



## Zen

Zen is a form of Buddhism that developed first in China around the sixth century CE and then spread from China to Korea, Vietnam and Japan. The term *Zen* is just the Japanese way of saying the Chinese word *Chan* (禪), which is the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word *Dhyāna* (*Jhāna* in Pali), which means "meditation." In the image above one sees on the left the character 禪 in Japanese calligraphy and on the right an *ensō*, or Zen circle. In Japan the drawing of such a circle is considered a high art, the expression of a moment of enlightenment by the Zen master calligrapher.

The tradition known as *Chan Buddhism* in China, and *Zen Buddhism* in Japan, brings together Mahāyāna Buddhism and Daoism. This confluence of Buddhism and Daoism in Zen is most obvious in the Chinese script on the left which reads: "The heart-mind (*xin* 心) is the buddha (佛), the buddha (佛) is the path (*dao* 道), the path (*dao* 道) is meditation (*chan* 禪)." The line is from a text called the *Bloodstream Sermon* attributed to the legendary Bodhidharma. An Indian meditation master, Bodhidharma had come to China around 520 CE and in time would come to be regarded as the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism. In Bodhidharma's *Bloodstream*

心  
鳴  
是  
佛  
佛  
是  
道  
道  
是  
禪  
禪  
是  
道  
道  
是  
禪

*Sermon* (in the Chan Buddhism online selections) it is evident that Bodhidharma had absorbed something of Daoism after he came to China. The Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings that are most evident in Bodhidharma's text are the teachings of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* as well as the notion of the buddha-nature (*dharmakāya*) that is part of the Mahāyāna teaching of the three bodies (*trikāya*) of the Buddha. The Daoist influence on Bodhidharma can be seen in the way these teachings are presented.

The Mahāyāna teaching of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), summarized most succinctly in the *Heart Sutra*, holds that not only all the five parts or branches of the self, but indeed all things, are empty of independent or inherent existence. Nothing exists separately. Everything exists in a web of interdependence. This teaching of emptiness was just a dramatic way of restating the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, who taught that everything exists in interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*). The Daoist philosophers also had a notion of emptiness (*wu* 無) expressed throughout the *Daodejing* in images such as an empty clay vessel. How similar or different are the Buddhist teaching of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) and the Daoist notion of emptiness (*wu* 無) is one of the interesting philosophical questions that arise in thinking about the philosophy of Zen.

The notion of the buddha-nature in all things is part of the Mahāyāna conception of the three bodies of a buddha. There is first of all the buddha manifested in a particular human being, the "manifestation body" (*Nirmāṇakāya*), the buddha seen in visions and deep states of meditation, the "body of bliss" (*Sambhogakāya*), and finally the "truth-body" (*Dharmakāya*) or buddha-nature in all things. Some schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism depict the Sambhogakāya buddhas as god-like beings, celestial Buddhas, which then become the object of devotional worship. The distinctive thing about the Chan/Zen school of Buddhism is its focus on the Dharmakāya. Whereas other schools emphasized devotional practice, knowledge of the sutras, doing good deeds and/or keeping to the rules or precepts, Bodhidharma emphasizes in the *Bloodstream Sermon* that all one has to do is see one's own nature. If the buddha-nature is in all things, then one does not have to look outside oneself for the buddha; the buddha is within, in the heart-mind (*xin* 心). Although *xin* is translated as "mind" in the translation of the *Bloodstream Sermon*, it is important to be aware that in the Chinese context, *xin* is "heart" as well as "mind." This means that it is not a purely intellectual understanding, but rather an experience of the heart as well. The Chan/Zen tradition follows Bodhidharma's teaching emphasizing the experience of enlightenment. Although the tradition

would eventually emphasize two different forms of practice, *zazen* or meditation practice and *koān* study (*koāns* are a kind of riddle or thought experiment) both aim at bringing about the experience of the buddha within the self, within the heart-mind. Of course, with the understanding of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), it is understood that the self is not separate and independent, but instead arises interdependently with everything else. The Zen tradition thus also emphasizes, with other schools of Mahāyāna, that wisdom leads to compassion, and thus to the bodhisattva vow to be concerned not just for one's own enlightenment, but rather to the liberation from suffering for all beings.

Although its emphasis is on the fundamental teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Bodhidharma's *Bloodstream Sermon* also suggests the Daoist notion of *wuwei* (無為) in teaching "a buddha is someone who does nothing." Bodhidharma also echoes the opening line of the *Daodejing*, "the dao that can be put into words is not really the dao," in teaching that the Way (*dao*) of the Buddha cannot be expressed in language. Like Laozi, the legendary author of the *Daodejing*, Bodhidharma teaches that "the Way (*dao* 道) is wordless (*wuming* 無名)"; and also like Laozi, Bodhidharma uses words not with the pretention of capturing the *dao*, but rather as a way of suggesting or pointing to it. It is not enough to simply understand the words, one must experience oneself the buddha-nature within the heart-mind.

While in China the Chan tradition split into two main schools, and after Chan Buddhism came to Japan and developed as Zen Buddhism, the two schools became known as the Soto and Rinzai traditions. The main difference between the two schools is the emphasis on the practice. The Soto school focuses mainly on *zazen*, the practice of 'just sitting' or meditation while the Rinzai school emphasizes *koān* practice. The two most important philosophers in the development of Zen in Japan are Dōgen, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Zen master who established the Soto tradition, and Hakuin, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Rinzai Zen master.



## Dōgen

Perhaps the most important of all Japanese philosophers is the 13th century Zen master Dōgen (1200-1253). The selection below from the *Shōbōgenzō* ("Eye Treasury of the True Dharma") includes perhaps the most famous lines from Dōgen: "Studying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things." Dōgen echoes Bodhidharma's teaching emphasizing that the buddha is not found by looking outside oneself, outside one's own mind. Thus studying the Buddha Way is studying oneself; however, because the essence of mind is emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), studying the self is also forgetting the self, forgetting the self as a separate, independent being. If one forgets this self, and understands that the self arises in interdependence with everything else, then in forgetting the self, one can be enlightened by all things. Dōgen also says here in this text that enlightenment is like the "moon reflected in water." Here again we see an image suggesting the notion of interdependence. Each drop of water is connected in reflecting the light of the moon. One can imagine Dōgen sitting quietly and watching the moon reflecting in water and coming up with this verse. That Dōgen uses this experience of the natural world, of the moon reflected in water, to express an insight into enlightenment also shows a Daoist influence in Zen.

From the *Shōbōgenzō*  
“The Issue at Hand” (*Genjōkōan*)  
by Dōgen Zenji

Seeing forms with the whole body and mind, hearing sounds with the whole body and mind, one understands them intimately.

Yet it is not like a mirror with reflections, nor like water under the moon—

When one side is realized, the other side is dark.

To study the buddha way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas.

To be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas is to free one's body and mind and those of others.

No trace of enlightenment remains, and this traceless enlightenment is continued forever.

When one first seeks the truth, one separates oneself far from its environs.

When one has already correctly transmitted the truth to oneself, one is one's original self at that moment.

When riding on a boat, if one watches the shore one may assume that the shore is moving.

But watching the boat directly, one knows that it is the boat that moves.

If one examines the ten thousand dharmas with a deluded body and mind, one will suppose that one's mind and nature are permanent.

But if one practices intimately and returns to the true self, it will be clear that the ten thousand dharmas are without self.

Firewood turns into ash and does not turn into firewood again.

But do not suppose that the ash is after and the firewood is before.

We must realize that firewood is in the state of being firewood and has its before and after. Yet having this

before and after, it is independent of them.

Ash is in the state of being ash and has its before and after.

Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, so after one's death one does not return to life again.

Thus, that life does not become death is a confirmed teaching of the buddha-dharma; for this reason, life is called the non-born.

That death does not become life is a confirmed teaching of the buddha-dharma; therefore, death is called the non-extinguished.

Life is a period of itself.

Death is a period of itself.

For example, they are like winter and spring.

We do not think that winter becomes spring, nor do we say that spring becomes summer.

Gaining enlightenment is like the moon reflecting in the water.

The moon does not get wet, nor is the water disturbed.

Although its light is extensive and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch across.

The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop in the grass, in one drop of water.

Enlightenment does not disturb the person, just as the moon does not disturb the water.

A person does not hinder enlightenment, just as a dewdrop does not hinder the moon in the sky.

The depth of the drop is the height of the moon.

As for the duration of the reflection, you should examine the water's vastness or smallness,

And you should discern the brightness or dimness of the heavenly moon.

When the truth does not fill our body and mind, we think that we have enough.

When the truth fills our body and mind, we realize that something is missing.

For example, when we view the four directions from a boat on the ocean where no land is in sight, we see only a circle and nothing else.

No other aspects are apparent.

However, this ocean is neither round nor square, and its qualities are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It just seems circular as far as our eyes can reach at the time.

The ten thousand dharmas are likewise like this.

Although ordinary life and enlightened life assume many aspects, we only recognize and understand through practice what the penetrating power of our vision can reach.

In order to appreciate the ten thousand dharmas, we should know that although they may look round or square, the other qualities of oceans and mountains are infinite in variety; furthermore, other universes lie in all quarters.

It is so not only around ourselves but also right here, and in a single drop of water.

When a fish swims in the ocean, there is no limit to the water, no matter how far it swims.

When a bird flies in the sky, there is no limit to the air, no matter how far it flies.

However, no fish or bird has ever left its element since the beginning.

When the need is large, it is used largely.

When the need is small, it is used in a small way.

Thus, no creature ever comes short of its own completeness.

Wherever it stands, it does not fail to cover the ground.

If a bird leaves the air, it will die at once.

If a fish leaves the water, it will die at once.

Know, then, that water is life.

Know that air is life.

Life is the bird and life is the fish.

Beyond these, there are further implications and ramifications.

In this way, there are practice and enlightenment, mortality and immortality.

Now if a bird or a fish tries to reach the limit of its element before moving in it, this bird or this fish will not find its way or its place.

Attaining this place, one's daily life is the realization of ultimate reality [genjokoan]. Attaining this way, one's daily life is the realization of ultimate reality [genjokoan].

Since this place and this way are neither large nor small, neither self nor other, neither existing previously nor just arising now, they therefore exist thus.

Thus, if one practices and realizes the buddha way, when one gains one dharma, one penetrates one dharma; when one encounters one action, one practices one action.

Since the place is here and the way leads everywhere, the reason the limits of the knowable are unknowable is simply that our knowledge arises with, and practices with, the absolute perfection of the buddha-dharma.

Do not practice thinking that realization must become the object of one's knowledge and vision and be grasped conceptually.

Even though the attainment of realization is immediately manifest, its intimate nature is not necessarily realized. Some may realize it and some may not.

Priest Pao-ch'e of Ma-ku shan was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, "Sir, the nature of the wind is permanent, and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, must you still fan yourself?"

"Although you understand that the nature of wind is permanent," the master replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere."

"What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" asked the monk.

The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed with deep respect.

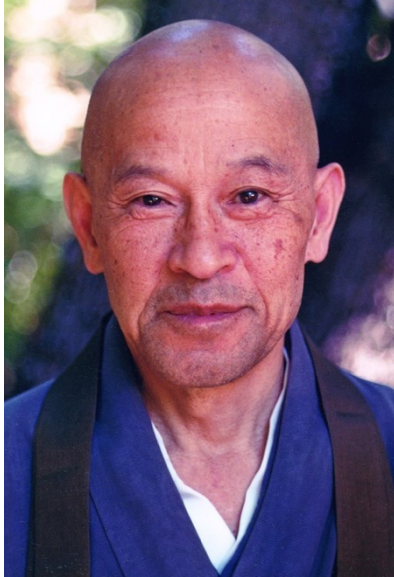
This is the enlightened experience of buddha-dharma and, the vital way of its correct transmission. Those who say we should not use a fan because wind is permanent, and so we should know the existence of wind without using a fan, know neither permanency nor the nature of wind.

Because the nature of wind is eternally present, the wind of Buddhism actualizes the gold of the earth and ripens the cheese of the long river.

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Dōgen, Zenji. 1993. "To Forget the Self," in *Entering the Stream: An Introduction to the Buddha and his Teachings*, Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn eds. Boston: Shambala Press.



*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

By Shunryu Suzuki

SHUNRYU SUZUKI (1905-1971) was a Japanese Zen master of the Soto school who moved to the United States in 1958. He founded Zen Center in San Francisco and Zen Mountain Center in Tassajara, California, the first Soto monastery in the West. Suzuki Roshi had a quality of impeccable, spotless awareness. Any reader, whether familiar with Zen or not, can gain a luminous experience of this spotless awareness simply by reading a few pages of his talks to his students. The selection given here is on the right practice of zazen, or sitting meditation. It is a direct and lucid journey to the heart of actual practice, which is the beginning and conclusion of Zen.

*Beginner's Mind*

People say that practicing Zen is difficult, but there a misunderstanding as to why. It is not difficult because it is hard to sit in the cross-legged position, or to attain enlightenment. It is difficult because it is hard to keep our mind pure and our practice pure in its fundamental sense. The Zen school developed in many ways after it was established in China, but at the same time, it became more and more impure. But I do not want to talk about Chinese Zen or the history of Zen. I am interested in helping you keep your practice from becoming impure.

In Japan we have the phrase *shoshin*, which means "beginner's mind." The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind. Suppose you recite the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* only once. It might be a very good recitation. But what would happen to you if you recited it twice, three times, four times, or more? You might easily lose your original attitude towards it. The same thing will happen in your other Zen practices. For a while you will keep your beginner's mind, but if you continue to practice one, two, three years or more, although you may improve some, you are liable to lose the limitless meaning of original mind.

For Zen students the most important thing is not to be dualistic. Our "original mind" includes everything within itself. It is always rich and sufficient within itself. You should not lose your self-

sufficient state of mind. This does not mean a closed mind, but actually an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.

If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. If you are too demanding or too greedy, your mind is not rich and self sufficient. If we lose our original self-sufficient mind, we will lose all precepts. When your mind becomes demanding, when you long for something, you will end up violating your own precepts: not to tell lies, not to steal, not to kill, not to be immoral, and so forth. If you keep your original mind, the precepts will keep themselves.

In the beginner's mind there is no thought, "I have attained something." All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless. Dogen-zenji, the founder of our school, always emphasized how important it is to resume our boundless original mind. Then we are always true to ourselves, in sympathy with all beings, and can actually practice.

So the most difficult thing is always to keep your beginner's mind. There is no need to have a deep understanding of Zen. Even though you read much Zen literature, you must read each sentence with a fresh mind. You should not say, "I know what Zen is," or "I have attained enlightenment." This is also the real secret of the arts: always be a beginner. Be very very careful about this point. If you start to practice zazen, you will begin to appreciate your beginner's mind. It is the secret of Zen practice.

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Suzuki, Shunryu. 1993. "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind," in *Entering the Stream: An Introduction to the Buddha and his Teachings*, Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn eds. Boston: Shambala Press.