

ZEN BUDDHISM AND THE JAPANESE LOVE OF NATURE¹

PART ONE

1

The Japanese love of nature, I often think, owes much to the presence of Mt. Fuji in the middle part of the main island of Japan. Whenever I pass by the foot of the mountain as a passenger on the Tōkaidō line, I never fail to have a good view of it if the weather permits and admire its beautiful formation, always covered with spotless snow and “rising skywards like a white upturned folding-fan,” as was once described by a poet² of the Tokugawa period. The feeling it awakens does not seem to be all æsthetic in the line of the artistically beautiful. There is something about it spiritually pure and enhancing.

One³ of the earlier poets of Japan who sang of Mt. Fuji has this:

“To the beach of Tago
I come, and, behold,
In pure whiteness enveloped
There rises Mt. Fuji—
Snowing it seems above us!”

Saigyō’s poem has a mystical vein which was quoted in my essay on “Zen and Japanese Culture”:

“The wind-blown
Smoke of Mt. Fuji
Vanishing far away!
Who knows the destiny
Of my thought wafting with it?”

¹ Based on the lectures delivered at the Oriental Culture Summer School, 1935.

² Ishikawa Jōzan (1583–1672).

³ Yamabe-no-Akahito in the *Manyōshū*.

In Saigyō's day, in the twelfth century, Fuji must still have been a live volcano, at least emitting smoke now and then. Such a sight is always inspiring. To see a solitary drifting cloud over a high peak carries one's thought away from earthly affairs.

It was not the poets alone who were impressed with Fuji; even a warrior had a feeling for it expressing himself thus:

“Each time I see Fuji
It appears differently,
And I feel I am viewing it
Ever for the first time.”

“How shall I describe Fuji
To those who have not yet seen it?
It is never seen twice alike,
And I know no one way
Of describing the sight.”

The singer is Date Masamune, one of the best renowned generals, at the time of Hideyoshi and Iyeyasu. He was a dauntless fighter winning many fierce battles in which he personally took part. He was made the first feudal lord of the district of Sendai, which is in the north-eastern section of Japan. Who would imagine such an active soldier in the warlike days of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century finding room in his brain to appreciate nature and write poems on it? But such was actually the fact, in which we recognise how innate the love of nature is in the Japanese heart. Even Hideyoshi who rose from a farmer's family—in his days a class badly downtrodden and hopelessly ignorant—composed poems and was patron of the arts. His time is known as the Momoyama period in the history of Japanese art.

Fuji is now thoroughly identified with Japan. Whenever Japan is talked or written about, Fuji inevitably is mentioned. Justifiably so, because even the Land of the Rising Sun would surely lose much of her beauty if the

sacred mountain were erased off the map. The mountain must be actually seen in order to be impressed by it. Pictures and photographs, however artistically depicted, cannot do justice to the real view. As Masamune sings, it is never the same, it is ever changing in its features, as it is affected by atmospheric conditions, and also as it is viewed topographically from different angles and at different distances. To those who have never seen it, even Hiroshige fails to convey the real artistic value of the mountain, of which another poet sings, though from a different point of view from that of Masamune :

“In fair weather,
In cloudy weather,
Beautiful indeed
And never changing—
This peak of Fuji!”

In these prosaic days of ours, there is a craze among the young men of Japan for climbing high mountains just for the sake of climbing; and they call this “conquering the mountains.” What a desecration! This is a fashion no doubt imported from the West along with many others not always worth while learning. The idea of the so-called “conquest of nature” comes from Hellenism, I imagine, in which the earth is made to be man’s servant, and the winds and the sea are to obey him. Hebraism concurs with this view, too. In the East however this idea of subjecting nature to the commands or service of man according to his selfish desires has never been cherished. For nature to us has never been uncharitable, it is not a kind of enemy to be brought under man’s power. We of the Orient have never conceived nature in the form of an opposing power. On the contrary, nature has been our constant friend and companion who is to be absolutely trusted in spite of the frequent earthquakes assailing this land of ours. The idea of conquest is abhorrent. If we succeed in climbing a high mountain, why not say, “We have made a good friend of it”? To look

around for objects to conquer is not the Oriental attitude towards nature.

Yes, we climb Fuji, too, but the purpose is not to "conquer" it but to be impressed with its beauty, grandeur, and aloofness; it is also to worship a sublime morning sun rising gorgeously from behind the multicoloured clouds. This is not necessarily an act of sun-worship though there is nothing spiritually degrading in it. The sun is the great benefactor of all life on earth, and it is only proper for us human beings to approach a benefactor of any kind animate or inanimate with a deep feeling of gratitude and appreciation; for this feeling is granted to us only, the lower animals seem to be wanting in this delicate sentiment. Nowadays most high mountains of some popular interest in Japan are provided with a system of cable climbing, and the summit is easily reached. The materialistic utilitarianism of modern life demands all such contrivances, and perhaps there is no escape from them; for I myself often resort to them, for instance, when I go up to Hiei in Kyoto. Nevertheless my feeling revolts. The sight of the track lighted up by electricity at night reflects the modern spirit of sordid gain and pleasure-hunting. That Mt. Hiei in the northeast of the ancient capital of Japan, which Dengyō Daishi first consecrated with his Tendai monastery and other institutions of his order is to be so commercially ruthlessly treated, is no doubt a cause of grief for many a pious-hearted countryman. In the worshipful attitude towards nature there is a highly religious feeling which I should like to see preserved even in these days of science and economy.

2

If we want to see how much in love with nature the Japanese are, in spite of their modern assertion of the conquest-idea, let them build a study or rather a meditation room somewhere in the mountain woods. It is not much of a building so far as the notion of it goes in the Western manner

of measurement, for it will be no more than a four-and-half mat or six mat room (about ten or fifteen feet square). It is thatched with straw, it stands probably under a huge pine tree and protected by its outstretching branches. When viewed from a distance, the hut forms an insignificant part of the landscape, but it is seen as incorporated in it. It is by no means obtrusive, it belongs somehow to the general scheme of the view. As the master sits in it—where there are no cumbrous pieces of furniture, except perhaps just a hanging vase somewhere against one of the posts—as in this simple room the master sits, he finds that it is in no special way separated from the surroundings, from the general outside objects of nature encircling the hut. Among other plants a cluster of plantain-trees is growing near one of the oddly shaped windows; some of their broad leaves are irregularly torn by a recent storm, and how they look like a monk's worn-out robe all in tatters! And for this reason they appear more suggestive of the Zen poems of Kanzan. It is not only the formation of these leaves which are poetic, but the way they—in fact all plants—grow out of the earth that makes the observer feel that he too is living the life they are living. The floor of the meditation-room is not too far raised from the ground, just enough to keep the occupant from dampness and yet to feel the common source from which all life shoots forth.

A hut so constructed is an integral part of nature and the one who sits here is one of its objects like others. He is in no way different from the birds singing, the insects buzzing, the leaves swaying, and the waters murmuring—even from Mt. Fuji looming up on the other side of the bay. Here is a complete merging of nature and man and his work, illustrated in a practical manner. As I speak of Fuji again, I am reminded of a poem by Ōta Dōkwan, general of the fifteenth century. When he was asked by the Emperor Gotsuchimikado as to his residence, the general answered in verse:

“My hut is on the beach
 Lined with pine-trees,
 And the high peak of Fuji
 Looms up above the eaves.”

The emperor living in Kyoto never saw the mountain in actuality, hence the poet-soldier's special reference to it. And is it not interesting to notice here the way he describes his residence as a hut (*ihori* or *iho* in Japanese)? Being the warrior-general who first established his headquarters at the present site of Tokyo before Iyeyasu had his grand castle and residence, Ōta Dōkwan's must have been of no mean magnitude. Yet he describes it as an *ihori*, by which we generally understand an humble straw-thatched cottage occupied by a recluse. His poetical, nature-loving spirit revolted against anything highly savouring of human artificiality. His “hut” naturally fits in with a stretch of the pine-trees, the wave-washed beach, and the snow-crowned Fuji as has already been referred to. In this respect Dōkwan truly reflects the Japanese character whose predominant note is the love of nature.

A grandly-constructed building is too obtrusive an object to keep company with the surrounding objects of nature. From the practical point of view it highly serves its purpose, but there is no poetry in it. Any artificial construction with its object too prominently outstanding detracts much from its artistic value. It is only when it is in ruins and no more serves its original outspoken purpose that it is transformed into an object of nature and appreciated as such, though in this appreciation there is much that has to do with the historical signification of the ruins themselves.

3

Ōta Dōkwan the poet-general was fortunate to enjoy the mountain in white snow against the foaming waves of the blue ocean; but the hearts of the host and the hostess of the

dilapidated Ugetsu hut were torn between the moon and the autumnal rain drops, they were greatly puzzled and did not know what to do. Yet in this not knowing what to do with the hut—this time a really humble one—we recognise as much poetry as in the case of Dōkwan, perhaps more of it. The Japanese love of nature is graphically depicted here. The story in short runs as follows:

Saigyō, the wandering monk-poet of the early Kamakura period, came one evening to a solitary house and asked for a night's lodging. An old couple was living there, and the house looked quite dilapidated. The old man refused to respond to the monk's request on the ground that the accommodations were not good enough for him; while his wife seeing the traveller to be a Buddhist monk wished to give him a lodging. But the fact remained the same: the hut was in no proper condition to entertain a stranger. The reason was this: The old lady loved the moonlight so much that the leaking roof was left unrepaired according to her desire; but the old gentleman loved to listen to the rain drops beating against the roof, which would not take place, however, if the roof were left out of repair as it now was. Is the hut to be roofless for the moon? Or is it to be put in order for the rain? The autumn is already here. The finest moon season is approaching, and at the same time the autumnal showers are so enjoyable when one sits quietly listening to them. As long as this problem was not decided, it would be highly inhospitable on the part of the host and the hostess to take any stranger into their house, they thought.

“Our humble hut—

Is it to be thatched, or not to be thatched?”

Saigyō exclaimed: “Here is a good poem already half composed!” “If you understand poetry,” said the old couple, “complete the stanza, and we will give you a lodging, whatever it may be.” Saigyō immediately responded:

“Is the moonlight to leak?
 Are the showers to patter?
 Our thoughts are divided,
 And this humble hut—
 To be thatched, or not to be thatched?”

The monk-poet was now invited in. As the night advanced, the moon grew brighter illuminating the far-away fields and mountains and shedding its light even inside the hut. But, listen, showers are coming! Trees are rustling! No, it is the dead leaves that are beating against the house, sounding like the rain drops. A wind is up, but the sky is clear as ever. It is a shower of falling leaves in the moonlight.

“When the dead leaves are falling thick,
 As I sit quietly at night in my room,
 Difficult it is to judge
 Whether it is showering,
 Or whether it isn't showering.”¹

From the practical point of view rain is an inconvenient thing, but in Japanese literature and also in Chinese poetry so much reference is made to rain—especially to a gentle rain such as we have in Japan—as whispering to us the inner secrets of Reality.

Dōgen was the founder of the Sōtō branch of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Among other poems the following is the most celebrated of his, worth while quoting in this connection:

“How we go like clouds drifting through births and deaths!
 The path of ignorance and the path of enlightenment—we walk dreaming!
 There's one thing only still in my memory even after waking—
 The sound of a rainfall to which I listened one night while at my Fukakusa retreat!”

¹ By Minamoto-no-Yorizane.

Thoreau in his *Walden* gives an inkling of what is sometimes designated as cosmic consciousness or cosmic feeling which he cherished as he listened to a rainfall: "I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again."

4

Let us note here *en passant* how Oriental thoughts and feelings filtered into the American mind in the nineteenth century. The Transcendental movement started by the poets and philosophers of Concord is still continuing its work all over America. While the commercial and industrial expansion of America in the Far East is a significant event of the twentieth century, we must acknowledge at the same time that the Orient is contributing its quota to the intellectual wealth of the West—by which meaning America as well as Europe. Emerson wrote in 1844 in response to Carlyle's chiding of his other-worldliness in these remarkable terms:

“You sometimes charge me with I know not what sky-blue, sky-void idealism. As far as it is a partiality, I fear I may be more deeply infected than you think me. I have very joyful dreams which I cannot bring to paper, much less to any approach to practice, and I blame myself not at all for my reveries, but that they have not yet got possession of my house and barn. . . . I only worship Eternal Buddha in the retirements and intermissions of Brahma.”

Emerson's allusion to “sky-void idealism” is interesting. Apparently he means the Buddhist theory of *Śūnyatā* (emptiness or void). Although it is doubted how deeply he entered into the spirit of this theory which is the basic principle of the Buddhist thought and from which Zen starts on its mystic appreciation of nature, it is really wonderful to see the American mind as represented by the exponents of Transcendentalism even trying to probe into the abysmal darkness of the Oriental fantasy. I am now beginning to understand the meaning of the deep impressions which were made upon me while reading Emerson in my college days. I was not then studying the American philosopher but digging down into the recesses of my own thought which had been there ever since the awakening of Oriental consciousness. That was the reason why I had felt so familiar with him—I was indeed making acquaintance with myself then. The same can be said of Thoreau. Who would not recognise his poetic affinity with Saigyō or Bashō, and his perhaps unconscious indebtedness to the Oriental mode of feeling towards nature?

To finish this part of my lecture, let me introduce to you a Zen master whose remark on rain is well-known among the followers of Zen. It was raining one day, and Kyōsei the master said to a monk: “What is the sound outside the gate?” The monk answered: “The pattering of rain drops, master.” This was an honest answer, and the master knew it from the first. His verdict, however, was: “All beings are confused in mind, they are pursuing outside objects

always, not knowing where to find the real self." This is a hard hit. If the outside pattering is not to be called rain, what is it? what does it mean to pursue the outside objects, and to be confused in the notion of ego? Seechō comments:

"An empty hall, and the sound of a pattering rain!
Indeed, an unanswerable question even for an
accomplished master!"

The American Transcendentalists' attitude towards nature has no doubt a great mystical note, but the Zen masters go far beyond it and are really incomprehensible. But we will drop the rain for a while, for it is now time to see into the teaching of Zen.

PART TWO

1

To understand the cultural life of the Japanese people in all its different aspects, including their intense love of nature which we have seen just now, it is essential to delve into the secrets of Zen Buddhism. Without some knowledge of these the Japanese character is found difficult to appreciate. This does not of course mean that Zen is everything in the moulding of the character and culture of the Far Eastern people; but what I mean is that when Zen is grasped we can with some degree of ease get into the depths of their spiritual life with all its varied expressions.

This fact is recognised either consciously or unconsciously by scholars and by men of the street. The former recognise it in an analytical and critical manner worthy of their profession; whereas the latter appreciate it by actually living it, in the delight they feel in listening to tales and traditions traceable somehow to the teaching of Zen Buddhism.

That Zen has had a great deal to do in the building up of Japanese character and culture, is also strongly pointed out by foreign writers on Japan—among whom we may

mention the following. The late Sir Charles Eliot who most unfortunately passed away without personally revising his valuable book on *Japanese Buddhism* (p. 396) writes: "Zen has been a great power in the artistic, intellectual, and even the political life of the Far East. To a certain extent it has moulded the Japanese character, but it is also the expression of that character. No other form of Buddhism is so thoroughly Japanese." The one significant point in this remark by Sir Charles Eliot is that Zen is the expression of the Japanese character. Historically, Zen started in China about one thousand and five hundred years ago, and it was not until the latter part of the Sung dynasty (961-1280), i.e. in the earlier parts of the thirteenth century, that Zen was brought to Japan. Thus the history of Zen in Japan is far younger than that in China, but it was so adapted to the character of the Japanese people, especially in its moral and æsthetic aspects, that it has penetrated far more deeply and widely into the Japanese life than into the Chinese. Hence we see that the statement made by the author of *Japanese Buddhism* is not at all an exaggeration.

Sir George B. Sansom, another capable English writer on Japan, makes the following observation on Zen in his *Japan, A Short Cultural History of Japan* (p. 329): "The influence of this school (i.e. Zen Buddhism) upon Japan has been so subtle and pervading that it has become the essence of her finest culture. To follow its ramifications in thought and sentiment, in art, letters, and behaviour, would be to write exhaustively the most difficult and the most fascinating chapter of her spiritual history. . . ." While I may have occasion later to criticise this writer's view on the Japanese love of nature, the point he makes here is quite accurate, and I am in full agreement with him.

What are the characteristic features of Zen as distinguished from the other forms of Buddhism? It will be necessary to know them before we proceed to see the relationship between Zen and the Japanese love of nature.

Naturally, it is outside our scope of study here to enter in detail into what really and essentially constitutes Zen; for it is not only a deep subject but a very complex one, and its treatment will involve much time and labour allotted us at this meeting. Suffice it to make the following general statements concerning the teaching and discipline of Zen, which will give us enough knowledge to see into the character of the Japanese love of nature.

The general statements will then be made about the following four aspects of Zen; Religious, moral, æsthetic, and epistemological.

2

In the first place, Zen is not a mere ascetic discipline. When we see a monk living in an humble hut and sustaining himself on rice and pickles and potatoes, we may imagine him to be a world-flying recluse, whose principle of life is self-abnegation. True, there is a certain side in his life tending to this, as Zen teaches a form of detachment and self-control. But if we imagine there is nothing more in Zen, we entertain a very superficial view of it. The Zen insights go far deeper into the source of life, where Zen is truly religious. By this I mean Zen is in close touch with Reality; indeed Zen takes hold of it and lives it, and this is what constitutes the religious nature of Zen.

Those who are acquainted only with the Christian or some Indian Bhakti forms of religion may wonder where really is in Zen that which corresponds to their notion of God and their pious attitude towards him; Reality sounds to them too conceptual and philosophical and not enough devotional. In fact, Buddhism uses quite frequently more abstract terms than Reality, for instance, suchness or thusness (*tathatā*), emptiness or void (*śūnyatā*), limit of reality (*bhūtakoti*), etc. And this is sometimes what leads Christian critics and even Japanese scholars themselves to regard Zen as the teaching of a quietistic meditative life. But with

the followers of Zen these terms are not at all conceptual but quite real and direct, vital and energising. Because Reality or Suchness or Emptiness is taken hold of in the midst of concrete living facts of the universe, and not abstracted from them by means of thought.

Zen never leaves this world of facts. Zen always lives in the midst of realities. It is not for Zen to stand apart or keep itself away from a world of names and forms. If there is a God personal or impersonal, he or it must be with Zen and in Zen. As long as an objective world, whether religiously or philosophically or poetically considered, remains a threatening and annihilating power, standing against us, there is no Zen here. For Zen makes "an humble blade of grass act as the Buddha-body sixteen feet high, and, conversely, the Buddha-body sixteen feet high act as an humble blade of grass." Zen holds the whole universe, as it were, in its palm. This is the religion of Zen.

One may think that Zen is a form of Pantheism. Apparently it is, and Buddhists themselves sometimes ignorantly subscribe to this view. But if this is taken as truly characterising the essence of Zen, it altogether misses the point; for Zen is most decidedly not pantheistic in the same measure as Christianity is not. Read this dialogue between Ummon (Yün-mên) and his disciple.

Monk: "What is the Pure Body of the Dharma?"

Master: "The hedgegrove."

Monk: "What is the behaviour of the one who thus understands?"

Master: "He is a golden-haired lion."

When God is the hedgegrove dividing the monastery grounds from the neighbouring farms, there is perhaps a taint of Pantheism, we may say. But what about the golden-haired lion? The animal is not a manifestation of anything else, he is supreme as he is, he is autonomous, he is king of the beasts, he is complete as he is. There is no idea of manifestation suggested here of anything in any form.

“The golden-haired lion,” as it stands in Ummon’s statement, may not be quite intelligible, even with this short explanatory comment, to those who are not used to the Zen way of expression. To help them I may quote another Zen *mondō*:

Monk: I understand that when a lion seizes upon his opponent whether it is a hare, or an elephant, he makes an exhaustive use of his power; Pray tell me what is this power.

Master: The spirit of sincerity (literally the power of not-deceiving).¹

Sincerity, that is, not-deceiving means “putting forth one’s whole being” technically known as “the whole being in action” (*zentai sayū*), in which nothing is kept in reserve, nothing is expressed under disguise, nothing goes to waste. When a person lives like this, he is said to be a golden-haired lion; he is the symbol of virility, sincerity, whole-heartedness; he is divinely human; he is not a manifestation but Reality itself, for he has nothing behind him, he is “the whole truth,” “the very thing.”

This Zen way of understanding life and the world must be distinctly comprehended, as it is important when later the fact is demonstrated that there is nothing of symbolism in the Japanese love of nature.

If it is necessary to apply to Zen some form of classification, Zen may be pronounced to be a polytheism, although this “many” (*polus*) is to be taken as corresponding to the “sands of the Gangā” (*gāṅgānadīwālukā*). Not a few thousands of gods, but hundreds of thousands of kotis of gods. In Zen each individual is an absolute entity, and as such it is related to all the other individuals, and this nexus of infinite relationships is made possible in the realm of Emptiness because they all find their being here even as they are, that is, as individual realities. This may be difficult to grasp for those who are not trained in the Buddhist way of thinking. But I have here no time to stop and explain

¹ *The Transmission of the Lamp*, fas., 27.

the whole system from its beginning, and I must hurry on to the main subject.

In short, Zen has its own way of handling Reality, and this Zen way of handling Reality constitutes the inner meaning of the Japanese love of nature. For the Japanese love of nature is not to be understood in the sense as is ordinarily understood. This will be made clearer as we proceed.

3

Zen is ascetic when it plays the rôle of a moral discipline in the sense that it aims at simplicity in all its forms. It has something of Stoicism in which the Samurai class of Japan has been reared. The simplicity and frugality of the Kamakura life under the Hōjō régime in the thirteenth century no doubt owes its initiate motives to the influence of Zen. The moral courage and indomitable spirit, also, of Hōjō Tokimune without whom the history of Japan might probably have taken quite a different course were fostered by the teaching of Zen under the Chinese masters who, by the invitation of the Hōjō government, found their shelter then in Japan. Tokiyori, father of Tokimune, was also a great Zen devotee, and it was indeed under his direction that Tokimune visited the Zen monasteries where he went through a moral and spiritual training, making himself thereby one of the greatest figures in the annals of Japan.

In Zen we find Chinese pragmatism solidly welded with Indian metaphysics full of high-soaring speculations. Without this perfect welding of the two highest forms of Oriental culture it was very unlikely for Zen to have found such a congenial and therefore fruitful soil to grow as in Japan. And then it came to Japan in the most opportune time in the history of the country because it was then that the old schools of Buddhism in Nara and Kyoto had been proving inefficient to effect the ushering of a new spiritual era. It was most fortunate for Zen that it found in the very beginning

of its career in Japan such able disciples and patrons as it encountered in the persons of Hōjō Tokiyori and Hōjō Tokimune. The time will come before long to all the Japanese as the rising nation in the Far East when the full significance of the Kamakura era with Tokimune as one of its remarkable representatives and also of Zen as one of its most efficient moulding agencies of the Japanese character then will be more fully and vitally appreciated than ever before. For most Japanese are yet far from comprehending the spiritual meaning of the Kamakura period in the light of their really national history.

What is the most specific characteristic of Zen asceticism in connection with the Japanese love of nature? It consists in paying nature the fullest respect it deserves. By this it is meant that we treat nature not as an object to conquer and be turned into our human service wantonly, but as a friend, as a fellow-being who is destined like ourselves some day for Buddhahood. Zen wants us to meet nature as a friendly, well-meaning agent whose inner being is thoroughly like our own and always ready to work in accord with our legitimate aspirations. Nature is never our enemy who always stands against us in a threatening attitude; it is not a power which will crush us if we do not crush it or bind it into our service.

Zen asceticism consists not necessarily in curbing or destroying our desires and instincts but in respecting nature and not violating it, whether this nature be our own nature or that of the objective world. Self-mortification is not the proper attitude we may take towards ourselves, nor is selfish utilisation the justifiable idea we may conceive towards nature in any sense. Therefore, Zen asceticism is not at all in sympathy with the modern materialistic trends so much in evidence in our science, industrialism, commercialism, and many other thought-movements going on at present all over the world.

Zen purposes to respect nature, to love nature, and to

live its own life; Zen recognises that our nature is one with objective nature though not in the mathematical sense, but in the sense that nature lives in us and we in nature. For this reason, Zen asceticism advocates simplicity, frugality, straightforwardness, virility, making no attempt to utilise nature for one's selfish purposes.

Asceticism, some are afraid, lowers the standard of living. But, to speak candidly, the losing of the soul is more than the gaining of the world. Are we not constantly engaged in warlike preparations everywhere in order to raise or keep up the precious standard of living? If this state of affairs continues there is absolutely no doubt of our finally destroying one another, not only individually, but internationally. Instead of raising the so-called standard of living, will it not be far, far better to elevate the quality of living? This is a truism, but in no time of history truism has been more in need of being loudly declared than in these days of greed, jealousy, and iniquity. We followers of Zen ought to stand strongly for the asceticism it teaches.

4

The æsthetic aspect of Zen teaching is closely related to Zen asceticism in that there is in both the absence of selfhood and the merging of subject and object in one absolute Emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This is a strange saying, but being the ground teaching of Zen, it is reiterated everywhere in Zen literature. To explain this is a great philosophical task, full of intellectual pitfalls. Not only does it require arduous and sustained thinking, but very frequently this very thinking is apt to lead one to grave misconceptions as to the true meaning of Zen experience. Therefore, as has already been hinted at, Zen avoids making abstract statements and conceptual reasonings; and its literature is almost nothing but an interminable string of constant citations of the so-called "anecdotes" or "incidents" (*innen* in Japanese) or "questions and answers" (known as *mondō*). To those who

have not been initiated into its mystery, it is a wild unapproachable territory filled with briars and brambles. The Zen masters, however, are not yielding; they insist on having their own way of expressing themselves; they think in this respect they know best, and they are in the right because the nature of their experience is determinative as regards their method of communication or demonstration. If I cite the following *mondō* to illustrate Zen æstheticism, I hope you will not take me as purposely mystifying my position.

While Rikkō,¹ a high government officer of the T'ang dynasty, had a talk with his Zen master Nansen,² the officer quoted Sōjō,³ a noted monk-scholar of an earlier dynasty, saying:

“‘Heaven and earth, with me, are of the same root:
The ten-thousand things, with me, are of one substance’;”

and continued, “Is this not a most remarkable statement?”

Nansen pointing at the flowering plant in the garden called the attention of the visitor and said:

“People of the world look at these flowers as if they were in a dream.”

This “story” or *mondō* eloquently describes the æsthetic attitude of Zen towards objects of nature. Most people do not really know how to look at the flower; for one thing they stand away from it; they never grasp the spirit of it; as they have no firm hold of it, they are as if dreaming of a flower. The one who beholds is separated from the object which is beheld; there is an impassable gap between the two; and it is impossible for the beholder to come in touch innerly with his object. Here is no grasping of actual facts as we face them. If heaven and earth with all its manifold objects between them issue from the one root from which you and I also come, this root must be firmly seized upon so that

¹ 陸耳大夫, Lu-kōng.

² 南泉普願, Nan-chüan (748-834).

³ 僧肇, Sōng-chao (384-414).

there is an actual experience of it; for it is in this experience that Nansen's flower in its natural beauty appealed to his æsthetic sense. The so-called Japanese love of nature becomes related to Zen when we come to this experience of nature-appreciation, which is nature-living.

Here we must remember that the experience of mere oneness is not enough for the real appreciation of nature. This no doubt gives a philosophical foundation to the sentimentalism of the nature-loving Japanese, who are thus helped to enter deeply into the secrets of their own æsthetic consciousness. Sentimentalism to that extent is purified, one may say. But the feeling of love is possible in a world of multiplicity. Nansen's remark falls flat where there is only sameness. It is true that people of the world are dreaming because of their not seeing into the real foundation of existence. The balancing of unity and multiplicity or, better, the merging of oneself with others as in the philosophy of the Avatamsaka is absolutely necessary to the æsthetic understanding of nature.

Tennyson says:

“Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.”

The beauty of the little flower in the crannied wall is really appreciated only when it is referred to the ultimate reason of all things. But it goes without saying that this is not to be done in a merely philosophical and conceptual way but in the way Zen proposes to accomplish. Not in a pantheistic way, nor in a quietistic way, but in the “living” way as has been done by Nansen and his followers. To do this and truly to appreciate Nansen one must first greet Rikkō and be friendly with him; for it is in this way only that one can feel the force of the remark made by Nansen. The genuine beauty of the flower as he saw it is for the first time reflected in one's soul-mirror.

The æsthetical appreciation of nature always involves

something religious. And by being "religious" I mean being "superworldly," going beyond the world of relativity where we are bound to encounter oppositions and limitations. The oppositions and limitations which confront every movement of ours, physical and psychological, put also a stop to the free overflowing of our æsthetical feeling towards its objects. Beauty is felt when there is freedom of motion and also freedom of expression. Beauty is not in form, but in the meaning it expresses and this meaning is felt when the observing subject throws his whole being into the bearer of the meaning and moves along with it. This is possible only when he lives in a "superworld" where no mutually excluding oppositions take place, or, rather, when the mutually excluding oppositions of which we are always too conscious in this world of multiplicities are taken up even as they are into something of a higher order than they. Æstheticism now merges into religion.

Sir George Sansom makes this comment concerning the Zen love of nature (*Japan, A Short Cultural History*, p. 385): "The Zen artists and the Zen poets—and it is often hard to say where their poetry ends and their painting begins—feel no antithesis between man and nature, and are conscious even of an identity rather than a kinship. What interests them is not the restless movement on the surface of life, but (as Professor Anesaki puts it) the eternal tranquillity seen through and behind change." This is not at all Zen. Both Professor Anesaki and Sir George Sansom fail to grasp the true Zen attitude towards nature. It is not an experience of identification, nor is it the feeling of the "eternal tranquillity" which the Zen poets and the Zen artists have when they stand before objects of nature. As long as they are on this stage of realisation, they are still outside the gate of Zen, they are not at home with it. They are dreaming. The "eternal tranquillity" they dream of is not Zen. If the poets and the artists linger with that which is felt "through and behind change," they are still walking

hand in hand with Rikkō and Sōjō, they are far, far from being friends of Nansen. The real flower is enjoyed only when the poet and artist lives with it, in it; and when even a sense of identity is no more here, much less the "eternal tranquillity."

This I wish to emphasise here that Zen does not see any such thing as is designated "the restless movement on the surface of life." For life is one integral and indivisible whole which has neither surface nor interior; hence no "restless movement" which can be separated from life itself. As was explained in the case of Ummon's "golden-haired lion," life moves in its complete oneness whether restlessly or serenely as you may conceive it; your interpretation does not alter the fact. Zen takes hold of life in its wholeness and moves "restlessly" with it or stays quietly with it. Wherever there is at all any sign of life, there is Zen. When however the "eternal tranquillity" is abstracted from "the restless movement on the surface of life," it sinks into death, and there is no more of its "surface" either. The tranquillity of Zen is in the midst of the "boiling oil," the surging waves, and in the flames enveloping the god Acala.

Kanzan (Han-shan) was one of the most reputed poet-lunatics of the T'ang dynasty—Zen often produces such "lunatics"—and one of his poems reads:

"My mind is like the autumnal moon;
And how clear and transparent the deep pool!
No comparison, however, in any form is possible;
It is altogether beyond description."

Superficially, this poem may suggest the idea of tranquillity or serenity. The autumnal moon is serene and its light uniformly pervading the fields and rivers and mountains may make us think of the oneness of things. But this is where Kanzan hesitates to draw any form of comparison between his feeling and things of this world. The reason is sure to take the pointing finger for the moon as is frequently done by our worthy critics. To tell the truth, there

is here not the remotest hint at tranquillity or serenity, nor of the identity of nature and man. If there is anything suggested here, it is the idea of utmost transparency which the poet feels through and through. He is entirely lifted out of his bodily existence, including both his objective world and his subjective mind. He has no such interfering mediums inside and outside. He is thoroughly pure, and from this position of absolute purity or transparency he looks out to a world of multiplicity so called. He sees flowers and mountains and ten thousand other things, and will pronounce them beautiful and satisfying. "The restless movements" are appreciated just as much as "the eternal tranquillity." It goes entirely against the spirit of Zen and the Japanese idea of love of nature to imagine that the Japanese Zen poets and artists avoid the restlessness of a world of multiplicity in order to get into the eternal tranquillity of abstract ideas. Let us first get an experience of transparency, and we are able to love nature and its multifarious objects though not dualistically. As long as we harbour conceptual illusions arising from the separation of subject and object as final, the transparency is obscured, and our love of nature is contaminated with dualism and sophistry.

To quote another poet of Zen, this time a Japanese and the founder of a great Zen monastery called Eigenji in the province of Ōmi—his name is Jakushitsu (1290–1367):

“The wind stirs the flying waterfall and sends in a
refreshing music;
The moon is risen over the opposite peak and the
bamboo-shadows are cast over my paper
window:
As I grow older, the mountain retreat appeals all
the more strongly to my feeling;
Even when I am buried, after death, underneath
the rock, my bones will be as thoroughly trans-
parent as ever.”

Some readers may be tempted to read into this poem a sense of solitude or quietness, but that this altogether misses the point is apparent to those who at all know what Zen is. Unless the Zen artist is saturated with the feeling graphically expressed here by Jakushitsu, he cannot expect to understand nature, nor can he truly love nature. Transparency is the keynote to the Zen understanding of nature, and it is from this that its love of nature starts. When people say that Zen has given a philosophical and religious foundation to the Japanese love of nature, this Zen attitude or feeling must be taken fully into consideration. When the author of *Japan* surmises that "They (aristocrats, monks, and artists) were moved by a belief that all nature is permeated by one spirit," and that "it was the aim of the Zen practitioner in particular, by purging his mind of egotistic commotions, to reach a tranquil, intuitive realisation of his identity with the universe" (*op. cit.*, pp. 384-5), he ignores the part Zen has really contributed to the Japanese æsthetic appreciation of nature. He cannot shake off the idea of "eternal tranquillity" or of a spiritual identity between subject and object.

The idea of "spiritual identity" by which our egoistic commotions are kept quiet and in which eternal tranquillity is experienced is an alluring idea. Most students of Oriental culture and philosophy grasp at it as giving them the key to the inscrutable psychology of the Eastern peoples. But this is the Western mind trying to solve the mystery in its own way—in fact they cannot do anything else. As far as we Japanese are concerned, we are unable to accept without comment this interpretation offered by the Western critics. Plainly speaking, Zen does not acknowledge "one spirit" permeating all nature, nor does it attempt to realise identity by purging its mind of "egotistic commotions." According to the author of this statement, the grasping of "one spirit" is evidently the realisation of identity which is left behind when the purgation of egotism is effected. While it is dif-

difficult to refute this idea convincingly as long as we are arguing along the logical line of Yes and No, I will try to make my point clearer in the following paragraphs.

5

It is now necessary to say something about Zen epistemology. The term may sound too philosophical, but my object here is to make some plain statements about the facts of Zen intuition. What Zen is most anxious to do in its own characterisation is to reject conceptual mediumship of any kind. Any medium that is set up before Zen in its attempt to understand the facts of experience, is sure to obscure the nature of the latter. Instead of clarifying or simplifying the situation, the presence of a third party always ends in creating complexities and obscurations. Zen therefore abhors medium. It advises its followers to have a direct dealing with their objects, whatever they may be. We often speak of identification in our Zen discipline, but this word is not exact. Because identification presupposes original opposition of two terms, subject and object, but the truth is that from the very first there are no two opposing terms whose identification is to be achieved by Zen. It is better to say that there has never been any separation between subject and object, and that all the discrimination and separation we have or rather make is a later creation, though the conception of time is not to be interposed here. The aim of Zen is thus to restore the experience of original inseparability, which means, expressed in other words, to return to the original state of purity and transparency. This is the reason why conceptual discrimination is discredited in Zen. Followers of identity and tranquillity are to be given the warning: they are ridden by concepts; let them rise to facts and live in and with them.

Chōsa¹ of the T'ang dynasty one day came back from a walk in the mountains. When he reached the monastery

¹ 長沙, disciple of Nansen.

gate, the head-monk asked:

“Where have you been all this time?”

Replied the master: “I am just back from my mountain walk.”

The monk pursued: “Where in the mountains?”

“I first went out in the field scented with grasses, and then walked home watching the flowers fall.”

Is there any expression here suggestive of “tranquillity that is behind and through change”? or of identity that is perceptible between Chōsa and the grasses and flowers among which he walked up and down?

Chōsa one evening was enjoying the moonlight with his friend Kyōzan.¹ Kyōzan said pointing at the moon: “Each person without exception has this, only that he fails to use it.” [Is this a suggestion of “one spirit” or of “tranquillity”?]

Chōsa said: “Just as you say; and may I ask you to use it?” [As long as “identity” or “tranquillity” blinds your eyesight, how can you “use” it?]

Kyōzan: “Let me see how you use it.” [Did he then enter into Nirvana eternally serene?]

Chōsa then kicked his brother-monk down to the ground. Kyōzan quietly rising remarked: “O Brother-monk, you are indeed like a tiger.” [When this tiger like the golden-haired lion roars, one ghostly “spirit” so valued by the critics vanishes, and “tranquillity” is no more.]

A strange, yet lively scene enacted by the Zen poets, who were supposed to be enjoying the serenity of a moonlight eve, makes us pause and think about the signification of Zen in regard to its relation to the Japanese love of nature. What is really here that stirs up the two apparently meditative and nature-loving monks?

The epistemology of Zen is, therefore, not to resort to the mediumship of concepts. If you want to understand Zen, understand it right away without deliberation, without

¹ 仰山, Yang-shan (814-890), disciple of Kuei-shan.

turning your head this way or that. For while you are doing this, the object you have been seeking for is no more there. This doctrine of immediate grasping is characteristic of Zen. If the Greeks taught us how to reason and Christianity what to believe, it is Zen that teaches us to go beyond logic and not to tarry even when we come up against "the things which are not seen." For the Zen point of view is to find an absolute point where no dualism in whatever form obtains. Logic starts from the division of subject and object, and belief distinguishes between what is seen and what is not seen. The Western mode of thinking can never do away with this eternal dilemma, this or that, reason or faith, man or God, etc. With Zen all these are swept aside as something veiling our insight into the nature of life and reality. Zen leads us into a realm of Emptiness or Void where no conceptualism prevails, where rootless trees grow and a most refreshing breeze sweeps all over the ground.

From this short characterisation of Zen we can see what Zen's attitude towards nature is. It is not a sense of identity, nor of tranquillity that Zen sees and loves in nature. Nature is always in motion, never at a standstill; if nature is to be loved, it must be caught while moving and thus given estimate as regards its æsthetic value. To seek tranquillity is to kill nature, to stop its pulsation, and to embrace the dead corpse that is left behind. Advocates of tranquillity are worshippers of abstraction and death. There is nothing in this to love. Identity is also a static condition and decidedly associated with death. When we are dead, we return to the dust where we started, we are then identified with the earth. Identification is not the thing highly to covet. Let us destroy all such artificial barriers we put up between nature and ourselves, for it is only when they are removed that we see into the living heart of nature and live with it—which is the real meaning of love. For this, therefore, the clearing off of all conceptual scaffolds is imperative. When Zen speaks of transparency, it means this clearing off, this

thorough wiping of the surface of the mind-mirror. But from the point of fact, the mirror has never been obscured, and no need has ever been felt for wiping it clean; but because of such notions as identity, tranquillity, one spirit, egotistic commotions, and so on, we are compelled to set up a general sweeping operation. Hence my apologetics, so to speak.

After these interpretations, some may declare Zen to be a form of nature-mysticism, a philosophical intuitionism, and a religion advocating stoical simplicity and austerity. Whatever this is, Zen gives us a most comprehensive outlook of the world, because the realm of Zen extends to the very limits of thousands of kotis of chiliocosms, and even beyond them all. Zen has a most penetrating insight into Reality, because it sounds the very depths of all existence. Zen knows a most thoroughgoing way of appreciating the genuinely beautiful, because it lives in the body of the beautiful itself, known as the golden-coloured Buddha-body with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of super-humanity. With these as the background the Japanese love of nature unfolds itself as it comes in contact with its objects.

PART THREE

1

The love of nature the Japanese people originally had was no doubt their innate æsthetic sense for things beautiful; but the appreciation of the beautiful is at bottom religious, for without being religious no one can detect and enjoy what is genuinely beautiful. And there is no denying that Zen gave an immense impetus to the Japanese native feeling for nature, not only by sharpening it to the highest degree of sensitiveness but by giving to it a metaphysical and religious background. If in the beginning the Japanese were simply naively attracted to the beautiful which they saw about them; and again if they regarded all things in nature as

uniformly animated with life, after the manner of primitive people, who looked upon things even non-sentient, from their animistic point of view; the æsthetic and religious sensitiveness of the Japanese was further given nourishing food as they cultivated themselves in the Zen teaching of Buddhism. And this nourishment came to them in the form of an exalting moral discipline and of a highly spiritual intuition.

That is to say, the snow-crowned peak of Fuji is now seen as rising from the background of Emptiness; the pine-trees ornamenting the monastery grounds are ever fresh and green because they are "rootless" and "shadowless"; the rain-drops pattering on the roof of my humble hut transmit the echo of the ancient days when Secchō and Kyōsei, Saigyō and Dōgen had their comment on their sound. The moonlight that "leaked" into the empty room of Kanzan and of the old couple in the Ugetsu house will also visit this evening your hotel with all its modern accommodations. You may say, the universe remains ever the same with Zen or with no Zen. But my solemn proclamation is that a new universe is created every moment Zen looks out from its straw-thatched four-and-half mat retreat. This may sound too mystical, but without a full appreciation of it not a page of the history of Japanese poetry, Japanese arts, and Japanese handicrafts would have been written. Not only the history of the arts, but the history of the Japanese moral and spiritual life would lose its deeper signification, when detached from the Zen way of interpreting life and the world. Otherwise, it would have been perhaps impossible for the Japanese people to stand against the unprecedented onslaught of modern science, machine, and commercial industrialism.

Let me illustrate in the following the spirit of Zen as was lived by Ryōkwan (1758-1831), a Buddhist monk who passed his unpretentious life in the province of Echigo early in the nineteenth century. His having been a monk does not weaken as one may suppose the strength of my statement that Zen has deeply entered into the life of the Japanese

people; for all those who came to associate with him, that is, the entire community in which he moved approved of his life and saw in it something of permanent worth. To judge the direction of a wind it is enough to look at a single blade of grass. When we know one Ryōkwan, we know hundreds of thousands of Ryōkwans in Japanese hearts.

2

Ryōkwan was a Zen monk belonging to the Sōtō school.¹ His hut was built in the northern part of this country facing the Sea of Japan. From the ordinary worldly point of view he was a "big fool" and a lunatic, he lacked what is known as common sense of which we people of the world have too much. But he was very much liked and respected by his neighbours, and quarrels and other annoying incidents which sometimes darken our daily life were cleared off if he happened to appear among them. He was an accomplished poet in Chinese and Japanese and also a great calligrapher. Villagers and townspeople pursued him for his autographs, which he found very hard to refuse, for they devised many contrivances to get from him what they wanted.

I said he was a lunatic and "a great fool"—this latter being his own literary name. But he had a most sensitive heart for all things human and natural. Indeed he was love incarnate—a manifestation of Kwannon Bosatsu.² His solitary retreat on a mountain away from the village was once (or twice?) broken into by a burglar. The burglar must have been a complete stranger to this neighbourhood, otherwise he would never have singled out this poor man's shelter for his plunder. Naturally there was nothing to carry away. He was greatly disappointed. Seeing this Ryōkwan's heart was touched and he gave him the clothes he had on. The burglar hastily left him with the outside *amado* open, from which a bright moon poured its light into

¹ Founded by Dōgen in the Kamakura era (1185-1392).

² The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Ryōkwan's room. The poet in him asserted himself:

“A burglar failing to carry off the moon
It shines in from the window!
[How transcendently bright it looks!]”

Another poem by him reads:

“Where, I wonder, is he passing the night.
This cold freezing night
When 'tis even beginning to storm,—
A lonely wayfarer in a world of darkness!”

This is also said to have been composed by the recluse-lover of humanity after another unwelcome visit by a stranger. The visited himself must also have suffered the freezing night in the lonely hut. Sure enough, he came the following morning to his parental home with a flowing nose and shivering with cold to ask for bedding.

He was also good to beggars. On his way home from his own begging tour, he was ready to give up everything he had to any unfortunate fellow-being he might happen to meet. The following must have been composed on one of such occasions:

“If my robe dyed in black
Were wide and broad,
I would cover all the poor people of the world
Under my sleeves.”

He had very few desires as far as he was concerned. When one of the feudal lords in the neighbouring districts once visited his hut in order to take him along to his own town, and perhaps build a temple for his shelter and religious practice, this beggar-poet remained silent for a while. When politely pressed for an answer, he wrote this:

“As much fuel as I need,
Is supplied by the Wind—
These fallen leaves I gather!”¹

So blessed in poverty the Zen poet was a great trouba-

¹ This means that all his wants are supplied by the benevolent hands of Nature and he has no desire to forfeit his freedom in the service of a feudal lord.

dour of poverty. His poems, especially in Chinese, are full of these sentiments. He must have been an ardent admirer of Kanzan (Han-shan) of the T'ang dynasty, for his poems remind us at once of the highly spiritual atmosphere in which Kanzan moved. Here is one singing of poverty :

“In tatters, in tatters,
 Again in tatters—this my life:
 For food I pick herbs on the roadside,
 For a hut, straws and bamboos are gathered.
 In the moonlight I sit meditating all night
 long,
 Looking at the flowers I forget to return
 home—
 This idiotic life I have come to adopt
 Ever since my association with the Buddhist
 Brotherhood.”

3

What lessons did he learn at the Buddhist Brotherhood?
 Some of them are here :

“The past is already past,
 The future is not yet here,
 The present never abides;
 Things are constantly changing with nothing
 to depend upon;
 So many names and words confusingly self-
 created—
 What is the use of wasting your life thus idly
 all day?
 Do not retain your time-worn views,
 Nor pursue your newly-fashioned imagina-
 tions:
 Sincerely and whole-heartedly make inquiries
 and also reflect within yourself;
 Inquiring and reflecting, reflecting and in-
 quiring,
 Until the moment comes when no further in-
 quires are possible;
 For this is the time when you will realise that

all your past has been in the wrong.”

Another one runs thus:

“Whence is my life?
Whither does it depart?
I sit alone in my hut,
And meditate quietly yet earnestly;
With all my thinking I know no whence,
Nor do I come to any whither:
So is with my present,
Eternally changing—all in Emptiness!
In this Emptiness is the Ego for a while,
With its yeas and nays;
I know not just where to set them up,
I follow my karma as it moves, with perfect
contentment.”

What is the practical outcome of this philosophy of “not knowing anything” and leaving karma, whatever this may be, to its own working? In short what is Ryōkwan’s life of absolute passivity or dependence or emptiness?

“This solitary hut named Gogo-an
Resembles a hanging bell in shape;
It stands surrounded by the cryptomerias
growing thick,
While a few poems decorate the inside walls;
The cooking pot is sometimes found covered
with dust,
And smoke often fails to issue from the
hearth;
The lonely visitor is an old man of the Eastern
Village,
Who sometimes knocks at the door when the
moon is bright.”

“One autumnal eve I was wakeful,
Took a staff, and went out of doors;
The crickets were singing under the ancient
tiles,
The dead leaves were fast falling off the
shivering trees;
Far ’way the stream was heard murmuring.

The moon was slow to rise above the high
 peak:
 All conspired to draw me on to a deep medita-
 tion.
 And it was sometime before I found my robe
 heavily wet with dew."

+

This apostle of poverty and solitude—or would it be better to call him a grand nature-mystic, had a very warm heart for nature and all objects of nature, plants and animals. As he makes allusions in his poems to a bamboo grove surrounding his hut, many bamboo-shoots must have been growing there. He liked them very much I suppose for food, but chiefly for their growing straight, for their being freshly green all the year round. Their roots are firmly set in the ground, while the trunk is hollow symbolising the virtue of emptiness. These Ryōkwan liked in the bamboo. Once it is said that a young growing shoot began to break through the floor of his closet. He took interest in it. At last, seeing it grow too tall for the enclosure, he started to remove the roof for it. He tried to burn the roof with a candle. Did he think it the easiest way to accomplish the work? Perhaps he had no such design in his mind, he simply wanted to give room to the young plant, and seeing the candle most available at the time he began the work. But unfortunately the roof caught fire more extensively than was first designed, and the whole structure, together with the bamboo itself I believe, was burned down. Height of stupidity indeed, this work of burning the roof for the sake of a bamboo-shoot—I mean from our practical point of view. But I feel like condoning or rather admiring his stupidity. There is something so genuine, or, shall I say, so divine in his feeling for the bamboo-shoot. There is something like this in every genuine act of love. We as human beings so given up to all kinds of practical and sordid considerations

are unable to follow every pure impulse of kindly feeling. How often do we deliberately suppress or repress the impulse! In us the impulse may not always be so thoroughly undefiled as in the case with our poet-lunatic, and this may be our conscious reason for repression or suppression. If so, our life ought to be purgated of all impurities before we are spiritually qualified to criticise Ryōkwan.

Ryōkwan's love for pine-trees appears in his poems. He does not seem to have been much of a talker or writer; everything that went through his sensitive mind was caught up in his poems which took various forms according to his mood at the time, either in Chinese, or in classical Japanese of thirty-one syllables, or in the shorter form of seventeen syllables, or in the style of folk-song, or in the *Manyō* style of many syllables. He was quite an expert in all these compositions, but no conventional stickler for literary rules, for he frequently ignored them. The other favourite form in which he gave expression to his inner life was calligraphy. In this he was really great. But as his calligraphic works are not easily accessible, we must confine ourselves to his literary products to read into his inward sentiments as they moved him. He sings of an old solitary pine-tree in front of a temple (?) building at Kugami:

“At Kugami,
 In front of the Otono,
 There stands a solitary pine-tree,
 Surely of many a generation;
 How divinely dignified
 It stands there!
 In the morning,
 I pass by it;
 In the evening
 I stand underneath it,
 And standing I gaze,
 Never tired,
 At this solitary pine!”

There must have been something terribly fascinating

about this ancient tree. In fact every old tree of any sort inspires a beholder with a mystic feeling which leads him to a far-away world of timeless eternity.

There was another pine-tree at Iwamuro which deeply stirred his feeling of pity. The tree must have been a younger one, with no branches stately outstretching. It was raining hard and Ryōkwan saw it all drenched :

“At Iwamuro,
 In the middle of the field
 A solitary pine stands;
 How I pity this solitary pine,
 Standing all alone
 Thoroughly drenched in showers;
 If it were a human being
 I would give him a rain-coat
 I would help him with a rain-hat;
 Pitiful indeed this solitary tree!”

5

This lover of trees was also a great friend of the louse, perhaps also of the flea, of the mosquito, etc. He had a tender human feeling for all beings. One interesting, though not quite engaging, incident recorded of him is his care for the louse. The story is illustrative of his general attitude towards other forms of life. He was often seen in one of the early warm winter days to give to the lice a sun bath and exercise in the air. By taking them out one by one from his underwear on to sheets of paper he exposed them in the sun. Before it begins to be too cool in the afternoon, they will be picked up and taken back into his own *fudokoro*, saying :

“O lice, lice,
 If you were the insects
 Singing in the autumn fields,
 My chest (*fudokoro*) would really be
 For you the Musashino prairie.”

The subject may not be very edifying I am afraid, but his genuine, unadulterated love for such creatures has some-

thing tenderly touching. Our modern idea of hygienic cleanliness has much to say about harbouring beings of this class, but it was not very long ago I am told that in England gentlemen and ladies of the higher classes were not exempt from vermin, that the wearing of wigs over their shaven heads was partly due to its annoying presence, and that even these wigs were often full of nits. One scientist notes that "even long into the eighteenth century, lice were regarded as necessities."¹ Further, he notes that George Washington copied in his fourteenth year a paragraph on "Rules of Civility" which contains the following remarkable statements: "Kill no vermin, as fleas, lice, ties, etc. in the sight of others, if you see any filth or thick spittle, put your foot dexterously upon it: if it be upon the cloths of your companions, put it off privately, and if it be upon your own cloths, return thanks to him who puts it off."²

He was a great lover of children as might be expected of such a character as Ryōkwan who was himself a child. He liked to play with them, he played hide-and-seek, he played *temari* ("hand-ball") too. One evening it was his turn to hide, and he hid himself well under a straw-stack in the field. It was growing darker and the children not being able to locate him left the field. Early in the following morning a farmer came and had to remove the straw-stack to begin his work. Finding Ryōkwan there, he exclaimed, "O Ryōkwan sama, what are you doing here?" The poet-lunatic answered, "Hush! don't talk so aloud! The children will find me." Did he wait for the children all night under the straw? Did it never occur to him that the young ones were just as deceiving and untrustworthy as the grown-ups? But to reason like this is our human way in this world of unrealities, his perhaps followed another order of reasoning, it was that of burning the roof to save the bamboo-shoot. It was his simplicity that made him spend the whole night in

¹ Dr. Hans Zinsser in *The Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1935.

² *Ibid.*

the open field with the controlling idea to hide from his young, guileless, but occasionally mischievous, friends. The story being somewhat too extreme its genuineness may be suspected, but the fact that such has been in circulation conclusively proves his readiness in any moment to follow this pattern of action.

These days we live under so many and so varied rules of convention. We are really slaves to ideas and notions, fashions and traditions, which constitute the psychological background or what is now popularly called the ideology of modern people as belonging to an organisation. We can never act as Whitman advises. We are in a state of complete slavery although we may not realise it or rather are not willing to admit it. When we see Ryōkwan giving himself up to the free movements of his feelings, which are thoroughly purged, to follow the conventional parlance, of all egotistically oriented defilements, we feel so refreshed as if we were transported into another world. In his love of children we recognise the same psychological trait of independence and spontaneity as was exhibited in his feeling for a solitary pine-tree and a bamboo-shoot breaking through the floor. His love of playing *temari* and *otedama* with children is also indicative of his free playful spirit, which we all have but are constrained to indulge in, imagining that such playing is below the dignity of the grown-ups.

While playing *temari* and *otedama*, winnings are reckoned by singing a popular ditty. The bouncing of the *temari*, the turning of hands, and the rhythmic concurrence of voices—however simple, they perhaps help to give vent to the movements of Ryōkwan's simple and undecieving spirit. This is also the reason for his liking to dance a primitive village dance on festival occasions. He was once caught dancing with the villagers, disguised as a young woman. When one of the dancers nearby recognising Ryōkwan, made a remark about his or rather her being a good dancer, he overheard it because the remark was purposely

made audibly enough. It is said that he later referred to it to his friends with an expressed feeling of elation.

6

There is in every one of us a desire to return to a simpler form of living, which includes simpler ways of expressing feelings and also of acquiring knowledge. The so-called "way of Gods" points to it. Although I do not know exactly what signification the advocates of *Kannagara-no-michi* want to give to this term, it seems to be certain to my mind that by this they wish to mean going back to, or retaining, or reviving the way in which the gods are supposed to have lived before the arrival of humankind. This Way was one of freedom, naturalness, and spontaneity. How did we go astray from this? Here lies a great fundamental religious problem. Its solution gives the key to the understanding of some aspects of Zen Buddhism and then of the Japanese love of nature. When we speak of being natural we mean first of all to be free and spontaneous in the expression of our feelings, to be immediate and not premeditating in our response to environment, and to make any calculation as to the effects of our doings either on others or on ourselves, and to conduct ourselves in such a way as not to leave room for the thought to come in, either of gain, value, merit, or consequence. To be natural means, therefore, to become like a child, though not necessarily with its intellectual simplicity, nor with its emotional crudity. In a sense the child is a bundle of egotistic impulses, but in its assertion of these it is altogether "natural." it has no scrupulousness, no deliberation as regards its practical and worldly merit or demerit. In this respect the child is angelic, even divine. It ignores all social devices to keep grown-up people decent and conventional and law-abiding. It is living under no such artificial, human-made constraints. The practical outcome of such behaviour may not always be acceptable to the taste of so-called cultivated, refined, sophisticated people of

the world. But the question is here not with such practical considerations but with the genuineness of motive the disinterestedness of feeling, and the immediateness of response. When there is thus no crookedness in one's heart, we say that he is natural and child-like. In this there is something highly religious, and angels are represented sometimes as babies with wings. And this is the reason why the Zen artists have a special liking for painting Kanzan and Jittoku, or Hotei with a group of children.

Going back to nature, therefore, does not mean to go back to the natural way of living as seen among the primitive peoples of the prehistoric world. It means a life of freedom and emancipation. The one thing that hampers and complicates our modern life especially is the concept of teleology which is made to be felt by us in every phase of our life. The concept is all right as far as our moral, economic, intellectual, and terrestrial existence is concerned, but this existence of ours means far more than all these considerations; for we never feel completely satisfied with them, we seek for something going really far, far deeper than merely moral and intellectual. As long as we are on the plane of the teleological conception of existence, we are not at all free. And not being free is the cause of all the worries, all the miseries, all the conflicts that are going on in this world.

To be thus free from all conditioning rules or concepts is the essence of the religious life. When we are conscious of any purpose in our movements of any kind, we are not free. To be free means purposelessness, which of course does not mean licentiousness. The idea of a purpose is something the human intellect reads into certain forms of movement. When teleology enters into our life, we cease to be religious, we become moral beings. So with art. When there is an idea of purpose too much in evidence in a work of art so called, art is no more there, it becomes a machine or an advertisement. Beauty runs away, and ugly human hands become altogether too visible. Success in art consists in its

artlessness, that is, purposelessness. In this, art approaches religion; and nature is a perfect specimen of art inasmuch as there is no visible purpose in the waves rolling on since the beginningless past in the Pacific Ocean, and in Mt. Fuji covered with ancient snow absolutely pure and standing high against the sky. In the flower we as beings obsessed with utilitarian ideas may read its going to seeds, and in seeds their harbouring a life for the coming years; but from the religious æsthetical angle of observation, flowers as flowers are red or yellow, and leaves as leaves are green, and in this all utilitarian and teleological or biological conceptions are excluded.

We admire a machine most exquisitely and most delicately balanced and most efficiently working, but we have no feelings of going towards it; it is a thing altogether distinct from us, which stands here ready to obey our commands. Not only that, we know every part of it mechanically and the purpose for which it is set to work; there is no mystery as it were in the whole construction of it; there are no secrets, there is no autonomous creativeness here; everything is thoroughly explainable, subject to laws discovered by physics or dynamics or chemistry or some other sciences. But an ink-sketch composed of a few strokes of the artist's brush—one apparently very crudely executed—and yet it awakens in us one of the deepest feelings and engages the attention of our whole being. In the same way, when we face nature, our whole being goes into it and feels every pulsation of it as if it were our own. To speak of an identification is a desecration, for it is a mechanical and logical conception, which does not apply to this phase of our life. And this is where Zen Buddhism has its realm, and the corner from which people like Ryōkwan survey the world.

7

Before concluding let me say a few words about the Nirvana picture of the Buddha. This may not seem to be a fit

subject to be introduced here. What has the Nirvana picture to do with the Japanese love of nature or with Zen Buddhism, one may argue? But what I wish to see in the picture as it is generally painted in Japan has some significant bearing on the Buddhist attitude towards nature. And as the picture has much to do with the Zen monasteries in Japan, and further as the picture has an unusual fascination for the Japanese generally, I will point out here one or two facts regarding the Nirvana scene of the Buddha.

I have not yet been able to trace the historical development of the Nirvana conception as we have it today. As tradition ascribes the first idea of it or rather the first authorship of the picture to Wu-tao-tzu the reputed painter of T'ang, it is likely that it originated first in China. But I have at present no means to ascertain how far and how strongly it has taken hold of the imagination of the Chinese people. It is certainly in Japan that it has deeply entered into the religious consciousness of the people. The picture has come to be so intimately connected with the Buddhist life, especially with the Zen followers, of Japan. There must be something in it which powerfully appeals to us all.

The one prominent feature of the Nirvana picture is naturally the central figure and his quietly passing away surrounded by his disciples. Contrast this to the crucifixion of the Christ with blood oozing from his head and also from his sides. He is stretched upright against the cross with an expression of the utmost pain and suffering, whereas the Buddha looks as if sleeping on the couch contentedly with no signs of distress. The vertical Christ represents an intense spirit of fight, but the horizontal Buddha is peaceful. When we look at the latter, everything that goes against the spirit of contentment is excluded from our consciousness.

Not only the Buddha lies contentedly with himself but with all the world and with all beings animate and inanimate in it. Look at those animals, those gods, and those trees that are weeping over his parting. To my mind this is the scene

pregnant with a meaning of the utmost significance. Is it not a strong demonstration of the fact that the Buddhists are not at war with nature, but that they and nature are one in living the life of the Dharma?

This idea and the real feeling of living one and the same life of the Dharma makes the Buddhists feel at once at home with their surrounding nature. When they listen to the crying of a mountain bird they recognise the voice of their parents; when they see the lotus flowers in the pond, they discover in them the untold glory and magnificence of the Buddha-Kshetra. Even when they encounter an enemy and take his life for the sake of a greater cause, they pray for him so as to have their own merit turn towards his future salvation. This is further the reason why they have the so-called soul-consoling rite performed for the morning glories which were weeded out to give room to the better-qualified kind, or for all kinds of the poor animals who were killed for various reasons to help humanity, or for the painters' used-up brushes which served them in so many useful ways to produce their masterpieces in varied styles. The Japanese love of nature is thus seen to be deeply coloured with their religious insight and feeling. The Nirvana picture in this respect is illuminating as it sheds much light on the Japanese psychology.

It was due, I am told, to the genius of the Sung Zen monk-artists that the Buddha or Bodhisattva came to be painted along with the animals and plants. Until then the Buddha and Bodhisattva were represented as beings transcending the reach of human feelings, they were supernatural beings as it were. But when Zen came to control the religious consciousness of the Chinese and the Japanese people, it took away from Buddhist figures that aloof, unconcerned, or rather unapproachable air which had hitherto characterised them. They came down from the transcendental pedestal to mingle themselves with us common beings and also with common animals and plants, with inorganic rocks and

mountains. When they talked, stones nodded their heads, and plants pricked up their ears. That is the reason why the Buddha's Nirvana is so intimately participated in by all forms of being as we observe in the picture.

The famous Nirvana picture of the Tōfukuji Zen monastery, of Kyoto, was painted by one of its monks. It is one of the largest hanging pictures of this class in Japan. It measures about 39×26 feet, and it is said that at the time of a civil war which devastated the greater parts of Kyoto early in the sixteenth century, the army of the Hosokawa family utilised this Nirvana picture by Chō-densu (1352-1431), one of the greatest painters of Japan, for screening their camp from the winds. There is a legend in connection with the production of this reputed picture which is characteristic of the Buddhist philosophy of life. When Chō-densu was engaged in this grand work, a cat used to visit him and sit by him watching the progress of the picture. The artist who wanted ultramarine in mineral form playfully remarked, "If you are good enough to bring me the stuff I want, I will have your picture in this Nirvana." The cat is generally missing for some unknown reason in the Nirvana pictures hitherto executed. Hence Chō-densu's remark. And, miraculously enough, the following day the cat brought him the painting ingredient he wanted and besides led him to the place where it could be found in abundance. The artist's delight was beyond measure and to keep his word he painted the cat in his Nirvana picture, for which it has ever since earned a nation-wide reputation. Is it not a strange story? And it well illustrates the Buddhist attitude towards animals, which is also that of the country-men generally.

8

In fact, Japanese literature abounds with stories of this kind. But instead of citing more such stories it will suit our purpose better to give just a few more references from the history of Japanese culture, wherein an intense apprecia-

tion of objects of nature is expressed by our poets and artists. And the significant fact is that those objects are not necessarily confined to things commonly considered beautiful or those suggestive of an order beyond this world which is so evanescent and ever-changing. Changeability itself is frequently the object of admiration. For it means movement and eternal youthfulness and is associated with the virtue of non-attachment, which is characteristically Buddhistic as well as an aspect of Japanese character.

The morning glory as we all know well is one of the most common flowering plants in Japan. It is quite an art on the part of the cultivators to make the plant yield to their artistic treatment, and competitive exhibitions take place everywhere in Japan early in summer. There are so many changing conditions which are to be taken into consideration most thoroughly when one expects fine large flowers of the vine. But ordinarily it will bloom anywhere profusely throughout the summer over the country fences, walls, hedges, and so on. The one peculiarity is that it blooms fresh every morning, and there are no yesterday's flowers on it. However splendidly the flowers are this morning, they fade even before noon of the same day. This evanescent glory has appealed very much to the Japanese imagination.

I do not know this momentaristic tendency in Japanese psychology is in their native blood or due in some measure to the Buddhist *Weltanschauung*; but the fact is that beauty is something momentary and ever-fleeting and that if it is not appreciated while it is fully charged with life, it becomes a memory, and its liveliness is entirely lost. This is exemplified in the morning glory:

“Each morn as the sun rises,
The flowers are newly fashioned,
Glorious in their first awakening to life;
Who says the creeper is short-lived?
It keeps on blooming ever so long.”

Beauty is ever alive because for it there is no past, no

future, but the present. You hesitate, turn your head, and there is no more beauty. The morning glory must be admired at its first awakening as the sun rises; so is the lotus. This is the way the Japanese people have learned from Zen teaching as to how to love nature, how to be in touch with the life running through all objects including ourselves.

Another poem runs thus:

“The pine-tree lives for a thousand years,
The morning glory but for a single day;
Yet both have fulfilled their destiny.”

There is no fatalism in this. Each moment pulsates with life both in the pine tree and in the morning glory. The worth of this moment is not measured by the one-thousand years of the one and the single day of the latter but by the moment itself. For this is absolute in each of them. Therefore, beauty is not to be spoiled by the thought of fatalism, nor by that of evanescence.

When Chiyo, the Haiku poetess of Kaga Province, ran for her morning water to one of her neighbours because the morning glory was found blooming around the well, her mind was so fully occupied with the beauty of the flower and a tender feeling for the plant that she had no desire to disturb it for her practical purposes. The plant could easily and quietly be removed from the rope or pole around which it probably entwined itself. But the idea never occurred to her. There was something holy about the beautifully unfolding morning glory—though quite an ordinary one of its kind. The poetess caught at the moment a glimpse of this holiness, and we can feel too some of her inspirations in her seventeen syllables:

“My bucket’s carried away
By the morning glory,
And I beg for water.”

What may be called a divine inspiration flashes upon our consciousness, at the sight of an object of nature—which is not necessarily beautiful but may even be ugly from the

so-called commonsense point of view and we are so raised from our earthly occupations that a mere giving vent to the experience sounds curiously factual and prosaic to most outsiders. It is only when they are elevated to the same height that they can grasp the full meaning of the utterance and see into the secrets that are concealed in the poet's feeling for nature. The frog does not seem ordinarily to be a beautiful creature, but when it is found perching on a lotus or bashō leaf still fresh with the morning dew, it stirs the Haiku poet's imagination.

“A solitary frog drenched in rain
Rides on a bashō leaf,
Unsteadily.”

A quiet summer scene is depicted by means of a green-backed amphibious animal. To some an incident like this may seem too insignificant to call out any poetical comment, but to the Japanese, especially to the Buddhist Japanese, nothing that takes place in the world is insignificant. The frog is just as important as the eagle or the tiger; every movement of it is directly connected with the primary source of life, and in it and through it one can read the gravest religious truth. Hence Bashō's poem on a frog leaping into the ancient pond in his park. This leap is just as weighty a matter as the fall of Adam from Eden, for there is here too a truth revealing the secrets of creation.

“By a little kitten
Sniffed at,
Creeps the slug unconcerned.”

Here is also a bit of human playfulness and sweetness.

References to such happenings in nature are constantly met with throughout Japanese literature, but especially in Haiku poetry, which developed wonderfully during the Tokugawa period. Haiku is singularly concerned with little living things such as flies of all kinds, lice, fleas, bugs, the singing insects, birds, frogs, cats, dogs, fishes, turtles, etc.

It is also deeply concerned with vegetables, plants, rocks, mountains, and rivers. And as we know Haiku is one of the most popular methods for the Japanese people to express their poetic appreciation of nature. In the feeling compressed within the smallest number of syllables, we detect the soul of Japan transparently reflected, showing how poetically sensitive it is towards nature and its objects sentient as well as non-sentient.

It goes without saying that Haiku embodies the spirit of Bashō, its modern founder, and that the spirit of Bashō is the spirit of Zen expressing itself in the seventeen syllables.

Probably the best way to illustrate the Japanese love of nature in relation to the spirit of Zen Buddhism is to analyse the various concepts that have entered into the construction of the tea-room or tea-house where tea-ceremony so-called is conducted in accordance with a set of rules. The rules have not by any means been arbitrarily compiled but they have gradually and unconsciously grown out of the artistically-trained minds of the tea-masters; and in the composition of these minds we find the Japanese instinct for nature thoroughly disciplined in the philosophy of Zen, morally, aesthetically, and intellectually. When we know all about the tea-ceremony—its history, its practice, its conditions, its spiritual background, and also the moral atmosphere radiating from it, we can say that we also comprehend the secrets of Japanese psychology. The subject is fully interesting, but as this paper has already become too long, its treatment will be deferred to another occasion.

Let me then conclude with Jōshū's Zen treatment of his disciples to a cup of tea. You may think that there is nothing in sipping a beverage of this kind and that the Japanese people in fact make too much of daily trivialities while there are so many graver things to think about in our modern life. Whatever you may think about the matter, the Zen masters and tea masters I am sure will go on serenely with their Zen,

their tea, their *Wabi*, or *Sabi*—what this is will be explained somewhere else.

A monk once came to Jōshū (778–897 C.E.) who asked: “Have you ever been here?” And the monk answered, “No, master.” Jōshū said, “Have a cup of tea.”

When another monk came to him, he asked the same question, to which the monk answered, “Yes, master. I have once been here.” Jōshū said, “Have a cup of tea.”

Later the Inju (the residing priest) queried, “How is it, master, that you give the same treatment to the monks whether they have ever been here or not?” Jōshū called out, “O Inju!” The Inju answered, “Yes, master”; and Jōshū said, “Have a cup of tea.”

Still later, when Bokujū, another master, learned of this, he asked the monk who coming from Jōshū gave him this information, “What is Jōshū’s idea?” “Nothing but his old tricky method,” was his answer. Bokujū said, “Poor Jōshū, he does not know that you have baptised him with a dipperful of filth.” So saying, the master struck the monk.

Bokujū now turned to one of his young attendants and said, “What do you think of Jōshū?” The attendant reverently made bows before him, and the master struck him.

The monk from Jōshū later visited the attendant and asked, “What did your master mean when he struck you awhile ago?” Said the attendant, “Unless it is my master, nobody else will ever strike me so.”

After all, the sipping of a cup of tea is not a trifling affair, it is full of grave consequences. “Tea-cult” so called may also have something weighty to tell us about the cultural history of the Japanese people.

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