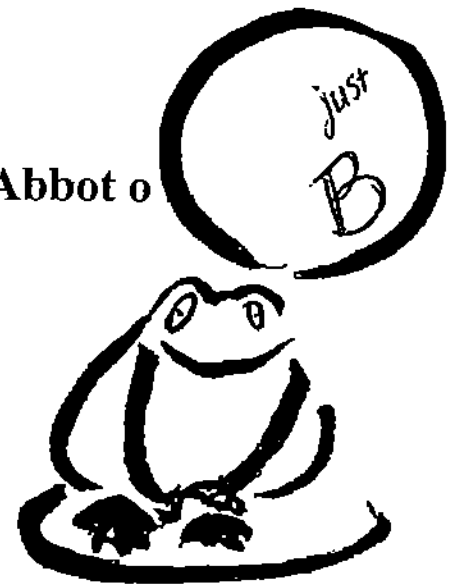


What is Zen:

A Brief Explanation by Eido Tai Shimano Roshi Abbot of Zen Studies Society



*A special transmission outside the scriptures;
No dependence on words and letters;
Direct pointing to the mind of man;
Seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.*
Bodhidharma

The special transmission of Zen is the realization of the Buddha's enlightenment itself, in one's own life, in one's own time. This experience has been realized by Zen students and confirmed by their teachers for over 2500 years.

Central and indispensable to Zen is daily Zazen practice. It is this practice that is the "direct pointing to the mind of man." Zazen melts away the mind-forged distances that separate man from himself; leads one beyond himself as knower, to himself as known. In Zazen, there is no reality outside what exists here and now. Each moment, each act is inherently Buddha-nature. While sorrow and joy, anxiety and imperturbability cannot be avoided, by not clinging to them we find ourselves free of them, no longer pulled this way and that. With this self-mastery comes composure and tranquility of mind, but these are by-products of Zazen rather than its goals.

Zazen is a Japanese term consisting of two characters: *za*, "to sit (cross-legged)," and *zen*, from the Sanscrit *dhyana*, meaning at once concentration, dynamic stillness, and contemplation. The means toward the realization of one's original nature as well as the realization itself, Zazen is both something one does - sitting cross-legged, with proper posture and correct breathing - and something one essentially is. To emphasize one aspect at the expense of the other is to misunderstand this subtle and profound practice.

In ordinary experience, being and doing are separated: what one does is cut off from what one is, and conversely. Such separation leads inevitably to the condition of self-alienation. Particularly in this century, this condition has become acute. With time and sincere effort in Zazen practice, mind and body, inside and outside, self and other are experienced as one. This condition of effortless concentration, is known as Samadhi.

In the clarity of Samadhi-liveliness, dissatisfaction and the sense of the meaningless of modern life vanish. No longer searching for answers externally, the student journeys within to reach the moving spirit of the Buddha - his own Self-Nature.

Through devotion and persistence, the aims of Zazen practice are eventually realized. The first is Enlightenment. With this experience, Samadhi is fulfilled; mind and body, the self and the universe are seen to have been one reality from the beginning. The second and more difficult aim is the actualization of the Bodhisattva (Enlightened Being) ideal. This spirit of love and compassion for all beings is developed through continual spiritual purification, the cultivation of a deep sense of responsibility, and most importantly, through self-discipline. As one's practice ripens, one becomes more alive, more creative; filled with the longing to actualize the Bodhisattva spirit in every moment and every aspect of daily life.

Zen Buddhism

*Transmission outside doctrine,
No dependencies on words.
Pointing directly at the mind,
Thus seeing oneself truly,
Attaining Buddhahood.*

—Bodhidharma, 520 CE

This poem, written by the famous Indian monk, Bodhidharma, embodies the spirit of Zen Buddhism, a school of thought born in China around 520 CE. Zen arrived in Japan in 1191. Unlike other branches of Buddhism, Zen places no emphasis on either scriptures or bodhisattvas. Rather, practitioners of Zen believe that direct experience alone can lead one to truth. In other words, scriptures and teachers can serve only to point to enlightenment. It is the individual who must live and understand. In fact, mentors and theories must be destroyed before the mind is free, because their ideas and opinions about enlightenment prevent understanding. This point is illustrated in a story of a well known Zen master who shocked his students by tossing all the statues of Buddha into a fire in order to warm the room. Like these clay idols, images should be burned out of the mind: a person must be self-reliant, his or her own master.

Students of Zen practice meditation in order to increase their awareness and purify their minds. They hope to undo their opinions and preferences and reach a state of *satori*, or illumination. With this clarity, they can live calmly and compassionately in the world. A poem by the Chinese master, Tessho, describes this freedom of mind:

*Finally out of reach—
No bondage, no dependency.
How calm the ocean,
Towering the void.*

Although Zen does not emphasize scripture, it has a rich body of literature which points to understanding. Besides poetry, these books contain dialogues between pupils and teachers. These discussions are meant to illuminate the reader.

Zen Buddhism also finds expression in the martial arts, which arrived in Japan about 800 years ago. The schools of karate and judo, among others, are meant to enhance discipline and self-awareness. Gardening is also a popular expression of the Zen spirit. These gardens are simple but exact, mirroring the tranquility of Zen.



B 10



Zen: the great way of enlightenment

Buddhism was transmitted from India to China around 50 ce and thence to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, absorbing elements of Taoism along the way. Then, according to tradition, in the fifth century, Bodhidharma, a successor to the Buddha, traveled from South China to a monastery in northern China. There he reportedly spent nine years in silent meditation, "facing the wall." On this experiential foundation, he became the first patriarch of the radical path that came to be called Ch'an Buddhism, from the Sanskrit *dhyana*, the yogic stage of meditation. Although this traditional account of its origins and founder is not fully accepted by scholars as absolute fact, it is known that this way was transmitted to Japan, where its name became Zen.

Zen claims to preserve the essence of the Buddha's teachings through direct experience, triggered by mind-to-mind transmission of the dharma. It dismissed scriptures, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas in favor of training for direct intuition of cosmic unity, known as the Buddha-nature or the Void.

A central way of directly experiencing the underlying unity is zazen, "sitting meditation." "To sit," said the Sixth Zen Patriarch, "means to obtain absolute freedom and not to allow any thought to be caused by external objects. To meditate means to realize the imperturbability of one's original nature."²⁶

*The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate are both absent
everything becomes clear and undisguised.
Make the smallest distinction, however,
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.*

Sengtsan²⁷

Prescriptions for the manner of sitting are quite rigorous: one must take a specific upright posture and then not move during the meditation period, to avoid distracting the mind. Skillful means are then applied to make the mind one-pointed and clear. One beginning practice is simply to watch and count each inhalation and exhalation from one to ten, starting over from one if anything other than awareness of the breath enters the mind. Although this explanation sounds simple, the mind is so restless that many people must work for months before finally getting to ten without having to start over. Getting to ten is not really the goal; the goal is the process itself, the process of recognizing what comes up in the mind and gently letting it go without attachment or preferences.

As one sits in zazen, undisturbed by phenomena, as soon as one becomes inwardly calm, the natural mind is revealed in its original purity. This "original mind" is spacious and free, like an open sky. Thoughts and sensations may float



The purpose of Zen meditation and arts such as archery, the tea ceremony, calligraphy, garden design, and flower arrangement is to train the mind to return to its original unselfconscious union with ultimate reality.

through it like clouds, but they arise and then disappear, leaving no trace. What remains is reality, "True Thusness." In some Zen schools, this perception of thusness comes in a sudden burst of enlightenment, or **kensho**.

When the mind is calmed, action becomes spontaneous and natural. Zen practitioners are taught to have great confidence in their natural functioning, for it arises from our essential Buddha-nature. It is said that two Zen monks, upon becoming enlightened, ran naked through the woods scribbling on rocks.

On the other hand, the Zen tradition links spontaneity with intense, disciplined concentration. In the art of calligraphy, the perfect spontaneous brushstroke — executed with the whole body, in a single breath — is the outcome of years of attentive practice. Giving ourselves fully to the moment, to be aware only of pouring tea when pouring tea, is a simplicity of beingness that most of us have to learn. Then whatever we give ourself to fully, be it painting, or serving tea, or simply breathing, reveals the Thusness of life, its unconditioned reality.

Another tool used in one Zen tradition is the *koan*. Here the attention is focused ardently on a question that boggles the mind, such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "What is your face before your parents' birth?" As Roshi [venerable teacher] Philip Kapleau observes, "Koans deliberately throw sand into the eyes of the intellect to force us to open our Mind's eye and see the world and everything in it undistorted by our concepts and judgments." To concentrate on a koan, one must look closely at it without thinking about it, experiencing it directly. Beyond abstractions, Roshi Kapleau explains, "The import of every koan is the same: that the world is one interdependent Whole and that each separate one of us is that Whole."²⁸

The aim of Zen practice is enlightenment, or *satori*. One directly experiences

the unity of all existence, often in a sudden recognition that nothing is separate from oneself. As one Zen master put it:

*The moon's the same old moon,
The flowers exactly as they were,
Yet I've become the thingness
Of all the things I see!*²⁹

All aspects of life become at the same time utterly precious, and utterly empty, "nothing special." This paradox can only be sensed with the mystically expanded consciousness; it cannot be grasped intellectually.

Pure Land: calling on Amida Buddha

Zen is essentially an inner awareness in which great attention is given to every action; it has little appeal for the laity. Other forms developed in India and the Far East have much greater popular appeal. One of the major trends is known as Pure Land Buddhism. At times of great social upheaval (for instance, when the old Japanese feudal aristocracy was falling apart), it was widely thought that people had become so degenerate that it was nearly impossible for them to attain enlightenment through their own efforts. Instead, many turned to Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Boundless Light, to save them. Amida (first worshipped in India under the Sanskrit name Amitabha) was believed to have been an ancient prince who vowed to attain enlightenment. When he did, he used his virtue to prepare a special place of bliss, the Pure Land, for all those who called on his name.

Japan had an ancient tradition of worshipping mountains as the realm to which the dead ascend and from which deities descend to earth. The originally abstract Indian Buddhists' concept of the "Pure Land" far to the west to which devotees return after death was transformed in Japan into concrete images. They depicted Amida Buddha riding on clouds billowing over the mountains, coming to welcome his dying devotees.

Many people contributed to the growth of Pure Land Buddhism into a mass movement. In the tenth century, for example, a Japanese monk named Kuya encouraged others to join him as he danced through the streets with a bell about his neck, singing songs of devotion and calling on Amida Buddha by chanting praise of Amida Buddha.

The results of loving trust in Amida Buddha were described very vividly by the monk Genshin. After graphic depictions of the eight hells, such as the burning vat in which people are cooked like beans, he describes the ineffable pleasures of being reborn into the Pure Land upon death:

*Rings, bracelets, a crown of jewels, and other ornaments in countless profusion adorn his body. And when he looks upon the light radiating from the Buddha, he obtains pure vision, and because of his experiences in former lives, he hears the sounds of all things. And no matter what color he may see or what sound he may hear, it is a thing of marvel.*³⁰

Many believers interpret these passages literally, anticipating that if they are sufficiently faithful they will enjoy a beautiful life after death. But some understand



Amida appears to welcome the faithful to the Western Paradise. (Konkai Komya-ji, Kyoto, 14th century.)

the Pure Land as a state that can be achieved in this life; a metaphor for the mystical experience of enlightenment, in which one's former identity "dies" and one is reborn into an expanded state of consciousness. According to this view, the lotus symbolizes the blooming of the pure lotus from the mire of ignorance and suffering, which the Buddha identified as the human condition. As contemporary Pure Land Buddhist priest and scholar Taitetsu Unno explains:

To be reborn into that state one has to be reborn here and now in awakening. There is no such thing as after death. Buddhism sees time not past, present, and future, but as present to present to present . . . When one's life is fulfilled in this moment, the next moment is fulfilled. And if death is the next moment, that, too, is fulfilled."

In pragmatic China, Ch'an Buddhism — with its emphasis on personal effort and meditation — has often been combined with Pure Land Buddhism — with its devotional emphasis on salvation by Amida Buddha. Although reliance on "self-power" and reliance on "other power" seem contradictory, the combination of meditation and devotion is considered a practical way to single-minded concentration on the Buddha and thus to the Pure Land of enlightenment.

What is Zen?

Zen means understanding yourself completely and then helping our world. Because human beings do not understand themselves, they suffer. We tend to associate strongly with our desire and anger, our likes and dislikes. Because of this we create suffering for ourselves and the other beings we share our planet with. Zen uses basic meditation techniques to help us return to our original nature, our loving and compassionate self. When our minds calm down, our original nature will naturally reveal itself and allow us to live a clear and helpful life, moment to moment. People come to a Zen Center to practice meditation together with others and attain their true selves.

Can people from other spiritual traditions practice Zen?

Most of the people who practice Zen in this country come from a Christian or Jewish background. The meditation techniques which Zen uses are very simple and can be used in any spiritual tradition. In fact, members of some religious traditions which have lost their contemplative or meditative traditions turn to Zen to satisfy spiritual needs which lead us beyond ritual or theology. Practicing Zen is not dependent on religious belief and may be used by anyone. Zen comes in a Buddhist package but a belief in Buddhism is not necessary. What is inside the package is useful for a deeper understanding of all religious traditions.

What is meditation?

Meditation means becoming completely aware. We call that a "just-now mind." So, Zen meditation involves making your mind clear just now and just doing what you are doing now, without being carried away or controlled by distracting thoughts. This allows one to make one's life very clear. This style of meditation will naturally lead to a reduction of stress, improved health, and ultimately a state of well-being and centeredness in all of life's circumstances.

Who was the Buddha?

The Buddha was a man who lived 2,500 years ago. He taught compassion and love for all beings and an end to suffering by letting go of delusion, self-centered desire and anger. Aside from being the name of the historical Buddha, the term "Buddha" is the name of your original, clear, compassionate self.

—Zen Master Dae Kwang
Guiding Teacher

The Zen Center was established in Providence in 1972. In 1979, it moved to its wooded fifty-acre home in Cumberland. The core of the main building was built as a private home in the early 1800s. When the Zen Center acquired the property, it had been operated for thirty years as a nursing home. Students at the Zen Center have remodeled extensively, adding more resident rooms, meditation and dining halls, and offices. Perhaps the best-known feature of the

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The TRANSMISSION
The 5th Hung Jen

H.H. The Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng

(638 - 713)

His Holiness Hui Neng, who became the great Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an (Japanese Zen) was a poor illiterate peasant boy from Hsin Chou of Kwangtung. One day, after he had delivered firewood to a shop, he overheard a man reciting the following line from the "Diamond Sutra" - "Depending upon no-thing, you must find your own mind." Instantly, Hui Neng became Enlightened. The full verse said: "All Bodhisattvas (Compassionate Ones) should develop a pure mind which clings to no-thing whatsoever; and so he should establish it."

The man who recited this sutra encouraged Hui Neng to meet the Fifth Zen Patriarch, Hung Jen, at the Tung Chian Monastery in the Huang Mei District of Chi Chou. Hui Neng said to the Fifth Patriarch: "I am a commoner from Hsin Chou Kwangtung (today, near Canton in the south of China). I have traveled far to pay you respect, and I ask for nothing but Buddhahood." "You are a native of Kwangtung, a barbarian? How can you expect to be a Buddha?" asked the Patriarch. "Although there are northern men and southern men, north and south make no difference to their Buddha Nature. A barbarian is different from Your Holiness physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha Nature." Master Hung Jen immediately accepted Hui Neng as his disciple, but he had to hide this fact from the very educated-northern monks at the monastery. At the time of the Fifth Patriarch, Ch'an was still influenced by Indian Buddhism, which did not emphasize direct awakening, but the importance of study and metaphysical debates. To protect Hui Neng, the Patriarch sent him to the kitchen to split firewood and pound rice for eight months.

One day the Fifth Patriarch told his monks to express their wisdom in a poem. Whoever had true realization of his original nature (Buddha Nature) would be ordained the Sixth Patriarch. The head monk, Shen Hsiu, was the most learned, and wrote the following:

The body is the wisdom-tree,
The mind is a bright mirror in a stand;
Take care to wipe it all the time,
And allow no dust to cling.

The poem was praised, but The Fifth Patriarch knew that Shen Hsiu had not yet found his original nature, on the other hand, Hui Neng couldn't even write, so someone had to write down his poem, which read:

7
WHAT DO YOU THINK HE WROTE?
(see pg 8 top)



((WHAT DID HE WRITE ?))

The Fifth Patriarch pretended that he wasn't impressed with this poem either, but in the middle of the night he summoned Hui Neng. The Fifth Patriarch gave him the insignia of his office, the Patriarch's robe and bowl ([source](#)). Hui Neng was told to leave for the South and to hide his enlightenment and understanding until the proper time arrives for him to propagate the Dharma.

NOTE: For more on Hui Neng and Shen Hsiu's two stanzas and the stanza competition please go to [TRANSLATION NOTES](#)

The monks were jealous and ignorant, believed that the transmission was material, and decided to get back the robe and the bowl. After pursuing Hui Neng for 2 months, they found him on top of a mountain and wanted to kill him. Their leader was Hui Ming, whose lay surname was Chen. Of all the monks who pursued Hui Neng, he was the most skillful. Hui Ming had been a general of the fourth rank, and was hot tempered and rough mannered. When Hui Neng was about to be overtaken, he threw the robe and the begging bowl on a rock, quickly hid, and then said, "This robe is nothing but a symbol. What is the use of taking it away by force?" When Hui Ming arrived at the rock, he tried to pick up the robe and bowl, but was unable to do so. He cried out, "Lay Brother, Lay Brother, " (for Hui Neng had not yet formally joined the monastic order), "I come for the Dharma, not for the robe. " Hui Neng emerged from his hiding place and sat down on the rock. Hui Ming made obeisance and begged him to teach. Hui Neng said, "Since the object of your coming is the Dharma, refrain from thinking of anything and keep your mind empty. I will then teach you." They meditated together for a considerable time, then Hui Neng asked Hui Ming, "When you are thinking of neither good nor evil, at this particular moment, what is your original nature (Buddha Nature)?" As soon as Hui Ming heard this, he instantly became enlightened. Hui Ming then further asked, "Apart from those esoteric sayings and esoteric ideas handed down by the Fifth Patriarch from generation to generation, are there any other esoteric teachings?" Hui Neng replied, "What I can tell you is not esoteric. If you turn your light inwardly you will find what is esoteric within you."

Hui Neng's statement was used as a Koan from then on - "what did your original face look like before you were born? " Koans represent truths that can't be understood by logic. Hui Neng's Koan cuts through concepts and speculations about one's nature. It is shocking to discover that there is no concept which can fit such a question. The shock shakes one's assumptions, and that begins the waking up process. As in his first poem, Hui Neng's original face is empty:

"When you hear me speak of emptiness, don't become attached to it, especially don't become attached to any idea of it. Merely 'sitting' still with your mind vacant, you fall into notional emptiness.

The boundless emptiness of the sky embraces the 'ten thousand things' of every shape and form - the sun, moon and stars; mountains and rivers; bushes and trees; bad people and good; good teachings and bad; heavens and hells. All these are included in emptiness.



The emptiness of your original nature (Buddha Nature) is just like that. It too embraces everything. To this aspect the word 'great' applies. All and everything is included in your own original nature."

Hui Neng later became The Sixth Patriarch, the founder of the Dhyana (Ch'an) School of Sudden Awakening, which emphasized that sudden Enlightenment was possible, given the right teacher and method. The Sixth Patriarch's teaching emphasize non-duality and oneness of everything. Hui Neng became the most famous Ch'an (Zen) master in Chinese history. After his death, his works were collected and classified as the only Chinese Buddhist sutra, called The Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra. His new school of Sudden Awakening is the only major surviving Dhyana School of Chinese Buddhism. Later, Hui Neng's disciples spread the Dharma all over Asia. Hui Neng defined Sitting Ch'an as: "In the midst of all good and evil, not a thought is aroused in the mind - this is called Sitting. Seeing into one's original nature, not being moved at all - this is called Ch'an." He taught that Sitting Ch'an should be practiced at all times, not just during formal sitting. He stressed it is the attitude of mind that is important, and not the physical posture, because truth can be found standing, walking, or lying down. In Japanese Sitting Ch'an was called Zazen.

D.T. Suzuki writes in "An Introduction to Zen Buddhism":

Zen is not a system of Dhyana as practiced in India and by other Buddhist schools in China. Dhyana is generally understood to be a kind of meditation or contemplation directed toward some fixed thought; in Hinayana Buddhism it was a thought of transiency, while in the Mahayana it was more often the doctrine of emptiness. When the mind has been so trained as to be able to realize a state of perfect void in which

there is not a trace of consciousness left, even the sense of being unconscious having departed; in other words, when all forms of mental activity are swept away clean from the field of consciousness, leaving the mind like the sky devoid of every speck of cloud, a mere broad expanse of blue, Dhyana is said to have reached its perfection. This may be called ecstasy or trance, or the First Jhana, but it is not Zen. In Zen there must be not just Kensho, but Satori. There must be a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulations of intellection and lays down the foundation for new life; there must be the awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hitherto undreamed-of angle of observation. In Dhyana there are none of these things, for it is merely a quieting exercise of mind. As such Dhyana doubtless has its own merit, but Zen must be not identified with it. (source)

The most important point in the teaching of the Dhyana (Meditation, or Ch'an) School lies in Introspection, which means the turning of one's own 'light' to reflect inwardly. To illustrate, let us take the analogy of a lamp. We know that the light of a lamp, when surrounded by a shade, will reflect inwardly with its radiance centering on itself, whereas the rays of a naked flame with diffuse and shine outwardly. Now when we are engrossed with criticizing others, as is our wont, we hardly turn our thoughts on ourselves, and hence scarcely know anything about ourselves. Contrary to this, the followers of the Dhyana School turn their attention completely within and reflect exclusively on their own 'real nature,' known in Chinese as one's original face.'

Lest our readers should overlook this important passage, let it be noted that in China alone thousands of Buddhists have attained Enlightenment by acting on this wise saying of the Sixth Patriarch.

By Dih Ping Tsze. Edited by the Wanderling. Some information was drawn from The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui Neng, Translated by A.F. Price and Wong, Mou-Lam, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1985. (see)

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