

# The Practice of Zen

UEDA SHIZUTERU

## INTRODUCTION

What is Zen? Zen, one could answer, is eating, sleeping, or anything else one does. One could also state that Zen is nothing at all, or one could clench one's fist and say, "*This is Zen!*" In Zen one can claim that a mountain is a mountain, or one can just as well claim that a mountain is *not* a mountain. However, such responses—the classic ways in which Zen explains itself—are valid only for a person who truly understands the *is-ness* of the Mahāyāna concept, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." Every word and every action of such a person flows from a certain source and, in turn, awakens within us the desire to seek that source.

In attempting to say something about Zen, I intend to take neither a traditional nor a strictly academic approach; I will probably stay somewhere between the two, in line with my own interests and experience. As a philosopher my background is in the areas of ontology and the philosophy of religion, based on my study of modern German thought, particularly that of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Jaspers, Bollnow, and Buber; my interests also include Meister Eckhart and the other German mystics. In addition to these more intellectual pursuits, I have for a number of years also practiced Zen as a layman in the Rinzai tradition; my reasons for starting were various, but in any event Zen soon became the focus of my own existential path. I had the opportunity to rethink this existential path from the perspective of another culture during extended stays of perhaps six years altogether in Germany and

\* This is a translation of "Zen e no michi," in the author's *Zen Bukkyō: Kongen-teki ningen* [Zen Buddhism: The Fundamental Human Being] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1993), pp. 293–316. Portions have been adapted by the author for the purposes of the present article. We wish to thank Ron Hadley for preparing the draft translation and Thomas L. Kirchner for editing the final manuscript.

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

Switzerland; this experience forced me to a new interpretation of Zen, a more global interpretation that took into account the standpoint of the West as well as of the East.

The thoughts on Zen I will present below emerged from my own Zen practice, from my philosophical ruminations on it, and from my study of the Zen classics and such modern Zen thinkers as D. T. Suzuki, Ōmori Sōgen, and Sawaki Kōdō. My approach to Zen is thus highly individualistic, with interpretations quite different from those of contemporary scholars in the areas of Zen studies, the history of Zen thought, and orthodox Buddhist studies. My ideas are also, I must admit, quite distinct from the traditional, experientially-based Zen explanations offered by the Zen masters. My intention, in short, is to try to interpret Zen from a human standpoint (or perhaps it would be better to say, to understand the human condition from the standpoint of Zen). I say this because I feel that Zen takes everything man can do or be—it takes dehumanization and rehumanization, it takes crisis and liberation, it takes everything impossible, everything possible, and everything beyond possibility—it takes all these things, brings them into sharp focus in their extreme form, and says, “Look at these things!” Zen, for me, is something both indescribably frightening and indescribably fascinating, just as life itself is frightening and fascinating.

### EARLY CONTACTS AND IMPRESSIONS

Fundamentally Zen is not something that can be put into words. Nor am I, who have never undergone monastic training, really qualified to speak from the standpoint of the Zen tradition. I would therefore prefer to approach Zen from a bit more personal a perspective, explaining such matters as how I came into contact with it, what my impressions of it were at the time, and how my understanding of it developed as I practiced meditation myself and received Zen instruction.

I first encountered Zen through books when I was already about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. The first work on Zen that I ever came across was *Zen hyakudai* [One Hundred Zen Topics] by Suzuki Daisetz (1943).<sup>1</sup> In this volume Suzuki recreates the classical Zen

<sup>1</sup> Selections from *Zen hyakudai* appear in *The Eastern Buddhist* 11-1 (1978), 11-2 (1978), and 13-1 (1980), as well as the present issue.

*mondō* 問答 (question and answer), one by one, as living events. The book fascinated me, and I read it with rapt attention. I went on to read various other of Suzuki's writings and began, little by little, to study the original Zen texts mentioned by him.

One such text that I read relatively early was the *Tun-wu yao-men* [On the Essentials of Sudden Awakening], the recorded sayings of Ta-chu Hui-hai (Daishu Ekai, n.d.), a disciple of Ma-tsu Tao-i (Baso Dōitsu, 709–788). The text mentions a number of anecdotes that I found extremely interesting, such as one about a certain Idealist scholar who went to visit a Zen monk. After several days he took his leave, saying that he had to be off to his next destination. He walked with the Zen monk as far as the temple gate, where the latter pointed to a large stone and asked, "Tell me, is that stone inside your mind, or outside your mind?" The scholar—being an Idealist to whom the ten thousand dharmas are simply expressions of the consciousness—answered, "It's inside my mind." The Zen monk replied, "Really! It's going to be hard getting to your destination weighed down with such a heavy stone!" The scholar was deeply struck by these words and remained with the monk to practice Zen.

This story indicates something of the difference between Zen and doctrinal speculation. I, a scholar myself, could not help feeling that the story pointed to something fundamental that lay beyond the reach of academic endeavor.

Another interesting story I came across was in an essay by Nishitani Keiji entitled "Nishida, My Teacher" (1951). Nishitani recalls being at Nishida's house once with D. T. Suzuki.

At one point in the conversation Suzuki declared, "This is what Zen is all about," and began rattling the table in front of him. Nishida found this extremely interesting. Afterwards, whenever other guests were present, he would glance my way as if to say, "You know this one because you were there," and would then begin to rattle the table, saying, "As Suzuki once said, this is what Zen is all about."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In *Nishida Kitarō*, by Nishitani Keiji, translated by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 25–26. Translation here differs slightly from the Heisig version.

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

As I read this anecdote the rattling seemed to reverberate loudly in my own heart. For some reason the story left a deep impression on me.

In this way I gradually became familiar with Zen, and I began wondering how exactly Zen might best be characterized. "Freedom" somehow seemed, and still seems, the best word; Suzuki, too, uses the phrase "creative freedom." The concept of freedom is a broad one, of course, and includes a variety of meanings. When we interpret the concept from the standpoint of European philosophy (especially modern European philosophy), we tend to think of it in terms of self-origination, self-determination, and spontaneity. However, the freedom that I sense in Zen is slightly different from this. It has a feeling closer to what might be expressed in Japanese as *jiyū jizai*—a boundless lack of restriction. It is freedom in the sense of being completely "open," of being completely free of all fetters. It may be akin to what Heidegger is speaking about when he discusses *freiheit* (freedom) in the sense of *offenheit* (opening).

Somewhere at the very core of our existence we are invisibly bound, invisibly restrained. Our very way of being—everything that we do—is restricted. The freedom of Zen is the feeling that such restrictions have been broken through and our existence opened up. In this regard, a saying of which I am very fond is Dōgen's "Let go, and you are filled to repletion." This "repletion" is the feeling of infinite boundlessness that occurs when one "lets go." However, if this experience remains simply a *feeling* then there is a danger that, in time, it will fade away. Thus one desires to grasp *what* this boundless "repletion" is that occurs when one "lets go." Here for the first time the *what* of this experience becomes clearly delimited and defined. Moreover, in spite of this delimitation it retains the flavor of the original, ungraspable boundlessness, since the definition emerges from the living experience of "let go, and you are filled to repletion."

Simultaneously with this act of grasping or understanding there occurs a kind of "about-face" from the original feeling of boundlessness, connected with the fact that such understanding is possible only through words. When something is grasped through the medium of words, the self, the "I," that does the grasping enters the picture, and an entwining or adhering takes place between selfhood and words. As a result only that which can be grasped through words is considered to be real. The grasping self clutches at more and more in an attempt to

confirm its own existence, and ends up captured by the very things it clutches at.

A deeper understanding of this situation would necessitate a fundamental inquiry into the phenomenon of language, an issue I am unable to deal with here. I would, however, like to touch upon just one point, which is the mysterious nature of words. Basically words are used to represent facts, but when they are employed in this way a strange phenomenon occurs: the facts take on the nature of the original words, while the words themselves are forgotten. In other words, a fact comes to be understood in light of the words used to represent it. Words can bring even nonexistent "facts" into existence, as with lies and fantasies. Fantasies could not exist if they were not put into words, and, once created, their "unreal" existence proceeds to pervade the world of the "real." This demonstrates not only the creative power of words but their danger as well. There is an additional danger: words are used to define various relationships between things and situations, but the fact that these are only verbal correlations tends to be forgotten after the words themselves are gone, and we end up thinking of them as defining actual, existent connections.

When I think about these issues, D. T. Suzuki's table rattling seems all the more interesting. Through this rattling Suzuki not only cuts through the world in which we imagine that a fact is a fact because it is expressed in words, but he also sets the world up again in a new way. And he does it so that one feels as though the cutting through and the setting up are part of a single essential movement.

Let us see what Suzuki himself says on the matter. On the one hand, we have the following statement: "If we do not overturn, from its very roots, our normal, comfortable, conceptualizing consciousness, then we will not be able to penetrate to the truth." And, on the other: "Even if we say that something is meaningless, to the extent that it is a human activity, that very meaninglessness must be its meaning." These two quotations approach the situation from opposite directions, but here we see the established world broken down and then set up anew.

Let me return, however, to the story of my own encounter with Zen. I have described how I first came across Zen in books, and how the fascination I felt somehow moved me to the very core of my being. And I have mentioned how the word "freedom" seemed, then and now, the best description of Zen. This is not to say, however, that this reflected

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

the state of my life at the time. It was a quite despondent period for me, actually, and if anything I felt less free than I ever had. Zen seemed a way out of the total impasse I saw myself in, and this, plus a number of other things, led me to start Zen meditation (*zazen*) and Zen instruction (*sanzen*).

Among these "other things" was perhaps the most crucial factor of all: the influence of other people. The influence of others is, I believe, of decisive importance with anyone who makes the decision to take up the actual practice of Zen. In my case, for example, what got me started was not simply the interest I felt in Zen stories, nor my belief that Zen might provide a way to freedom; these things alone could never have provided sufficient motivation. I believe that the only thing that can really *move* a person to believe that Zen might be the best path and to persevere once started is an actual person who can serve as a living example. D. T. Suzuki, whose books first introduced me to Zen, was one person who inspired me in this way.

The truth of the matter is that I met Suzuki only once. Yet so decisive was his effect on me that I find this hard to believe. His influence stemmed not from his books (of which I have read many) but from something I sensed in him, a certain living truth that went far beyond anything he ever put down on paper. Let me give two or three examples that illustrate what it was about Suzuki that impressed me so deeply.

The following reminiscence is by Okamura Mihoko, who looked after Suzuki for many years and served as his secretary until the end of his life. It relates an episode that occurred during her third meeting with Suzuki, when she was still living in New York and he was a visiting professor at Columbia.

"I can't trust people any more. Life seems empty to me," [I said.]

[Sensei] listened to the plea of that girl in braids and answered only: "Well." I thought at the time that he neither affirmed nor denied what I had said. But now I realize afresh that the resonance I heard behind those words lent my straying heart a new life. Sensei took my hand and opened it, palm upward.

"What a pretty hand. Look carefully at it. This is the Buddha's hand." His eyes shone as he spoke.

And so our talk ended that time. That was the atmosphere in which I began to receive help in solving my problems while I assisted Sensei with his work."<sup>3</sup>

There is also the following anecdote, of a slightly different nature, from the time Suzuki was lecturing at Columbia University. One day after a lecture, a woman who specialized in the study of psychology began to question Suzuki quite persistently about the relationship between Zen and clairvoyant powers. Finally she said, "Surely, Dr. Suzuki, you are able to see into the minds of others." Suzuki replied, "What's the use of knowing the mind of another? The important thing is to know your own mind!" With this, it is said, the woman's questions came to a halt.

The final incident took place when Suzuki, who had gone to America after the war, was on one of his brief return trips to Japan. His former students from Gakushū-in were holding a gathering in his honor. One of the party asked him, perhaps unwisely, "Can Americans really understand Zen?" Suzuki's reply was quick as a flash and right to the point: "Do any of *you* understand?" No one there will forget that moment as long as he lives.

These anecdotes may be seen as illustrations of the workings of compassion and wisdom (two of the most fundamental concepts in Mahāyāna Buddhism), with the first example expressing compassion and the latter two expressing wisdom. They show Suzuki's clear, direct rediscovery of these two core concepts in the midst of his life and work in the West. It is in these spontaneous, face-to-face, spur-of-the-moment responses that Suzuki's "person" (his *nin* 人, in Zen parlance) emerges most clearly and most naturally. The written word is important, of course, but what causes one to actually *believe* in something is this kind of vibrant, free, and unpremeditated functioning of a living human being.

In the Mahāyāna sutras it is said that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. To truly perceive that form is emptiness is called Great Wisdom; to truly perceive that emptiness is form is called Great Com-

<sup>3</sup> Okamura Mihoko, "Wondrous Activity," translated by Jeffrey Hunter, in *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, edited by Masao Abe (New York, Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1986), pp. 160-72; p. 169.

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

passion. From ancient times there have been various ways of answering the question, What is Zen?, but one basic approach is to say that Zen is the wisdom that becomes manifest through *zenjō* 禪定 (*samādhi*). This is not to emphasize wisdom alone, for the wisdom that becomes manifest in this way is a wisdom imbued with compassion. When one enters the state of *samādhi* one becomes the “nothingness” (*mu* 無) of *śūnyatā*, where “emptiness is form/form is emptiness”; when one emerges from *samādhi*, wisdom and compassion function as one. Speaking from the standpoint of compassion, one can say that the mind, permeated by *mu*, becomes truly gentle.

As seen in the above-mentioned anecdotes about Suzuki, Great Wisdom and Great Compassion involve the ability to do what is truly necessary to help someone in a specific, concrete situation. In order for wisdom and compassion to work together in this way, it is absolutely necessary that we practice continually amidst the sufferings of everyday life. Without such practice—known in Zen as *nichijō kufū* 日常工夫 (the application of Zen in everyday life)—Great Wisdom and Great Compassion can never function through us.

### PRACTICE

Let me now move on to the basic practices of Zen: *zazen* and *sanzen*. In my discussion of these two basic elements I will consider Zen not as an abstract tradition but as a more human phenomenon, something that touches directly upon the basic nature of human existence.

Zen is linked at the most fundamental level to *gyō* 行, “practice.” Though it perhaps cannot be said that practice equals Zen, Zen without practice would be like religion without prayer. So what is practice? Strictly speaking, practice as *gyō* is neither a form of behavior or a type of activity. Behavior, as an instinctual component of our organic being, and activity, as a means to realize the desires of our goal-oriented consciousness, both involve clear-cut motives and are carried out “in the world.” Practice is quite different. It does, of course, involve a specific form of discipline that is linked to a religious concept, but it is not limited to this. Practice is also a certain way of being that shapes the way we live our daily life and the way we handle the various encounters it involves.

Be that as it may, the fundamental practices of Zen are *zazen* and *sanzen*, and I would therefore like to have a look at what these signify. It must be stressed, first, that *zazen* and *sanzen* are not basically separable. In practical terms, Zen training is a matter of sitting in *zazen*, getting up to go to *sanzen*, then returning from *sanzen* to resume *zazen*. It is the repetition of this process that constitutes formal Zen praxis, and if either of the two aspects is eliminated then the practice ceases to be genuine.

### *Zazen*

With this in mind, let me begin with a discussion of *zazen*. In Buddhism the basic postures of the body are defined as walking, standing, sitting, and lying. Our concrete existence in the world is expressed through these four bodily postures; they express in visible form our "stance," our way of being, with respect to the world. Of these four, sitting has always been regarded as the primary posture in Zen, or, to be more accurate, in Buddhism as a whole. With sitting as the basic posture, the totality of walking, standing, sitting, and lying unfolds. And each of these postures is, again, contained within sitting.

This may seem a trivial point, but it reflects something quite fundamental in the outlook of Buddhism. In anthropology the standing posture is regarded as the determining characteristic of human existence, the characteristic that made possible the development of all the diverse cultures of the world. By standing our hands were freed, providing us with the "opening" to transcend our biological environment and refashion it into the human world. Even today this is an immutable tenet of anthropology. Given this view of the upright posture as the very basis of human superiority, it seems to me quite significant that Buddhism accords the status of primary posture to sitting, a posture in which the standing posture is effectively nullified.

There are three traditional ways of sitting in Japan. One is *agura* (sitting with one's legs crossed), the second is *seiza* (sitting erect with one's legs folded underneath one), and the third is *zazen* (sitting with legs folded in either the half- or the full-lotus position). Each one of these three ways of sitting has its own special significance, expressing a particular way of being in the world. Basically, *agura* can be seen as the posture of relaxation. *Seiza*, in contrast, is the posture of formality: it

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

is the posture of choice for polite, proper occasions. The lotus posture, however, combines something of the relaxation of *agura* with the tension of *seiza*. Of course the leg-folding is painful at first, but once one is accustomed to it zazen is indeed, as they say in Zen, "the easy gate to the Dharma." The ease that we experience in this posture is not the relaxation that we associate with *agura*—rather, as I mentioned above, it is an ease that combines the qualities of *agura* and *seiza*. This fusion of relaxation and tension is itself a concrete expression of a certain way of being, one that is within the world yet transcends the world.

In zazen the hands are set one upon the other and the legs are crossed. This is a simple matter, but I find it extremely significant. To arrange our hands and legs in this way is to literally tie ourselves into an integrated unit. The position is thus a concretized expression of the state of concentration; it is, furthermore, a concretization of the opening-up of the concentrated self. In Japanese we contrast the terms *isshin* 一心 (single-minded) and *mushin* 無心 (no-minded, purposeless); in zazen we attain single-mindedness, then leave this for a state of no-mindedness, a state in which circumstances unfold just as they are, with nothing added. Thus in zazen one moves from sitting with hands and feet arranged—the concrete expression of concentration—to a state in which the concentrated self falls away. It is here that zazen is linked to the concept of ease.

Arranging our hands and legs in this way also concretely demonstrates the fact of our not *doing* anything with them. This fact, too, is quite significant. As mentioned above, the reason that the upright posture is seen as the basis of human superiority is that this position freed our hands to *do* things and thereby allowed us to escape entrapment in our organic environment through the creation of a new human culture. In so doing, however, humanity set itself in the center of existence and proceeded, with ever-increasing haste, to impose this anthropocentric structure upon the entire world. One glance at the state of the environment around us suffices, I think, to show us where this outlook has brought us.

In contrast, sitting with hands and legs immobile nullifies the tools of man's biological superiority and returns him, for the moment, to the point of "not-doing." A sort of reverse activity is involved here, of course: a *doing* of *non-doing*. But in zazen even this doing is finally cancelled out by the not-doing, and it truly becomes a matter of "not

doing anything." Zazen, indeed, can be seen as the concrete expression of complete "not doing anything." Zazen becomes, in a manner of speaking, an escape from our humanity, or, in more religious terms, a "repentance" of our very human existence.

I think, however, that there is another matter even more fundamental than this. Before one reaches the stage of not-doing, one reaches an impasse in which one is *unable* to do anything. The Buddha himself experienced this. He studied philosophy and mastered all of the religious practices of his time, but he was still unable to achieve liberation. Finally he began zazen, vowing that this time he would not rise from his seat until he attained full liberation. Zazen is less a matter of deciding not to do anything than of reaching a deadlock in which one is no longer *capable* of doing anything. Moreover, this impasse—called *gidan* 疑團 (ball of doubt) in Zen—comes about naturally as one's zazen matures.

Zazen can thus be seen as a concrete expression of this deadlock. However, in the practice of zazen—and this is of crucial importance—the answer to the deadlock is already concretely present from the very beginning; the true way of being is already realized. This is when zazen is genuine.

This ties into the emphasis in Zen meditation on keeping the eyes half open. Though open, the eyes are not looking at anything in particular—they are simply open to a bright openness, an openness that is not of the sort in which the self is the center. When standing erect we are also open to the world, but it is an openness inevitably centered upon and therefore limited by the self. But in sitting with hands and legs settled, not looking at anything in particular but just being present in the brightness, one is not the center but is simply open to a boundless openness. This may seem a vacant state, but it is in fact far more significant than that: it is a state of nonconfrontation in which nothing is taken as an object. Moreover, it is a way of being that is physically actualized within the practice of zazen.

It is also emphasized during zazen that the spine must be kept straight, another fact that I find extremely interesting. Here the direction of verticality is clearly immanent, implying a potential for up-and-down movement. Though movement is for the moment kept at zero, the possibility is obviously there—the position is such that one could stand up at any time.

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

Breathing is extremely important too. Zazen does not employ a special breathing technique—one breathes naturally, gently letting out and drawing in the air. Apparently certain traditions such as yoga utilize special breathing methods in their religious practices, methods that involve directing the breath to certain parts of the body, but this is not done in Zen. In Zen the breath is released naturally, but with full awareness, into the infinite openness; one lets out one's entire self, one dies completely, then lets the breath flow back in again and comes back to life. It is a kind of infinite exchange between the internal and the external.

Zen has a number of apt expressions concerned with breathing, born of actual experience. I can't recall exactly where I read it, but one example speaks of following your breath into infinity with your mind's eye as you exhale. This reflects the unity of very quiet breathing and thorough awareness.

There is another such expression, one that concerns the overall practice of sitting in zazen. One should sit, the expression says, "calm, composed, and firm, like Mount Fuji towering in the sky above the eastern sea." These are, I believe, the words of Harada Sōgaku Rōshi (1871–1961). Plain and simple though they are, they are right on the mark. Zazen must, indeed, be "calm" and "composed." And "firm" (which is linked to sitting with the spine erect and straight), so that the entirety is "like Mount Fuji towering in the sky above the eastern sea." The firmness of zazen is not, however, the same as the tension of a taut line. This firmness is not merely physical, but reflects a kind of limitless rising up from the great Earth itself, a rising up that is simultaneously possessed of an abiding calmness. Zazen is a concrete expression of the concentrated state of awareness, but there is also a slipping away of all tension when this concentration is achieved. Zazen, for the person doing it, is a way entirely free of form and a way that must be learned through the body.

Zazen, it should be added, is not simply a state or condition. Zazen is true zazen when the condition of complete awareness crystallizes into an infinite question regarding the "what" of this condition. It is absolutely vital that we reach, and fully *become*, this impasse. Zazen is, at the same time, the fully realized and concrete expression of the solution to this impasse; in zazen the body is already expressing the openness and "just-as-it-is-ness" that is itself the answer to the original ques-

tion. To take the matter still further, *zazen* is not so much a matter of either question or answer as of fully becoming *mu*; the question and answer implicit in this state become manifest when one stands up from *zazen* and goes to *sanzen*.

Before proceeding to a consideration of *sanzen*, I would like to touch upon one final issue with regard to *zazen*. In Zen it is made quite clear that *zazen* practice is not a "spiritual athleticism," in which one attempts to achieve, through one's own efforts, some kind of spiritual goal. This is an important point, and one that is emphasized in a variety of interesting expressions peculiar to Zen. On the one hand, Zen stresses the uselessness of *zazen*: "Though you practice *zazen*, nothing will come of it!" On the other, it claims, "In the very doing of *zazen*, one is already a Buddha." What is being said here, from different directions, is that one does not *become* a Buddha through *zazen*, but simply manifests what one already *is*. Much the same point is being made in such quintessentially Zen admonitions as "Practice without practicing!" or "Practice without seeking!"

### *Sanzen*

The word *sanzen* is used in both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broad sense it refers to the overall practice of Zen (in which case it encompasses *zazen* as well). In the narrow sense—which is what I am concerned with here—it refers to the method of instruction in which one receives a *kōan* from one's teacher, then returns to the teacher at a later point to present one's understanding of the *kōan* (or more precisely, one *becomes* the understanding and has the teacher examine this). What I would like to consider in particular at this point is the moment of standing up from *zazen* and proceeding to *sanzen*.

First let us examine the implications of standing up from *zazen*. Buddhism has a technical term for this: *shutsujō* 出定 (coming out of *samādhi*), as opposed to *nyūjō* 入定 (entering *samādhi*). Zen teaches that *shutsujō* is not a matter of leaving *zazen* but of *zazen* itself starting to move. At that point something entirely new takes place. *Zazen*, as explained before, is "doing nothing," so that during *zazen*, "nothing" happens. Since it is from this state of nothingness that we stand up, standing up can be seen as a kind of primal event. This event is accompanied by various associated phenomena; of these I would like to con-

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

sider two in particular that relate to the fundamental condition of being human.

First is the fact that the moment we stand up there are *objects*, that is, there are things separate from and set against the self that stands up. Zazen is a way of being in which one is not in confrontation with anything; one is simply open to infinite openness and as such one possesses no self. Once we stand up, however, we exist as selves over against other objects, which is a fundamentally new and different way of being.

Second is the fact that when one stands up from the infinite openness of zazen, one returns to an existence "in the world." This is the world of human existence in the sense referred to by Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger. It might be called an "all-inclusive sphere of meaning": the world as a single, cohesive, interrelated space. And yet this world that we return to—and here it differs from Scheler's and Heidegger's depictions—is encompassed within the infinite openness that we experienced during zazen. We are in the world, yet at the same time we somehow remain in the infinite openness that both envelops and transcends the world. To the self that emerges from zazen the world thus seems dual. This is not to say that there are two worlds—the world is just as it is, and yet is imbued with an infinite openness. This imparts a decisive quality to our existence in the world, leading to a way of being in which one lives within and yet transcends (or, perhaps, penetrates) the world. The "actor" exists as a self within the world and at the same time penetrates to the infinite openness in which there is no self; this actor might thus be called "a self that is not a self."

Earlier I mentioned the fact that when one arises from zazen, objects in opposition to self appear. Since the scene of that mutual confrontation is the dual world that I have just described—the world as imbued with infinite openness—we must now consider the nature of these objects and the mode of being in which they "oppose" the self.

Let us start once again from the fact that such "opposing objects" appear when we stand up from zazen. The manner in which we encounter these objects depends upon the depth of our zazen; it is quite likely, for example, that someone who is a friend in the everyday world will be seen as a bodhisattva when one arises from a particularly profound sitting. Ordinarily, the way in which we experience the objects we encounter is determined by the nature of the place in which the encounter

occurs (or—more comprehensively—by the web of interrelated meaning that penetrates the world). In this case, however, the world that forms the place of encounter is surrounded by an infinite openness and possessed of an infinite depth. Thus objects encountered there are experienced as themselves being profoundly deep (depending, again, upon the depth of one's own zazen).

For the person who arises from zazen, then, all things confronting the subject and all things confronted by the subject are—to put it in Buddhist terms—Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sentient beings. When we rise from zazen, something personal, something replete with the boundlessness of infinite openness and infinite depth, appears from afar. This presents itself in the form of the various Buddhas. That which is in the world (the world as encompassed by infinite openness) presents itself in the form of sentient beings. At that time one is called upon to “vow to all the Buddhas that one will work for the sake of all sentient beings.” This is the way of being of the bodhisattva. It is by no means an easy task and can only be approached through practice.

Next, let us examine how we deal with the objects we encounter when we arise from zazen. The most primal response to these objects is worship. It is claimed sometimes that worship has no place in Zen, but this is not the case. Actually, I think worship is one of the most fundamental practices of Zen monastic life. When the Zen practitioner rises from zazen, for example, he or she always bows. If someone were to ask if the bow is for the Buddha, one could answer in a variety of ways. “I am not bowing” is a possible response, as is Huang-po's, “Without seeking the Buddha, without seeking the Dharma, without seeking the Sangha, I simply bow, just like this.” When one bows, one “just bows.” In any event, when one faces an object after standing up from zazen, the self returns once again to the state of nothingness and from this condition of boundless depth receives the object anew. This is worship; in the language of religious studies, we could call it the simplest and most basic of rituals.

Worship is the acceptance of the fundamental fact that “the other” exists. One might even say that worship alone is everything, but once this duality appears a whole variety of things takes place so that worship no longer suffices. In particular, the confrontation with “that which is in the world” involves a quite difficult problem: since the most basic and primary condition of face-to-face confrontation is that it takes the

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

form of "I and Thou," self and other, how then do we take in, *as* the other, the other that is not the self? Moreover, one must at the same time express the self *as* the self, since if either aspect is missing the self-other relationship does not obtain. The self-other encounter requires the clear and immediate *actualization*, on each and every occasion, of the fact that the self is the self even as it receives the other as the other.

To make a bit of a logical jump, one could say that the encounter between self and other implies, from the very beginning, the fundamental question "Who are you?" We must be able to respond, right then and there, "*This* is who I am." Hence mutual encounter is an enormously problematic situation, involving the reception of the other that is not the self and the simultaneous presentation of the I that is independent of the other.

We can thus say that the self-other encounter possesses the fundamental character of a Zen *mondō*. For example, when a certain monk came to the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng (Enō, 638-713) and said that he wished to study Zen, the patriarch asked, "Who is it that has come here in this way?" In other words, "Who is it that appears before me like this?" This could be viewed as a typically enigmatic Zen question, but it might be more appropriately regarded as the fundamental question that arises when one person encounters another. The *mondō* can then be seen as simply Zen's way of pursuing this fundamental question.

However, that is not all there is to the mutual confrontation of self and other. When one stands up from *zazen* and has to deal with encounters within the world, the things of the world—since this *is* a world of things—come between the self and the other. In *zazen* there are no things, but when we stand up and face each other within the world we become involved with the things that exist between the self and the other, and the question arises for both sides as to what to do about them. Both sides, that is, must ask not only "Who are you?" but also "What should we do about these *things*?" It is said that a certain Zen master would ask "What is this?" at every encounter. In effect he bundled everything in the world into one single question. I think that this too should be regarded not so much as an eccentric Zen question as a clear expression, in question form, of the fact that, when we are in the world, then the things of the world are our problem.

Hence we have the fundamental question of "being within the

world," composed of the issues of self and other, of our relationship with things, and of the interrelationship between these various aspects; we also have the answer to this question provided by the imbuelement of this world with infinite openness. The repetition of this question and this answer in the space between self and other comprises the true meaning of *sanzen*.

As we have seen, when one stands up from *zazen* one confronts the other, and in that very fact a problem arises. Moreover, the things of the world in which this confrontation occurs also give rise to a problem. It is within the context of this reality that the *Zen mondō* and *sanzen* developed and that they continue to be practiced.

Earlier I referred to the world into which one stands up from *zazen* as possessing a dual nature, describable in Heideggerian terms as "existence within the world" being imbued with an infinite openness. Worldly existence can be seen as the locus of the problem, while the answer to this problem can be found in the infinite openness that imbues this existence. Whether one can actualize this answer is, however, another question.

As noted earlier, *sanzen* practice involves receiving a *kōan* from the master and, during subsequent meetings, having one's understanding of the *kōan* checked. I would thus like to explain, very simply, what *kōan* work entails. In the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism the *kōan* most commonly given to the beginning student—the *kōan* referred to as "the first barrier"—is Chao-chou's "Mu." The *kōan*, one of the many associated with the great T'ang dynasty Zen master Chao-chou Ts'ung-shen (778-897), is Case 1 of the *Wu men kuan* collection.

A monk asked Chao-chou, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?"

Chao-chou said, "Mu."

The point of the *kōan* is for the practitioner to look into the meaning of this *mu* (meaning "no" or "nothing"). One must "investigate" the *kōan* with complete attention and singleness of purpose. By becoming one with this *mu* the practitioner attains *gedatsu* 解脱, liberation from the bonds of illusion; one might also call it freedom, or knowledge of the true self. The point of *kōan* work is not the practical application of Buddhist theory—one is not trying, in other words, to resolve the question of whether or not a dog actually has Buddha nature. One is at-

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

tempting, through identification with Chao-chou's *mu*, to cut through the bonds of discrimination, and cut through them in the most concrete way. One must, as the *Wu men kuan* says, investigate this *mu* day and night as though one's entire body were a huge ball of doubt.

This is the basic form of kōan practice. It would, however, be a mistake to try to understand Zen entirely on the basis of such practice. The true significance of Zen is to be found in *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落, the "dropping off of body and mind." Regardless of how high the "first barrier" of *mu* may soar up before one, the kōan is intended only to bring about the free working of fundamental wisdom. As the classic Zen texts would put it, "Zen is the functioning of the wisdom that emerges from samādhi."

It is with this purpose in mind that the Zen teacher presents the student at a certain point in his or her training with numerous variations of the *mu* kōan. The student may be asked to *prove* that he has seen *mu*, or to pick up *mu* and bring it. Or the teacher may explain to the student that Chao-chou, when asked on another occasion whether a dog has Buddha nature, answered "U" ("yes" or "something"); the teacher will then demand that the student look into the meaning of this *u*. Or he may go even further and ask the student to examine that which *precedes* both the monk's question and Chao-chou's answer (the idea being that once the questioning and answering has begun it is already too late).

In this way the master presents various aspects, forms, and levels of the kōan, so that liberated wisdom (the realized, active wisdom of the teacher) functions to help detonate the same wisdom in the student (whose wisdom is still potential). This wisdom is fundamentally non-discriminatory, but since it responds to circumstances it might best be called "nondiscriminating discriminatory wisdom." Throughout its long history Zen has been transmitted from teacher to student in this direct, practical way. The locus, so to speak, in which this type of kōan work takes place is the kōan system with its various levels: the *hosshin* 法身, *kikan* 機關, *gonsen* 言詮, *nantō* 難透, and *goi* 五位 kōans. Chao-chou's *mu* serves as the foundation of this entire edifice.

Virtually all of the kōans given to the Zen practitioner today have a dual nature: they are, in a sense, replays by the teacher and student of question-and-answer *mondōs* that occurred in the ancient past, and yet at the same time they are immediate events that take place in the *sanzen*

room for the very first time. As such they function as "heightened-potential" problems for the practitioner. That which served as an answer in the context of the original exchange becomes, in the context of *sanzen*, a new question in itself, and in this way the flame of living Zen is passed from generation to generation. The past, expressed as a question for the present, becomes itself the present; antiquity is contemporized by voicing it in the form of question and answer.

Even this brief look reveals the fundamental difference between *sanzen* and *zazen*. In *zazen*, where there is no opposition, only the individual exists. Or rather, even the individual has disappeared into the emptiness of *zazen*, into the state where the individual is *mu*. *Sanzen*, on the other hand, is one individual facing another individual at the very edge between self and other. *Zazen* is a thoroughgoing silence, a continual deepening into stillness; *sanzen* is a matter of words, words that are born of the silence of *zazen*. The "at-the-edge" encounter of *sanzen* requires little talk—a word or a phrase is quite sufficient, conveying everything that the teacher needs to know. Even silence becomes a "word," whether it is the silence that indicates a simple inability to answer or the active silence that comprises an answer in itself. In *zazen* one "does nothing"; in *sanzen* the practitioner *must* do something. Even the raising of a finger or the blinking of an eye can assume an enormous significance—the body itself becomes a concrete means of expression.

What is of decisive importance in the structure of Zen praxis is the complementarity of the two contrasting elements of *zazen* and *sanzen*. To put it more concretely, Zen practice is the repetition of going from *zazen* to *sanzen*, and from *sanzen* back to *zazen*. This cycle is the same as that from emptiness to opposition and back again to emptiness; from silence to words and back again to silence; from rest to activity and back again to rest. Through this repetition emptiness becomes ever more free of things, opposition becomes ever more clear-cut, silence becomes ever deeper, and words become ever more expressive (though this is not to say that the process is smooth and linear—it progresses along a painful path of setback and despair in *sanzen* and of forgetting even that despair in the nothingness of *zazen*).

For this to come about, however, *zazen* and *sanzen* must become integral parts of everyday life—otherwise they easily come to be seen as something exotic and thus of no immediate importance. Daily life is or-

## THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

dinary, yet every day has its unordinary events. Life can only be lived from one day to the next—we work in the world and relate to people and things, and as we do so everything that happens has its effect upon the mind. Thus for the lay Zen practitioner the significance of everyday life is especially great: it is not only the “training hall” in which one practices zazen but also the very place in which we learn to function *from* zazen. With daily practice zazen assumes a weight that makes of it something far more than simply a regular activity one performs. One may sit for only a limited time each day, but one’s zazen is not restricted to that particular time-frame; rather, one’s entire life comes to be lived within the state of zazen. The emptiness that opens up during zazen becomes the very locus of everyday existence; our thought, our action, our very being are decisively influenced by it. When we clearly realize this, when we live our daily life as a training hall of zazen and sanzen, then, truly, the “path *to* Zen” becomes the “path *of* Zen,” and the “path *of* Zen” becomes the “path *to* Zen.”