

## Education in Zen

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TO CLARIFY the Zen idea of education at least two aspects should be discussed: one is the group practice among monks in a Zen monastery which is regulated by strict and time-tested precepts; the other is the one-to-one relationship between master and disciple. In this paper I would like to take up only the second aspect, partly because of limitation of space, and more importantly, partly because the second aspect is the basis for the first. In discussing the second aspect, the relation between master and disciple, I would like to focus on the role of the master in his relationship with his disciples.

To begin with, the relationship between a Zen master and his disciple is rather different from the ordinary teacher-student relation. What the Zen master tries to lead his disciple to and the disciple wants to attain, is not the intellectual knowledge of the natural world nor the understanding of cultural traditions and values, but the disciple's awakening to his original nature. To attain the awakening of his original nature, a Zen student carefully considers which master is the best qualified and most appropriate for him. Once this is decided he visits the master's monastery and asks permission to join. It is only after passing a strict entrance test, which usually lasts five days, to confirm the novice's seriousness and devotion, that he is accepted into the monastery as a member and is allowed to have an interview with the master. Through this interview he formally becomes a disciple of that master. This means that the novice will thereafter follow the guidance of the master even at the ex-

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\* This paper was delivered at the World Congress on Buddhism and the Modern World held at Dongguk University in Seoul, Korea in September, 1976. The author is grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Schneider for their revision of the manuscript.

## EDUCATION IN ZEN

pense of his life, and the master will give whatever form of instruction or direction he feels is appropriate for the novice.

In Zen it is extremely important to practice under the guidance of an authentic master. Dōgen, the founder of the Japanese Sōtō Zen tradition says, "Whether one's satori is true or false depends on whether his master is right or wrong."<sup>1</sup> He even says, "If you can not find an authentic master you had better not practice Zen."<sup>2</sup> He defines an authentic master as follows: "one who regardless of his age or the length of his religious career has awakened to the right Dharma and has been approved by an authentic master. Without giving priority to Scriptures and intellectual understanding he has both extraordinary ability and aspiration. Without clinging to selfish views and without attaching to emotional perceptions his practice and understanding are in complete accord with one another."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that however great that master may be, he can not give satori to his disciple. This is simply because satori is the self-awakening of one's original nature which takes place spontaneously without any external cause. It is the disciple himself who awakens to his own true self. Then what significance does a master have? His role in relation to his disciple may be compared to the role of a midwife in relation to a pregnant woman. In this connection you may recall the "midwife's art" of Socrates. It is ridiculous if a midwife gives her own baby to an expectant mother. The role of midwife lies in helping an expectant mother give birth to her own baby. According to Socrates, all that the teacher can do is to persuade his pupil to face himself so that the vision of the truth strikes the "eye of the soul," and to exercise his mind so as to draw out of it the truth which is being sought.<sup>4</sup>

In the same sense, while a Zen student must have an authentic master, a master is necessary only as a midwife, i.e., not as a satori-giver but as a satori-helper.

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<sup>1</sup> "Gakudō-yōjinshū," *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū*, ed. Ōkubo Dōshū (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1970), p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen and Co., 1965), p. 31.

What kind of midwife may a Zen master be said to be? Here again we see some significant affinity between Socrates and Zen. To make his student face himself Socrates shows him the hopeless perplexity, the "aporia" or position with no way out, in which his ordinary muddle-headed notion about the truth would land him if its implications were worked out. Then he stimulates him gently to discover the right solution.<sup>5</sup> In a similar way a Zen master tries to make his disciple face himself, to get him to return to the root-source of his being, by showing him a kind of "aporia" in which his analytic reason and intelligence come to a deadlock that can be overcome only by the awakening of his original nature. A Zen master, however, does so more severely than Socrates did.

Let me mention a few examples. A monk asked his master. "What is the truth of Zen?" The master answered, "In Zen there is nothing to explain by means of words. Thirty blows whether you affirm or negate. . . . Do not remain silent; nor be discursive."<sup>6</sup> Lin-chi (Rinzai, in Japanese) asked Huang-po, "What is the cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma?" Before he had finished speaking Huang-po hit him. A little while later he went back and asked him again, and Huang-po again hit him. In all Lin-chi asked the same question three times and was hit three times.<sup>7</sup> This is a well known story about Lin-chi in his younger days.

In such a way a master often thrusts away his disciple and drives him into a corner. He does not impart anything positively nor stimulate his disciple gently, but rather *deprives* him of everything and pushes him into perplexity or aporia. However this perplexity or aporia is not intellectual as in the case of Socrates, but is entirely existential. The disciple's whole existence including intelligence, emotion and volition becomes an aporia. In the midwife's art of Socrates the focus is put on virtue, which to Socrates is knowledge. Accordingly, although Socrates' approach is somewhat existential, it is largely colored by intellectualism. On the other hand, Zen is concerned with the awakening of one's true self and this can take place only by overcoming intellectualism and by breaking through the framework of ego-self. This is the

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Daisetz Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider & Co., 1960), p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> *The Record of Lin-chi*, trans. by Ruth Fuller Sasaki (Kyoto: Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), p. 4.

reason a Zen master often uses even harsh and drastic means like shouting and beating. In this way he will deprive his disciple of any conceptual understanding of Zen in order to make him go beyond affirmation and negation, cornering him in existential perplexity, and turning his existence into a great block of doubt.

By such means a Zen master is, in the last analysis, trying to destroy the disciple's attachment to Buddha or clinging to satori. Since Buddha or satori is the central concern of a Zen student, it is natural and inevitable for him to become attached to it. However, Buddha as an object of attachment is not the true Buddha, and satori must be free from any form of clinging; so the student must be completely deprived of an attachment to Buddha or clinging to satori. Only then will his original nature awakens to itself. The harsh means of a Zen master is thus often compared with "driving away an ox from a farmer, or depriving a hungry man of food."<sup>8</sup>

However, beating and shouting is not the only means employed by a Zen master. A Zen master as midwife uses various skillful means to help his disciple give birth to his own baby. To return to the story of Lin-chi and Huang-po, when Lin-chi, in deep perplexity after being hit three times, came to Huang-po to take his leave, Huang-po said: "You mustn't go anywhere else but to Ta-yü's place. He's sure to explain things for you." Lin-chi arrived at Ta-yü's temple. Ta-yü said: "Where have you come from?" "I have come from Huang-po's place," replied Lin-chi. "What did Huang-po have to say?" asked Ta-yü. "Three times I asked him just what the cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma was and three times he hit me. I don't know whether I was at fault or not." "Huang-po is such a grandmother that he utterly exhausted himself with your troubles!" said Ta-yü. "And now you come here asking whether you were at fault or not!" At these words Lin-chi attained great enlightenment. "Ah, there isn't so much to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma!" he cried.<sup>9</sup>

As you see, Huang-po sent Lin-chi to Ta-yü, another outstanding Zen master of those days, because he thought an approach from a different angle was necessary to lead Lin-chi to awakening. Meeting his expectations Ta-yü

<sup>8</sup> *Tsung-men wu-k'u* by Ta-hui P'u-chüeh (Daie Soko).

<sup>9</sup> *The Record of Lin-chi*, p. 51.

struck Lin-chi's blind spot by saying, "Huang-po is such a grandmother that he utterly exhausted himself with your troubles! And now you come here asking whether you were at fault or not!" At these unexpected words Lin-chi's ego-structure, which was at that time in deep perplexity, completely collapsed and his original nature awakened to itself. The words Lin-chi uttered at that moment, that is, "Ah, there isn't so much to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma!" clearly show his independence of his master. At this moment, through awakening of his true self, Lin-chi became a truly independent person who could properly judge his master's Buddha-dharma.

Here we also see the good timing of a Zen master. When Lin-chi said, "I don't know whether I was at fault or not," his existential perplexity was so deep that it was ready to be broken through by a proper blow. Not overlooking this Ta-yü told him how kind Huang-po was in hitting him three times. At these words Lin-chi's perplexity was dissolved and his true self manifested itself. This kind of good timing is often called *sottaku-dōji* (啐啄同時), the simultaneity of a chick's pecking and a mother hen's pecking. If the mother hen pecks the shell of an egg too early the chick inside may die. If the mother hen pecks the shell of an egg too late the chick also may die. Only when the chick's pecking from inside and the mother hen's pecking from outside take place simultaneously is the chick certain to be born. A good Zen master is one who pecks the shell of his disciple's ego-structure at the right time, penetrating it as the disciple is pecking from within. But we should realize that however necessary the pecking by a mother hen may be, it is nothing more than *a condition* for a chick being born as a new bird. What is being born is not the mother hen but the chick who is pecking from inside.

The idea that a newly born baby—as a metaphor for a newly awakened one—is self-dependent and has dignity is well expressed symbolically in the legend of Gautama Buddha's birth. When he was born the Buddha is said to have walked seven steps without another's support and, raising his right hand, to have said "In heaven and on earth, I alone am to be revered." As for his enlightenment, the Buddha is said to have attained it by himself without a teacher. These legends reflect the Buddhist idea that enlightenment is nothing but self-awakening to one's original nature which is beyond any external conditioning.

In fact, awakening in Buddhism only takes place if all given conditions are "transcended."<sup>10</sup> In this sense Buddhism is essentially not a religion of faith, but a religion of self-awakening. Of course this self-awakening takes place on a particular occasion under certain conditions. Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment upon seeing the morning star. Hsiang-yen (Kyōgen, in Japanese) awakened to enlightenment upon hearing the sound of a pebble striking a bamboo. Ling-yün (Reiun, in Japanese) attained satori when he saw the peach flowers in bloom. These natural events could become the occasion or condition for their awakenings precisely because their inner spiritual problems had ripened and were ready to be broken through. These cases are not essentially different from the case of Lin-chi. The light of morning star, the sound of a pebble, the peach flowers, and the words of a Zen master, though indispensable, all are no more than an occasion or condition for awakening—which in Buddhism is essentially *self-awakening*.

In Zen the transmission of Dharma from master to disciple is of great importance. This is why the Dharma genealogy is held in such high esteem in Zen. However, the transmission of Dharma from master to disciple should not be regarded as a mere continuity, or as a direct continuity without discontinuity, but as a continuity which happens through discontinuity. For the Buddha Dharma cannot be transmitted from one person to another as if it were an object. The Buddha Dharma can be transmitted to a disciple only when he attains satori, i.e., self-awakening to his original nature. Since a master cannot be a satori-giver but only a satori-helper, and since satori is self-awakening, there is a discontinuity between a master and the disciple who would be his successor. Only when the disciple goes beyond his dependence on his master and attains independence on the basis of his own self-awakening is he qualified as a Dharma successor. Therefore the continuity in terms of Dharma transmission is made possible through the discontinuity between the disciple's new born independence and the master. Only because of this discontinuity can the Buddha Dharma be passed and continued.

This dynamic character of the master-disciple relationship in Zen is well-expressed in the following story of Ikkyū, a Zen master of 15th century Japan.

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<sup>10</sup> A term coined by Takeuchi Yoshinori.

When Ikkyū was twenty-six he was deeply involved in an inner struggle. Late one summer night he was sitting in Zen meditation in a small boat on Lake Biwa, when, hearing the cawing of a crow, he suddenly cried out in wonder. At that instant he felt all uncertainties melt away and a clear awakening took place. Returning to the temple he asked for an interview with his master Kasō. After listening to him, Kasō said merely, "You've reached the realm of an *arbat*. You still are not a Buddha." An *arbat* is someone who has attained enlightenment, but who is regarded in Mahayana Buddhism as a little lower than Buddha in the sense that he remains attached to his own enlightenment. To this Ikkyū replied, "If that's the case, I'm delighted to be an *arbat* and have no desire to be a Buddha." Then Kasō answered, "You are truly a Buddha."<sup>11</sup>

If Ikkyū, when he heard his master's negative words, i.e., "You still are not a Buddha," had been disappointed or had felt uncertain of his own enlightenment, his enlightenment would not have been a genuine one. As his awakening was, in fact, to him, clear and decisive, he was not only not disturbed by his master's negative reply, but, beyond that, he affirmed his own realization by saying, "I am delighted to be an *arbat* and have no desire to be a Buddha." Seeing his firm conviction Master Kasō said, "You are truly a Buddha," and thus fully approved him.

It is not the case in Zen that a disciple can be said to attain enlightenment by receiving his master's approval. Instead, it is when a disciple attains enlightenment clear to himself and can stand independent of his master's approval that the master approves him. This is the reason Po-chang (Hyakujō, in Japanese) says: "One whose insight is the same as his teacher's lacks half of his teacher's power. Only one whose insight surpasses his teacher's is worthy to be his heir."

Here, in the dynamics of the master-disciple relationship in Zen, and in the focus in Zen education on man's original nature, I think can be found many suggestions and possibilities for education in our time.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits* (Tokyo: Kōdansha International Ltd., 1971), p. 234.