

SOME ASPECTS OF ZEN BUDDHISM*

“WHAT is Zen?” This is the question I am frequently asked both by foreigners and Japanese. But it is one of the most difficult questions to answer, I mean, to the satisfaction of the inquirer; for Zen refuses even tentatively to be defined in any manner. The best way to understand it will be of course to study and practise it at least for some years. Therefore, even after the reader has carefully gone over my article, he may still be at sea as to the real significance of Zen. It is, in fact, in the very nature of Zen that it evades all definition and explanation, that is to say, Zen cannot be converted into ideas, it can never be described in logical terms. For this reason, the Zen masters declare that it is “independent of letters,” being “a special transmission outside the orthodox teachings.” But the purpose of this article is not just to demonstrate that Zen is an unintelligible thing and there is no use of attempting to discourse about it. My object, on the contrary, is to make it clear to the fullest extent of my ability, however imperfect and inadequate that may be.

I

As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate of all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual effort must culminate in it if it is to bear any practical fruit. Every religious aspiration must end in it if it has to prove at all efficiently workable in our active life. Zen is not necessarily an offshoot of Buddhist philosophy alone. For I find it in Christianity,

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Mahomedanism, in Taoism, and even in Confucianism. What makes them vital keeping up their usefulness and efficiency is due to the presence of the Zen element in them. Mere scholasticism or mere sacerdotalism will never do. Religion requires something more, something more energising and capable of doing work. The intellect is useful in its place, but when it tries to cover the whole field of religion it dries up the source of life. The feeling or mere faith is so blind and will grasp anything that may come across and hold to it as the final reality. Fanaticism is vital enough as far as its explosiveness is concerned, but this is not a true religion, and its practical sequence is the destruction of the whole system, not to speak of the fate of its own being. Zen is what makes the religious feeling run through its legitimate channel and what gives life to the intellect.

Zen does this by giving one a new point of view of looking at things, a new way of appreciating the beauty of life and the world, by discovering a new source of energy in the inmost recess of consciousness, and by bestowing on one a feeling of completeness and sufficiency. That is to say, Zen works miracles by overhauling the whole system of one's inner life and opening up a world hitherto entirely undreamt of. This may be called a resurrection. And Zen tends to emphasise the speculative element, though confessedly it opposes this, more than anything else in the whole process of the spiritual revolution, and in this respect Zen is truly Buddhist.

According to its philosophy, we are too much of a slave to the conventional way of thinking, which is dualistic through and through. No "interpenetration" is allowed, there takes place no fusing of opposites in our everyday logic. What belongs to God is not of this world, and what is of this world is incompatible with God. Black is not white and white is not black. Tiger is tiger, and cat is cat, and they will never

be one. Water flows, a mountain towers. This is the way things or ideas go in this universe of the senses and syllogisms. Zen, however, upsets this scheme of thought and substitutes a new one in which there exists no logic, no dualistic arrangement of ideas. We believe in dualism chiefly because of our traditional training. Whether ideas really correspond to facts is another matter requiring a special investigation. Ordinarily, we do not inquire into the matter, we just accept what is instilled into our minds; for to accept is more convenient and practical, and life is to a certain extent, though not in reality, made thereby easier. But time comes when traditional logic no more holds true, for we begin to feel contradictions and splits and in consequence spiritual anguish. We lose trustful repose which we experienced when we blindly followed the traditional ways of thinking. Eckhart says that we are all seeking repose whether consciously or not, just as the stone cannot cease moving until it touches the earth. Evidently, the repose we seemed to enjoy before we were awakened to the contradictions involved in our logic, was not the real one, the stone has kept moving down towards the ground. Where then is the ground of non-dualism on which the soul can be tranquil and blessed? To quote Eckhart again, "Simple people conceive that we are to see God as if He stood on that side and we on this. It is not so; God and I are one in the act of my perceiving Him." In this absolute oneness of things Zen establishes the foundations of its philosophy.

The idea of absolute oneness is not the exclusive possession of Zen, there are other religions and philosophies that preach the same doctrine. If Zen, like other monisms or theisms, merely laid down this principle and did not have anything specifically to be known as Zen, it would have long ceased to exist as such. But there is in Zen something unique which makes up its life and justifies its claim to be the most precious heritage of Eastern culture. The following

“mondo” (literally, questioning and answering) will give us a glimpse into the ways of Zen. A monk asked Jōshu (趙州從諗, 778-897), one of the greatest masters in China, “What is one word [of the ultimate reason]?” Instead of giving him any specific answer, he made the simple response, “Yes.” The monk asked for a second time, and this was the master’s answer, “I am not deaf.” See how irrelevantly (shall I say?) the all-important problem of absolute oneness or of the ultimate reason is treated here! But this is characteristic of Zen, this is where Zen transcends logic and overrides the tyranny and misrepresentation of ideas. As I said before, Zen mistrusts the intellect, does not rely upon traditional and dualistic methods of reasoning, and handles problems after its own original manners.

To cite another instance before going farther into the subject. The same old Jōshu was asked another time, “One light divides itself into hundreds of thousands of lights; may I ask where this one light originates?” This question, like the last mentioned, is one of the deepest and most baffling problems of philosophy. But the old master did not waste much time in answering the question, nor did he resort to any wordy discussion. He simply threw off one of his shoes without a remark. Is this not extraordinary? What does he mean after all? To understand all this, it is necessary that we should acquire a third eye, so to speak, and learn to look at things from a new point of view.

How is this new way of looking at things illustrated by the Zen masters? As you may expect, their ways are very singular and incomprehensible by the uninitiated. I have tried to describe these ways under the following headings: 1. Paradoxes, 2. Opposites negated, 3. Contradictions, 4. Affirmations, 5. Repetitions, and 6. Actions. This is of course no thorough-going classification of the Zen methods as recorded in its literature, is not even an attempt at it, mere random

groupings for the illustration of the present discourse, and only some characteristic features of Zen are here to be delineated. Nothing exhaustive is even provisionally planned.

II

It is well known that all mystics are fond of paradoxes to expound their views. For instance, a Christian mystic may say: "God is real, yet he is nothing, infinite emptiness; he is at once all-being and no-being. The divine kingdom is real and objective; and at the same time it is within myself—I myself am heaven and hell." Eckhart's "Divine Darkness" or "Immovable Mover" is another example. I believe we can casually pick up any such statements in mystic literature. And Zen is no exception. But in Zen this way of expressing its truth is carried on almost recklessly. To give just a few cases, declares Fudaishi (傅大士, 497-569):

"Empty-handed I am, and behold the spade handle is in the hands;
 "I walk on foot, and yet on the back of an ox I am riding;
 "When I pass over the bridge,
 "Lo, the water floweth not, but the bridge doth flow."

This sounds altogether out of reason, but in fact Zen is full of such irrationalities. "The flower is not red, nor is the willow green"—is one of the best known utterances of Zen, and is regarded as the same as its affirmative—"the flower is red and the willow is green." To put it in logical form, it will run thus: "A" is "A" and at the same time "not-A." I am I and yet you are I. An Indian philosopher asserts that "Tat twam asi"—Thou art it. If so, heaven is hell and God is Devil. To pious orthodox Christians, what a shocking doctrine this Zen is! When Mr Chang drinks, Mr Li grows tipsy. The silent-thundering Vimalakirti (維摩) confessed that he was sick because all his fellow-beings were sick. All wise and loving souls must be said to be the embodiments of the Great Paradox of the universe. I am

digressing. What I wanted to say was that Zen is more daring in its paradoxes than other mystical teachings. The latter are more or less confined to general statements concerning life or God or the world, but Zen enters into every detail of our daily life. It has no hesitation in flatly denying all our most familiar facts of experience. "I am talking here and yet I have not uttered a word. You are perhaps listening to me and yet there is not a person in this room. I am utterly blind and deaf, but every colour is recognised and every sound discerned. This is my manuscript prepared for the occasion, but I have not been doing anything of the sort during these past weeks." The Zen masters will go on like this indefinitely. Basho (芭蕉), a Korean monk of the ninth century, once delivered a famous sermon which ran thus: "If you have a staff (*shujō* 拄杖), I will give you one; if you have not, I will take it away from you."

When Jōshu, the great Zen master of whom mention was made repeatedly, was asked what he would give when a poverty-stricken fellow should come to him, he replied, "What is wanting in him?" When he was asked on another occasion, "When a man comes to you with nothing, what would you advise?" his immediate response was, "Cast it away!" Let me ask, when he has nothing, what will he cast? When a man is poor, can he be said to be sufficient unto himself? Is he not in need of everything? Whatever deep meaning there may be in these answers of Jōshu, the paradoxes are sometimes quite puzzling and baffle our logically-trained intellect. "Carry away the farmer's oxen, make off with the hungry man's food," is a favorite phrase with the Zen masters who think we can thus best cultivate our spiritual farm and fill up the soul hungry for the substance of things.

It is related that Okubo Shibutsu, famous for painting bamboo, was requested to execute a kakemono representing

a bamboo forest. Consenting, he painted with all his known skill a picture in which the entire bamboo grove was in red. The patron upon its receipt marvelled at the extraordinary skill with which the painting had been executed, and, repairing to the artist's residence, he said: "Master, I have come to thank you for the picture; but, excuse me, you have painted the bamboo red." "Well," cried the master, "in what colour would you desire it?" "In black, of course," replied the patron. "And who," answered the artist, "ever saw a black-leaved bamboo?" When one is so used to a certain way of looking at things, one finds it so full of difficulties to veer round and start on a new line of procedure. The true colour of the bamboo is perhaps neither red nor black nor green nor any colour known to us. Perhaps it is red, perhaps it is black just as well. Who knows? The imagined paradoxes are really no paradoxes.

III

The next form of Zen expression is to deny the opposites, somewhat corresponding to the mystic "Via Negativa." The point is not to be "caught" in any of the four propositions: 1. "It is A"; 2. "It is not A"; 3. "It is both A and not-A"; and 4. "It is neither A nor not-A." When we make a negation or assertion, we are sure to get into one of these formulas. As long as the intellect is to move along the ordinary dualistic groove, this is unavoidable. It is in the nature of our logic that any statement we can make is to be so expressed. But Zen thinks that the truth can be reached only by transcending the logical conditions, for the idea of absolute oneness tips one way or another when it is either asserted or negated. To escape this dilemma seems an utter impossibility, but no such arguments will ever avail with the Zen masters who insist on the impossibility to be achieved. Let us see how they do it.

The masters generally go around with a kind of a short stick known as a *shippé* (竹篋), or at least they did so in old China. It does not matter whether it is a *shippe* or not, anything in fact will answer our purpose. Shuzan (首山省念), a noted Zen priest of the tenth century, held out his stick and said to a group of his disciples; "Call not it a *shippe*; if you do you assert. Nor do you deny its being a *shippe*; if you do, you negate. Apart from affirmation and negation, speak, speak!" The idea is to get our heads free from dualistic tangles and philosophic subtlety. A monk came out of the rank, took the *shippe* away from the master, and threw it down on the floor. Is this the answer? Is this the way to respond to the master's request to speak? Nothing is stereotyped in Zen, and somebody else may meet the requirement in quite a different way. This is where Zen is original.

When the ownership of a kitten was disputed between two parties of monks, the Master Nansen (南泉普願, 749–835) came out, took hold of the animal, and said to them, "If you could say a word, this would be saved; if not, it would be slain." By "a word" of course he meant one which transcended both negation and affirmation. No one made a response, whereupon the master slew the poor creature. Nansen looks like a hard-hearted Buddhist, but his point is: To say it is, involves us in a dilemma; to say it is not, puts us in the same predicament. To attain to the truth, this dualism must be avoided. How do you avoid it? It may not only be the loss of the life of a kitten, but the loss of your own soul. Hence Nansen's drastic procedure. Later, in the evening, Jōshu who was one of his disciples came back when the master told him of the incident of the day. Jōshu took off one of his straw sandals and putting it over his head began to depart. Upon this, said the master, "What a pity you were not with us today, who could have saved the kitten!" This strange behaviour, however, was Jōshu's way of affirming

the truth transcending the dualism of "to be" and "not to be." What will be ours?

While Kyōzan (仰山慧寂, 804-890) was residing at To-hei (韶州東平山), his master, Isan (滌山靈祐, 771-853),—both of whom were noted Zen masters of the T'ang dynasty—sent him a mirror accompanied with a letter. Kyōzan held forth the mirror before a congregation of monks and said, "O monk! Isan has sent here a mirror. Is this Isan's mirror or my own? If you say it is Isan's, how is it that the mirror is in my own hands! If you say it is my own, has it not come from Isan? If you make a proper statement, it will be retained here. If you cannot, it will be smashed in pieces." He said this for three times but nobody made even an attempt to answer. The mirror was then smashed. This was somewhat like the case of Nansen's kitten. In both cases the monks failed to save the innocent victim or the precious treasure, simply because their minds were not yet free from intellectualism and were unable to break through the entanglements purposely set up by Nansen and Kyōzan. The Zen method of training its followers thus appears so altogether out of reason and unnecessarily inhuman. But the masters' eyes are always upon the truth absolute and yet attainable in this world of particulars. If this can be gained, what does it matter whether a thing known as precious be broken or an animal be sacrificed? Is not the recovering of the soul more important than the loss of a kingdom?

Kyōgen (香嚴), a disciple of Isan, with whom we got acquainted elsewhere, said in one of his sermons: "It is like a man over a precipice one thousand feet high, he is hanging himself there with a branch of a tree between his teeth, the feet are off the ground, and his hands are not taking hold of anything. Suppose another man coming to him propose a question, 'What is the meaning of the First Patriarch coming over here from the west?' If this man should open

the mouth to answer, he is sure to fall and lose his life; but if he would make no answer, he must be said to ignore the inquirer. At this critical moment what should he do?" This is putting the negation of opposites in a most graphically illustrative manner. The man over the precipice is caught in the dilemma of life and death, and there can be no logical quibblings. The cat may be sacrificed at the altar of Zen, the mirror may be smashed on the ground, but how about one's own life? The Buddha in one of his former lives is said, in order to get the whole stanza of the truth, to have thrown himself down into the maw of a man-devouring monster. Do we have such a noble determination to give up our dualistic life for the sake of enlightenment and eternal peace? Perhaps the gate of Zen opens when this determination is reached.

IV

We now come to the third heading, "Contradictions," by which I mean the Zen master's negating, implicitly or expressly, what he himself has stated or what has been stated by another. To one and the same question his answer is sometimes "No," sometimes "Yes." Or to a well-known and fully-established fact he gives an unqualified denial. From an ordinary point of view he is altogether unreliable, yet he seems to think that the truth of Zen requires such self-contradictions and denials; for Zen has a standard of its own, which, to our common-sense minds, consists just in negating everything we popularly hold true and real. In spite of these apparent confusions, the philosophy of Zen is guided by a thorough-going principle which, when once grasped, its topsy-turviness becomes the plainest truth.

A monk asked the sixth Patriarch (六祖慧能) of the Zen sect in China, who flourished late in the seventh and early in the eighth century, "Who has attained to the secrets of

Obai (黃梅)?” Now, Obai is the name of the place where the fifth Patriarch (五祖弘忍) used to reside, and it was a well-known fact that Yeno, the sixth Patriarch, studied Zen under him and succeeded him in the line of transimission. The question was, therefore, really not a plain regular asking, seeking an information about facts. It had quite an ulterior object. So, replied the sixth Patriarch, “One who understands Buddhism has attained to the secrets of Obai.”

“Have you then attained them?”

“No, I have not.”

“How,” asked the monk, “is it that you have not?”

The answer was, “I do not understand Buddhism.”

Did he really not understand Buddhism? Or is it that not to understand is to understand?

The self-contradiction of the sixth Patriarch is somewhat mild and indirect when compared with that of Dōgo (道吾). He succeeded to Yakusan (藥山惟儼, 751-834), but when he was asked by Goho (五峯) whether he knew the old master of Yakusan, he flatly denied, saying, “No, I do not.” Goho was persistent, “Why do you not know him?” “I do not, I do not,” was the emphatic statement of Dōgo. The latter, thus singularly enough, refused to give any reason except simply and forcibly denying the fact which was apparent to our common-sense knowledge.

Another emphatic denial by Tesshikaku (鐵背覺) is better known to students of Zen than the case just cited. He was a disciple of Jōshu. When he visited Hōgen (法眼文益, died 958), another great Zen master, the latter asked him what was the last place he came from. Tesshikaku replied that he came from Jōshu. Said Hōgen, “I understand that a cypress tree once became the subject of his talk; was that really so?” Tesshikaku was positive in his denial, saying, “He had no such talk.” Hōgen protested, “All the monks coming from Jōshu lately speak of his

reference to the cypress tree in answer to a monk's question, 'What was the real object of the coming east of Dharma?' How do you say that Jōshu made no such reference to the cypress-tree?" Whereupon Tesshikaku roared, "My late master never had such a talk; no slighting allusion to him, if you please!" Hōgen greatly admired this attitude on the part of Tesshikaku and said, "Truly you are a lion's child!"

In Zen literature, Dharma's coming from the West, that is, from India, is quite frequently made the subject of Zen discourse. When a question is asked as to the real object of his coming over to China, it refers to the ultimate principle of Buddhism, and has nothing to do with his personal motive which made him cross the ocean, landing him at some point along the southern coast of China. Later, if I have more time, I may acquaint you with some samples of numerous answers given to this all-important question; for they are so varied and so unexpected and give one a general idea of what Zen is.

V

So far Zen must have appeared to you nothing but a philosophy of negation and contradiction, whereas Zen in fact has its affirmative side, and this is where Zen stands unique. In most forms of mysticism, speculative or emotional, their assertions are general and ordinary enough even for outsiders to form some ideas about them. When Blake sings,

"To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour;"

or when the exquisite feelings of Wither are expressed thus:

"By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustling;
By a daisy, whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed;

“Or a shady bush or tree—
 She could more infuse in me
 Than all Nature's beauties can
 In some other wiser man.”*

We can understand their feelings though we may not realise exactly as they felt. Even when Eckhart declares that “the eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me,” or when Plotinus refers to “that which mind, when it turns back, thinks before it thinks itself,” we do not find it hard to understand them as far as the ideas are concerned which they try to convey in these mystical utterances. But when we come to statements by the Zen masters, we are entirely at sea how to take them. Their affirmations are so irrelevant, so inappropriate, so irrational, and so nonsensical—at least superficially, that those who have not gained the Zen way of looking at things can hardly make, as we say, heads or tails of them. The truth is that even with full-fledged mystics they are unable to be quite free from the taint of intellection, and leave as a rule “traces” by which their holy abode could be reached. Plotinus' “flight from alone to alone” is a great mystical utterance proving how deeply he delved into the inner sanctuary of mind. But there is still something speculative or metaphysical about it, and when it is put side by side with the Zen statements to be cited below, it has, as the masters would say, a mystic flavour. So long as the masters are indulging in negations, denials, contradictions, or paradoxes, they are not quite washed off the stain of speculation. Naturally, Zen is not opposed to speculation as it is also one of the functions of the mind. But Zen has travelled along a different path, altogether unique, I think, in the history of mysticism, whether Eastern

* This reminds us, by the way, of Wordsworth's beautiful lines,
 “The meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that so often lie too deep for tears.”

or Western, Christian or Buddhist. A few examples will suffice to illustrate my point.

A monk asked Jōshu, "I read in the sutra that all things return to one, but where does this one return?" Answered the master, "When I was in the province of Tsing I had a robe made which weighed seven *ch'in*." When Kyōrin (香林遠) was asked what was the signification of Dharma's coming from the West, his reply was, "After a long sitting one feels fatigued." (坐久成勞). What is the logical relation between the question and the answer? Does it refer to Dharma's nine years sitting against the wall? If so, his propaganda was much ado about nothing? When Kwazan (禾山) was asked what the Buddha was, he said, "I know how to play the drum, dong-do-ko-dong!" (解打鼓). When Baso (馬祖道一) was sick, one of his disciples came to him and inquired about his condition, "How do you feel today?" "Nichimen Butsu, Gwachimen Butsu," (日面佛, 月面佛) was the reply, literally meaning, "Sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." A monk asked Jōshu, "When the body crumbles all to pieces and returns to the dust, there eternally abides one thing. Of this I have been told, but where does this one thing abide?" The master replied, "It is windy again this morning." When Bokujū (睦州) was asked who was the teacher of all the Buddhas, he merely hummed a tune, "Ting-ting, tung-tung, ku-ti, ku-tung!" (釘釘東東骨低骨董). To the question what Zen was, the same master made this answer, "Namo-triratnāya!" (南無三寶). On another occasion, the same question called forth a different response, which was, "Mahāprajñāpāramitā!" (摩訶般若波羅蜜). The monk confessed that he could not comprehend the ultimate meaning of it, and the master went on,

"My robe is all worn out after so many years' usage,
And parts of it in shreds loosely hanging, have been blown away
with the clouds."

(抖擻多年穿破衲 襤毳一半逐雲飛)

Perhaps this is enough to show how freely Zen deals with those abstruse philosophical problems which have been taxing all human ingenuity ever since the dawn of intelligence. This part will be concluded with a sample sermon delivered by Goso (五祖法演); for even a Zen master occasionally, no, quite frequently, comes down to the human level of understanding and tries to deliver a speech for our edification. But being a Zen sermon we may expect something unusual in it. Goso was one of the ablest Zen masters of the twelfth century. He was the teacher of Yengo (圓悟) famous as the author of the *Hekiganshu* (碧巖集). One of his sermons then runs thus: "Yesterday I came across one topic which I thought I might communicate to you, my pupils, today. But an old man such as I am is apt to forget, and the topic went off altogether from my mind. I cannot just recall it." So saying, Goso remained quiet for some little time, but at last he exclaimed, "I forget, I forget, I cannot remember!" He resumed, however, "I know there is a mantram in one of the sutras known as the *King of Good Memory* (聰明王). Those who are forgetful may recite it, and the thing forgotten will come again. Well, I must try." He then recited the mantram, "Om o-lo-lok-kei svaha!" (唵阿盧勒繼婆婆訶). Clapping his hands and laughing heartily, he said, "I remember, I remember. This it was: However we seek the Buddha, he is not discernible; however we seek the Patriarch he is not discernible. The muskmelon is sweet even to the stems, the bitter gourd is bitter even to the roots." He then came down from the pulpit without further remarks.

VI

In one of his sermons, Eckhart referring to the mutual relationship between God and man, says: "It is as if one stood before a high mountain and cried, 'Art thou there?'"

The echo comes back, 'Art thou there?' If one cries, 'Come out,' the echo answers, 'Come out.'" Something like this is to be observed in the Zen master's answers now classified under "Repetitions." It is hard to penetrate into the inner meaning, if there is really any such, of those parrot-like repetitions which are often given by the master to his disciples.

Chosui (長水子璿) once asked Yekaku (慧覺) of Mount Rōya (瑯琊), who lived in the first half of the eleventh century, "How is it that the Originally Pure has all of a sudden come to produce mountains and rivers and the great earth?" The question is taken from the *Śūrangāma sūtra* (首楞嚴經) in which Purna asks of Buddha how the Absolute came to evolve this phenomenal world. For this is a great philosophical problem that has perplexed the greatest minds of all ages. So far all the interpretations making up the history of thought have proved unsatisfactory in one way or another. Chosui also being a student of philosophy in a way has now come to his teacher to be enlightened on the subject. But the teacher's answer was no answer as we understand it, for he merely repeated the question, "How is it that the Originally Pure has all of a sudden come to produce mountains and rivers and the great earth?" Translated into English, this dialogue loses much of its zest. Let me recite it in Japanese-Chinese: Chosui asked, "*Shō-jō hon-nen un-ga kos-shō sen-ga dai-ji*," (清淨本然云何忽生山河大地), and the master echoed, "*Shō-jō hon-nen un-ga kos-shō sen-ga dai-ji*."

This was not, however, enough. Later in the thirteenth century, another great Zen master, Kido (虛堂), commented on this in a still more mystifying manner. His sermon one day ran in this wise: "When Chosui asked Yekaku, *Shō-jō hon-nen un-ga kos-shō sen-ga dai-ji*, the question was echoed back to the questioner, and it is said that the spiritual eye

of the disciple was then opened. I now want to ask you how this could have happened. Were not the question and the answer the same? What reason did Chosui find in this? Let me comment on it." Whereupon he struck his chair with the *hossu*, and said, "*Shō-jō hon-nen un-ga kos-shō sen-ga dai-ji.*" His comment complicates the matter instead of simplifying it.

Tōsu Daidō (投子大同), of the T'ang dynasty, who died in 914, answered "Buddha" when he was questioned, "What is Buddha?" He said "Tao" when the question was, "What is Tao?" He answered "Zen," to the question "What is Zen?"

When Jōshu asked Kwanchu (大慈寰中) of the ninth century, "How does Prajñā embody itself?" (般若以何爲體) Kwanchu echoed the question, "How does Prajñā embody itself?" Jōshu then gave a hearty laugh. Prajñā may be translated supreme intelligence, and the Buddha idealised or Manjuśri may be regarded as the embodiment of Prajñā. Prajñā in itself is too abstract. While homage is always paid to Prajñā as the essence of Buddhahood, it must have a body, or it must become a person, whose function Prajñā is; for it is impossible for human minds to conceive it as mere abstraction having no personality. Hence the question, "How is Prajñā embodied?" The answer or rather the echo does not explain anything, we are at a loss as far as intellectual signification goes. The Zen masters must be classed as belonging entirely to a different category of mentality. When we try to understand them intellectually, we utterly fail. They are living on another plane, so to speak, of consciousness. Unless we come round to the same plane where they stand, there is no possible bridge which will carry us over the chasm dividing our ordinary intellection from their psittacine repetitions.

Before we proceed to the last of the headings under

which I proposed to consider characteristics of Zen Buddhism, let me cite another case of echoing. Hōgen (法眼文益), the founder of the Hōgen Branch of the Zen sect, flourished early in the tenth century. He asked one of his disciples, "What do you understand by the statement—Let the difference be even a tenth of an inch, and it will grow as wide as heaven and earth?" The disciple said, "Let the difference be a tenth of an inch, and it will grow as wide as heaven and earth." Hōgen however told him that such will never do. Said the disciple, "I cannot do otherwise; how do you understand?" The master at once responded, "Let the difference be even a tenth of an inch, and it will grow as wide as heaven and earth,"*

VII

We now come to the most characteristic feature of Zen Buddhism, by which it is distinguished not only from all the other Buddhist schools, but from all forms of mysticism that are ever known to us. So far the truth of Zen has been expressed through words, however enigmatic they may superficially appear, but now the masters appeal to "direct action" instead of verbal medium. In fact, the truth of Zen is the truth of life, and life means to live, to move, to act, not merely to reflect. Is it not the most natural thing for Zen therefore that its development should be towards acting or rather living its truth instead of demonstrating or illustrating in words, that is to say, with ideas? In the actual living of life there is no logic, for life is superior to logic. We imagine logic influences life, but in reality man is not a rational creature, of course he reasons, but he does not act according to the result of his reasoning pure and simple. There is something stronger than ratiocination. We may call it im-

* When it is thus literally translated, it is too long and loses much of its original force. Here is the original Chinese, 毫釐有差天地懸絕.

pulse, or instinct, or more comprehensively will. Where this will acts there is Zen, but if I am asked whether Zen is a philosophy of will, I rather hesitate to give an affirmative answer. Zen is to be explained, if at all explained it should be, rather dynamically than statically. When I raise the hand thus, there is Zen. But when I assert that I have raised the hand, Zen is no more there. Nor is there any Zen when I assume the existence of somewhat that may be named will or anything else. Not that the assertion or assumption is wrong, but that the thing known as Zen is three thousand miles away as they say.

Life delineates itself on the canvas called time; and time never repeats, once gone, forever gone; and so is an act, once done, it is never undone. Life is a *sumiye*-painting, which must be executed once and for all time and without hesitation, without intellection, and no corrections are permissible or possible. Life is not like an oil-painting which can be rubbed out and done over time and again until the artist is satisfied. With a *sumiye*-painting, any brush stroke painted over a second time results in a smudge; the life has left it. All corrections show when the ink dries. So is life. We can never retract what we have once committed to deeds, nay, what has once passed through consciousness can never be rubbed out. Zen therefore ought to be caught while the thing is going on, neither before nor after. It is an act of one instant. When Dharma was leaving China, as the legend has it, he asked his disciples what was their understanding of Zen, and one of them who happened to be a nun, replied, "It is like Ananda's looking into the kingdom of Akshobya Buddha, it is seen once and has never been repeated."

The monk Jō (定上座) was a disciple of Rinzai (臨濟義玄), the founder of the Rinzai Branch of the Zen, who lived early in the ninth century. When he asked the master what the fundamental principle of Buddhism was, Rinzai

came down from his straw chair, and taking hold of the monk slapped him with the palm of his hand, and let him go. Jō stood still without knowing what to make of the whole procedure when a by-standing monk asked him why he was not going to bow to the master. While doing so, Jō all of a sudden awoke to the truth of Zen. Later, when he was passing over a bridge, he happened to meet a party of three Buddhist scholars, one of whom asked Jō, "The river of Zen is deep, and its bottom must be sounded. What does this mean?" Jō, disciple of Rinzai, at once seized the questioner and was at the point of throwing him over the bridge, when his two friends interceded and asked Jō's merciful treatment of the offender. Jō released the scholar, "If not for the intercession of his friends I would at once let him sound the bottom of the river himself." With these people Zen was no joke, no mere play of ideas, it was on the contrary a most serious thing on which they would stake their lives.

Rinzai was a disciple of Ōbaku (黃蘗希運), but while under the master he did not get any special instruction on Zen; for whenever he asked him as to the fundamental truth of Buddhism, he was struck by Ōbaku. But it was these blows that opened Rinzai's eye to the ultimate truth of Zen and made him exclaim, "After all there is not much in the Buddhism of Ōbaku!" In China and in Korea what little of Zen is left mostly belongs to the school of Rinzai. In Japan alone the Soto Branch is flourishing as much as the Rinzai. The rigour and vitality of Zen Buddhism that is still present in the Rinzai school of Japan comes from the three blows of Ōbaku so mercifully dealt out to his poor disciple. There is in fact more truth in a blow or a kick than in the verbosity of logical discourse. At any rate the Zen masters were in dead earnest whenever the demonstration of Zen was demanded. See the following instance.

When Tōimpo (鄧隱峰) was pushing a cart, he happened to see his master Baso (馬祖道一) stretching his legs a little too far out in the roadway. He said, "Will you please draw your legs in?" Replied the master, "A thing once stretched out will never be contracted." "If so," said Tō, "a thing once pushed out on the way, will never be retracted." His cart went right over the master's legs which were thus hurt. Later Baso went up to the Preaching Hall where he carried an axe and said to the monks gathered, "Let the one who wounded the old master's legs awhile ago come out of the congregation." Tō came forth and stretched his neck ready to receive the axe, but the master instead of chopping the disciple's head off, quietly set the axe down.

Tōimpo was ready to give up his life to re-assert the truth of his deed, through which the master got hurt. Mimicry or simulation was rampant everywhere, and therefore Baso wanted to ascertain the genuineness of Tō's understanding of Zen. When the thing is at stake, the masters do not hesitate to sacrifice anything. In the case of Nansen, a kitten was done away with; Isan broke a mirror into pieces; a woman follower of Zen burned up a whole house; and another woman threw her baby into a river. This latter was an extreme case, and perhaps the only one of the kind ever recorded in the history of Zen. As to minor cases such as mentioned above, they are plentiful and considered almost matters of course with the Zen masters.

While I have not attempted to be very exhaustive in describing all the different methods of demonstration or rather realisation of the truth of Zen resorted to by masters of various schools, the statements so far made in regard to them, may suffice to give you at least a glimpse into some of the peculiar features of Zen Buddhism. Whatever explanations may be given by critics or scholars to the philosophy of Zen, we must first of all acquire a new point of view of looking at

things, which is altogether beyond our ordinary sphere of consciousness. Rather, this new viewpoint is gained when we reach the ultimate limits of our understanding, within which we think we are always bound and unable to break through. Most people stop at these limits and are easily persuaded that they cannot go any further. But there are some whose mental vision is able to penetrate this veil of contrasts and contradictions. They gain it abruptly. They beat the wall in utter despair, and lo, it unexpectedly gives away and there opens an entirely new world. Things hitherto regarded as prosaic and ordinary and even binding are now arranged in quite a novel scheme. The old world of the senses has vanished, and something entirely new has come to take its place. We seem to be in the same objective surroundings, but subjectively we are rejuvenated, we are born again.

Wu Tao-tzu or Godoshi (吳道子) was one of the greatest painters of China, and lived in the reign of the Emperor Hsüan-tsung, of the T'ang dynasty. His last painting, according to legend, was a landscape commissioned by the Emperor for one of the walls of his palace. The artist concealed the complete work with a curtain till the Emperor's arrival, then drawing it aside exposed his vast picture. The Emperor gazed with admiration on a marvellous scene: forests, and great mountains, and clouds in immense distances of sky, and men upon the hills, and birds in flight. "Look," said the painter, "in the cave at the foot of this mountain dwells a spirit," He clapped his hands; the door at the cave's entrance flew open. "The interior is beautiful beyond words," he continued, "permit me to show the way." So saying, he passed within; the gate closed after him; and before the astonished Emperor could speak or move, all had faded to white wall before his eyes, with not a trace of the artist's brush remaining. Wu Tao-tzu was seen no more.

The artist has disappeared, and the whole scene has been

wiped out; but from this nothingness there arises a new spiritual world, abiding in which the Zen masters perform all kinds of antics, assert all kinds of absurdities, and yet they are in perfect accord with the nature of things in which a world moves on stripped of all its falsehoods, conventions, simulations, and intellectual obliquities. Unless one gets into this world of realities, the truth of Zen will be eternally a sealed book. This is what I mean by acquiring a new point of view independent of logic and understanding.

Emerson expresses the same view in his own characteristic manner: "Foremost among these activities (that is, mathematical combination, great power of abstraction, the transmutations of the imagination, even versatility, and concentration), are the somersaults, spells, and resurrections, wrought by the imagination. When this wakes, a man seems to multiply ten times or a thousand times his force. It opens the delicious sense of indeterminate size, and inspires an audacious mental habit. We are as elastic as the gas of gunpowder, and a sentence in a book, or a word dropped in conversation, sets free our fancy, and instantly our heads are bathed with galaxies, and our feet tread the floor of the Pit. And this benefit is real, because we are entitled to these enlargements, and, once having passed the bounds, shall never again be quite the miserable pedants we were."

Here is a good illustration of the difference between a "miserable pedant" and one who has "passed the bounds": There was a monk called Gensoku (玄則監院) who was one of the chief officials of the monastery under the Zen master Hōgen (法眼文益), of the early tenth century. He never came to the master to make inquiries about Zen; so the master one day asked him why he did not come. The chief official answered; "When I was under Seiho (青峰), I got an idea as to the truth of Zen." "What is your understanding then?" demanded the master. "When I asked my master,

who was Buddha, he said, Ping-ting T'ung-tzu comes for fire." (丙丁童子來求火). "It is a fine answer," said Hōgen, "but probably you misunderstand it. Let me see how you take the meaning of it." "Well," explained the official, "Ping-ting is the god of fire; when he himself comes for fire, it is like myself who, being a Buddha from the very beginning, wants to know who Buddha is. No questioning is then needed as I am already Buddha himself." "There!" exclaimed the master, "Just as I thought! You are completely off." Soku, the chief official, got highly offended because his view was not countenanced and left the monastery. Hōgen said, "If he comes back he may be saved; if not, he is lost." Soku after going some distance reflected that a master of five hundred monks as Hōgen was would not cheat him without cause, and returned to the old master and expressed his desire to be instructed in Zen. Hōgen said, "You ask me and I will answer." "Who is Buddha?"—the question came from the lips of the now penitent monk. "Ping-ting T'ung-tzu comes for fire." This made his eyes open to the truth of Zen quite different from what he formerly understood of it. I need not repeat that Zen refuses to be explained but that it is to be experienced. Without this, all talk is nothing but an idea, woefully inane and miserably unsatisfactory.

Let me conclude with another sermon from Goso (五祖法演) of whom mention has already been made:

If people ask me what Zen is like, I will say that it is like learning the art of burglary. A son of a burglar saw his father growing older and thought, "If he is unable to carry out his profession, who will be the bread-winner of this family, except myself? I must learn the trade." He intimated the idea to his father, who approved it. One night the father took the son to a big house, broke through the fence, entered the house, and opening one of the large chests, told the son to go in and pick out the clothings. As soon as he

got into it, the lid was dropped and the lock securely applied. The father now came out to the court-yard, and loudly knocking at the door woke up the whole family, whereas he himself quietly slipped away from the former hole in the fence. The residents got excited and lighted candles, but found that the burglars had already gone. The son who remained all the time in the chest securely confined thought of his cruel father. He was greatly mortified, when a fine idea flashed upon him. He made a noise which sounded like the gnawing of a rat. The family told the maid to take a candle and examine the chest. When the lid was unlocked, out came the prisoner, who blew off the light, pushed away the maid, and fled. The people ran after him, who, noticing a well by the road, picked up a large stone and threw it into the water. The pursuers all gathered around the well trying to find the burglar drowning himself in the dark hole. In the meantime he was safely back in his father's house. He blamed him very much for his narrow escape. Said the father, "Be not offended, my son. Just tell me how you got off." When the son told him all about his adventures, the father exclaimed, "There you are, you have learned the art!"

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