

Dark Zen

What is Mystical Zen Buddhism?

This text is presented by: Zenmar, the Dark Zen Mystic.

“What if the universe was an afterimage whose only purpose was to serve as a finger pointing to that invisible power which originated it? Would, therefore, our perception of it be like a backward glance in which even our bodies would be those of backward men chasing after endless illusions without ever finding their origin? According to the Buddha, we are such backward men who desire to look into the obscure past that mankind calls its future!

“Who now is brave enough to look forward, as if to live in such a way as to preexist the universe, thus to never become backwards again?

“What manner of human-being is willing to live above all things that come after his vision? Such men we declare, are called Sages. Truly, such men come before all else, having surpassed the visible tomb called the human body.

“Here then is our declaration: transcend the shadow called mankind and live in anterior bodies of light. If now your lost courage is coming back to you-if now you feel the awakening from a thousands sleeps about to commence, then you must leave your house of flesh and join our cause. For what greater adventure is there for a knight of wisdom than to conquer his own mortality as the Buddha conquered Mara.”

Q:-

What do you mean by "Dark Zen"?

A:-

Dark Zen is synonymous with mystical Zen. It is the highest truth of Zen which is transmitted by means of Mind's self-awakening. Here you are in complete unity with true nature of Mind itself. In the time span of a single thought you complete the stages of a Bodhisattva and enter the lineage of the Buddhas, going back to the first Buddha. Without a doubt, you recognize that all phenomena are continent on Mind's bright vivifying nature.

Q:-

How does Dark Zen differ from conventional Zen?

A:-

Given that the fundamental basis of conventional Zen owes its origin to Dark Zen, it does not follow that conventional Zen can likewise transmit the Buddha-nature. That is the chief difference between the two. What, in fact, conventional Zen transmits is a second-hand teaching. Such a second-hand teaching is only intended to comfort and inspire those who wish to proceed on their own to look even deeper within their own being so as to awaken and see the mysterious nature of Mind.

Q:-

Isn't it true that the lineage of Zen began with the Buddha passing his knowledge on to Mahakashyapa who in turn passed the teaching on to Ananda where it eventually was transmitted to present day teachers? Are you saying that this lineage is false?

A:-

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That history of the transmission from one teacher to another was composed by an adept of Dark Zen during the Sung dynasty in China as a means to inspire weaker souls who lacked the ability to understand that the Buddha is their very own mind. To be honest with you, the lineage that you are alluding to, described in *The Flame Transmission* is an extended allegory speaking to the various ideas and aspects of absolute Mind as it unfolds itself. Now to answer your question. These stories are not false if they lead you to see the nature of Mind itself. However, these stories will delude anyone who does not have the True Eye to see the nature of Mind in each story, foolishly clinging, instead, to a succession of human teachers supposing that each teacher actually handed over Mind's bright nature to his heir!

Q:-

My own teacher claims to be the Dharma heir of his teacher's teaching going back to the Buddha. Is he not a genuine heir of the teaching of Zen?

A:-

Again, that is the teaching of conventional Zen. It is not the ultimate teaching. Your teacher is an heir to his teachers opinions about Mind's mysterious nature. That is all. That doesn't mean he is enlightened to the nature of Mind itself. It only means that he is part of a lineage that accepts Zen's Mind doctrine. In Dark Zen, a "Dharma heir" is someone who has seen Mind's pure nature directly having passed through all the stages of a Bodhisattva. From this they are able to promote the ancient teachings of the Buddha, creating skillful means in order to teach others the true purport of Buddhism.

Q:-

My own teacher who was transmitted seems to know the answers to the koans. Doesn't that say something for his wisdom?

A:-

When a teacher gives his Dharma heir a collection of koans with answers, which more or less is considered the succession of Dharma, he is merely recognizing his student's potential to become a genuine Bodhisattva. In other words, the Dharma heir has only demonstrated his understanding of Buddhism, not his accomplishment of it. If you think that this individual can interpret a Mahayana Sutra correctly or has had genuine Bodhicitta after five or ten years of study, you are deluded. Before the Sung dynasty and the invention of the succession fable, for almost four hundred years prior to that, Zen was mainly Dark Zen. Teachers recognized genuine enlightenment in others without recourse to koans as a means of testing. Today, that has all changed.

Q:-

In what way has modern Zen changed from the perspective of Dark Zen?

A:-

From the perspective of Dark Zen, today's Zen institution is much different. It is based on paternal allegiances, formalism, blind rituals, and clericalism. We must realize that the pure essence of Zen is not found in the outer elements of religion which such institutions present to the public. The true content of Zen is only to be found within our being stripped bare of all preconceptions. Let me finally say, that institutional Zen is really for those people who are afraid to give up conceptual thinking and their emotions. Such people are still motivated by the ways of the world putting their energies into building a cultural edifice that they believe will somehow push back the ocean of suffering. In contrast to this, Dark Zen is for those individuals who understand that the mysterious source of the teaching cannot be conceptualized through the senses, taught, or even cultivated. In fact, it cannot even be

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transmitted. What the term transmission, in fact, means is just to awaken to the whereabouts of Mind itself thus putting an end to suffering once and for all.

Q:-

My teacher has the authority to teach Zen. I have seen his credentials. What is your authority and where is your proof?

A:-

Buddhism only recognizes one authority. That is Mind which is also the Buddha. If you have seen Mind's nature then you have the authority, given to you by the Buddha, to do as you please. If not, then you should guard both your words and your actions. Those who claim to have the authority to teach Zen, showing off their robes and certificates, have no authority since these things are not Mind. Over the years, I have seen that anyone, with enough money, can become a Zen master almost overnight. So it proves nothing to brag about your teacher's credentials. In the past good students could recognize good teachers just by listening to a word or two. In their heart, they were searching for the one true source of all, having recognized that Mara's shadow was upon them. And because they were searching in this manner, their hearts resonated with the ideal teacher who had safely crossed to the other shore. Today, inferior students can only recognize inferior teachers judging them by looking at their wares like merchants. This implies that they only resonate with materialism and not Mind. As for proof, if you only want mouse shit, rather than gold, there is nothing I can do to convince you otherwise. Evidently, you are attached to the trappings of conventional Zen. But make no mistake about it, Dark Zen, variously described as Yin Zen, is the true teaching that Bodhidharma brought to China.

The Teachings of Mystical Zen Buddhism

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A short introductory talk from Zenmar, the mystic of Dark Zen.

Students of the Way, you have asked me tonight to speak from the heart about the secrets of Zen. I realize of course that I have neglected my duty to you to do so, please forgive this old fool. Old age dulls his body which only thinks of taking naps in the afternoon and watching the sunset in the evening.

First of all, I would like you to understand that the profound teachings of Dark Zen really consist of two important awakenings. In the first awakening we come to behold Mind's pure nature (cittaprakriti) called the 'gotra'. In this state, rather than being the perfection of Mind, we only come to see a small portion of Mind's vastness. Also, please understand that you must have this intuition first before you can become a real Bodhisattva.

Let me also say that with regard to what modern teachers say about becoming a Bodhisattva, don't be misled. Becoming a true Bodhisattva is about having certain spiritual intuitions concerning Mind, rather than learning how to be a Buddhist Boy Scout doing good deeds. Remember that showing compassion for the unfortunate is the duty of the Pratyekabuddha (Solitary Buddha) who helps the wretched and teaches the laity. The Bodhisattva's compassion is spiritual and cannot be seen with ordinary perception.

Next, I will briefly talk about the second awakening--which I know is over your heads. In the final awakening, after you have already become a Bodhisattva going through many stages, you will completely verge with Mind--not just a small portion of it, it the case of the gotra. After you verge with Mind, you will see that the Buddha's secret is no big deal--rather the big deal is just getting there. That is why an ancient worthy called Zen the path from gold to dung. In verging with Mind, nothing is really accomplished or attained called "Mind" because Mind, in hindsight, was present from the very beginning of the crazy journey to the other shore of enlightenment. Ironically, I should say, Mind moved all of you to come here tonight to the lecture hall in order to sit like dunces listening to an ignorant fool!

Well, that is all that I am going to say tonight. I am going to put this old fool to bed, for he is very tired. Meanwhile--all of you--wake up a little, enough to see a small portion of Mind's light come into your sleepy eyeballs!

1)Buddha-nature

Students of the Way. Many of you seem perplexed about the idea of Buddha-nature. I know that a number of you come from other Zen centers which teach the doctrine of Dogen Zenji who believes that "all beings are Buddha-nature". And perhaps, using Dogen's words, you also believe that a "donkeys' jowls are the Buddha-nature".

Tonight, I will enlighten you with the truth of Buddha-nature. Then you can set aside the belief that a donkey's jowl is the Buddha-nature, thereby coming to learn, for the first time, where to begin your search for the authentic Buddha-nature which is within yourself.

First, you should realize that the term "Buddha-nature" refers to the very mind of the Buddha. Next, it is important to understand that sentient beings have the potential to attain Buddha-nature, but have not yet actualized it.

For what is potential, in the example of a acorn, must still develop itself into an oak tree which is its actuality. Keep in mind, too, that the little acorn, more than likely, will be eaten by a squirrel or will be taken away by a woodpecker. What I am driving at, is that many of you will not actualize your Buddha-nature, even though you have the sentient potential to do so.

Hopefully, I can help most of you become oak trees!

To realize our Buddha-nature, two general conditions must be met. First, we must be sentient beings. Looking around, I think that we all qualify! The Buddha calls this the "direct cause". It is analogous to milk from which cream can be derived.

Next, it is important to know what a sentient being is. A sentient being is, roughly speaking, "spirit". Don't be confused and just assume that a sentient being is an animal or a plant, or even the five aggregates. It isn't. Your thoughts, for example, are sentient beings--but not a common fence post.

The second condition you must fulfill in order to realize Buddha-nature is the "indirect cause". The indirect cause refers to the six paramitas according to the Maahaparinirvaana Sutra. By means of the six paramitas you will surpass the confines of the mortal body, in addition to all levels of attainments, including those of the Hearers and the Solitary Buddhas.

What does the term "indirect cause" mean? It means a cause that comes from the outside to do its work on the direct cause. This is analogous to adding the juice of the p'o-chiu tree to milk, according to the Buddha, which causes cream to be formed right away.

Turning to the indirect cause, namely the six paramitas, let me briefly outline their meaning consistent with the spiritual practice of Dark Zen.

According to our founder Bodhidharma the paramitas are the means to the other shore, namely, Buddha-nature. They are intended to help us surpass the six senses which Bodhidharma calls the "six robbers".

The first paramita is charity. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of the visual world and thereby become spiritually wealthy. This paramita destroys our desire to cling to visual things as would a miser who clings to his property.

The second paramita is discipline. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of the auditory world and acquire good spiritual practices and concentration. It destroys our desire to cling to acoustical determinations, thus becoming free of distractions, being able to abide in stillness.

The third paramita is patience. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of the olfactory world and acquire inner peace, both for self and for others. It destroys our desire to investigate what is pleasant

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and unpleasant in the example of a dog tracking scents. Thus, we come to abide indifferently with regard to what is pleasant and unpleasant.

The fourth paramita is strength. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of the world of taste and acquire devotion. It destroys our desire for the appetites and various forms of flattery that come from the tongue. Acquiring this paramita, we develop wholesome spiritual states.

The fifth paramita is meditation. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of tactile sensations. It eliminates sensuous distractions. Acquiring this paramita, we are able to focus mind on a sublime object.

The sixth paramita is wisdom. By mastering it, we surpass the robber of consciousness. This paramita eliminates all false views of the absolute. Acquiring this paramita, we are able to distinguish our Buddha-nature from that which is empty of it.

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From what has been said thus far, the actualization of our Buddha-nature is not easy to accomplish. Grasses and mountains, it is evident, have not actualized the Buddha-nature. What is more, grasses and mountains are not even Bodhisattvas who are the only beings worthy to actualize Buddha-nature.

I see a real danger for some American Buddhists who have been misled by deviant teachings which insist that temporal conditions are Buddha-nature itself. Make no mistake about it, mountains, rivers, and earth are not Buddha-nature. A mountain is a mountain because it is not Buddha-nature, having never completed the six paramitas. A river is a river because it is not Buddha-nature. And earth is not Buddha-nature. If earth were Buddha-nature, having completed the six paramitas, then nothing with a body made of earth would ever suffer or perish. Clearly, this is not the case.

To see Buddha-nature requires extraordinary actions. Obstructions that hamper our supreme vision of Buddha-nature must be removed by using the paramitas. In that respect, Buddha-nature does not come easily or automatically.

I beg you to surpass the six senses which are empty of Buddha-nature. Don't imagine that Buddha-nature can be seen. Don't search for it as if it were a sound. Do go after it like a dog tracking a scent. Don't imagine that the tongue can taste it or speak of it. Don't believe that it can be touched or felt. Don't be misled and take Buddha-nature to be a mental representation. Surpass all the senses. Leave everything behind so that you might awaken to that which is the very source of all things.

2) Critique of modern Zen

Does modern Zen resemble the Zen (C. Ch'an) of old China? It would seem that it doesn't. While many modern day practitioners, who frequent American Zen centers believe, to the contrary, that it does there is no historic evidence that this is the case. First, it is a fallacy to think that early Zen was a school of meditation (S. dhyana, C. Ch'an, J. Zen). The word *Ch'an* (J. Zen) was reinterpreted in the Sung period to mean "enlightenment", not meditation. In fact, followers of Ch'an (J. Zen) in the Sung denied that their tradition taught meditation. They argued that Zen was synonymous with Buddha Mind, as an enlightenment tradition transmitted outside the common teaching; and had little or nothing to do with practicing meditation (C. hsi-ch'an). Even a close examination of the word *dhyana*, in light of traditional Buddhist practices, reveals that seated meditation is not suggested in the meaning of this word. In Sanskrit, the word merely expresses the ideas of contemplation, reflection, and mental concentration, being more akin to the Greek meaning of *theoria*. What is lost sight of in the modern day practices of Zen, is that Zen's traditional goal is the realization of Buddha Mind. Consequently, any and all forms of meditation must be subordinate to the goal at hand, namely, enlightenment. Meditative forms can never become the goal itself. Historically speaking, many Zen priests became enlightened during work, rather than during seated meditation; or from reading, as was the case with the great Hakuin (1685-1768).

Modern Zen, its practice, is chiefly Soto. But more specifically, it revolves around the strange teachings of Dogen Zenji. The often murky writings of Dogen, have their appeal to a certain type of Zennist; but what Dogen says about Zen, nevertheless, has to be examined and tested against Zen's historical and spiritual culture. Japanese Zen has another tradition besides that of Dogen Zenji, the father of that lineage being Bu'nan Shidoo (Munan) whose vision gave birth to the great Hakuin Zenji. Bu'nan, to change the subject somewhat, reads differently than Dogen. For one thing, he is clear rather than obscure.

To illustrate the strangeness of Soto *sitting methodologies*, I am sure all of you remember the anecdote where Nan-yueh likens his disciple Ma-tsu's zazen to the futility of polishing a tile in order to make a mirror, pointing out the limitation of seated meditation (knowing whether to whip the cart or the horse). So what does the genius Dogen Zenji say about this particular anecdote? He argues that the act of polishing, in fact, creates a mirror out of a tile! Just in the same way that sitting on a zafu makes one a living Buddha! Actually, here are Dogen's words:

"We truly know that when we make a mirror by polishing a tile, Ma-tsu becomes a buddha. When Ma-tsu becomes a buddha, Ma-tsu immediately becomes Ma-tsu. When Ma-tsu becomes Ma-tsu, zazen immediately becomes zazen."

Maybe the foregoing explains the general irrationality of most modern Zen temples (with the exception of Ch'an and Son traditions). It would also seem that Dogen is quite ignorant of Buddhism. Generally speaking, the Five Aggregates (skandhas), making up the physical body, including the senses and consciousness (vij~naana), are not regarded to be vehicles (yanas) through which enlightenment is accomplished. The real question for orthodox Zen was WHO held up this half-alive corpse? And WHO is fixated to the Five Aggregates, constituting the ego-form?

The extreme emphasis, in modern Zen centers, on seated meditation alone will not advance a student of Buddhism to the level of wisdom the Buddha attained under the Bo- tree. Without extensive Sutra study and proper instruction in Dharma, no actual advance can be made to the other shore of intuitive wisdom. Also, it is rather curious that most Zen centers make little or no mention of the *stages of a bodhisattva*, nor is there any mention of what actually constitutes the credentials of a genuine Bodhisattva; that, in fact, the rank of a Bodhisattva only occurs in the ecstasy of *bodhicitta*. Yet, traditional Zen never departed from the Bodhisattva path and strove to meet the demands of the path. Now, modern Zen has lapsed into anti-intellectualism concerning the study of Dharma and the Bodhisattva path. Some even hold that it is merit not to read traditional Buddhist literature. Moreover, some practitioners believe it a virtue to act unreasonable, as if insanity were the mark of enlightenment. Some Buddhists, like myself and others, are very displeased with this new trend.

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However, we don't blame it on the practitioners. It is rather the fault of their teachers who suffer from religious ignorance.

3)Dark Zen Meditation Part 1

Q: What is the meditation of being mindfulness of in-and-out breathing?

A: From the perspective of Dark Zen it means that fundamentally we are unrelated to in-and-out breathing.

Q: What! I have never heard that before. I thought that mindfulness of in-and-out breathing meant that we must follow our breath. Isn't that right?

A: If you follow something, aren't you led by it? In that case you are less than what you follow. And don't you also, as a consequence, become more of what you follow?

Q: Yes, of course. But isn't that what the Buddha is telling us to do doing this particular form of meditation? I mean—aren't we supposed to be aware of our breathing?

A: Why would the Buddha, who is detached from his corporeal body, teach his students to be dependent on the breath cycles, as if to be led by them? Maybe he is telling his students to remember what is before in-and-out breathing so as to be aloof from any kind of breath attachment—and overall, the mortal body.

Q: Give me a practical example. I am confused right now.

A: When I meditate, I first recollect the antecedent source of my breathing. In this state, when breathing is going on, I maintain a recollection which is prior to the totality of breathing which is most imperceptible.

Q: I am still confused. Explain to me again what you mean.

A: First, assume the proper meditation posture that you have been taught. Next, just breathe in and out for a few seconds. Fine. Now, do this.

Activate your out-breath so as to breathe it out. Next, activate your in-breath, so as to breathe it in. This would be like actively thrusting your hand out, then taking it back in thinking, I am thrusting my hand out; now I am drawing it in. So, do that now with your breathing. And think all the while that what is doing the breathing is always prior to both in-and-out breathing.

Q: Okay. It's a little strange, but I sense a small 'energy' of sorts growing in me when I do that. I see what you mean. Curiously, something is happening.

A: Hey, that is great! That means that you are energizing your breathing by being a little bit before it. Just let me say, that the more prior you can manage to become, the more you will sense the breathing as being energized.

Q: Where does the mindfulness come into play?

A: Mindfulness actually means to recollect that which is, let us say, the one who is free of breathing! This one is always before in-and-out breathing—just remember that. By recollecting it, the more of you eventually begins to spiritually separate from the body—in a spiritual way that is—thus being able to distinguish the body from that which is not the body.

Q: May I ask you where you learned this type of meditation?

A: If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. In the course of practice, many things happen which cannot be explained. One day you just try something different. Then, pow! Something extraordinary happens.

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Then you re-read a few Sutras and discover the Buddha was a slippery old devil. Nothing magic, but nothing ordinary either.

Q: Do you think that maybe you invented something new?

A: Let's put it this way - I was just lucky to discover what I think the Buddha figured out a long time ago.

Q: Do you practice it? And what is it like?

A: Sure. After a while you can even get past your heart beats. Sometimes I can, for a moment, get past the body. It is quite weird.

Q: Do you teach this kind of meditation?

A: No, not personally. I haven't either the space nor the money to teach. In what amounts to living in a back room and eating beans and rice, I do the best I can.

Q: I don't believe that. Well, anyway, I hope someone helps you.

A: Me too. But I don't expect anything. We just happen to live in a time when everyone wants money and power. Most people could care less about this kind of stuff, unless, of course, it helps them with their task of making a million dollars! [laughing]

Q: Is this meditation of yours like zazen?

A: Not at all. Zazen is like waiting for a bus. My meditation is like flying. I should say, however, that all forms of meditation are directed towards overcoming our fixation with the body and all its problems. Why would anyone meditate thinking, I want to experience great pain whilst meditating? No, instead we sit and try to come to some kind of inner peace. To bring this about we try out different meditations like following our breaths or counting or just sitting. Most of these forms, however, don't work. And many kid themselves into believing that their meditation is making progress. With Dark Zen's meditation - progress is known without a doubt.

Q: How is that?

A: Because Mind is the leader of all things.

Q: You're saying, it seems, that because Mind is before all else and all else comes after; that by remembering our beforeness during breathing, we are, in a way, tracing our steps back to the original Buddha Mind. Is that right?

A: Say, do you want to take over? [laughing] Hey, that was good. But you figured it out because it is so natural. That is what I love about Buddhism - it's like the religion of the universe. It is simple and elegant. But I am afraid we humans are getting too complicated these days. And maybe that is why Buddhism seems difficult. But I am digressing, I am afraid.

Q: So what is it like when you meditate - I think I have asked this before?

A: Well, I'm at that stage where the more of me is identified with what is not my mortal body. I guess you could say I sense my mind affecting my body's nerves so as to energize and lead my body and thus not follow it anymore as to be its slave. As a result, my body tries to comport itself with mind and shape up! Automatically, I began to eat less, sleep less, and care less about dying. One also senses another body growing which is like clear light, but with bliss. It is kind of neat—your own secret delight.

Q: Well that sounds interesting. I sure hope you do something with this meditation and share it with the rest of us.

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A: I hope so too. It would be fun to have everyone all jacked up on joy!

4)Dark Zen Meditation Part 2

Q: How do we begin to practice Dark Zen Meditation [DZM]?

A: First, the proper mental attitude is necessary. You cannot just sit down on a cushion, cross your legs, and hold your back erect. That is not enough. It just becomes performative, you might say. One becomes a Zen actor, in other words.

Q: Well, could you give me a few more details as to how to frame the proper mental attitude?

A: Start this way. First, realize that all day long we cling to a material body which we believe is our true identity. Next, understand that what is clinging to the material body is not really in the body. We should conceive that our true fundamental nature is like the moon overhead, in contrast to the moon in the water below.

Q: Let me ask you this question. When I am aware of my body, is that like the moon in the water?

A: Yes. Everything we sense or are aware of is like the moon in the water. Even our awareness is limited to being like the moon in the water.

Q: What is not the moon in the water?

A: You might say our true-nature. All arises from our true-nature, or the same, Buddha Mind. This means that everything—absolutely everything—exists on account of this nature. Nothing is outside of it. But now I have only given you empty words. You need to merge with this nature which is within.

Q: Okay, I am beginning to get the picture. You are saying that in DZM I am really above my body and its breathing like the moon overhead. Is that right?

A: Yes. But now the problem is how do we identify with our true nature which transcends our breathing—even this very body?

Q: Then, do we first follow our breath?

A: No. That doesn't make any sense if you think about it. We need to backup and envisage being prior to the breath. Following the breath leads to attachment. We must sense our breathing as it is generated. At that point we enter true meditation sensing an "energy-stream" growing inside of us.

Q: That is hard to do. How do you "backup" as you say?

A: Believe it or not, you are already there. But by depending on the body and its breathing, you have forgotten the moon overhead! Face it, all of us can get so focused on a subject that we forget our true nature. It is like movie goers being absorbed in a movie, so much so that they imagine they are the character. They fall into sympathy with their character. They feel fear when their character feels fear, or laughs when he laughs. One lives as if they were that very character. Then, when the movie is over—wham—the audience comes back to reality. Our situation is much the same. Presently, we are in the movie of this body. At some point, we must come away from the movie screen. [laughing]

Q: Getting back to energy—do you feel an energy-stream inside of you?

A: Yes. And I can increase it by being more of that which is antecedent to my body and its various biological processes. One is aware of a growing power, you might say, which is more powerful than the body.

Q: I must tell you I am having a difficult time understanding DZM.

A: Don't try so hard. Just sense your breathing, but be the one who is working the lung bellows! Don't get involved in the breathing effect. Get involved in the breath making. That will put you prior to breathing. It is the same with your body, too. Be before it. Think that what you really are flows into the body and makes it work. Be the source of that inflow.

Q: I like your description. I get the sense that I am surrounded by a life energy field and that my body is just a node in that field. My problem is to orient myself to the field instead of the node. Is that about right?

A: If it helps to make the energy appear in your body, I say that is pretty good.

Q: So, what is the deal with this energy, or as you have mentioned, energy-stream?

A: Not wanting to sound too mysterious, let's say that we only know Mr. Buddha by this energy which we shall call "Bodhisattva". In that respect, the Bodhisattva, as an energy, lies between our Mr. Buddha and this corporeal hunk of impending disaster! It is also like a stream flowing back to Mr. Buddha—but a stream of energy.

Q: Is it like the sun warming us, although we are not the sun?

A: Yes, that is a very good analogy. We could say that the Buddha is 93 million miles away from us, like the sun, yet we still feel his warmth. In the same way when we line up right, being prior to our breathing, in a sense we have joined with his power so that we sense this power within us.

Q: Are there other ways to sense this energy?

A: Yes. Visualize a tiny point in front of your mind's eye. Then project into it. Imagine that you are a beam of pure light going towards it. You may feel some energy in your head—wherever the point is. After you do, then put the point in certain parts of your body and do the same. Again, as you do so, again imagine that you are a beam going towards the point. Let me add that the finer the point you can visualize, the more powerful the effect becomes.

Q: Hey, I just felt something! I feel an energy in my head, as you said. I feel almost light headed. I can't believe it. You're right! This is unbelievable! Is that the way you sense it?

A: Yes.

Q: I have sat in zazen for many years now. This is the first time something like this has happened to me. What is more exciting, I think I can do this at will. Just now I visualized the point and felt the energy again. Is this an actual technique?

A: Yes it is. But why it works is that it is natural. This is the way things really are. If you get lined up with the universe, you will sense something extraordinary. Just let me say, that there is no need to sit on your buns on a zafu. Just be prior to your breathing, or visualize a mental point beaming into it.

Q: What you have discovered is incredible. Could you say that this is DZM?

A: I guess you could. As you can see, a sitting posture is not required. Nor do you have to polish your body in the sense of trying to turn this hunk of flesh into a mirror. DZM is about getting in touch with the true source of things which is luminous Mind. By the way, another name for this Mind is "Buddha" who is prior to all, transcending the world, being spontaneous.

Q: This is interesting. I didn't learn about this at the Zen center I attended. Is this a part of Zen?

A: Well, Zen master Ejo taught this. He wrote about this in detail in his book, Absorption in the Treasury of Light. Remember that true meditation is not about sitting on your rump for hours on end. When you get in touch with the light—energy, that is—which Ejo is talking about, it doesn't matter how you sit. You are always immersed in it—that is true sitting, you might say. Let me also say that

one must believe that Lord Buddha's light flows into our world. This is important. Why? Because we can tap into this light if we figure out how to do it. But not everyone will believe this is possible. But today you have seen that it is possible. There is much more energy available to you than you can imagine. But that is a difficult subject to speak about to profane ears. Let me say that you are fortunate to have this tiny glimpse.

Q: Let me ask you this. After you feel this energy—what then?

A: You must learn to make more of yourself accessible to it. If you only wish to have a brief encounter with it, what is the point? It is much more. When this energy is strong, your old problems don't have the same power over you as they did before. The various kinds of suffering begin to dissolve. Soon you are transported to a higher dimension of being.

Q: Is this mystical Zen?

A: Yes. You might say there are two kinds: Conventional Zen and Mystical Zen. Conventional Zen is learning to sit on your rump, enduring hours of pain. It is a form of low-level self-torture. It is for those who cling to the conventional world; who are comfortable following a corpse. In Mystical Zen we call this "ghost sitting". However, in Mystical Zen we are seeking communion with our luminous Mind—not our body. This is Zen master Ejo's Zen which few are lucky to discover. This is the Zen in which the adept is animated by Vairocana Buddha, symbolizing radiant power. He learns how to tap into Vairocana, allowing his being to become immersed in this special light. Can you feel that?

Q: Yes! How did you do that? I feel an intense energy in my heart.

A: [laughing] That is Mr. Vairocana Buddha giving you some juice. Let me put it this way. Great Zen masters like the Sixth Patriarch and great Lamas, especially Dzogchen masters, have tapped into this power and know how to become available to it. All the rest are following shadows. Most are Dharma errand boys delivering dead, lifeless messages from a Buddha of their imagination. Worse, their meditation is like an old dog chewing on a dry bone. What do they hope to gain from it? Zen is not about gnawing on a dry bone. Nor is Buddhism the religion of errand boys. But that is conventional wisdom. It is also the world of endless suffering.

Q: Without your guidance I would still be sitting, getting nowhere. For some strange reason I know you have saved my life. I bow to you. Thank you, my friend for your help.

A: I am glad to help. I am always delighted when someone becomes as crazy as I am. [laughing]

5)Heart Sutra of Wisdom

The Bodhisattva, Noble Avalokitesvara, practicing the profound Perfection of Wisdom, looked down. He beheld the Five Aggregates as being empty of absolute nature.

O "Saariputra, form is empty; emptiness is precisely form. Form is indistinguishable from emptiness and emptiness is indistinguishable from form. The same goes for sensation, concept, conditioning force, and consciousness.

O "Saariputra, all phenomena are characterized by being empty of the unbegotten, the non-annihilated, the not pure nor impure, the non-decreasing, and the non-increasing.

Therefore "Saariputra, in the emptiness [of all phenomena] there is no form, no sensation, no concept, no conditioning forces, no consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or sensation; no form, sound, scent, taste, touch-object or objects of thought; no constituent element of vision, till we come to no constituent element of mental perception; there is no ignorance, nor the destruction of ignorance till we come to no old age and no death, nor the extinction of old age and death. There is no suffering, its origination, extinction, or path. Neither is there gnosis nor possession, nor witness or state witnessed.

Therefore "Saariputra, because there is no gnosis, no possession, or witness or state witnessed, the Bodhisattva dwells in reliance on the Perfection of Wisdom, his or her Mind free of obstruction. Because there is no obstruction in their Mind, there is no fear; and transcending all error, Nirvaana is reached.

All the Buddhas of the three times have awakened to unexcelled perfect enlightenment by relying on the Perfection of Wisdom.

Therefore it should be known that the Heart Sutra of Wisdom is the great Mantra,--it is the Great Light-giving Mantra, the most excellent Mantra, the peerless Mantra, capable of allaying all suffering; it is truth because it not in error. Therefore we repeat the Heart Sutra Mantra--

Gate Gate Paaragate Paarasa.mgate bodhi svaahaa.

A commentary from Zenmar, the Dark Zen Mystic.

Q: What is the Heart Sutra really saying?

A: The Sutra's intention is to bring about a special kind of intuition, revealing what the Five Skandhas (corporeality) are empty of, namely, our self-nature, or the same, our fundamental nature. According to the Chinese Buddhists, the Heart Sutra, in speaking about emptiness, never means it to refer to our fundamental nature. The emptiness of which the Sutra speaks is merely the emptiness of signs. Apart from this emptiness we are to understand that what is left is our fundamental nature.

Q: Don't most other traditions take emptiness to be our fundamental nature, rather than what our fundamental nature is not?

A: Yes that is true. But in so doing, they are in error. In the Pali Nikayas, as a matter of proof, emptiness is not about our fundamental nature. It just means that we must empty the Mind of sensory images, including consciousness; finally to dwell in the fullness of Mind itself which is not empty. Let me put it this way: Emptiness is a kind of practice. In order to reach Mind itself, we must negate Mind's phenomena.

Q: What you are saying is different from what I have been led to believe. Doesn't the basic teaching of Buddhism tell us that there is no fundamental nature, such as a Self? One modern Zen master said, in fact, that phenomena are the absolute, because it was his understanding that emptiness is the Buddhist absolute. Doesn't the Heart Sutra imply that form is emptiness. So form must be absolute. Right?

Sutra

A: I am afraid that is incorrect. It is not the true teaching of Buddhism that there is no fundamental nature or categorically no Self. Such interpretations of Buddhism amount to pseudo-Buddhism. The notion of essentiality is admitted in Buddhism. Think about this. If there is no fundamental nature, then how would anyone be able to take refuge in the Triple Gem, comprising the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha? Concerning the Self, if there is no Self, then why did the Buddha declare the Self to be like unto a guiding lamp? Even the great Nagarjuna, the 2nd. Century founder of the Madhyamaka school, said the Buddha taught the Self to those who understood the implication of derived name.

Q:- So, would it be correct to say that we should understand emptiness to be like the via negativa of the mystics?

A:- Yes, that would be a better understanding. In the Heart Sutra, Avalokiteshvara represents the idea of universal wisdom that teaches us how to comprehend our true nature which transcends the Five Aggregates. In order to reach the other shore, we must negate the Five Aggregates seeing them, instead, as being empty. On the other hand, if we affirm the Five Aggregates, how can we reach the other shore? We would always be attached to the finite and the imperfect. Finally, remember that the absolute is above and beyond emptiness and even the via negativa. In the perfection of wisdom we are passing through all things good and bad. This even includes exalted states of being. Actually, we are just trying to remove our fundamental nature from all things, conditions, and concepts that are inadequate to it.

Q:- How should I practice the perfection of wisdom? I mean, what should I do right now to begin to cross to the other shore as the Sutra says?

A:- That is a good question. It shows that you are ready to put your foot into the cold water of the sea of suffering! The best way to begin is just to examine your thoughts and try to see their substance. Imagine that your thoughts are like images on the face of a mirror. Now, try to see the mercury of the mirror! Try and distinguish the images from the mercury itself. In the same fashion, distinguish your thoughts from their pure content. See, in effect, what these thoughts and mental images are empty of. Eventually, over time, you will succeed, and maybe you will even discover who the mirror-maker is that creates and negates!

6)Q&A Karma and Rebirth

Q: What are your views on rebirth?

A: Well, it is undeniable that the Buddha, under the Bodhi-tree during the first night-watch, came to recollect his previous births.

Q: Yes, I know. But wasn't he just accepting the outlook of his day? Didn't many of his contemporaries just assume that each person had a former existence and that, owing to karma will continue to have more rebirths?

A: I seriously doubt that. Jayatilleke pointed out in his book, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, that it is false to conjecture that rebirth was generally accepted in India during the Buddha's time.

Q: How so?

A: The theory can't be found in either the Rigveda or the Atharvaveda. Nor do even the early Upanishads endorse it, being only one of many such theories. So, I can't agree with you that 'rebirth' was the accepted outlook of that day. The Buddha's insight seems to me to be quite original and only finds parallels in ancient Greece. In fact, explicit mention of rebirth is only found in Hellenic culture and in Buddhism.

Q: But I was under the impression that he just adopted it as a ploy to get people to act in a moral way. Isn't it true that rebirth served as the basis for moral responsibility?

A: It was hardly a ploy in the Buddha's mind! In fact, the Buddha's own recognition of rebirth proved that morality is necessary. If there is nothing upon which to base morality, why, therefore, bother to practice morality?

Q: But why do we need rebirth to compel us to act in moral ways? We practice morality because it benefits us here and now.

A: No, we practice morality because at a deep level, in our being, we sense that we will be reborn. In other words, moral action arises owing to the fact of rebirth.

Q: What, in your estimation, is reborn if Buddhism denies a self?

A: The Buddha says that 'consciousness' rather than self is reborn. There is a huge difference. Presently, you may or may not understand the Buddha's notion of 'self', but you are certainly aware that as you speak, you are conscious of what you say. This is what transmigrates. Not a self.

Q: Is there some kind of consciousness field that exists between the consciousness which leaves the body and the embryo into which it enters in the next life?

A: Certainly, it is not impossible. For example, when a sodium atom oscillates at 510 billion times to the second, there is an interval between the atom's death and its subsequent rebirth. In that interval, or zero phase, there must be a pattern of the sodium atom if it is to reappear after one of its periodic deaths. If the pattern is kept inside the atom, then when it ceases, so should the pattern for the atom also cease. If not, then you must be open to the idea of a "consciousness field" between sodium atom events which conserve the pattern of the atom. Let me say that I think the Buddha was well within science to universalize birth, death, and rebirth. It is the mode of everything. Indeed, this happens at the micro level of our universe as I have shown. So, why shouldn't we assume the rebirth of consciousness after death? Maybe this is the true meaning behind the Buddhist idea of a conservatory of consciousness which perhaps mediates between discontinuous phenomenal events. But whatever the opinion on this matter, it is better to have an open mind.

Q: Is it really necessary to believe this stuff? I am an agnostic.

Rebirth

A: What do you mean by agnostic? If you mean by agnostic, "I don't want to know," then we shouldn't be agnostics. An agnostic, in that case, would be promoting positive ignorance!

Q: But in his recent book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, Stephen Batchelor said that the Buddha was agnostic. Isn't this essentially true?

A: The Buddha was not an unbeliever who presupposed that rebirth is impossible. He had an open mind. He also verified rebirth at an intuitive level.

Q: Didn't the Buddha only wish us to suspend our judgements if, for example, rebirth was not demonstrable.

A: That is rather simple minded. Demonstration is limited. Ironically, all demonstration ultimately rests on some undemonstrable basis. Even the basis of the empirical sciences rests on theoretic consciousness which is ideal and axiomatic. And what about the so-called scientific observer? Can this 'observer' be demonstrated? Treating the subject of rebirth as if it were a scientific object will always give us cause to reject it. The validity of rebirth lies elsewhere than by means of physical demonstration. Next, you will be suggesting that we disbelieve compassion because it cannot be demonstrated [laughing]!

Q: But rebirth is just a belief. There are no empirical data to support such a theory. Are there any studies of which you are aware?

A: Yes. Are you familiar with Ian Stevenson's work from the University of Virginia? You should read his book entitled *Children Who Remember Past Lives*. Although it is not proof positive, nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that rebirth is possible just as it is reasonable to believe in global warming. Stevenson conducted a rigorous study of the subject with children who had no motive to deceive him. I find his conclusions reasonable.

Q: But what practical value does rebirth serve?

A: That is not a very scientific question [laughing]. First, let's see whether or not it is reasonable to believe in rebirth. In this direction, Stevenson operates by establishing a rigid set of criteria by which to determine the truth or falsity of a rebirth claim. If there are enough cases which fit his criteria, then the argument for rebirth cannot be brushed aside, as there is no other way to account for the goodness of fit. As for rebirth's practical value, it prevents the intrusion of relativistic morality. It also prevents us from temporarily side stepping morality for short term profit. Who knows, maybe in the future we will evolve a new morality based on a science of rebirth.

Q: But I am indifferent to the matter of rebirth. Can't Buddhists just do good and be Buddhists without believing in rebirth or karma?

A: When is the suspension of belief just veiled disbelief? Perhaps it is an attempt to escape from Buddhism's tenets—and morality. Being open to the possibility of rebirth demands a reasonable open mind - not a suspended one. At least, for me, it is reasonable to accept rebirth if only because the Buddha is a worthy person and personally verified it. But your view, as I see it, is almost that of an unbeliever! Remember that in the Buddha's time, he describes the views of six heretics with whom he disagreed. Five of the heretics rejected karma and rebirth. It must be borne in mind that rebirth and karma are integral to Buddhism.

Q: I don't see myself as being the Buddhist equivalent of an infidel. The Buddha didn't ask us to accept everything he said as being true. Isn't that right?

A: I agree, but he also told us to test the meaning of his words by intuitive wisdom. Nor, did he suggest that we suspend belief. That is absurd! Just imagine, if you will, twelve agnostic jurors!

Rebirth

Q: Just recently I finished reading Stephen Batchelor's book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. He makes a fine case for suspending blind belief. Don't you agree that we should weigh the Buddha's statements according to logic and evidence?

A: Well, according to the Kalama Sutta which Batchelor cites at the beginning of his book, we shouldn't! Why he used this particular citation to shore up his arguments is beyond me. The passage clearly states that we should not be satisfied with "logical inference" or with weighing evidence". On the other hand, in the "Parable of the Water-snake" [Majjhima 22] it clearly states that we should test the meaning in the canon by "intuitive wisdom". Such wisdom is mystical, I must say.

Q: What is Dark Zen's understanding of rebirth?

A: Show me your original face before you were born!

Q: I can't!

A: And since you can't, you are constantly being incarnated as the human form to which you are presently attached. If, on the other hand, you can see your 'original face', you will not be reborn as your original face is unborn. Said another way, you will be reborn in the unborn!

Q: But the idea of the unborn is just a fiction. This is the real world, isn't it?

A: Yes, if you are tied to perceptual cognition out of which this world is made. But when we go beyond perceptual cognition, there we find the unborn. Here the opposition between perceiver and perceivable has ceased. The original unity of Mind is restored. Duality is ended.

Q: Then what is the purpose of this life?

A: To learn many lessons. But most of all to see your original face before you were born.

Q: What does your original face look like?

A: Like yours.

Q: Is that the one you're looking at right now, with a nose on it?

A: What is more original than that? In fact, besides a nose, it even supports the perceptual cosmos!

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

7)A dialogue between Master and Disciple*

Bodhidharma: Today you have seen Mind which is not part of this world.

Hui-k'o: But is this all? To be sure, I see Mind's incorporeal nature. I see that it is not here nor there. I see that it is measureless. But it seems that there is much more to learn.

Bodhidharma: You are wise, my student, to realize this at this stage. Most would believe that they were Buddhas and go off to preach. But they are unwise. This insight of yours is just the beginning. That is why I give you this copy of the Lankavatara Sutra, so that one day you might come to see the world the way a Buddha does.

Hui-k'o: How does a Buddha see the world differently than I do?

Bodhidharma: The Buddha has converted the Alaya.

Hui-k'o: What exactly do you mean by the Alaya being converted?

Bodhidharma: First, it is important to understand that the Alaya is like a receptacle in which all possible appearances are contained and reproduced. All that we perceive as human beings rests in the Alaya. But the Alaya is nothing itself except Mind's defiled aspect, insofar as we cling to effects as being absolute. To further complicate matters, when Mind is in the Alaya mode it comes under the bondage of objectifying forces of which it knows nothing, being unable to fully realize that these forces are directly from Mind. What arises from this is the world of appearance, both external and internal which mutually conditions itself. Keeping this in mind, imagine converting this perception so that you are no longer a bondsman to the appearances of Mind. At this point, you actually merge with that wherefrom all things arise and to where they cessate. In other words, you become Mind!

Hui-k'o: From what you have said Master, I think my realization was merely an insight into the purified aspect of the Alaya, is that correct?

Bodhidharma: Yes, that is correct. But rather than this insight being nothing, you conceived the Tathagata embryo in the Alaya/ovary . And if you continue to nurture this holy conception, without fail, you will eventually generate Bodhicitta, becoming a true Bodhisattva.

Hui-k'o: Although I sense something wonderful has happened to me I still perceive the world in the same fashion. Will this change one day?

Bodhidharma: Yes, one day it will change. When, for example you break the spell of your visual perception, everything will look like images in a mirror. But in the mean time your vision is blocked by 4 things.

First, you believe that what you see is 'out there'; when it is merely an optical illusion as the images first appear on the back of your eyeballs. Second, you are habituated to ideas based on the belief that all is 'out there'. Third, you are locked on the eye organ itself, and have no idea how to break its spell. Fourth, you are attracted to what you see and so you have a love affair with the visible world.

Hui-k'o: But Master everything seems so real.

Bodhidharma: what you see seems real is due to the mutual conditioning process between perceiver and perceived. In the past, as you have invested in the eye's world and its ideas, you did not realize that the source of your eye's images is not an image; over time you became gradually dependent on eye-consciousness originations, knowing no other way of 'seeing'. Now, do this for me. Look at the cave wall. Now, put your finger next to your right eye and gently move the eyeball and tell me what you see.

Disciple

Hui-k'o: It is strange Master. But as I gently press my eyeball looking at the cave wall, the entire wall moves. And, as I look to the shrine, it too moves as your body moves.

Bodhidharma: What does this tell you?

Hui-k'o: That what I see is beheld first in the eye organ; 'that what I see to be 'out there' is not actually there.

Bodhidharma: Can you see that which makes the image of the cave wall appear on your eye?

Hui-k'o: But isn't what I see the same as the real cave wall from which the image comes?

Bodhidharma: How do you know that? Is the moon in the water exactly the same as the one above? Is the image of the world you see, the same as that which makes the image appear?

Hui-k'o: No. But now if all the senses are like visual consciousness, upon what does all this rest?

Bodhidharma: That is the Alaya consciousness which I have been trying to explain. But now I want you to look at me sitting here. Do you see a robed monk?

Hui-k'o: Yes, Master, I do.

Bodhidharma: Do you hear my voice?

Hui-k'o: Yes, Master, I can hear your beautiful voice, so filled with the Dharma.

Bodhidharma: Hui-k'o, please understand that I am not in the body you see before you. I am completely detached from it. Like a flame gone from its fuel, my whereabouts cannot be discerned-- yet the image you see, teaches Dharma through this corporeal body. How wonderful! I am able to use this

body, but not be used by it. Unlike the common lot of mankind who are used by the body's needs and as a result come into samsara, I come to rest in nirvana which is perfectly detached. Without further ado, take this Sutra and retire into the forest and study it for twenty or more years. Yes, master it my disciple.

Hui-k'o: Yes, Master, I will do as you say. I swear this to you.

Bodhidharma: Good, Hui-k'o. You please your old master greatly.

** This is a fictional conversation created by Zenmar to correctly teach the Buddha-Dharma*

8)Mystical Zen Buddhism

The goal of Zen Buddhism is directed towards achieving mystical union with Buddha Mind because Buddha Mind is the basis of all existence. In so doing, the Zennist comes to see for himself that all things are born from this Mind; that in fact, all things are subjoined to Buddha Mind, having their true commencement and end in it.

The Zennist is one who faithfully strives to realize Buddha Mind, studies the Buddhist canon, and practices many forms of meditation. Ultimately, the Zennist perceives in a very real sense what the Buddha actually intuited when he became enlightened. It is the full and complete remembrance of the ultimate nature of existence. Intuitively identifying directly with this mysterious principle, which is uncreated, the Zennist discovers that he has always been one with this mysterious principle.

This intuitive perception, usually called by its Japanese name, 'Satori', is an indescribable mystical awakening that transcends both human thought and sensory experience. At once, the Zennist recognizes that from the very beginning he was never really separated from Buddha Mind. Further, the sleep of ignorance, the Zennist comprehends, was caused by his continuous clinging to all kinds of phenomena, from gross manifestations to extremely subtle manifestations, including even so-called religious experiences.

Realizing Buddha Mind, the Zennist eventually becomes, in a very substantial way, detached from his illusory body. In this sense, detachment in Buddhism goes far deeper than our ordinary understanding of the word can convey. In its fullest sense, detachment suggests disembodiment, such that the Zennist eventually comes to transcend his mortal body, as it were, abiding in another body more perfect and not liable to samsaric generation. Upon complete enlightenment, the Zennist comes to see the mortal body to be empty and insubstantial.

As for the unique path of Zen Buddhism which makes it possible for the Zennist to awaken to Buddha Mind, the pathway of Zen sets about to remove the illusion that Buddha Mind is not already attained. In addition, such a path is intended to free the Zennist from all path-dependency because a path exists on account of the goal not yet being attained. But when the goal is attained the former path, therefore, becomes unnecessary. With regard to path-dependency, many Buddhist practitioners mistake the path for the goal confusing the search for wisdom with its actual possession. Eventually, the one following the path and the one making the path, i.e., Buddha Mind, are realized to be one and the same.

To conclude, at a mystical level, just like the Buddha's own mysterious body that he attained long ago after his own enlightenment, the Zennist likewise acquires a spiritual body of thirty-two marks of excellence analogous to a coat of mail which is bright like the moon in the month of Karttika (The Mahavastu).

9)Old Zen and zazen

(This article appeared in the July 96 issue of the The Zennist newsletter.)

The history of Zen can be said to have begun in the Chinese port city of Canton some time around 480 A.D. with the arrival of a mysterious Indian Buddhist teacher, named Bodhidharma. Important to the background of Zen, there is nothing unique in the use of the term Zen (meditation) which would suggest that Bodhidharma was the sole originator of Zen. Judging from Buddhist documents of the Sui period, Zen, as a meditational practice, existed in China prior to Bodhidharma's arrival. Still, Bodhidharma's introduction of what today is referred to as "Zen" to China is unique, but not because it is solely the practice of seated meditation. During the period of Bodhidharma's arrival, China was being flooded with many Buddhist scriptures from India. Against this backdrop, Chinese Buddhists were bewildered as to how to interpret these scriptures correctly, often having to rely on their native religions for clues. With the advent of Bodhidharma's Zen came the message of the true teaching which revealed the keys for decoding the metaphorical language of the Buddhist scriptures.

Further, with Zen's arrival also came the message that the authentic teaching of the Buddha was really about Mind which could only be comprehended by a supreme act of noetic intuition, raising thought to the same level as the Buddha did when he uncovered his universal vision under the Tree of Knowing.

Bodhidharma's new message of Zen held that the Buddhist scriptures were not to be understood in a literal fashion. What, in fact, the scriptures pointed to was beyond the pale of the dead letter; this being the noumenal side of Buddhism which could only be transmitted from Buddha Mind to Buddha Mind by means of a special intuitional transference. During this transference, using the analogy of one torch lighting another, the Zen adept awakened suddenly to the very same Mind that the Buddha had awakened to long ago. Truth in this sense was imparted from the Buddha directly to the adept in which the Buddhist scriptures, subsequently, were regarded like a finger pointing to the moon.

Following the methodology of Bodhidharma's Zen, the early Zen practitioners sought thus to merge into the inner recesses of highest reality, namely, Buddha Mind. Like their founder, Bodhidharma, traditional Zennists practiced a form of contemplation known as "wall-gazing" which means "to abide in the pure silence of truth having transcended discrimination". But rather than being a form of conventional meditation (J. zen; S. dhyana), Bodhidharma's "wall-gazing" is completely contemplative, drawing its strength from, and having its source directly in Buddha Mind itself.

Zen, unlike other Buddhist schools, has always claimed that it represents the true spirit of primitive Buddhism and therefore, the authentic teaching of the founder. Generally speaking, this claim seems substantiated by the facts, at least when we compare the very first Zennists with the Buddha's first horde of students. Indeed, both can be said to have placed a great deal of emphasis on meditation, contemplation, and self-discipline. In addition, like primitive Buddhism, Zen steers away from the extensive use of rituals. As proof, Bodhidharma's writings show a positive disdain for such superstitious rubbish as washing a Buddha statue, which among other such practices, was prevalent in Chinese Buddhism during his stay in China.

To be sure, traditional Zen does not put a great deal of importance in ritualism, nor does it give great importance to debating arcane doctrines with other Buddhists and non-Buddhists. But still it insists, that when all is said and done, it alone penetrates into the founder's true doctrine, making it possible for any Zennist to give a systematic account of the Buddha's words as contained in the scriptures. As is evident from Bodhidharma's own writings, he systematically connects the diverse elements of Buddhism together, under the notion of Buddha Mind.

Turning our attention now to modern Zen as practiced in the West, the practice of modern Zen, chiefly derived from Japanese Soto Zen, takes up what is called 'zazen' which is the meditation of "sitting crosslegged".

Zazen

Insistently, its chief spokesman, Dogen (1200-1253), claimed that primitive Zen was originally called "zazen" which, while a novel speculation, is simply unfounded. Limited strictly to sitting crosslegged, modern Zen, i.e., Dogen's zazen, hardly seems connected with traditional Zen as founded by Bodhidharma. In fact, in the sermons of Bodhidharma, there is not the slightest mention of a "sitting" Zen.

The adherents of modern zazen-Zen firmly believe that the practice of zazen alone will lead to a state of enlightenment in which the adept will enter into the oneness of all reality, feeling the consciousness of ego and otherness fade into nothingness in which a "holy void" remains. In order to attain the "beatitude of voidness" in which egoity and otherness fade away, the student of zazen is given minute directions as to how and where to sit crosslegged, learning chiefly how to place the physical body on a meditation cushion called a "zafu". In the main, zazen teaches one to "sit like a dead tree", to use the description of one Zen master who advocated a zazen-only approach.

Compared with traditional Zen which is chiefly interested in achieving a gnosis of Buddha Mind, one cannot but be struck with the contradiction of zazen practice itself, which is believed to be the sole means for achieving the goal of enlightenment. The methodology of original Zen, it is clear, is fundamentally noetic while the methodology of zazen is taken up with sensuous sitting and such formalities as keeping the "lips and teeth stuck to each other". How such physical matters can lead to transcendence is puzzling.

Finally, while original Zen's enlightenment can deal with the sensuous world, seeing that all things are but a manifestation of Mind, zazen's 'quiet mind' therapy can only last under favorable conditions for a few hours at the most, since it is based on sitting crosslegged.

Presently, there is a great divide between the Zen of Bodhidharma and Zen practiced in a modern Zen center which is strictly concerned with sitting crosslegged. Underscoring the significance of this disparity, some modern Zen teachers go so far as to emphasize that Zen is not 'mystical', which is tantamount to saying that Buddhism is not a religion! The gravity of such opinions, however, should not be taken lightly, Those who hold such opinions are not following the Zen of Bodhidharma which was mystical. Instead, they are following a type of Zen called Bonpu Zen that is simply the practice of zazen.

10)Students of the Way

I cannot teach you the true meaning of Zen if you are more concerned with day to day matters rather than understanding the truth. Please don't bother me with questions such as where to put your shoes or hang your coats. I am not your father or your mother. I am not here to scold you or to give you warm milk and tuck you into bed. Now some of you, I noticed, when I first came in, looked bored. Are you disappointed in Zen? Did you expect me to pull a rabbit out of a black hat?

Some of you, I suspect, want to see some miracles. I am not a magician either. Zen is not a sideshow. Also, I suspect some of you came here to become instantly enlightened, expecting me to drill a hole in your head and fill it with wisdom at once. I cannot do that. It wouldn't be Zen. You must learn to wipe your own nose and effect your own enlightenment and attain the mysterious Mind transmission that our founder Bodhidharma still gives out--although some believe that he died a long time ago.

Long ago the Buddha told us that life is hell; that it is a dung pit, and that no matter what we did to improve it, our efforts would still prove unsatisfactory in the long run. To remedy this painful existence the Buddha instructs us not to cling to this world and this mortal body that we are housed in, being in his words, "home dwellers". He cautioned us that the consequence of such clinging would only make matters worse. I know that you must feel by now that the Buddha is a pessimist; that when he was alive he walked from village to village in ancient India telling everyone that all of existence is miserable and just accept it that way. But this is not the message of the Buddha. The Buddha was not a pessimist. If you want me to tell it to you straight from the heart, the Buddha experienced great joy when he realized enlightenment, becoming disembodied from his parents body and the world it abided in. Even during my own practice, I am amazed to look at my own parent-begotten dung machine and wonder why I took a nose dive into it, getting involved in its birth and death. There is more beauty outside this mortal body than living a life stuck inside it--and there is more freedom in nirvana than going from one body to still another.

So this evening, please try to concern yourself with the pursuit of absolute truth, coming to the joyful realization of your Buddha-nature. It is your only hope for avoiding a future life of pain and sorrow. Students of the Way, if you begin earnestly to seek the truth, I promise you, things will get much better. One day you will thank me for telling you to seek your Buddha-nature. But if you insist on bothering me with petty day to day details, I am afraid that you will never uncover your Buddha-nature. Please stop clinging to such finite matters and instead, question who or what is moving this body of yours around. Try at least to give it some thought tonight.

11)The Transcendence Q &A

Q: What do you mean by transcendence?

A: Can you see "that" which asks this question? Can you hear it? Can the nose smell it or can the tongue taste it? Can you become conscious of it? In truth, you cannot. And because you can't, something mysterious transcends the sphere of the six senses.

Q: But if I can't perceive it, it doesn't exist. So, why even bother with transcending?

A: You can't see wind either or hear vision or see smells. But that does not prove the nonexistence of wind, vision or smell. If we wish to stop suffering, then we must turn to that which is free of suffering--despite the fact that the senses can't see it. The very minute we do, that is transcendence.

Q: You are saying then, that the Buddha's enlightenment is outside of the sphere of the six senses.

A: Yes.

Q: But that sounds like some kind of God or Soul. Didn't the Buddha deny an absolute? Isn't this world, itself, the absolute when we see it as being purely empty--when we empty it of form?

A: Not to my recollection--although many academic Buddhists think so. He just pointed out that such words, rather than being vital and real, evoke impermanent mental images which should be recognized to be empty. What is absolute, is beyond the emptiness of speech and mental imagining. Nor can it be experienced as some gurus imagine.

Q: You didn't answer the second part of my last question. Isn't this world the absolute when we see it as empty?

A: Some Buddhists, I am sure, believe that. It is like making a mountain into rocks, then crushing the rocks into powder, then making the powder into aether! But that is a destructive view. The true nature of the cosmos is already empty; it cannot be made empty a second time. It is like watching ripples of water. Only the form changes--the content is still the same.

Q: To me, this is just a bunch of mystical mumbo-jumbo. I find it just to be word-games. It doesn't help our world one bit. So-called transcending, I am convinced, won't do a single thing to help anyone, least of all, a starving child. Isn't this kind of Zen irrelevant? In our Zen center we are helping each other to become better human beings and to make this world a better place.

A: To make the world a better place, as you use the term, only means to make people comfortable. On the other hand, what the Buddha preached and what the Zen masters of old transmitted, was a means for making us truly happy by learning how to distinguish the undying from the mortal. As a result, it is possible to stop clinging to finite appearances such as this mortal dung heap which is a lasting cause of sorrow. Personally, I think it is better to be comfortable and wise, rather than be comfortable and

ignorant. Your approach is too narrow. You can't exclude the mysterious. If you want to give everyone mental problems, then destroy the mystical. But such a path, I must add, is one of lasting alienation.

Q: What do you mean by that last remark?

A: At the deepest level, we are Buddhas. But by looking outwards to what is an image of our Buddha-nature, we become confused because we can't see our imageless Buddha-nature. Nothing lines up, so to speak. This is alienation which is the difference between our Buddha-potentiality and our current state of progress marching towards Buddhahood. In addition, this is disharmony which is the same as suffering. Now, what you propose is that we all give up the long march towards harmony with our original Buddha-nature and turn into moralists, instead. Well, by doing that, alienation can only

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get worse-not better. Don't you see that we are all unhappy because we are not practicing the Dharma, learning how to remember our Buddha-nature?

Q: But aren't we really unhappy because we haven't the things we need and require as human beings?

A: When I was a little boy, we lived with no electricity. We had an old radio with "B-batteries". We even had a Ward's icebox that held a huge block of ice in it! Now we have electricity, T.V., computers and refrigerators--but we are still unhappy. Everyone is on Prozac--even little children. Something is wrong. Technology isn't making anyone happy--I like the good old days anyway! Seriously, we have to look within, trying instead, to remember where our Buddha-nature is located. Life will become happy again if we do that. I know that to be a fact.

Q: So you are saying that to study the Dharma will make us feel less alienated?

A: Yes. And to follow the ways of the world will make you unhappy. And to follow religions which only teach you how to cope with the ways of the world will make you unhappy. However, the more you study authentic Dharma, the less medications you will need [laughing].

12)The Satori Q and A

Question: What is meant by "satori" (C. Wu)? I realize that it usually means "enlightenment", but I am still having a difficult problem with its definition.

Answer: Usually the tentative definition of satori is stated to be the direct experience of realizing the nature of Mind, this being the same as our Buddha-nature.

Question: What do you experience in satori?

Answer: Strictly speaking, satori is not actually what you might call an experience. By definition, experiences are always temporal and sensible. On the other hand, seeing Mind's nature is not something temporal or sensible. So how can it be experienced? And if we assume that the experience of Mind's nature agrees with sensory experience, then how are we to acquire confidence in our satori, given the inadequacy of sensory knowledge, which is always changing? Truthfully, satori is not an experience.

Question: Then what you are saying, is that satori is not a kind of sensory experience. But without the use of the senses, how do we arrive at the realization of Mind's nature and have satori?

Answer: In order to have satori, we must not be apart from Mind's nature. While our senses must remain consciously apart from their corresponding sensory objects in order to perceive them, satori demands immediate participation with the foundation of all realities, namely, the nature of Mind.

Question: Let me get this clear in my own mind. Are you saying that genuine satori participates directly with Mind's nature, rather than being conscious of it? If so, then what does satori comprehend?

Answer: To answer one part of your question, the answer is yes; satori is participation with Mind's nature. When we have the proper satori of Mind's nature, henceforth, we will become identical with Mind's nature. It is like water flowing into water. Finally, to answer your last question as to what satori comprehends, all that I can say is that to realize the nature of Mind is to see the obvious. In fact, we discover that we have been using Mind's pure nature all of our lives! Were it not for this nature, we would have never, in the past, been able to seek the truth of Mind, as paradoxical as that sounds.

Question: What it is like, belonging to Mind's nature?

Answer: To answer your question is impossible, because such a nature has no 'likeness'. There is nothing in the universe that is like it. Belonging to Mind's nature is independent of likeness. What I am saying is that whatever we might imagine Mind's nature to be like, it is not that. We simply cannot use conventional ways of looking at this mysterious nature. Being unbounded it has no dimensions. Being free from mental images, how can we even imagine it? And being silent, how can it be spoken of?

Question: Is satori the highest state of enlightenment?

Answer: In many ways, it is just a catchall word. Technically speaking, the satori of a Buddha is much different than, let us say, the satori of a beginner. What I have been talking about thus far, is advanced satori.

Question: What is satori like for a beginner?

Answer: I guess for a beginner, satori might be called an "interpretative insight". The beginner might come to a small insight over the question, "Where would you be if your bones were returned to your father and your flesh to your mother?" But again on further reflection, the beginner might not be able to understand what made the founder of Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma, go to China or understand

what is the meaning of a Zen shout. Until beginners belong to Mind's nature, letting go of every preconceived idea, they will have successes some times and failures at other times, trying to understand the mystery of Zen. But in the long run, a beginner's wisdom will always be incomplete because they have not awakened to the principle of Buddhism itself, which is beyond perceptions.

Question: What should beginners do to attain their first authentic satori?

Answer: Traditionally, Zen masters tell their students to make an attempt at perceiving what is beyond all mental impressions. In a word, to penetrate through the veil of your mental pictures, seeing their true content.

Question: Is this like stopping all thinking?

Answer: No. That would be the wrong state, being merely the fourth dhyana (J. zenna). If you stop there, you will fall into a miserable state of being, thinking that you have attained sainthood. If you don't believe me, then read about the fifty false satoris in the Shurangama Sutra. Indeed, some Buddhists fall into one of the fifty false enlightenments, thinking they have become enlightened by seeing Vairocana Buddha, for example, standing in front of them. Some imagine they are enlightened by entering into voidness. Some even imagine that enlightenment is to be able to make the Five Aggregates immortal!

Question: I gather from what you are saying, that stopping thoughts is all wrong. Are you suggesting that these false fifty states are just subtle perceptions and that we must go beyond them?

Answer: Well said! As one Zennist put it, "If you see the Buddha, slay the Buddha!" If your satori is anything perceptible, it is not genuine satori. If you go into a trance, or feel blissful-this is not satori, because you are perceiving something. We should never forget that our fundamental Buddha-nature is here, presently. So we must conclude that all these other states are just wishful thinking, part of our productive imagination.

Question: I think I understand what you are saying. But I have read the accounts of other Buddhists having visions of Buddhist deities, who give them teachings. Is that false?

Answer: Again, according to the Shurangama Sutra, these deities emanate from Mara, who is a kind of Buddhist devil. But actually, he just symbolizes our mortality. It is not that these deities are bad in themselves, it is just wrong to become attached to them, thus stopping short of the goal. With regard to the teachings these deities give, they only point to false enlightenments. True satori, in a manner of speaking, just reveals our nose that we once thought had disappeared. How, therefore, can a deity reveal what you have never lost or point to that which is already yours? But having said this, satori also liberates us from the wheel of birth and death, since we have become the one who now turns the wheel, instead of the one who follows it!

13)The Bodhicitta Q and A

Q: What is meant by Bodhicitta?

A: From the standpoint of Buddhist mysticism, it is a special kind of illumination in which the adept is awakened to Mind's great power.

Q: But I thought Bodhicitta just means "enlightened thought".

A: Yes of course, but that is just the commonsense meaning-not the spiritual meaning.

Q: What is the experience of Bodhicitta?

A: As regarding its actual experience, the adept receives a kind of superessential illumination, emanating from universal Mind. Inwardly, he enjoys a spirit-like irradiation that passes completely through his body, even arousing the sense-perceptions.

Q: It sounds a lot like kundalini yoga in which a divine energy is raised through the spiritual centers in the body. Is it like that?

A: Yes, it is somewhat like kundalini, but with a difference.

Q: What is the difference?

A: Prior to Bodhicitta, the adept intuitively knows what is called the 'archetype of the Buddha', known as the "gotra". Various descriptions, it is also called a "germ", a "seed", an "element", "lineage", and so on. Actually, what the word gotra is alluding to, is knowing which has become, all at once, an object of itself. At any rate, over time, the gotra turns into Bodhicitta.

Q: I don't understand. Could you give me an example?

A: In our everyday lives, we are used to seeing everything under the mode of the "object". But never once has it dawned on us to look at knowing itself, as if it too, were an object! Now, beginning with the intuition of seeing knowing itself, called the "gotra", the adept brings the gotra up in their mind's eye tens of thousands of times for many years. This activity amounts to forcing the gotra out of its latent stage into actuality, becoming eventually Bodhicitta. It is analogous to cultivating a seed, or the gestation of an embryo in a mother's womb.

Q: So far, what you have said is very interesting. But why haven't I read about this before?

A: Those who have not manifested Bodhicitta, how would they know what it is? Yet, to suggest that it doesn't exist in the canon is unwarranted. If you have read about the birth of the Bodhisattva from Queen Maya, that is Bodhicitta. The whole story of the Buddha's birth, by the way, is a drama about spiritual birth which explains the entire process of enlightenment. Those who take the birth of the Buddha in a literal way, I am afraid, miss the true teaching.

Q: I don't know quite what to say. My understanding of Bodhicitta is different. I never imagined that it is some kind of real spiritual transformation. In your explanation, everything seems more difficult.

A: I know. But whoever said the Way was easy?

Q: From the perspective of Zen, how should I conceive of this gotra, or what you call, the "Buddha-archetype"?

A: Imagine in your mind's eye Bodhidharma walking to China. Now, conceive what, within your mind, is producing this image of him walking to China.

Q: This is a koan-right? Is this how they were really intended to be used?

A: Of course. Each koan has a secret word that you fix onto, as if to conceive of its origin, before the word popped into your brain.

Q: But I thought that koans were illogical, or irrational.

A: Try super-logical.

Q: Okay, let us say I figured out what is making Bodhidharma go to China. Then what?

A: When you experience this "whatness" prior to the mental image of Bodhidharma going to China, you will, in that instant, be transported to the family of Buddhas. That is the gotra. Yet, I should caution you, this is only the beginning of the Bodhisattva's career. Some Buddhists, however, fall into the delusion of believing that the gotra is final enlightenment. Zennists, who for example, talk about "no-thought", or say, "This is it", are only talking about the gotra. True enlightenment is far beyond that.

Q: Earlier, you mentioned that gotra can be called "lineage". Do you think this is what is meant by lineage in Zen?

A: That is a good question. It is certainly a possibility. In Zen's literature there is hardly anything mentioned about the Bodhisattva's path. Most Zen masters just brush it aside as if the Bodhisattva's path were inferior to "sudden enlightenment". My reading, however, is different. I believe that early Zen only taught the gotra which it called "sudden enlightenment". After that experience, the adept lived in the woods, so to speak, for about twenty years, mastering the Bodhisattva path.

Q: Who were some of the teachers that taught that kind of practice?

A: Right off the top of my head, Tsung Mi comes to mind. He was, I believe, the fifth patriarch of the Ho-tse School. He was a very strong advocate of the Bodhisattva path.

Q: But don't today's teachers teach the Bodhisattva path?

A: From what I have seen, I am inclined to say no. But this is only my opinion. Let me say, that if the gotra is not conceived, which is the foundation of the Bodhisattva's practice, how can the Bodhisattva's Way be accomplished? Furthermore, the Way is taught by a Buddha who is superessential, rather than a flesh and blood teacher. I think that I recall Saint Asanga flying up to Tusita heaven to learn from Maitreya! One more thing, remember that Bodhisattva's only take refuge in the Buddha.

Q: What do you mean by flying up to Tusita heaven?

A: It is just a spiritual metaphor. Call it the plane of sublime intuitions.

Q: But how can the Buddha teach a Bodhisattva since he died long ago?

A: Who ever said he died? In the Mahavastu, it says that the Buddha was born from Queen Maya as a "spiritual body". Obviously, that is not a physical body that will crap-out one day. The old coot is still around. Believe me.

Q: But the canon said that he was cremated and that his ashes were divided up.

A: That is a spiritual metaphor. In fact, everything from the Buddha's conception in Queen Maya's womb to his subsequent passing into nirvana is a spiritual fable. In actuality, the Buddha is Mind. Now, does that hit the ash heap? Does it burn? Let me tell you one important piece of information. The Buddha's birth can take place in you. You can see Queen Maya and witness her death after seven days. You will even see the four mysterious Gods which attended her birth.

Q: That is strange. But I have always wondered about the story of the Buddha's birth. It never seemed human to me. Why is it like that?

A: To lay it out to you in one bite, the Buddha's birth, represents the reversal of natural birth. The Buddha's birth is a spiritual genesis. As such, the maturation of the Bodhisattva (the young Buddha) is a progression from the physical to the spiritual.

Q: So what is gained by the reversal of natural birth?

A: Freedom from re-embodiment. The adept accomplishes the ability to distinguish between Mind's true nature which is prior to the totality of being. That is about it. If all of a sudden, you find yourself prior to your mortal body, as it were, outside of it, I think it is fair to call this disembodiment.

Q: Is that maybe what nirvana means?

A: Hey, that is pretty darn good for an amateur! You are on the right track. I strongly suspect that nirvana and disembodiment are synonymous, although some Buddhists would howl at this idea. But what is the alternative? If religion only teaches us just to cope and wait for extinction; or wait for some savior to ride a cloud down to earth and raise the dead, I am afraid we will wait a very long time for salvation. The Buddha teaches us that we can attain nirvana now, rather than later.

14)The Koan Q & A

Q: What is the basic purpose of koans?

A: Mainly to put a stop to representational thinking.

Q: Just what exactly do you mean by representational thinking?

A: Basically, representational thinking deals with the habitual use of mental images at a very subtle level. The major problem with such thinking is that we believe it matches the object it tries to represent. But it doesn't. From a Buddhist standpoint, no representation can match our Buddha-nature. And as long as we try to visualize this nature, we are just going to run around in circles.

Q: If I am given a koan, then, I am expected to perceive what is not a mental image--breaking my habit of representational thinking--right?

A: Yes...that's right. But surmounting such thinking, especially for us moderns, is really difficult. Often, we fail to arrive at the limit of representational thinking. Some even go so far as to represent non-representational thinking! Talk about delusion!

Q: Could you explain how all this pertains to the "Mu" koan about whether or not a dog has the Buddha-nature?

A: As you know Joshu replied to the question with "Mu", meaning "No". This came as a shock to the questioner who believed that all sentient beings, including a dog, have the potential to realize Buddhahood in the future. In regard to the koan exercise, itself, as laid out by Chinese Zen master Ta-hui, Joshu's "Mu" is called a *hua-wei* meaning "word-tail". For the practitioner thinking "Mu" in his mind's eye, it is merely a hua-wei, being no more than a mental image, or more precisely, a mental sound. In the exercise, itself, hua-wei chiefly refers to representational thinking. "Mu", let us say, is the grand representation of all! Imagine, then, trying to transcend "Mu", seeing the *pure antecedentness* of the hua-wei called the *hau-t'ou*, meaning 'ante-word'. But that is what we have to do. Basically, this means to look at the suchness which comes prior to the arising of Mu in our mind's eye. If we look correctly, we will see the first trace of Buddha Mind, understanding that the myriad of things issue from this abode which is free of mental images.

Q: Are you saying that the "Mu" I intone in my mind comes from Buddha Mind which cannot be intoned or seen?

A: Yes. However, most people are so addicted to representational thinking that they are unable to see anything besides the hua-wei side, in this case, the imagined "Mu" which is not the same as the real antecedent "Mu". Continuing this way, they will never get a glimpse of Buddha Mind. I should say, to actually merge with the hau-t'ou of "Mu" proves a great event if it is actually accomplished. But most practitioners never do it.

Q: Why is that?

A: It is because most people believe in the seen rather than the unseen. In the world of mental constructs, we have been led to believe that the source of thoughts is nothing--it is a dream. We are taught to value thoughts, schemata, feelings, desires and so on. Never once have our cultural wise men encouraged us to investigate the true source of these images.

Q: When you saw the hau-t'ou--the "pure antecedentness" as you call it--what was it like?

A: I just saw *that* which was image-free. No matter what image came before my mind I could see its hau-t'ou. It was great! I can remember the next morning as I watched the sun rise over the eastern hills and saw its hau-t'ou and jumped for joy like a madman! Then, when I went in the woods to cut

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firewood, I even felt the hau-t'ou of sawing wood! Even when my old fears came up, I could see the hua-t'ou. Over the years as my practice deepened, I became more of the the hau-t'ou and less and less of the hua-wei. As this happened, more of the Buddha's teaching was revealed to me. Oh, let me say this before I forget--Zen practice really begins after we see the hau-t'ou, and not before.

Q: That is very interesting. So, there comes a point when you actually "see the hua-t'ou" of "Mu". Right?

A: Yes--exactly so. No "ifs" "ands" or "buts" about it. You see **that** which no image can represent. In addition, it is like a mysterious jewel which, if you turn to it, your existence becomes more complete over time. The more you look at it, the clearer your Buddha knowledge becomes.

Q: That seems easy enough. But what about bigger koans like Hyakujo's fox? I really have a difficult time with that one. How did Hyakujo's words "The enlightened man is one with causation" free the Zen master from further rebirth as a fox?

A: The teacher of Ta-hui, Zen master Yuan-wu, said, "Do not seek for anything within the meaning of the phrase". What he was stressing is that you must learn to hear clearly outside of the phrase in the example of "The enlightened man is one with causation". That is the hua-t'ou. Do you understand?

Q: Not exactly. I am familiar with a number of interpretations of that particular koan. Do you mean they are wrong and yours is right?

A: [laughing] No, only truth has the correct answer. But let me now get to the point. Teachers who engage in looking for the various meanings in koan phrases themselves, are off the track. If a thousand Zen masters have a thousand different interpretations of Hyakujo's answer, which one should we follow? These teachers are only investigating dead words. They should see the live word that comes before all words!

Q: So what is the "live word", as you say?

A: It is where the hau-t'ou is. Exactly there! It is the source of my tongue which not even the Buddha can find! [laughing]

Q: Well, I must admit that is a pretty good answer. In other words, I have to get beyond representational thinking, as you say, and stop trying to conceptualize. By the way, I have heard a lot about "doubt" in koan practice. What does it mean?

A: When the pioneer of the koan exercise, Yuan-wu, used the expression "doubt", he meant it to refer to obstacles which Zen practitioners must overcome. Basically, in Yuan-wu's use, it is what separates us from the truth.

Q: But I read somewhere that we are supposed to cultivate "great doubt".

A: Oh, that was Ta-hui's understanding of doubt who was Yuan-wu's successor. He said that "great doubt is followed by great enlightenment", or something to that effect.

Q: What is your assessment of the way koans are practiced today?

A: To be honest, not very good. It is much like Yuan-wu's time, in which everyone was stuck on interpreting koan phrases, which, ironically, koans were designed as an antidote against. It seems to me, that we haven't changed a bit. Today, the only difference is that teachers now are analyzing koans from various psychological perspectives. They treat koans as if they were psycho-social parables which, of course, they are not.

Q: Aren't there answer to koans?

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A: Not in a mundane sense, although in Japanese Rinzai Zen there are pat answers. But this is like giving out pictures of cookies to stop hunger. Thankfully, some crazy Zen master in 1916 gave out the answers to Hakuin's koan system and spared us all pictures of cookies! By the way, he called such Zen "pseudo-Zen".

Q: Does that mean, therefore, there are no answers?

A: It was never the intention of Ta-hui, or his teacher, to give 'word answers' to koans, in the case of riddles. When you penetrate the hua't'ou of the phrase you will know the right spiritual answer. If I say, "Mu" or "Cypress tree in the courtyard", or put my shoes on my head--you will understand. If I say, "Buddha" or chant a mantra, it is the same answer. That comes from seeing the hua-t'ou.

Q: Basically, you're saying that the modern practice of the koan is incorrect--right?

A: I am not going to answer that one. [laughing] I am already in hot water for my views. That is what you get for trying to be true to the original. I guess that makes me an old conservative Zennist!

Q: Well, you have to admit that what you have said so far, is not found in today's Zen books. To be honest, is your version traditional?

A: Of course, my account is traditional. On the other hand, today's so-called Zen books are, for the most part, the machinations of Pop Zennists who don't have the slightest inkling of how koans work. Basically, on this issue, Zen is divided into two camps, viz., those who wish to go beyond representational thinking and those who are using koans as a vehicle for psychological problem solving.

Q: What do you say when teachers tell their students that their own life is a koan?

A: You mean Dogen's idea? I say that they are looking in the wrong direction. Life is samsara--it never gets anywhere.

Q: Then, you don't think our life has any ultimate meaning?

A: What has ultimate meaning is the deathless hua-t'ou. In contrast with that, our body is a walking corpse looking for a grave. Yet, despite this dismal outlook, each of us has the capacity to harmonize with Buddha-nature, and by harmonizing with it, attain eternal life. After that, we will be like a swan, taking flight from a smelly old lake, flying to heaven.

Q: So, koans help us reach heaven? I can't believe that.

A: Koans help us see the immortal. By the way, I was using a metaphor from the Dhammapada. Yes, the Buddha talks about "swans" and "heaven". Sorry to rain on your parade! [laughing]

Q: It is going to take me a while to digest what you have said. For some who have spent years in study with a teacher, your words are depressing. In effect, you are suggesting that my Zen is not Zen because my answers dealt with psychological issues.

A: If I am suggesting anything it is this: China once greatly valued spirit. When the great Chinese mind developed Ch'an (Zen) it was for the purpose of spiritual transcendence--not learning how to cope with everyday life and the kids. In other words, there was only super swan flying Zen! [laughing]

Q: If Zen can't deal with common everyday issues, how can it be any good?

A: The problems people face today are not spiritual problems, but problems of desire and excess. In this regard, not even a Sage can be of any benefit. Only nature and Fate can deal with such people, teaching them their hard lessons. Spirit, on the other hand, says that if you want true happiness, leave your madhouse behind and move towards a higher level of being. The koan helps us do that.

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Q: Does answering a koan correctly make one a Buddha?

A: Absolutely not. The answer only points you in the right direction. You just see a little bit of our Mr. Buddha! The insight still has to be cultivated until you manifest the state of Bodhisattva. After you become a Bodhisattva, a whole new practice evolves. Koans, after that, are like reading children's books.

Q: Does that explain why the Bodhisattva path is not mentioned very much in Zen?

A: I think so. But I should point out in Zen's beginnings, uncovered in old Tibetan manuscripts, there were roughly four kinds of Zen, viz., Gradual Zen, Sudden Zen, Mahayoga and Tathagata Zen. Mahayoga was basically the Bodhisattva path which lead to Tathagata Zen. What I think has happened now, is that Mahayoga and Tathagata Zen have been replaced by Sudden Zen. The higher forms of Zen, namely, Mahayoga and Tathagata Zen remained in Tibet and were subsequently absorbed.

Q: That is fascinating. I hope I haven't taken up too much of your time.

A: That's okay. I am glad to share my thoughts with you.

15)Zenmar Interview

In the electronic sangha of America Online the voice of Zenmar is distinctive and his knowledge is honored. It is unusual for him to visit a Buddhist chatroom, but when he does attention turns to him as an arbiter of theory and practice. On the BBS, he frequently posts to the more-serious folders where his erudite comments clear the air, or spark high-level discussion. Only a rarified few can stay toe-to-toe in discourse of high scholarship with Zenmar, though. A part of his genius, too, is exhibited in a pithy, sometimes-disarming humor that leaves the reader chuckling as well as challenged.

Zenmar agreed to an interview using a format of exchanged E-mail, thus allowing him to give full vent to his thoughts, and allowing me to find the right follow-up question where appropriate.

SnarkyMan: Talk to me a little about your development as a Zen Buddhist. Those of us who subscribe to your newsletter or have conversed with you in an E-mail discussion group have heard a little about your days as a zen monk--I believe in Japan. Are those the "good old days," that you look back on reverently, when you had Masters who you loved and were near-perfect beings?

Zenmar: I think my development as a Zen Buddhist began when my philosophy professor, Dr. Lauren, introduced me to Zen Buddhism in 1964. He knew D.T. Suzuki quite well and studied with him as a scholar at the University of Hawaii. Incidentally, my teacher had also been a student of Martin Heidegger's who once remarked that Suzuki's essays said what he was trying to say all along! Talk about a circle. Anyway, I thank my philosophy teacher for starting me on the path. About a year latter I found a Zen teacher who lived by the College of the Pacific and had taught Alan Watts a little Zen when Mr. Watts lectured at the American Academy of Asian Studies at COP around 1955 (I can't remember the exact date). At that time I felt I was in good hands and had no need to book passage on a cattle boat to

Japan! I felt that studying Zen in Japan, then trying to learn Japanese at the same time, would make me a lousy Zennist and a poor Japanese speaker. After I met my teacher, who was named Daino Doki, he convinced me that he was up to the task of training me. I had no reason to doubt him at the time. Daino Doki was a caucasian who had studied with Hodo Tobase in San Francisco and then a number of years later was elevated to the rank of Roshi by the Primate of Soto Zen, Rosen Takashina.

As for the "good old days," I must confess some of it was fun. At least I can say that my tenure with Daino Doki wasn't boring. He was quite a creative character. In his temple, the word "dullness" never came up. I found the whole Zen environment to be quite exciting. I must tell you that life there was unpredictable. Several times I got kicked out, and just as many times I came back, which was part of the testing process. To enumerate some things I did, I sat in zazen, chanted the *Heart Sutra*, cleaned the

garden, walked the dog, made coffee for my teacher, mowed the lawn, and made my own robes. Looking back, I think I was more of a holy houseboy. Supposedly, doing chores is a vehicle through which to practice "awareness," which for Soto Zen seems to be its main secret. There wasn't a day that went by when my teacher didn't say "Be aware!" I must admit that practicing awareness sobered me up. By paying attention to the little things, soon I saw that the big things take care of themselves.

As for the last part of your question, like most beginners new to Buddhism, I was a hopeless romantic and believed in my teacher--even when he told me he was the Tathagata! However, I soon came to learn that Buddhist teachers are not "near-perfect beings"--including my teacher. Many teachers, I found

out later, are very pedestrian. And some I have seen will do almost anything for money and fame. In hindsight, I learned that it is very important to stop focusing on the personality of your teacher and pay

attention to the content of the teaching. Many students I have noticed today, still must learn the hard way as I did, that the worship of a teacher corrupts the Dharma. It doesn't matter if the teacher is a Tibetan Lama or a Zen Buddhist Roshi--all teachers are all-to-human, to use Nietzsche's expression, and shouldn't be worshiped. The essential aim of a good teacher is to get his or her students on a path of philosophical intuition which will eventually lead to a reality that surpasses this finite world. Now I

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should point out that philosophical intuition is not to be confused with interpretive intuition, nor should it be confused with having so-called "religious peak experiences" which are often quite meaningless. In Buddhism, philosophical intuition is synonymous with remembrance; of trying to wake up and recall our Buddha-nature which has never left us. All the rest is humbug. I know this will no doubt offend

many Buddhists. But seriously, anyone who is familiar with the Buddhist canon as a whole has to see the Buddha as a wise old philosopher who just happened to recall the secret of the universe which is wholly detached from the cycles of samsaric regeneration.

SnarkyMan: Does training to be a monk have many similarities to being in the Army? The reputation that is "put out there" is one of precise organization and that it is very formal. So what was it like for you?

Zenmar: Rather than being like the Army, in my case life in a Zen temple with a Zen master was a combination of being in a Trappist monastery, a college, and a mild prison boot camp. Such an environment is heavy on formality and weak on content. I remember when Bishop Sumi came from Japan to inspect our temple he made sure that we had the right kind of bell and that our shrine was the correct height. He couldn't have cared less about our library and whether or not we had the Buddhist canon in it.

As far as my expectations of learning the content of Zen went, my whole stay in the Zen temple was a big let down. I was expecting Zen to be like T'ang Zen in China, and my teacher to be like Rinzai or Joshu. That was not the case.

SnarkyMan: Are you saying that you didn't have any kind of "satori" or some other kind of earthshaking experience while you trained with your teacher?

Zenmar: First, let me say something shocking about the Zen world. If your teacher likes you, you seem to answer all the koans and receive the seal of approval. If not, you figure it out. That I wasn't really liked by my teacher had something to do with not having satori, as funny as that sounds. My teacher's favorite disciple, for some strange reason, answered all the koans, while I couldn't get to first base. I began to have doubts when my teacher give me a book to read entitled *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* by Yukio Mishima. I think my teacher saw me as a kind of stuttering Mizoguchi who tried to destroy the Golden Temple in Mishima's book. After the big hint, I took another course. I decided to read every book in the library and become smarter than my teacher. I can remember when my teacher and his favorite disciple went on vacation and left me alone to take care of the temple. For a week I had an orgy reading the Pali Suttas and the Mahayana Lankavatara Sutra! I should mention that my teacher would only let me read certain books, ones that I thought were rather inane.

To make a long story short, many years later I had a profound satori. When I visited my teacher afterwards, I could see that his depth of penetration into the Dharma was quite shallow. By that time I saw that authentic Zen was not the same as modern Zen.

SnarkyMan: What is the meaning of the name "Zenmar?"

Zenmar: I just combined the Greek god Zeus, which can be written as "Zen", with the Roman god Mars and dropped the "s." I wanted six letters for my AOL name, and something quite odd that I could remember. On the whole it is rather barbaric and unbuddhist--but it has a nice ring to it. Actually, the name Zenmar is better suited to a comic book character flying around with a huge cape! On a more serious note, I wanted Zenmar to be a cybernetic creation. I have given him a personality and a set of manners with which to deal with Buddhists in the cybersangha. This way I don't have to become personal with anyone inasmuch as Zenmar is fictional. Speaking for myself, I do enjoy the character "Zenmar."

I should add this: I believe it is more important to understand a person's ideas rather than knowing someone's personal history, or what color his hair is. American Buddhists are far too concerned about

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the "person," which eventually turns into a cult of personality. I think it is time that we pay more attention to the teaching and less to who teaches it.

SnarkyMan: A dumb question, no doubt: But once the dust-free mirror reflects back to us that most-original of all Original Faces and we've taken The Great Swandive into the timeless, spaceless ocean, will we know what the hell this crazy passion-play called "life" was all about? Or will we "merely" transcend the question?

Zenmar: In a way the question becomes transcended. It is like a dream in which everything seems important at that moment, until you awaken and look back. Speaking about the "this crazy passion-play called 'life'," we eventually come to learn the cause of the passions. We understand that Mind, in the past, attached itself to its productions setting the stage for its own tragic downfall into embodied existence. Said another way, the human passion-play has its genesis in Mind's sympathy with its phenomenal side.

SnarkyMan: Should we feel an "urgency" in our quest for Enlightenment?

Zenmar: To answer your question I would say emphatically, yes! We need to feel a sense of urgency towards the quest. The reason, I think, why we don't feel an "urgency" is because of the hormonal high that we are on as land mammals that happens to becloud our reason. Hormones exert a very powerful influence over us and give us a false sense of well-being. Hence, whatever acts to transcend the hormone high seems less important. Maybe that is why most pedestrian Buddhists feel no urgency to seek enlightenment.

SnarkyMan: Most of us American gum-chewing Buddhists who tune in to cyberspace will never be devoting the time and effort that you have. Perhaps we are simply not doing "our best." What is the role of the ordinary man? Can it be that a person is born into a lifetime where the necessary "ripeness" for finding his Buddha-nature is never going to come?

Zenmar: Let me put your question this way. Would a gum-chewing ordinary American Buddhist study the Dharma if it was interesting and they saw its necessity? I think the answer is yes. So far, Buddhist teachers have not clearly articulated what Buddhism is actually about. They have a lot of half-baked theories about Buddhism that are frankly quite dull and just plain humbug. I can't blame people for not doing their level best, given some of the Buddhism I have seen over the years. The reason why Buddhism engaged the Orient in the past and caused great cultures to honor it with splendid works of art and literature was that Buddhism was seen as a path that ennobled mankind and taught him how to break the bonds of death and samsaric regeneration in a very concrete way. The Buddha has actually laid out a path that teaches us the process of disembodiment; of how to cast off this mortal body while still being able to generate it--a kind of divine "having your cake and eating it too" solution. It is interesting to see how much the word "Nirvana" still remains a riddle for most Westerners, when in fact it is just the state of disembodiment.

Now to answer the last part of your question, there is no cause for doom. If you would like to not worry about old age, suffering, and death ever again, just bear in mind that you are disembodied right now but can't remember how you are free of these conditions. Nothing is stopping you from realizing what the Buddha realized except your attachment to the corporeal body. You are quite ripe now, by the way.

SnarkyMan: I don't think I have ever heard it mentioned that Nirvana is like disembodiment--that is strange. Isn't Nirvana just the extinction of the ego? Is there any mention of disembodiment in Zen?

Zenmar: I think the idea of "ego-extinction" is a modern invention. Frankly, I don't see our modern concept of egoity in Buddhism. The Buddha wasn't Freud. Nirvana really has nothing to do with the extinction of the ego. Above all we should not understand Nirvana to be synonymous with extinction, as if to blow a flame out. Even though it is mentioned in this context once or twice, it is only an analogy used by the Buddha to describe Nirvana's indeterminate character. Supposedly, an adept when released from the corporeal body is beyond all measure just as the whereabouts of a flame

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blown out by a gust of wind cannot be determined. At least that is the way I read it in the Pali Suttas. I know this is going to sound weird, but the Greek word "utopia" is a perfect cognate for Nirvana. What does "utopia" mean? It means literally "no place," the term "place" in Greek being more at position or locus. Remember that in the scripture the Buddha spoke of Nirvana as being a place where there is no earth or water, nor wind or space. I can't remember most of the passage, but the Buddha goes on and says that Nirvana is even beyond consciousness and any kind of dependence. Nirvana you could say is kind of a placeless place that is free of suffering.

As to your last question--yes disembodiment is mentioned in Zen. Rinzai does a good job using the metaphor of the "unfixed true man" for the state of disembodiment. This "man" he says is not made of the elements and is constantly going out and coming in through our foreheads! Anyway, if you read his sermon, you can't fail to get the meaning.

SnarkyMan: Are Lao Tzu's writings of value? Is not the Tao the same as the One Mind, that ocean beneath our waves? Can we move forward on our path to locate our Buddha-nature by being Taoist?

Zenmar: I think his writings are of great value. I might add that there is a lot of wiggle room to interpret Taoism in a Buddhist way and vice versa. When Buddhism came to China it had to be interpreted in the context of Taoism. It would be like Westerners interpreting Buddhism in a Neoplatonic context when it first arrived on our shores. In fact, Buddhism would be a lot better off if Platonists had translated Buddhist Sutras. Now we are stuck with translations that reflect a postmodern agenda.

Taoism, I must say, didn't stop any Chinese Buddhists from realizing their Buddha-nature.

SnarkyMan: Is being in love with Buddhism an aid to locating our Buddha-nature?

Zenmar: Yes--very much. You have to really love Buddhism in order to understand the Buddha-nature. You can't practice out of fear, or just use Buddhism to make a name for yourself. You have to be in love with it. Every day you should delight in your study of the Dharma. I find that when I am really interested in something I learn quicker. It is amazing how fast students can progress in Buddhism when they are really in love with it. Instead of many lifetimes trying to find the Buddha-nature, if you are enthusiastic, you can realize it in thirty or forty years, maybe.

SnarkyMan: Thirty or forty years! I have heard that in Zen it only takes a very short time--maybe a few years or even a few days to realize your Buddha-nature. Is that not true?

Zenmar: Mostly that is hogwash. Take the example of Zen master Hakuin: Sure he had a lot of insights that he imagined were enlightenment, but in the end he had to acknowledge that they were misleading. In my reading of his biography, he reached profound enlightenment only in his forty-second year.

That is a long tenure. I am willing to bet that his last enlightenment almost came as a let down! He simply realized that the Buddha-nature that he was searching for was the very same one that was conducting the search for enlightenment all those years. Maybe this is why it takes so long with the truth, because we are dealing with any amazing subtlety. As an old Zen expression goes: It is like riding an ass in search of an ass.

SnarkyMan: When you post to the Boards is there always a "purpose" at play to enlighten the other person with what you write?

Zenmar: I think the main purpose why I post is to exchange ideas and to have dialogues with other Buddhists that are enriching to everyone concerned. Of course reaching that goal is not easy. Many people don't want to exchange ideas or have a dialogue. The vast majority of those that post are just snipers. If you write more than a sentence--you are too intellectual. If you speak metaphysically rather than dogmatically, someone tells you that you talk too much and that you need to do more zazen! All this is a waste of time to my way of thinking. Generally the sniping reflects the postmodern view which most Buddhists subscribe to, mainly that Buddhism should be unintelligible. D.T. Suzuki, I feel, was responsible for casting Zen into a postmodern mold. I think his understanding of Zen was dead wrong on a few points--but he was a man of his times, so what could he do?

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SnarkyMan: I have read a little Suzuki like most people. I have always found him interesting. He seems to know what he is talking about. Since you mentioned that he was dead wrong on some points, could you give an example?

Zenmar: The one that sticks in my mind is his idea of *emptiness*. Suzuki thinks that is it some kind of Buddhist absolute that we are to experience in some mystical way when we get rid of all of our concepts and logic. As a result of this purging--viola--emptiness is experienced! But is that emptiness or just an abstraction? I think the answer is clear. This kind of emptiness is only an empty artifact from what I can see. It is just as illusory as that which is negated. To be honest with you, I don't find an iota of evidence in the Buddhist canon which supports Suzuki's understanding of emptiness. For the Buddha, emptiness is the unreal, rather than the real. For Nagarjuna, called the second Buddha, emptiness is like an echo, which can deceive. In fact Nagarjuna equated emptiness with dependent origination. What he is saying is that things derived by causation are empty and impotent!

SnarkyMan: What are some of you insights about the Cyber Sangha that is developing?

Zenmar: An evolving Cyber Sangha is good for Buddhism. But not because it is providing practitioners with a lot of texts. It is good for Buddhism because, as Buddhists, we can exchange our ideas with other Buddhists, seeing which ideas make more sense and which ideas are mature or contradictory. I have found that what comes across best are solid ideas. A post well conceived and well written has a strong impact. On the other hand, blather gets nowhere. Nor does the typical flippant zenic "one word" response, as when some yokel writes "Kwatz." In the end, these people have to leave because their ideas are inadequate. I have to admit that a lot of garbage is posted. But every once in a while good stuff appears. Those who take a little time to say something of interest; who have something valuable to share with others and work at it, help the Cyber Sangha overall. One more thing. Recently, I have noticed an important development in the Cyber Sangha and in particular Buddhism AOL. It is a sense of community. Other media, like television, just focus on one person with a narrow-minded core of opinions. Contrary to this, on the BBS, there is a living community with no one single individual dominating the dialogue. It is open and free. Ideas, I must say, thrive in such an environment.

SnarkyMan: Do you think Buddhism will change as a result of the BBS? Will practice be as necessary as it has been?

Zenmar: The BBS cannot change Buddhism's content. The BBS can only increase the velocity of information transfer. That is, it can do away with information lag that is inherent in a slower medium such as a book or a journal. Most of us, for instance, learned of Taizan Maeizumi Roshi's death very quickly. However, I should emphasize that the swiftness of the so-called information highway does not generate wisdom. And if nothing is utilizing this highway except high-speed kitsch then we can expect nothing great from such a highway. Overall, we can expect the BBS to be of great benefit giving our ideas both access and speed by which to engage other ideas. Scholars can exchange information and ideas and banter on at a higher velocity. The beginner can ascertain at a faster rate which teachers and traditions are logically clearer to understand, thereby gaining trust in a particular teacher or teaching.

Practice will always be essential to Buddhism. It will still be necessary to contemplate the teaching of the Buddha and go on a noetic mountain climb. For those who practice seated meditation, it will still be necessary to sit for long periods of time. And for those who study Sutras and koans it will still be necessary to have certain key intuitions and generate the great doubt.

SnarkyMan: Thank you, Zenmar.

16)A Transmission outside religion (The Transmission Q & A)

Q: What does this statement mean?

"A special transmission outside the scriptures..."

A: Right off the bat, let me say that "scriptures" is the wrong word. It should read "outside religion".

Q: But that is the way most all Zen masters today translate this stanza. Is it wrong?

A: Misleading. Zen is not antinomian. We are not here to burn or ignore the scriptures. Those Zennists who are into that sort of interpretation are off the track. That, to my mind, is "wild fox Zen". Getting back to your question, which I believe has to do with the so-called "transmission", let me say that in Zen there occurs a spiritual transmission outside of the religious institution itself, by which we intuitively see our true nature. It is an inconceivable transmission. You can't actually transmit it to another.

Q: As I understand it--and I am probably wrong-- but isn't what is transmitted actually the secret that everything is Buddha-nature?

A: [Laughing] I guess you have been reading pop Zen pocketbooks. No, that is incorrect in this neck of the woods. More specifically, what is transmitted is the fundamental nature of all things which is beyond the range of thought and figurative thinking. When you fully see this nature for yourself, you become a Buddha--you are transmitted. By the way, it is really not a transmission at all, since you have always had this nature. It is rather like finding something you lost long ago.

Q: This brings up an interesting question. Isn't it necessary to have this transmission confirmed by an authorized Zen master?

A: Yes, and he is sitting on top of your head right now!

Q: I don't get it.

A: I mean that verification is within you at this moment. A real transmission must be independent of external verification--this includes ecclesiastical institutions with their so-called certifications. If you have to run to a teacher to verify your enlightenment to become transmitted, what kind of transmission is that? It doesn't seem very sound to me. Further, what kind of certitude is that which depends on another to be certain?

Q: But what about the problem with self-delusion?

A: There are many kinds of self-delusion. One kind is believing that having a certificate in your possession amounts to enlightenment. Surely you don't believe that every person who says they are transmitted has actually received the authentic transmission? Today, there are some teachers who claim to be transmitted, but who have no idea of what Buddha-nature is. They think Buddha-nature is sensory consciousness or just being aware of some finite matter, like pulling a weed. If that is the case, then we are all transmitted--even wild animals! If the truth be known, according to Zen master Huang Po, nothing was transmitted to anybody that could be recognized by the senses.

Q: Are you saying that it's all a hoax?

A: Far from it. Our ignorance is real enough. Equally, the correction of ignorance is real enough, too. What master Huang Po is saying is that when we see our true nature as it really is, that is the transmission--we attain Buddhahood. But nothing substantial is actually transmitted which can be viewed with the six senses--or by another. In addition, this transmission is also effortless. It doesn't even require that you practice being aware of pulling a weed or chopping an onion [laughing].

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Q: But all teachers get some kind of transmission document, don't they?

A: Yes. But it means nothing. Deluded teachers get transmission documents, too, and so do Kami (spirits). Former high school bullies get such documents, then go on to become Zen masters who treat their students like beasts of burden. Receiving a transmission document is part of conventional Buddhism--it is not part of ultimate Buddhism. People who are attached to such forms need these kinds of things, while real students don't. When a superior student, going beyond conventional Buddhism, sees his true nature, that is verification--it is the transmission! When I was young student, attached to conventional Buddhism, I expected my teacher to wear a robe and have transmission documents. In fact, the first thing he did was show me his certification. Was I impressed! Now, I could care less. I am too old, I guess. It is all like a dream in which ghosts go around declaring their ghost enlightenment to other ghosts.

Q: I think you need proper certification if you are going to teach. Do you agree? You can't practice medicine without a license, for example.

A: Buddha-nature certification is not the same as getting a license to run a sewerage treatment plant, for instance. A person who has seen Buddha-nature can help you to distinguish between mental images of it and that nature directly. But a certified Zen master who has no idea of what Buddha-nature is can only point out a false path of mental images, based on what he has put into his memory.

Q: In some Zen centers, they offer psychological counseling. Doesn't that require a license?

A: Of course it does. But then, that has nothing to do with the transmission of Zen. In Zen's early history no one bothered with psychological matters. Students were interested in seeing their true nature and overcoming samsara. Zen, they understood, transmitted Buddha Mind--not psychological mind.

17)Hui-K'o and Student*

Student: Is it good to study the Sutras? As a master of the Lankavatara School, would you tell me if it is beneficial?

Hui-k'o: Not if one is addicted to a literary understanding of Sutras. Unfortunately, today, many students have failed to come to a real understanding of their predecessor's words. They cling to the letter and forget the insight. In my own transmission from Master Bodhidharma, the Lankavatara Sutra is meant as an aid for transcending words and the mental pictures they create. In that way, Sutras are not an obstruction.

Student: I must confess, I get confused reading scriptures. There is so much to learn and so many important words which I don't understand.

Hui-k'o: How true! This reminds me of my youthful days as a student when Bodhidharma set me straight. After I saw the inconceivable aspect of my true Mind for the first time, I realized how dangerous clinging to words can be if one does not have a concrete realization.

Student: That is interesting. I am not at your level. For me, studying the meaning of words is like counting the sands at the bottom of the ocean. There are so many difficult ideas to learn-I shall never understand them all. I feel like I am drowning in letters!

Hui-k'o: This is because, as yet, you don't comprehend the single principle which unifies the diverse aspects of the teaching and makes it coherent. I know it is very difficult to do this. It was difficult for me. I had to remind myself what the Lankavatara Sutra said: "Don't become attached to the letter and the conventional view of reality."

Student: What should I do first, other than studying scripture, becoming like a parrot?

Hui-k'o: First, it is important to realize our true essence-lineage, called the gotra. This is a big accomplishment in itself!

Student: What exactly is the gotra?

Hui-k'o: It is like a precious jewel lying in the mind that is entirely covered by the dirt of habitual mental-picturing and corporeal sensations. After I had my initial glimpse into the gotra, it was easy for me to set aside those states which didn't fit with its pristine nature. If you are fortunate, one day you will catch a glimpse of it also.

Student: I hope so! Would you tell me more about it?

Hui-k'o: Surely. After we have an insight into this pea-size gotra, we must direct our whole being towards it. In that regard, we are becoming a member of the Buddha's lineage. At this stage, it is only a tiny little spiritual embryo! As it grows, we get wiser, eventually passing beyond corporeal conditions, abiding no longer in this body, yet still able to work its fingers! This was what Master Bodhidharma really taught me. I had no idea what the true nature of Mind was at the time I met him. But when he asked me to show it to him and I couldn't-well, instead, I saw the gotra, you might say. In a split second, I passed beyond the pale of my worldly body and its inner world of mental pictures and sensations. Then after that, he gave me the Lankavatara Sutra as an aid; he then told me to deepen and cultivate my insight.

Student: So there is more than just this insight?

Student

Hui-k'o: Oh. yes. Much more. One does not stop with this insight. Seeing an aspect of our Buddha Mind-the gotra-is like a seed which is yet to reveal its spiritual contents-the big Bodhi-tree! As we progressively cultivate it, we come to transcend ourselves and our previous old ways of perceiving reality.

Student: Is this the implication behind Bodhidharma's Two Entrances?

Hui-k'o: Yes. We first enter by seeing the pure image of the absolute which forms the basis of all existence. This is the gotra, or the same, the embryo of the Tathagata. In a finger snap we see something which is free from the veiling clouds of delusion.

Student: This is very interesting. So where does 'pi-kuan' (wall-insight) figure into this scheme? I heard that Grandmaster Bodhidharma sat facing a wall for many years.

Hui-k'o: As far as 'pi' is concerned, it is the 'unmoving' which is like a wall, as opposed to the ever changing quality of phenomena. Here, one sets aside the changing world of their corporeal body, including its perceptions and emotions. When Bodhidharma sat facing a wall, he actually faced the unmoving,, becoming the more of it.

Student: Ah! I get it now. Yes, pi-kuan is literally the insight into the unmoving.

Hui-k'o: Yes. 'Pi', means the unmoving principle. 'Kuan' means 'insight'. In this case a direct insight into the unmoving. Remember, too, kuan is Buddhist 'vipashyanâ' meditation. Pi-kuan is our version of it.

Student: Ah! I get it. Is this like the practice of the 'one pointedness of mind samadhi' meditation exercise?

Hui-k'o: Yes. You could say that. One mentally envisions an exceedingly small point in which the content of it and its conceptual absence become exactly the same. In this practice, one has penetrated through a veil, you might say. It is like a little hole in a rice paper screen, letting in the sun's light. Another way to think about this subject is to realize that our sense organs have limits. The ear cannot hear all sounds; nor can the eye see all forms. In this practice we go beyond the sensory house. We leave by way of the sensory doors and walk outside. To do this, as strange as it sounds, we drill a tiny hole in the fabric of reality and keep our gaze steady on this tiny hole for a long time! [laughing]

Student: That sounds interesting. What happens to you in 'one pointedness samadhi'?

Hui-k'o: First, samadhi means that spiritual light envelops us. As I sit here before you, I am in samadhi. How do I know this? I feel the dynamic light of the Buddha constantly energizing me. Why? Because I am in harmony with it. Over the years, I have chosen to be more of this mysterious light and less of this old mortal body. Now, if I even think of 'one point', I am totally enveloped in a superessential light.

Student: That is fascinating. So, what is the second entrance about?

Hui-k'o: The second entrance is in response to the first. In a nutshell, it means to cultivate and expand the first entrance. However, I must caution you, both are coordinate. You can't really separate them.

Student: I think I see what you mean. The first entrance is like a seed. The second entrance is like being a farmer cultivating that seed.

Hui-k'o: Yes. Even though we possess a tiny clue as to what the absolute is, we are far from its blessed shore. We still have to fully actualize the first entrance-bring it to a bloom, so to speak.

Student: In other words, we still have a lot of problems to overcome. Is that what you are saying?

Student

Hui-k'o: Yes. Habits run deep. What we did in the past is still with us. In the mean time, we have to bear our past errors as we move towards our true nature. This is where the Four Deeds come in, comprising the second entrance.

Student: What is the first deed?

Hui-k'o: The first deed is learning to bear our suffering because, in the past, we failed to have an insight into the absolute. So, we have to pay the price. The second deed is to accept the outcome of karma as we have, in the past, foolishly allowed ourselves to become conditioned and seduced by phenomenal conditions.

Student: It seems that the basis for these two deeds is our failure to see and to cultivate our true nature-our gotra, as you put it earlier. Instead, we believe our true nature is to be found in living a worldly life, tied to possessions.

Hui-k'o: Yes, that is a good understanding. As regards possessions, this concerns the third deed. We have to give up the habit of trying to possess things. We must see that all things are empty-they're not sacred. There is nothing worth possessing. This world is no more than a burning house. So why stay in a burning house, hanging on to a piece of furniture?

Student: What does the house mean from a spiritual standpoint?

Hui-k'o: It signifies our corporeal body in which we abide and play like foolish spiritual children, unaware that the house is doomed. In Buddhism, the 'house' is a symbol for the body. To take up a house, therefore, means to take up a body so as to possess it and deepen one's involvement in it.

Student: How does one stop this?

Hui-k'o: This is the fourth deed. This is to be in accord with the First Entrance which is our gotric true nature. Some call this nature the Tathagata-garbha, meaning the embryo of the Buddha. It is like a Spiritual fetus which is immaculate; which all the time is maturing. Eventually, it matures. We gain a spiritual body not having thirty-two defiled marks. That is emancipation.

Student: Is this what Grandmaster Bodhidharma taught you?

Hui-k'o: Yes. He used to call this practice 'spiritual obstetrics'. He said the story of the Buddha's birth was actually a mystery which hid a Secret method for giving birth to a Buddha within oneself.

Student: This is fascinating. This would explain words like "Tathagata-garbha" and others like it. What other things did he teach you about spiritual obstetrics?

Hui-k'o: Many things, which at the time, I didn't understand. Foremost, he said we must try to develop a Buddha-body which is essentially self-actual light. I must say, I was amazed by his words. I thought after my insight, I had really attained something big. But after his lectures, all of a sudden, I felt humble. I knew I was just a child in his presence.

Student: Was he a powerful person?

Hui-k'o: Yes. Just to be in his presence one felt a powerful energy. I can't describe it. But you could feel something very intense and at the same time blissful. It felt wonderful to be around this energy of his. All my worries disappeared. He was a joy to be with. He was like a warm fire in the winter.

Student: Did you ever ask him about this energy you felt?

Hui-k'o: Yes, of course I did. It was so strong at times I could barely walk. Anyone would ask under those circumstances. Basically, he said this is what comes from cultivation. He told me that his own

Student

master had the same energy. Interestingly, he said that without it, one is not much of a master of anything spiritual. [laughing]

Student: How true! What a wonderful insight. A spiritual master without spirit is like a merchant without goods to sell!

Hui-k'o: That is about it. In my own case, I have been content just to practice what my master wished. I had no goods to sell! [laughing]

Student: Well, I don't know about that! [laughing] What was it like to meditate with Bodhidharma?

Hui-k'o: As an experience, it was blissful beyond words. We sat and reclined our backs against meditation boards in the cave and abided in exhilarating ecstasy. Often he would guide me in this state, explaining various Buddhist subjects. Even when I read various Sutras with him, the words threw me into an ecstasy beyond measure. For many days after that, I would be in a rapture of sorts.

Student: Were you curious as to how he did this?

Hui-k'o: I must confess, I was devoted to figuring out how he radiated such pure energy. I walked the hills for days, following mountain streams, looking into my own mind for the secret. I remember that he said it was a good sign that I wanted to know, despite the bliss I felt around him. He said one day I would become a Buddha. I guess this is relevant, but Bodhidharma also mentioned that this energy is called Bodhisattva and without it, one could not achieve Buddhahood. I must say, I was surprised by his words.

Student: Why?

Hui-k'o: I guess like most monks I believed that being a Bodhisattva meant that one acted like one. How wrong I was.

Student: What do you mean?

Hui-k'o: First, it is ridiculous to imagine that a Bodhisattva has two legs! [laughing] I can remember one day sitting with Bodhidharma. He was looking at me strangely, as if to focus on something. Then suddenly I felt my heart open up like a flower! In the next moment I felt intense energy engulf me. It melted all of my human ambitions. I felt then like warm, wet clay. I was at a loss for words. So, I just looked at Bodhidharma and smiled! Then he grinned at me and said, "This is the Bodhisattva in you."

Student: I don't get it. I thought Bodhisattva was just a person who tried to save all sentient beings. You mean this is not correct?

Hui-k'o: Your view is Buddhism for toddlers. When someone informs you they are a Bodhisattva, run back to your house and hide your gold! [laughing]

Student: I am confused. What do you mean?

Hui-k'o: Have you read the story of the Buddha's birth when he was a Bodhisattva?

Student: Yes.

Hui-k'o: Well, read it again and pay attention to some of the details. The first one is that the Bodhisattva is born as a spiritual body called the mano-maya-kaya. This is to say that the Buddha-to-be was made of a spiritual substance. Next, consider the Buddha's birth to be like a mystery play. It is telling us, using poetic images, that we must go through some kind of spiritual transformation. This is what I am driving at.

Student: So if the Bodhisattva doesn't have two legs, what about the Buddha?

Student

Hui-k'o: In the Sutras there are many clues as to what Buddha, otherwise called the Illuminator, really means. Bodhidharma also taught me that "Buddha" means "light-maker". In other words, the Buddha is a sheer, spontaneous power from which spiritual energy is born, you might say. When a master like Bodhidharma taps into Buddha, the area surrounding him is flooded with bliss beyond your wildest imagination. It is like a healing, compassionate force. All who sense it are redeemed and are shown a new future. One of emancipation. That is all I can say.

Student: So how does Buddha differ from a god?

Hui-k'o: All gods are just beings. They are different from us only in that they live in exalted states of being. After their karma has been used up they fall from their heavenly abodes. Buddha is not such a being, or even a non-being. Yet, Buddha is real. Bodhisattvas know Buddha is real because they could not be Bodhisattvas without being sustained by a lineage of primordial Buddhas.

Student: Are you then saying that Buddhas are ever-present spiritual powers?

Hui-k'o: Yes. They sustain us by a power we cannot imagine. Bodhidharma says that a true sage just makes himself available to this power and thus comes to know how it is generated.

Student: Are there any techniques for doing this?

Hui-k'o: When one is in harmony with the Buddha's teaching, that is the best technique. But when studying the teachings, it is also important to distinguish between mental concepts, true principles, and direct contemplation. Many today are stuck in the family of scripture interpretation—they have no idea about the family of direct contemplation. They are deeply attached to such concepts as 'quality', 'negation', and 'relation'. Well, this attitude is not very effective for insight into the Buddha's deep principles.

Student: Is it best to not follow the path of words?

Hui-k'o: It is best to use them as a means to realize one's true nature. What is the point of spiritual words if one cannot manifest the spirit within which liberates us from suffering? People who won't go past words are no better than idle poets who recite poems; who can only dream of sublime states.

** This is a fictional conversation created by Zenmar to correctly teach the Buddha-Dharma*

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