zen Buddhism). One is, "The very mind is Buddha"; the other, "not-mind, and not-Buddha." Shen-hsiu's poem is the expression of the first phrase, and Hui-neng's of the second (see <http://www.moradnazari.com/meditation-in-india-in-contrast-to-the-teachings-of-sixth-patriarch-in-zen-buddhism/>).

Hui-neng's position was that a man with an empty consciousness was no better than "a block of wood or a lump of stone." He insisted that the whole idea of purifying the mind was irrelevant and confusing, because "our own nature is fundamentally clear and pure." In other words, there is no analogy between consciousness or mind and a mirror that can be wiped. The true mind is "no-mind" (*wu-hsin*), which is to say that it is not to be regarded as an object of thought or action, as if it were a thing to be grasped and controlled. To try to purify it is to be contaminated with purity. Obviously this is the Taoist philosophy of naturalness, according to which a person is not genuinely free, detached, or pure when his state is the result of an artificial discipline. He is just imitating purity, just "faking" clear awareness, hence the unpleasant self-righteousness of those who are deliberately and methodically religious.

Hui-neng's teaching is that instead of trying to purify or empty the mind, one must simply let go of the mind – because the mind is nothing to be grasped. Letting go of the mind is also equivalent to letting go of the series of thoughts and impressions which come and go "in" the mind, neither repressing them, holding them, nor interfering with them.

Of the usual view of meditation practice he said:

To concentrate on the mind and to contemplate it until it is still is a disease and not dhyana. To restrain the body by sitting up for a long time – of what benefit is this towards the Dharma?

And again:

If you start concentrating the mind on stillness, you will merely produce an unreal stillness.... What does the word "meditation" mean? In this school it means no barriers, no obstacles; it is beyond all objective situations whether good or bad. The word "sitting" means not to stir up thoughts in the mind.

In counteracting the false *dhyana* of mere empty-mindedness, Hui-neng compares the Great Void to space, and calls it great, not just because it is empty, but because it contains the sun, moon, and the stars. True *dhyana* is to realize that one's own nature is like space, and that thoughts and sensations come

and go in this “original mind” like birds through the sky, leaving no trace. Awakening, in his school, is “sudden” because it is for quick-witted rather than slow-witted people. The latter must of necessity understand gradually, or more exactly, after a long time, since the sixth Patriarch’s doctrine does not admit of stages or growth. To be awakened at all is to be awakened completely, for, having no parts or divisions, the Buddha nature is not realized bit by bit. His final instructions to his disciples contain an interesting clue to the latter development of the *mondo* or “question-answer” method of teaching:

If, in questioning you, someone asks about being, answer with non-being. If he asks about non-being, answer with being. If he asks about the ordinary man, answer in terms of the sage. If he asks about the sage, answer in terms of the ordinary man. By this method of opposites mutually related there arises an understanding of the Middle Way. For every question that you are asked, respond in terms of its opposite.

Hui-neng died in 713, and with his death the institution of Patriarchate ceased, for the genealogical tree of Zen put forth branches. Hui-neng’s tradition passed to five disciples: Huai-jang (died 775), Ch’ing-yuan (died 740), Shen-hui (668-770), Hsuan-chueh (665-713), and Hui-chung (677-744). The spiritual descendants of Huai-jang and Hsing-ssu live on today as two principal schools of Zen in Japan, the Rinzai and the Soto.

The first Principle is inexpressible

In later times the Ch’an school (Zen) in its major development followed the line set by Hui-neng. In it the combination already begun between the empty school and Taoism reached its climax. What the empty school called higher sense truth on the third level, the Zen called the First Principle and on this third level one simply cannot say anything. Therefore, the First Principle by its nature inexpressible. The Zen master Wen-yi (died 958) was once asked: “What is the First Principle?” To which he answered: “If I were to tell you, it would become the second principle.”

The First Principle is inexpressible, because what is called the *Wu* is not something about which anything can be said. By calling it “Mind” or any other name, one is at once giving it a definition and thus imposing on it a limitation. As the Ch’anists and Taoists both say, one thereby falls into the “net of words.” Ma-tsu or the Patriarch Ma (died 788), a disciple of the disciple of Hui-neng, was once asked: “Why do you say that the very mind is Buddha?” Ma-tsu answered: “I simply want to stop the crying of the children.” “Suppose they do stop crying?” asked the questioner. “Then not-mind, not-Buddha,” was the answer.

Another student asked Ma-tsu: “What kind of man is he who is not linked to *all* things?” The Master answered: “Wait until one gulp you can drink up all the water in the West River, then I will tell you.” Such an act is obviously impossible and by suggesting it Ma-tsu meant to indicate to the student that he would not answer his question. His question, in fact, was really not answerable, because he who is not linked to *all* things is one who transcends *all* things. This being so, how can you ask what kind of man he is?

There were Ch’an Masters who used silence to express the idea of *Wu* or the First Principle. It is said, for example, that when Hui-chung (died 775) was to debate with another monk, he simply mounted his chair and remained silent. The other monk then said: “Please propose your thesis so I can argue.” Hui-chung replied: “I have already proposed my thesis.” The monk asked: “What is it?” Hui-chung said: “I know it is beyond your understanding,” and with this left his chair. The thesis Hui-chung proposed was that of silence. Since the first principle of *Wu* is not something about which anything can be said, the best way to expound it to remain silent.

From this point of view no Scripture or Sutras have any real connection with the First Principle. Hence the Zen master Yi-hsüan (died 866), founder of group in Zen known as the Lin-chi school, said:

“If you want to have the right understanding, you must not be deceived by others. You should kill everything that you meet internally or externally. If you meet Buddha, kill Buddha. If you meet the Patriarchs, kill the Patriarchs.... Then you can gain your emancipation.”

Method of Cultivation

The writing and records of Hui-neng’s successors continue to be concerned with naturalness. On the principle that “the true mind is no mind,” and “our true nature is no (special) nature,” it is likewise

stressed that the true practice of Zen is no practice, that is, the seeming paradox of being a Buddha without intending to be a Buddha. According to Shen-hui:

If one has this knowledge, it is contemplation [Samadhi] without contemplating, wisdom [prajna] without wisdom, practice without practicing.

All cultivation of concentration is wrong-minded from the start. For how, by cultivating concentration, could one obtain concentration?

If we speak of working with the mind, does this working consist of activity or inactivity of the mind? If it is inactivity, we should be no different from vulgar fools. But if you say that it is activity, it is then in the realm of grasping, and we are bound up by the passions [klesa]. What way, then, should we have of gaining deliverance?...If working with the mind is to discipline the mind, how could this be called deliverance?

The knowledge of First Principle is knowledge that is non-knowledge; hence the method of cultivation is also cultivation that is non-cultivation. It is said that Ma-tsu, before he became a disciple of Huai-jang (died 744), lived on the Heng Mountain (in present Hunan province). There he occupied a solitary hut in which, all alone, he practiced meditation. One day Huai-jang began to grind some bricks in front of the hut. When Ma-tsu saw it, he asked Huai-jang what he was doing. He replied that he was planning to make a mirror. Ma-tsu said: "How can grinding bricks make a mirror?" Huai-jang said: "If grinding bricks cannot make a mirror, how can meditation make a Buddha?" By this saying Ma-tsu was enlightened and thereupon became Huai-jang's disciple.

Po-chang's student His-yün (died 847), Known as the master of Huang-po is not only was he the teacher of the great Lin-chi (Japanese, Rinzai), but he was also the author of the "Treatise on the Essential of the doctrine of mind." The content of this work is essentially the same body of doctrine as is found in Hui-neng, Shen-hui, and Ma-tsu, but it contains some passages of remarkable clarity as well as some frank and careful answers to questions at the end.

By their way seeking for it [the Buddha nature] they produce the contrary effect of losing it, for that is using the Buddha to seek for the Buddha, and using mind to grasp mind. Even though they do their utmost for full kelpa, they will not be able to attain it.

If those who study the Tao do not awake to this mind substance, they will create a mind over and above mind, seek the Buddha outside themselves and remain attached to forms, practices and performance – all of which is harmful and not the way to supreme knowledge.

Thus according to Ch'anism, the best method of cultivation for achieving Buddhahood is not to practice any cultivation. To cultivate oneself in this way is to exercise deliberate effort, which is *yu-wei* (having action). This *yu-wei* will, to be sure, produce some good effects, but it will not be everlasting. The master of Huang-po, said: "Supposing that through innumerable lives a man has practiced the *six paramitas* [methods of gaining salvation], done good and attain the Buddha Wisdom, this will still not last forever. The reason lies in causation. When the force of the cause is exhausted, he reverts to the impermanent."

Again he said: "All deeds essentially impermanent. All forces have their final day. They are like a dart discharged through the air; when its strength is exhausted, it turns and falls to the ground. They are all connected with the Wheel of Birth and Death. To practice cultivation through them is to misunderstand the Buddha's idea and waste labor."

And yet again: "If you do not understand *wu hsin* [absence of purposeful mind], then you are attached to objects, and suffer from obstructions....Actually there is no such thing as Bodhi [Wisdom]. That the Buddha talked about it was simply as a means to educate men, just as yellow leaves may be taken as gold coins in order to stop the crying of children....The only thing to be done is to rid yourself of your old *Karma*, as opportunity offers, and not to create new *Karma* from which will flow new calamities."

Thus the best method of spiritual cultivation is to do one's tasks without deliberate effort to purposeful mind. This is exactly what the Taoists called *wu-wei* (non-action) and *wu-hsin* (no mind). It is what Hui-yüan's theory signifies, as well as, probably, the statement of Tao-sheng that "a good deed does not entail retribution." This method of cultivation does not aim at doing things in order to obtain resulting good effects, no matter how good these effects may be in themselves. Rather it aims at doing things in such a way as to entail no effects at all. When all one's actions entail no effect, then after the effects of previously

accumulated *Karma* have exhausted themselves, one will gain emancipation from the Wheel of Birth and Death and attain *Nirvana*.

To do things without deliberate effort and purposeful mind is to do things naturally and to live naturally. Yi-hsüan said: *“To achieve Buddhahood there is no place for deliberate effort. The only method is to carry on one’s ordinary and uneventful tasks: relieve one’s bowels, pass water, wear one’s clothes, eat one’s meals, and when tired, lie down. The simple fellow will laugh at you, but the wise will understand.”* The reason why those who try to achieve Buddhahood so often fail to follow this course is because they lack self-confidence. Yi-hsüan said: *“Nowadays people who engage in spiritual cultivation fail to achieve their ends. Their fault is not having faith in themselves....Do you wish to know who are the Patriarchs and the Buddhas? All of you who are before me are the patriarchs and Buddha.”*

Thus the way to practice spiritual cultivation is to have adequate confidence in one’s self and discard anything else. All one should do is to pursue the ordinary tasks of one’s everyday life, and nothing more. This is what the Zen masters call cultivation through non-cultivation.

Here a question arises: Granted that this be so, then what is the difference between the man who engages in cultivation of this kind and the man who engages in no cultivation at all? If the latter does precisely what the former does, he too should achieve *Nirvana*, and so there should come a time when there will be no Wheel of Birth and Death at all.

To this question it may be answered that although to wear clothes and eat meals are in themselves common and simple matters, it is still not easy to do them with a completely non-purposeful mind and thus without any attachment. A person likes fine clothes, for example, but dislikes bad ones, and he feels pleased when others admire his clothes. These are all the attachments that result from wearing clothes. What the Zen masters emphasized is that spiritual cultivation does not require special acts, such as the ceremonies and prayers of institutionalized religion. One should simply try to be without a purposeful mind or any attachments in one’s daily life; then cultivation results from the mere carrying on of the common and simple affairs of daily life. In the beginning one will need to exert effort in order to be without effort, and to exercise a purposeful mind in order not to have such a mind, just as, in order to forget, one at first needs to remember that one should forget. Later, however, the time comes when one must discard the effort to be without effort, and the mind that purposefully tries to have no purpose, just as one finally forgets to remember that one has to forget.

Watts 1957 discussed that there is often a deceptive resemblance between opposite extremes. Lunatics frequently resemble saints, and the unaffected modesty of the sage often lets him seem to be a very ordinary person. Yet there is no easy way of pointing out the difference, of saying what it is that the ordinary, worldly fellow does or does not do which makes him different from a bodhisattva, or vice versa. The entire mystery of Zen lies in this problem, and we shall return to it at the proper time. It is enough to say here that the so-called “ordinary person” is only apparently natural, or perhaps that his real naturalness feels unnatural to him. In practice it is simply impossible to decide, intentionally, to stop seeking of nirvana and to lead an ordinary life, for as soon as one’s “ordinary” life is intentional it is not natural.

Thus cultivation through non-cultivation is itself a kind of cultivation, just as knowledge that is not knowledge is nevertheless still a form of knowledge. Such knowledge differs from original ignorance, and cultivation through non-cultivation likewise differs from original naturalness. For original ignorance and naturalness are gifts of nature, whereas knowledge that is not knowledge and cultivation through non-cultivation are both products of the spirit.

Teaching methods

In the beginning of Zen history, there was no specified method of studying Zen. Those who wished to understand it came to the master, the latter had no stereotyped instruction to give, for this was impossible in the nature of things. He simply expressed in his own way either by gestures or in words his disapproval of whatever view his disciples might present to him, until he was fully satisfied with them. His dealing with his disciples was quite unique in the annals of spiritual exercises. He struck them with a stick, slapped them in the face, kicked them down to the ground; he laughed at them, made sometimes scornful, sometimes satirical, sometimes even abusive remarks, which will surely stagger those who are not used to the ways of Zen masters.

Ma-tsu was the first Zen master celebrated for “strange words and extraordinary behavior,” and he described as one who walked like a bull and glared like a tiger. He was the first to answer questions about Buddhism by hitting the questioner, or by giving a loud shout—“Ho!” His interesting name “Stone-head” is attributed to the fact that he lived on top of a large rock near the monastery.

With Ma-tsu’s disciple Nan-ch’uan (748-834) and his successor Chao-chou (778-897), the teaching of Zen became peculiarly lively and disturbing....Chao-chou is said to have had his awakening after the following incident with Nan-chuan:

Chao-chou asked, “What is the Tao?”

The master replied, “Your ordinary [i.e., natural] mind is the Tao.”

“How can one return into accord with it?”

“By intending to accord you immediately deviate.”

“But without intention, how can one know the Tao?”

“The Tao,” said the master, “belongs neither to knowing nor not knowing. Knowing is false understanding; not knowing is blind ignorance. If you really understand the Tao beyond doubt, it’s like the empty sky. Why drag in right and wrong?”

When Chao-chou was asked whether a dog has Buddha nature – which is certainly the usual Mahayana doctrine – he gave the word “No!”. When a monk asked him for instruction he merely inquired whether he had eaten his gruel, and then added, “Go wash your bowl!” When asked about spirit which remains when the body has decomposed, he remarked, “This morning it’s windy again.”

Ma-tsu had another notable disciple in Po-chang (720-814), who is said to have organized the first purely Zen community of monks. He is said to have had his *satori* (the Zen experienced awakening) when Ma-tsu shouted at him and left him deaf for three days, and to have been in the habit of pointing out the Zen life to his disciples with the saying, “Don’t cling; don’t seek.” For when asked about seeking for the Buddha nature he answered, “It’s much like riding an ox in search of the ox.”

Zen communication is always “direct pointing,” in line with the traditional four-phase summary of Zen (Watts, 1957):

Outside teaching; apart from tradition,

Not founded on words and letters,

Pointing directly to the human mind,

Seeing into one’s nature and attaining Buddhahood.

The records of Zen masters

In Ma-tsu, Nan-chuan, Chao-Chou, Huang po, and Lin chi we can see the “flavor” of Zen at its best. Taoist and Buddhist as it is in its original inspiration, it is also something more. It is so earthy, so matter-of-fact, and so direct. The difficulty of translating the records of these masters is that their style of Chinese is neither classical nor modern, but rather the colloquial speech of the T’ang dynasty. Its “naturalness” is less refined, less obviously beautiful than that of Taoist sages and poets; it is almost rough and common. We are at loss for parallels from other cultures for comparison, and the western student can best catch the flavor of Zen through observing the works of art which it was subsequently to inspire.

Thus it should be obvious that the “naturalness” of these T’ang masters is not to be taken literally, as if Zen were merely to glory in being a completely ordinary, vulgar fellow who scatters ideals to the wind and behaves as he pleases – for this would in itself be an affectation. The “naturalness” of Zen flourishes only when one has lost affectedness and self-consciousness of every description. But a spirit of this kind comes and goes like the wind and is the most impossible thing to institutionalize and preserve. Yet in the late T’ang dynasty the genius and vitality of Zen was such that it was coming to be the dominant form of Buddhism in China, though its relation to other schools was often very close.

The record of Lin-chi (Japanese, Rinzai) shows a character of immense vitality and originality, lecturing his students in informal and often somewhat “racy” language. It is as if Lin-chi were using the whole strength of his personality to force the student into immediate awakening. Again and again he

berates them for not having enough faith in themselves, for letting their minds “gallop around” in search of something which they have never lost, and which is “right before you at this very moment.” Awakening for Lin-chi seems primarily a matter of “nerve” – the courage to “let go” without further delay in the unwavering faith that one’s natural, spontaneous functioning is the Buddha mind. His approach to conceptual Buddhism, to the student’s obsession with stages to be reached and goals to be attained, is ruthlessly iconoclastic.

On the importance of the “natural” or “unaffected” life he is especially emphatic:

There is no place in Buddhism for using effort. Just be ordinary and nothing special. Believe your bowels, pass water, put on your clothes, and eat your food. When you’re tired, go and lie down. Ignorant people may laugh at me, but the wise will understand....As you from place to place, if you regard each one as your own home, they will all be genuine, for when circumstances come you must not try to change them. Thus your usual habits of feeling, which make karma for the Five Hells, will of themselves become the Great Ocean of Liberation.

And on creating karma through seeking liberation:

Outside the mind there is no Dharma, and inside also there is nothing to be grasped. What is that you seek? You say on all sides that the Tao is to be practiced and put to the proof. Don’t be mistaken! If there is anyone who can practice it, this is entirely karma making for birth and death. You talked about being perfectly disciplined in your six senses and in ten thousand ways of conduct, but as I see it all this is creating karma. To seek the Buddha and to seek the Dharma is precisely making karma for the hells.

Persecution and reaching Popularity

In 845 there was a brief but vigorous persecution of Buddhism by the Taoist Emperor Wu-tsung. Temples and monasteries were destroyed, their lands confiscated, and the monks compelled to return to lay life. Fortunately, his enthusiasm for Taoist alchemy soon involved him in experiments with the “Elixir of Immortality,” and from partaking of this concoction he shortly died. Zen had survived the persecution better than any other school, and now entered into a long era of imperial favor. Hundreds of monks thronged its wealthy monastic institutions, and the fortunes of the school so prospered and its numbers so increased that the preservation of its spirit became a very serious problem.

Popularity almost invariably leads to deterioration of quality, and as Zen became less of an informal spiritual movement and more of a settled institution, it underwent a serious change of character. It became necessary to “standardize” its methods and to find means for the masters to handle students in large numbers. There were also the special problems which arise for monastic communities when their membership increases, their traditions harden, and their novices tend more and more to be mere boys without natural vocation, sent for training by their pious families.

The effect of this last factor upon the development of institutional Zen can hardly be underestimated. For the Zen community became less an association of mature men with spiritual interests, and more of an ecclesiastical boarding school for adolescent boys....Under such circumstances the problem of discipline became paramount. The masters were forced to concern themselves not only with the way of liberation from convention, but also with the instilling of convention, of ordinary manners and morals, in row youths.

Still another crucial problem arises when a spiritual institution comes into prosperity and power – the very human problem of competition for office and of who has the right to be a master. Concern for this problem is reflected in the writings of the “Record of the Transmission of the Lamp” by *Tao-yuan* in about 1004. For one of the main objects of this work was to establish a proper “apostolic succession” for the Zen tradition, so that no one could claim authority unless his *satori* (the Zen term for sudden awakening) had been approved by someone who had been approved ...right back to the time of the Buddha himself.

Sudden Enlightenment

The Practice of cultivation, no matter for how long, is in itself only a sort of preparatory work. For Buddhahood to be achieved, this cultivation must be climaxed by a Sudden Enlightenment, comparable to the leaping over of a precipice. Only after this leaping has taken place can Buddhahood be achieved.

Such Enlightenment is often referred to by the Zen masters as the “vision of the Tao”. P’u-yüan, known as the master of Nan-ch’üan (died 830), told his disciple: “The Tao is not classifiable as either knowledge or non-knowledge. Knowledge is illusory consciousness and non-knowledge is blind unconsciousness. If you really comprehend the indubitable Tao, it is like a wide expanse of emptiness, so how can distinctions be forced in it between right and wrong?” Comprehension of the Tao is the same as being one with it. Its wide expanse of emptiness is not a void; it is simply a state in which all distinctions are gone.

This state is described by the Zen Masters as one in which “knowledge and truth become undifferentiable, objects and spirit form a single unity, and there ceases to be a distinction between the experiencer and the experienced.” “A man who drinks water knows by himself whether it is cold or warm.” This last expression first appeared in the *Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch* (Hui-neng), but it was later widely quoted by the other Zen masters, meaning that only he who experiences the non-distinction of the experiencer and experienced really knows what it is.

In this state the experiencer has discarded knowledge in the ordinary sense, because this kind of knowledge postulates a distinction between the knower and the known. Nevertheless, he is not without knowledge, because his state differs from that of blind unconsciousness, as Nan-ch’üan calls it. This is what is called the knowledge that is not knowledge.

When the student has reached the verge of Sudden Enlightenment, that it is the time when the Master can help him the most. When one is about to make the leap, a certain assistance, no matter how small, is a great help. The Zen masters at this stage used to practice what they called the method of “stick or yell” to help the leap to Enlightenment. Zen literature reports many incidents in which a master, having asked his student to consider some problem, suddenly give him several blows with a stick or yelled at him. If these acts were done at the right moment, the result would be a Sudden Enlightenment for the student. The explanation would seem to be that the physical act, thus performed, shocks the student into that psychological awareness of Enlightenment for which he has long been preparing.

To describe Sudden Enlightenment, the Zen masters use the metaphor of “the bottom of a tub falling out.” When this happens, all its contents are suddenly gone. In the same way, when one is suddenly enlightened, he finds all his problems suddenly solved. They are solved not in the sense that he gains some positive solution for them, but in the sense that all the problems have ceased any longer to be problems. That is why the Tao is called “the indubitable Tao.”

The Attainment of Non-attainment

The attainment of Sudden Enlightenment does not entail the attainment of anything further. The Zen master Ch’ing-yüan, known as the master of Shu-chou (died 1120), said: “If you now comprehend it, where is that which you did not comprehend before? What you were deluded about before is what you are now enlightened about, and what you are now enlightened about is what you are deluded about before.” In Ch’anism (Zen Buddhism) there is the common expression that “the mountain is the mountain, the river is the river.” In one’s state of delusion, one sees the mountain as the mountain and the river is the river. But after Enlightenment one still sees the mountain as the mountain and the river as the river.

The Zen masters also use another common expression: “Riding an ass to search for the ass.” By this they mean a search for reality outside of the phenomenal, in other words, to search for *Nirvana* outside of the Wheel of Birth and Death. Shu-chou said: “There are only two diseases: one is riding an ass to search for the ass; the other is riding an ass and being unwilling to dismount. You say that riding an ass to search for the ass is silly and that he who does it should be punished. This is a very serious disease. But I tell you, do not search for the ass at all. The intelligent man, understanding my meaning, stops to search for the ass, and thus the deluded state of his mind ceases to exist.”

“But if, having found the ass and one is unwilling to dismount, this disease is most difficult to cure. I say to you, do not ride the ass at all. You yourself are the ass. Everything is the ass. Why do you ride on it? If you ride, you cannot cure your disease. But if you do not ride, the universe is as a great expanse open to your view. With these two disease expelled, nothing remained to affect your mind. This is spiritual cultivation. You need do nothing more.” If one insists that after attaining Enlightenment one will still attain

something else, this is to ride an ass and be unwilling to dismount.

Huang-po said: “[If there be Enlightenment], speech or silence, activity or inactivity, and every sight and sound, all pertain to Buddha. Where should you go to find the Buddha? Do not place a head on top of head or mouth beside a mouth?” If there be enlightenment, everything pertains to Buddha and everywhere there is Buddha. It is said that one Zen monk went into a temple and spat on the statue of the Buddha. When he was criticized, he said: “Please show me a place there is no Buddha” (Fung Yu-lan, 1966).

Thus the Zen sage lives just as everyone else lives, and does what everyone else does. In passing from delusion to Enlightenment, he has left his mortal humanity behind and has entered sagehood. But after that he still has to leave sagehood behind and to enter once more into mortal humanity. This is described by Zen masters as “rising yet another step over the top of the hundred-foot bamboo.” The top of the bamboo symbolizes the climax of the achievement of Enlightenment. “Rising yet another step” means that after Enlightenment has come, the sage still has other things to do. What he has to do, however, is not more than the ordinary things of daily life. Nan-ch’uan said: “After going to understand the other side, come back and live on this side!”

Although the sage continues living on this side, his understanding of the other side is not in vain. Although what he does is just what everyone else does, yet it has a different significance to him. As Hui-hai, known as the master of Pai-ch’ang (died 814), said: “That which before Enlightenment is called lustful anger, is after Enlightenment called the Buddha Wisdom. The man is no different from what he was before; it is only that what he does is different.” It would seem that there must be some textual error in this last sentence. What Pai-ch’ang apparently intended to say was: “What the man does is no different from what he did before; it is only that the man himself is not the same as he was.”

The man is not the same, because although what he does is what everyone else does, he has no attachment to anything. This is the meaning of the common Zen saying: “To eat all day and yet not swallow a single grain; to wear clothes all day and yet not touch a single thread.”

There is yet another common saying: “In carrying water and chopping firewood: therein lies the wonderful Tao.” One may ask: If this is so, does not the wonderful Tao also lie in serving one’s family and the state? If we were to draw the logical conclusion from the Zen doctrines that have been analyzed above, we should be forced to answer yes.

Invention of the *koan* system

It was the principle of the Zen masters to teach their disciples only through personal contact. For the benefit of those who did not have opportunity for such contact, however, written records were made of the saying of the masters, which were known as *yü lu* (recorded conversations). This was a practice that was later taken over by the Neo-Confucianists. In these records, we often find that when a student ventured to ask some question about the fundamental principle of Buddhism, he would often be given a beating by his Zen master, or simple quite irrelevant answer. He might, for example, be told that a price of a certain vegetable was then three cents. These answers seem very paradoxical to those who are not familiar with the purpose of Zen. But this purpose is simply to let the student know that what he asks about is not answerable. Once he understands that, he understands a great deal.

Nothing however, is more difficult than establishing problem qualifications in the imponderable realm of spiritual insight. Where the candidates are few the problem is not so grave, but where one master is responsible for some hundreds of students the process of teaching and testing requires standardization. Zen solved this problem with remarkable ingenuity, employing a means which not only provided a test of competence but – what was much more – a means of transmitting the Zen experience itself with a minimum of falsification.

The extraordinary invention was the system of the *kung-an* (Japanese, *koan*) or “Zen problem.” Literally, this term means a “public document” or “case” in the sense of a decision creating a legal precedent. Thus the *koan* system involves “passing” a series of tests based on the *mondo* or anecdotes of the old masters. One of the beginning *koans* is Chao-chou’s answer “No” to the question as to whether a dog has Buddha nature. The student is expected to show that he has experienced the meaning of the *koan* by a specific and usually nonverbal demonstration which he has to discover intuitively. Suzuki (1934) believed that the *koan* exercise is no doubt a great help to the understanding of Zen, but at the same time it is liable to lower the spiritual quality of the students who come to study Zen.

For the moment, it is enough to say that every *koan* has a “point” which is some aspect of Zen experience, that its point is often concealed by being made very much more apparent than one would expect, and that *koans* are concerned not only with the primary awakening to the Void but also with its subsequent expression in life and thought.

The *koan* system was developed in the Lin-chi (Rinzai) school of Zen, but not without opposition. The Soto School felt that it was much too artificial. Whereas the *Koan* advocates used this technique as a means for encouraging that overwhelming “feeling of doubt” which they felt to be essential as a prerequisite for *satori* (the Zen experienced awakening), the Soto school argued that it lent itself too easily to that very seeking for *satori* which thrusts it away, or – what is worse – induces an artificial *satori*. Adherents of the Rinzai School sometimes say that the intensity of the *satori* is proportionate to the intensity of the feeling of doubt, of blind seeking, which produces it, but for Soto this suggests that such a *satori* has a dualistic character, and is thus no more than artificial emotional reaction. Thus the Soto view was that proper *dhyana* lay in motiveless action (*wu-wei*), in “sitting just to sit,” or “walking just to walk.” The two schools therefore come to be known respectively as “observing the anecdote Zen” and “silently illuminated Zen.”

Introduction of Zen from China into Japan

Zen has had far more in Japan than in China to do with the molding of the character of her people and the development of her culture. That is perhaps one of the reasons why Zen is still a living spiritual force in Japan, while in China it has almost ceased to be so. The Zendo (Meditation Hall) in Japan is visited by youths of character and intelligence, and that Zen tradition is very much a living fact is shown by the sale of books on Zen. Many devoted followers of Zen can be found among business men, statesmen, and other people of social importance. The Zendo is thus by no means an institution exclusively meant for the monks.

The Rinzai School of Zen was introduced into Japan in 1119 by the Japanese monk Eisai (1119-1189) who established monasteries at Kyoto and Kamakura under imperial patronage. The Soto School was introduced in 1227 by Dogen (1200-1253), who established the great monastery of Eihei-ji, refusing, however, to accept imperial favors (see <http://www.moradnazari.com/introduction-of-zen-schools-from-china-into-japan/>). It should be noted that Zen arrived in Japan shortly after the beginning of the Kamakura Era, when the military dictator Yoritomo and his *samurai* followers had seized power from the hands of the then somewhat decadent nobility. This historical coincidence provided the military class, the *samurai*, with a type of Buddhism which appealed to them strongly because of its practical and earthy qualities and because of the directness and simplicity of its approach. Thus there arose that peculiar way of life called *bushido*, the Tao of the warrior, which is essentially to the arts of war. The association of the peace-loving doctrine of the Buddha with the military arts has always been a puzzle to Buddhists of other schools. It seems to involve the complete divorce of awakening from morality. But one must face the fact that, in its essence, the Buddhist experience is a liberation from conventions of every kind including the moral conventions. On the other hand Buddhism is not a revolt against convention, and in societies where the military caste is an integral part of the conventional structure and the warrior's role an accepted necessity Buddhism will make it possible for him to fulfill that role as a Buddhist. The medieval cult of chivalry should be no less of a puzzle to the peace-loving Christian.

Zen Buddhism in nowadays China

Zen continued to prosper in China until well into the Ming dynasty (1368-1643), when the divisions between the various schools of Buddhism began to fade, and the popularity of Pure Land School with its “easy way” of invoking the name of Amitabha began to be fused with *Koan* practice and at last to absorb it. A few Zen communities seem to have survived to the present day, but their emphasis inclines either to Soto or to the more “occultist” preoccupations of Tibetan Buddhism. In either case, their view of Zen seems to be involved with a somewhat complex and questionable doctrine man's psychic anatomy, which

would appear to derive from Taoist alchemical ideas (Watts, 1957).

Sitting Meditation

The history of Chinese Zen raises one problem of great fascination. Both Rinzai and Soto Zen as we find them in Japanese monasteries today put enormous emphasis on *za-zen* or sitting meditation, a practice which they follow for many hours of the day – attaching great importance to the correctness of posture and the way of breathing which it involves. To practice Zen is, to all intents and purposes, to practice *za-zen*, to which the Rinzai School adds *sanzen*, the periodic visits to the master (*roshi*) for presenting ones view of the *koan*. However, the *Shenhui Ho-chang I-chi* records the following conversation between Shen-hui and a certain Ch’eng:

The Master asked Dhyana Master Ch’eng: “What method must be practiced to see into one’s own nature?”

“It is first of all necessary to apply oneself to the practice of sitting cross-legged in samadhi, awaken prajna in oneself. By prajna one is able to see into one’s own nature.”

(Shen-hui:) “When one practices samadhi, isn’t this a deliberate activity of the mind?”

(Ch’eng:) “Yes.”

(Shen-hui:) “Then this deliberate activity of the mind is an activity of restricted consciousness, and how can it bring seeing into one’s own nature?”

(Ch’eng:) “To see into one’s own nature, it is necessary to practice samadhi. How could one see it otherwise?”

(Shen-hui:) “All practice of samadhi is fundamentally a wrong view. How, by practicing Samadhi, could one attain samadhi?”

We have already mentioned that the incident between Ma-tsu and Huai-jang, in which the latter compared sitting meditation to polishing a tile for a mirror. On another occasion Huai-jang said:

To train yourself in sitting meditation [za-zen] is to train yourself to be a sitting Buddha. If you train yourself in za-zen, (you should know that) Zen is neither sitting nor lying. If you train yourself to be a sitting Buddha, (you should know that) the Buddha is not a fixed form. Since the Dharma has no (fixed) abode, it is not a matter of making choices. If you (make yourself) a sitting Buddha this is precisely killing the Buddha. If you adhere to the sitting position, you will not attain the principle (of Zen).

This seems to be the consistent doctrine of all the T’ang masters from Hui-neng to Lin-chi. Nowhere in their teaching was any instruction in or recommendation of the type of *zazen* which is today the principal occupation of Zen monks. On the contrary, the practice is discussed time after time in the apparently negative fashion of the two quotations just cited (see <http://www.moradnazari.com/sitting-meditation-a-religious-practice-or-a-method-of-keeping-boys-out-of-mischief/>).

It could be assumed that *za-zen* was so much the normal rule of the Zen monk’s life that our sources do not bother to discuss it....Alternatively, it could be assumed that the type of *za-zen* under criticism is *za-zen* practiced for a purpose, to “get” Buddhahood, instead of “sitting just to sit.” This would concur with the Soto objection to the Rinzai School with its method of cultivating the state of “great doubt” by means of the *koan*. While the Soto is not quite fair to the Rinzai in this respect, this would certainly be a plausible interpretation of the early master’s doctrine. However, there are several references to the idea that prolonged sitting is not much better than being dead. There is, of course, a proper place for sitting – along with standing, walking, and lying – but to imagine that sitting contain some special virtue is “attachment to form.” Thus in the T’ang-ching, Hui-neng says:

A loving man who sits and does not lie down;

A dead man who lies down and does not sit!

After all these are just dirty skeletons.

Even in Japanese Zen one occasionally a Zen practice who lays no special emphasis upon *za-zen*, but rather stresses the use of one's ordinary work as the means of meditation. This principle underlies the common use of such arts as "tea ceremony," flute playing, brush drawing, archery, fencing, and *ju-jitsu* as ways of practicing Zen. Perhaps, then, the exaggeration of *za-zen* in later times is part and parcel of the conversion of the Zen monastery into a boys' training school. To have them sit still for hours on end under the watchful eyes of monitors with sticks is certainly a sure method of keeping them out of mischief.

Yet however much *za-zen* may have been exaggerated in the Far East, a certain amount of "sitting just to sit" might well be best thing in the world for the jittery minds and agitated bodies of European and American – provided they do not use it as a method to turning themselves into Buddhas.

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