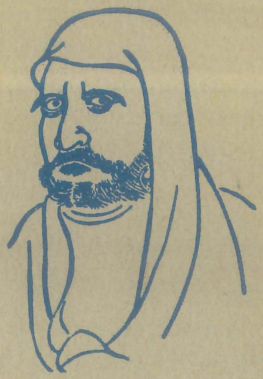

THE SPIRIT OF ZEN

A Way of Life, Work and Art in the Far East

By ALAN W. WATTS

WISDOM OF THE EAST SERIES

HERE is something quite unfamiliar to the West, something which will appeal strongly to all who are trying to find a deeper reality in life than philosophy and conventional religion can express. Historically, Zen is an aspect of Buddhism, but in itself it is so vital and elusive that it escapes definition. To be understood it must be lived. As a way of life it is the highest achievement of the Chinese spirit and the inspiration of its greatest art. Through Zen, Chinese culture reinforms our own with new meaning and offers us altogether new possibilities in a world of change.

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JOHN MURRAY

THE SPIRIT OF ZEN

WISDOM OF THE EAST SERIES

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EDITED BY J. L. CRANMER-BYNG, M.C.

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A Way of Life, Work and Art
in the Far East

by Alan W. Watts

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CONTENTS

if the Many, to achieve the same object, become once more the One, has anything been achieved? Must not the whole process repeat itself again? If the state of being One is Nirvana, while the state of being the Many is Samsara (the Wheel of Birth and Death, the world of form), it seems that we must alternate between Nirvana and Samsara and that Nirvana is not the *summum bonum* after all but just another aspect of the same ignorance. This was the cul-de-sac that had been reached by Mahayana philosophy when Zen made its first appearance as a distinct cult.

The Zen masters saw very quickly that in terms of intellect this problem had no solution whatever. They saw the whole Mahayana confused by its own attempt to think out the problems of life in words and ideas, and that Nirvana, intellectually conceived, was no better or worse than Samsara. They saw the Mahayana philosophers trying to explain life in words and definitions, and they knew at once that such an attempt could only end in hopeless confusion. Therefore from the very start Zen aimed at clearing aside all definitions, intellectual concepts and speculations; this it did with the most uncompromising thoroughness. It proclaimed at once that both Nirvana and Samsara are the same thing, and that to look for the former outside the latter and to try to reach it by the conventional performance of meritorious deeds is a mere absurdity. Nirvana is here and now, in the midst of Samsara, and there is no

question of its being a state of one-ness as distinct from a state of many-ness at all; everything depends upon one's own inner realization. A wise man will see Nirvana at once in the ordinary things of life; a fool will philosophize about it and think of it as something else, yet

> An old pine tree preaches wisdom,
> And a wild bird is crying out Truth.

and when master Tung-shan was asked, "What is the Buddha?" he replied, "Three pounds of flax." The whole technique of Zen was to jolt people out of their intellectual ruts and their conventional morality. The masters asked awkward and unanswerable questions; they made fun of logic and metaphysics; they turned orthodox philosophy upside down in order to make it look absurd. Thus we have master Hsuan-chien saying, "Nirvana and Bodhi (Enlightenment) are dead stumps to tie your donkey to. The twelve divisions of the scriptures are only lists of ghosts and sheets of paper fit to wipe the dirt from your skin. And all your four merits and ten stages are mere ghosts lingering in their decaying graves. Can these have anything to do with your salvation?"

Zen was first introduced into China by Bodhidharma in A.D. 527. Practically nothing is known of its history in India, and it is probable that Bodhidharma himself only suggested it to the Chinese who evolved it into its present unique form. A story is

arm, and then only says something quite unintelligible. Finally he is seen walking about with a shoe in his hand. And yet from that time there began something which inspired artists and writers, soldiers and statesmen, something which has influenced the cultures of China and Japan more than any other single factor. The truth was that Bodhidharma had found wisdom which could only be transmitted to someone prepared to receive it, and then it was a wisdom which could not be put into any intellectual formula. Only those who wanted it so much that, like Shang Kwang, they were prepared to give anything for it could understand. To others it was nonsense, and the absurd legends which have been attached to Bodhidharma probably originated from a desire to emphasize his unconventionality and to give him that slightly humorous atmosphere which always seems to attach itself to the exponents of Zen. Almost all the pictures of Bodhidharma by Zen artists seem to have been calculated to raise a smile.

It is the humorous aspect of Zen which shows one of its important affinities with Taoism, for a similar absence of pompous gravity and seriousness is found in some of the sayings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. During the years following the death of Bodhidharma and the beginning of Zen as it is known to-day it must undoubtedly have come into close contact with Taoist teachings, for in the sayings of the later masters the word " Tao " is often used synonymously with

the course of nature, the principle governing and causing change, the perpetual movement of life which never for a moment remains still. To Taoism that which is absolutely still or absolutely perfect is absolutely dead, for without the possibility of growth and change there can be no Tao. In reality there is nothing in the universe which is completely perfect or completely still; it is only in the minds of men that such concepts have arisen, and it is just those concepts which, according to Taoism, are at the root of human misery. For man clings on to things in the vain hope that they may remain still and perfect; he does not reconcile himself to the fact of change; he will not let Tao take its course. Thus Lao Tzu and his great exponent, Chuang Tzu, taught that the highest form of man is he who adapts himself to and keeps pace with the movement of Tao. He alone can find peace, for the fact that man notices and regrets change shows that he himself is not moving with the rhythm of life. Movement is only noticeable to something which is relatively still, but this is a false stillness because it creates friction with that which is moving. If man would keep pace with Tao he would find the true stillness, for he would be moving with life and friction would not arise.

This doctrine can very easily degenerate into mere *laissez-faire* and thus Taoism eventually became an easy-going fatalism, whereas the original teaching was nothing of the kind. For coupled with the doctrine of Tao is the teaching of *wu-wei*, the secret of

mastering circumstances without asserting oneself against them. *Wu-wei* has been translated by so many Western scholars as non-action and by corrupt Taoism it was held to mean the same thing. Actually it is the principle underlying *ju-jutsu*—a highly successful form of overcoming an opponent in wrestling—the principle of yielding to an oncoming force in such a way that it is unable to harm you, and at the same time changing its direction by pushing it from behind instead of attempting to resist it from the front. Thus the skilled master of life never opposes things; he never tries to change things by asserting himself against them; he yields to their full force and either pushes them slightly out of direct line or else moves them right round in the opposite direction without ever encountering their direct opposition. That is to say, he treats them positively; he changes them by acceptance, by taking them into his confidence, never by flat denial. Perhaps *wu-wei* can best be understood by contrast with its opposite, *yu-wei*. The character for *yu* is composed of two symbols—hand and moon—thus signifying the idea of clutching at the moon as if it could be seized and possessed. But the moon eludes all attempts at grasping, and can never be held still in the sky any more than circumstances can be prevented from changing by conscious striving. Therefore while *yu* is trying to clutch what is elusive (and Life as Tao is essentially elusive), *wu* is not only *not* clutching but also the positive acceptance of

elusiveness and change. Thus the highest form of man makes himself a vacuum so that all things are drawn to him; he accepts everything until by including all things he becomes their master. It is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation.

In a certain sense the concept of Tao is more dynamic than the Mahayana idea of Tathata; the former is something perpetually moving, while the latter is that which is unmoved in the midst of all changes. But the distinction between them is more apparent than real, for only that which accepts change can remain unharmed and truly unmoved. If it is large enough to include all changes it can never itself be changed, and Tathata is the one principle which includes all separate and transitory things. But, as in the case of the Mahayana, the Zen masters saw that to talk about Tao was to miss Tao altogether, for the moment one tries to hold it as a concept it becomes unreal and dead. It is all very well to talk about moving with Tao, but the very fact that one is talking about moving implies that one has not yet begun to move, and the Zen masters were concerned with giving people the initial push. Thus it was Zen that brought Taoism back to life; if for a moment one stops to philosophize and think *about*, life moves on and the living reality of the moment is lost. Therefore the Zen masters had no patience with concepts; conceptual thinking is putting a barrier between oneself and the Tao,

realization. The difference was that while some considered it necessary to come to a gradual understanding of Buddhism through patient study and the performance of meritorious deeds, Hui Neng saw that this method easily led one astray into intellectualism. Life is moving too swiftly to be approached tentatively and gradually, for while one makes elaborate preparations for Enlightenment the immediate truth is slipping away all the time. The person who dallies on the edge of the stream, wondering how best to take the plunge, testing the heat of the water with his toes, and thinking about how it will feel when he is in, soon gets into the habit of putting off the issue. The Zen disciple must walk quietly to the edge and slip calmly into the water without further ado, without allowing himself time to conjure up fears and anxious speculations as to what it will be like, or to find elaborate reasons as to why he should not get in at once.

Just before his death Hui Neng announced that the practice of appointing a Patriarch would be discontinued, for he said to his disciples, " You are all free from doubts, therefore you are all able to carry on the lofty object of our school." Then he quoted a verse said to have been written by Bodhidharma :

The object of my coming to China
Was to transmit the Teaching of Deliverance to all under delusion.
In five petals the flower will be complete ;
Thereafter the fruit will come naturally to maturity.

II

THE SECRET OF ZEN

A CONFUCIAN poet once came to Zen master Hui-t'ang to inquire the secret of his teaching, whereupon the master quoted to him one of the sayings of Confucius: "Do you think I am hiding things from you, O my disciples? Indeed, I have nothing to hide from you." Since Hui-t'ang would not allow him to ask any more questions, the poet went away deeply puzzled, but a short time after the two went for a walk together in the mountains. As they were passing a bush of wild laurel the master turned to his companion and asked, "Do you smell it?" Then to the answer, "Yes," he remarked, "There, I have nothing to hide from you!" At once the poet was enlightened.[1] For it is really a paradox to speak of the secret of Zen, and in spite of all the apparently abstruse or ridiculous answers of the Zen masters to the urgent questionings of their disciples, nothing is being hidden from us. The truth is that Zen is so hard to understand just because it is so obvious, and we miss it time and time again because we are looking for something obscure; with our eyes on the horizon we do not see what lies at our feet. In the words of Hakuin's "Song of Meditation":

[1] This and most of the other Zen stories (*mondo*) quoted have been translated by Professor Suzuki, and large numbers of them will be found in his various works.

All beings are from the very beginning the Buddhas;
It is like ice and water:
Apart from water no ice can exist.
Outside sentient beings, where do we seek the Buddha?
Not knowing how near Truth is,
People seek it far away. . . .
They are like him who, in the midst of water,
Cries out in thirst so imploringly.

(*Trans.* SUZUKI.)

Man is often too proud to examine the self-evident things which are closest to him. Zen found the followers of the Mahayana looking for truth to scriptures, to holy men and Buddhas, believing that they would reveal it to them if they lived the good life. For man's apparent humility in thinking that wisdom is something too sublime to reveal itself in the ordinary affairs of his life is a subtle form of pride. Inwardly he feels that he must be so great as to be removed from the things of the world before he can receive truth, and such is his pride that he will only deign to receive it from the lips of sages and from the pages of sacred scriptures. He does not see it in human beings or in the incidents of everyday life; he does not see it in himself, for again he is too proud to see himself as he is. So far from seeking for truth he hides his imperfections under his "meritorious deeds" and approaches the Buddhas from behind their mask.

To Zen this careful self-preparation for finding the truth at some future time or from some external source is putting off the issue of seeing the facts just as they are at the moment, be they good or evil.

For to him who cannot see the truth in himself no Buddha can reveal it, and he who does not look for it this moment cannot expect to be shown it in the future. And so Zen taught that nobody could find the Buddha in a Paradise or in any celestial realm until he had first found it in himself and in other sentient beings, and nobody could expect to find enlightenment in a hermitage unless he was capable of finding it in the life of the world. For the first principle of the Mahayana is that all things, however vile on the surface and however insignificant, are aspects of the Buddha-nature, and this implies that every being and thing must be accepted; nothing can be excluded from the "Lotus Land of Purity" as being "worldly" or "trivial" or "base." As Thomas à Kempis wrote in the *Imitation of Christ*, "If thy heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and abject, but it reflects the goodness of God," and to the question "What is Enlightenment?" a Zen master replied, "Your everyday thoughts," while another when asked, "What is the Tao?" answered, "Usual life is the very Tao." Master Pai-chang said that Zen meant simply, "Eat when you are hungry, sleep when you are tired," while Lin-chi declared that "the truly religious man has nothing to do but go on with his life as he finds it in the various circumstances of this worldly existence. He rises quietly in the morning, puts on his clothes and goes out to work. When he

wants to walk, he walks; when he wants to sit, he sits. He has no hankering after Buddhahood, not the remotest thought of it. How is this possible? A wise man of old says, If you strive after Buddhahood by any conscious contrivances, your Buddha is indeed the source of eternal transmigration" (Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, II, p. 260).

If all things are in reality the Tao or the Buddha-nature, what is the use of striving to become a Buddha and to attain Nirvana? For those who have eyes to see, eternal truth and Buddhahood are manifested plainly before us here and now, in our own thoughts and actions, and in the changing stream of events which is flowing past us all the time. Hence there is no object in seeking after Buddhahood as if it were something other than life as it is; in the words of Hui Neng, "The only difference between a Buddha and an ordinary man is that one realizes it while the other does not."

> This very earth is the Lotus Land of Purity,
> And this body is the body of Buddha.
>
> (HAKUIN.)

Therefore Zen interprets striving after Buddhahood as implying a distinction between oneself and the Buddha-nature; that is the foundation of egoism, for it means that the self has been separated from the rest of life, that it has become isolated from other beings, and this is a lesser form of lunacy, for the lunatic is the most isolated person in the world. Therefore all external ideas of the Buddha and Nir-

vana were uncompromisingly swept aside, and Zen became a form of iconoclasm. It ruthlessly broke down all conceptions and symbols, all external and anthropomorphic ideas of the Buddha, which masqueraded as the truth. Thus we have Lin-chi declaiming:

> O you followers of Truth! If you wish to obtain an orthodox understanding of Zen, do not be deceived by others. Inwardly or outwardly, if you encounter any obstacles kill them right away. If you encounter the Buddha, kill him; if you encounter the Patriarch, kill him; . . . kill them all without hesitation, for this is the only way to deliverance. Do not get yourselves entangled with any object, but stand above, pass on, and be free!
>
> (*Trans.* SUZUKI.)

Again there is the Zen saying, "Do not linger about where the Buddha is, and as to where he is not, pass swiftly on." An amusing story in this connection is that of master Tan-hsia and the wooden Buddha. One winter night Tan-hsia took shelter in a temple, and finding that the fire was going out he took down one of the wooden figures of the Buddha from the altar and placed it on the embers. When the keeper of the temple discovered what had been done he was furious at such an act of sacrilege and began to scold Tan-hsia for his irreverence. But Tan-hsia merely scratched about among the ashes, remarking, "I am gathering the holy relics from the burnt ashes."

"How," asked the keeper, "can you get holy relics from a wooden Buddha?"

"If there are no holy relics," replied Tan-hsia,

" this is certainly not a Buddha and I am committing no sacrilege. May I have the two remaining Buddhas for my fire ? "

Zen was therefore the direct method of approach ; it dispensed with external aids to religion as liable to lead people into confusion. Scriptures and doctrines were well so long as they were seen only as aids, and Zen masters likened them to a finger pointing at the moon ; he is a fool who takes the finger for the moon. Thus Zen has been summed up as :

A special transmission of Enlightenment outside the Scriptures ;
No dependence upon words and letters ;
Direct pointing to the soul of man ;
Seeing into one's own nature.

But while we may be told that the truth of Zen is obvious, that it is standing before our eyes every moment of the day, this does not take us very far. There seems to be nothing remarkable about the ordinary affairs of life ; there appears to be nothing in putting on one's clothes, eating one's food or washing one's hands which would indicate the presence of Nirvana and Buddhahood. Yet when a monk asked master Chao-chou, " What is the Tao ? " he replied, " Usual life is the very Tao." The monk asked again, " How can we accord with it ? " (i.e. " How can we bring ourselves into harmony and unity with it ? "). Chao-chou answered, " If you try to accord with it, you will get away from it." For life, even as the ordinary humdrum series of daily events, is something

and the definition does not hold. For happiness is like Maeterlink's blue birds—try to capture them and they lose their colour ; it is like trying to clutch water in one's hands—the harder one grips, the faster it slips through one's fingers. Therefore a Zen master when asked, " What is the Tao ? " replied immediately, " Walk on ! " for we can only understand life by keeping pace with it, by a complete affirmation and acceptance of its magic-like transformations and unending changes. By this acceptance the Zen disciple is filled with a great sense of wonder, for everything is perpetually becoming new. The beginning of the universe is now, for all things are at this moment being created, and the end of the universe is now, for all things are at this moment passing away. Therefore the Zen poet P'ang-yün says :

> How wondrously supernatural,
> And how miraculous this !
> I draw water, and I carry fuel !
> (*Trans.* SUZUKI.)

Thus Zen is sometimes described as " straightforwardness " or " going right ahead," for Zen is to move with life without trying to arrest and interrupt its flow ; it is an immediate awareness of things as they live and move, as distinct from the mere grasp of ideas and feelings *about* things which are the dead symbols of a living reality. Therefore master Takuan says in relation to the art of fencing (*kendo*)—an art strongly influenced by the principles of Zen—

> This—what may be termed the " non-interfering "

attitude of mind—constitutes the most vital element in the art of fencing as well as in Zen. If there is any room left even for the breadth of a hair between two actions, this is interruption.

That is to say, the contact between an event and the mind's response thereto should not be broken by discursive thinking, for, he continues,

When the hands are clapped, the sound issues without a moment's deliberation. The sound does not wait and think before it issues. There is no mediacy here ; one movement follows another without being interrupted by one's conscious mind. If you are troubled and cogitate what to do, seeing the opponent about to strike you down, you give him room, that is, a happy chance for his deadly blow. Let your defence follow the attack without a moment's interruption, and there will be no two separate movements to be known as attack and defence.

Hence if " attack " represents the external world, or life, and " defence " one's response to life, this must be taken to mean that the distinction between " self " and " life " is destroyed ; egoism disappears when the contact between the two is so immediate that they move together, keeping in the same rhythm. Takuan says further :

This immediateness of action on your part will inevitably end in the opponent's self-defeat. It is like a boat smoothly gliding down the rapids ; in Zen, and in fencing as well, a mind of no-hesitation, no-interruption, no-mediacy, is highly valued. So much reference is made in Zen to a flash of lightning or to sparks issuing from the impact of two flint-stones. If this is understood in the sense of quickness, a grievous mistake is committed. The idea is to show immediateness of action, an uninterrupted movement of

life-energy. Whenever room is left for interruption from a quarter not at all in vital relation with the occasion, you are sure to lose your own position. This of course does not mean to desire to do things rashly or in the quickest possible time. If there were this desire in you its very presence would be an interruption.

(*Trans.* SUZUKI.) [1]

This is in many ways similar to the art of listening to music; if one stops to consider one's emotional or intellectual reactions to a symphony while it is being played, to analyse the construction of a chord, or to linger over a particular phrase, the melody is lost. To hear the whole symphony one must concentrate on the flow of notes and harmonies as they come into being and pass away, keeping one's mind continuously in the same rhythm. To think over what has passed, to wonder what is about to come, or to analyse the effect upon oneself is to interrupt the symphony and to lose the reality. The whole attention must be directed to the symphony and oneself must be forgotten; if any conscious attempt is made to concentrate upon the symphony, the mind is led away by the thought of oneself trying to concentrate, and it was for this reason that Chao-chou told the monk that if he *tried* to accord with the Tao he would get away from it. Therefore Zen went further than telling man to listen to the symphony instead of thinking about his reactions to it, for even to tell someone not

[1] The above translation of Takuan's advice is taken from Vol. III of Professor Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, p. 319. See also the section on Judo and Kendo in Chapter V.

to think about his independent reactions is to make him think about not thinking about them! Therefore Zen adopted the positive method of emphasizing the symphony of life itself; all talk about trying to bring the mind into harmony introduces the concept of the self which is trying, thereby drawing the attention away from the actual fact of life. It was this to which the Zen masters pointed; they simply demonstrated life without making any assertions or denials *about* it. Therefore one would say to his disciple, "Beyond assertion and denial show me the truth of Zen. Quick, quick, or thirty blows for you!" The disciple had no time to stop and think out an answer; the master expected it to come as immediately and as spontaneously as life itself is moving. A master once held up a stick before a gathering of his disciples and said, "O monks, do you see this? If you see it, what is it you see? Would you say, 'It is a stick'? If you do you are ordinary people, you have no Zen. But if you say, 'We do not see any stick,' then I would say: Here I hold one, and how can you deny the fact?" The particular stick in question was known as the *hossu*, the master's symbol of office, and it was often used to demonstrate Zen since it always lay close to the master's hand. Master Hsiang-yen once asked a disciple:

"There was once a monk who asked Wei-shan why Bodhidharma had come to China, and Wei-shan in answer held up his *hossu*. Now how do you understand the meaning of Wei-shan's action?"

(Pali. *Tanha*), which is so often mistranslated as "Desire." Literally it means "Thirst," and from this it came to mean "thirst for life," while in the context of the Buddha's teaching it undoubtedly meant thirst for life as an isolated being, as one who stands outside and considers primarily the effect which life is having and will have upon himself. Apart from this effect he has no realization of life whatever, and thus he never actually lives; to return to the analogy of music, he is like one who is so occupied with his own feelings about a tune that the tune is only half heard, for while he is thinking over the effects of the first bar the orchestra has played several more which he misses altogether. But while the philosophers of the Mahayana were considering these things intellectually, being concerned with the ideas rather than the realities, Zen passed beyond all discursive thinking. When asked about the ultimate mysteries of Buddhism, it replied, "The cypress tree in the courtyard!" "The bamboo grove at the foot of the hill!" "The dried up dirt scraper!" Anything to bring the mind back from abstractions to life!

Closely connected with the foregoing is another important aspect of Zen, which may be called "spiritual poverty." Almost every form of religion has insisted that many possessions are a bar to spiritual progress, but while the Zen monk has certainly the minimum of material possessions, Zen interprets poverty as an attitude of mind rather than

a physical condition. One of the most common ways of trying to fix life into rigid definitions is to qualify something, whether a person, a thing or an idea, with the statement, "This belongs to me." But because life is this elusive and perpetually changing process, every time we think we have really taken possession of something, the truth is that we have completely lost it. All that we possess is our own idea about the thing desired—an idea which tends to remain fixed, which does not grow as the thing grows. Thus one of the most noticeable facts about those obsessed with greed for possessions, whether material goods or cherished ideas, is their desire that things shall remain as they are—not only that their possessions shall remain in their own hands, but also that the possessions themselves shall not change. There are theologians and philosophers who show the greatest concern if anyone questions their ideas about the universe, for they imagine that within those ideas they have at last enshrined ultimate truth, and that to lose those ideas would be to lose the truth. But because truth is alive it will not be bound by anything which shows no sign of life—namely, a conception whose validity is held to depend partly on the fact that it is unchangeable. For once we imagine that we have grasped the truth of life, the truth has vanished, for truth cannot become anyone's property, the reason being that truth *is* life, and for one person to think that he possesses all life is a manifest absurdity. The part cannot possess the

whole. Therefore Chuang-Tzu tells the following story:

> Shun asked Ch'eng, saying, "Can one get Tao so as to have it for one's own?"
>
> "Your very body," replied Ch'eng, "is not your own. How should Tao be?"
>
> "If my body," said Shun, "is not my own, pray whose is it?"
>
> "It is the delegated image of Tao," replied Ch'eng. "Your life is not your own. It is the delegated harmony of Tao. Your individuality is not your own. It is the delegated adaptability of Tao. . . . You move, but know not how. You are at rest, but know not why. . . . These are the operation of the laws of Tao. How then should you get Tao so as to have it for your own?"

Just as no person can possess life, so no idea which a person may possess can define it; the idea of possession is illusory, for apart from the fact that all things must eventually pass away into some other form, and can never remain in one place for eternity, at the root of possession lies the desire that things shall not alter in any way, and this is a complete impossibility. If, therefore, life can never be grasped, how can it ever be understood? How can truth be known if it can never be defined? Zen would answer: by not trying to grasp or define it, and this is the fundamental Buddhist ideal of non-attachment, or the Taoist ideal of *wu-wei*.

But Buddhism and Taoism go further than saying that nothing can ever be possessed; they declare that those who try to possess are in fact *possessed*,

they are slaves to their own illusions about life. Spiritual freedom is just that capacity to be as spontaneous and unfettered as life itself, to be "as the wind that bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." "Even so," said Jesus, "is everyone that is born of the Spirit." But non-attachment does not mean running away from things to some peaceful hermitage, for we can never escape from our own illusions about life; we carry them with us, and if we are afraid of them and wish to escape it means that we are doubly enslaved. For whether we are content with our illusions or frightened of them, we are equally possessed by them, and hence the non-attachment of Buddhism and Taoism means not running away from life but running with it, for freedom comes through complete acceptance of reality. Those who wish to keep their illusions do not move at all; those who fear them run backwards into greater illusions, while those who conquer them "Walk on."

Thus the poverty of the Zen disciple is the negative aspect of his spiritual freedom; he is poor in the sense that his mind is not encumbered with material and intellectual *impedimenta*—the significant Latin word for "baggage." This state of mind is the realization of the Mahayana doctrine of *sunyata*, of the emptiness of all transitory things; nothing can be grasped, for everything is emptiness; nor is there anything which can grasp, for the self is emptiness.

Therefore the *Yuen-Chioh Sutra* declares that all component things are "like drifting clouds, like the waning moon, like ships that sail the ocean, like shores that are washed away," and the Zen masters, realizing the evanescence of the outer world, of their own ideas and of the ego itself, cease to cling to these passing forms. In the words of the *Dhammapada* they are "those who have no possessions . . . who have realized the causeless and unconditioned freedom through understanding the emptiness of that which passes away—the path of these men it is impossible to trace, just as the track of birds in the sky cannot be followed." For the Zen life does not move in ruts; it is the freedom of the Spirit, unfettered by external circumstances and internal illusions. Its very nature is such that it cannot be described in words, and the nearest we can get to it is by analogy. It is like the wind moving across the face of the earth, never stopping at any particular place, never attaching itself to any particular object, always adapting itself to the rise and fall of the ground. If such analogies give the impression of a dreamy *laissez-faire*, it must be remembered that Zen is not always a gentle breeze, like decadent Taoism; more than often it is a fierce gale which sweeps everything ruthlessly before it, an icy blast which penetrates to the heart of everything and passes right through to the other side! The freedom and poverty of Zen is to leave everything and "Walk on," for this is what life itself does, and Zen is the religion of life.

Therefore the masters tell their disciples to forget all that they have ever learnt before coming to the practice of Zen, to forget even their knowledge of Buddhism. For the Buddha himself declared that his teaching was only a raft with which to cross a river; when the opposite bank has been reached it must be left behind, but so many of his followers mistook the raft for the opposite bank. Yet this negative aspect of Zen, this giving up, is only another way of expressing the positive fact that to give up everything is to gain all. "He that loseth his life shall find it." Professor Suzuki points out that while it was the custom of some of the masters to express their poverty, others would refer rather to the complete sufficiency of things. Thus while Hsiang-yen says:

My last year's poverty was not poverty enough;
My poverty this year is poverty indeed.
In my poverty last year there was room for a gimlet's point;
But this year even the gimlet has gone—

Mumon emphasizes the other side of the picture:

Hundreds of spring flowers, the autumnal moon,
A refreshing summer breeze, winter snow—
Free thy mind from idle thoughts,
And for thee how enjoyable every season is!

Here we find the acceptance and affirmation of the seasonal changes, and in the same way Zen accepts and affirms the birth, growth, decay and death of men; there are no regrets for the past, and no fears for the future. Thus the Zen disciple gains all by

accepting all, since ordinary possessiveness is loss—it is the denial of the right of people and things to live and change; hence the only loss in Zen is the loss of this denial.

After all this the Western student will naturally be wondering where ordinary morality comes into Zen. Every religion has had its moral code, and the Buddha summed up his teaching in the words:

> Cease to do evil;
> Learn to do well;
> Cleanse your own heart—
> This is the way of the Buddhas.

It will be asked if there is not a grave danger in the Zen practice of accepting all things, both good and evil, as manifestations of the Buddha-nature, for on such grounds it might be possible to justify any form of action. Indeed, this is a difficulty with which the Zen masters have had to reckon only too often; disciples would frequently make the all-inclusiveness of Zen an excuse for pure libertinism, and it is for this reason that the members of Zen communities observe a rigid discipline. The solution to the difficulty is that no one should undertake the practice of Zen without first having adapted himself to a thorough moral discipline. While morality should not be confused with religion, it does take one a certain distance towards the goal; it cannot go the whole way because it is essentially rigid, intellectual and limiting, and Zen begins where morality leaves off. At the same time, morality is valuable so long

as it is recognized as a means to an end; it is a good servant, but a terrible master. When men use it as a servant it enables them to adapt themselves to society, to mix easily with their fellows, and most especially it permits freedom for spiritual development. When it is their master, they become bigots and conventional ethical machines. But as a means to an end it makes social existence possible; it guarantees men against obstruction from their fellows, and while it does not of itself produce spiritual understanding, it provides the necessary freedom for spiritual development. A garden has to be disciplined so that the plants and flowers do not strangle each other, but the beauty of the garden is not in the discipline so much as in the things whose growth it has made possible. And just as the garden must be cultivated and planned before the flowers are allowed to grow, so the moral law must be mastered before the spiritual law, for just as the flowers might strangle each other, so might the followers of the spirit become wild libertines. Yet morality, in the ethical sense of being adapted to society, is not by itself sufficient preparation for Zen. Something stronger than this is needed if the tremendous power of the spirit is to be born in man without running amok, and that is self-discipline. In the fullest sense of the term this virtue is rare in human society, although no society can exist for long without it, and the long duration of Chinese civilization as compared with that of ancient Greece must primarily be attributed to the

Some descriptions are even more vivid than these; in many cases it seemed as though the bottom had fallen out of the universe, as though the oppressiveness of the outer world had suddenly melted like a vast mountain of ice, for Satori is release from one's habitual state of tenseness, of clinging to false ideas of possession. The whole rigid structure which is man's usual interpretation of life suddenly drops to pieces, resulting in a sense of boundless freedom, and the test of true Satori is that he who experiences it has not the slightest doubt as to the completeness of his release. If there is anywhere the least uncertainty, the least feeling of "this is too good to be true," then the Satori is only partial, for it implies the desire to cling to the experience lest it should be lost, and until that desire is overcome the experience can never be complete. The wish to hold fast to Satori, to make sure that one possesses it, kills it in just the same way as it kills every other experience. But one's own feeling of certainty is not the only test of Satori; the experienced master can tell at once whether the disciple has any doubts, firstly, by his intuition, and secondly, by testing the disciple with a Koan.

While Satori is "the measure of Zen," because without it there can be no Zen at all, only a heap of nonsense, the Koan is the measure of Satori. Literally the word "Koan" means "a public document," but it has come to mean a form of problem based on the actions and sayings of famous masters. It is

is generally a choice between two alternatives, both of which are equally impossible. Thus each Koan reflects the giant Koan of life, for to Zen the problem of life is to pass beyond the two alternatives of assertion and denial, both of which obscure the truth. Thus a less "nonsensical" Koan is the already quoted, "Beyond assertion and denial say one word of Zen, or thirty blows for you!" Every Koan must eventually lead to this impasse. One begins by trying to grapple with it intellectually; it is found to contain a certain amount of symbolism and analogy. Thus in the tale about the goose we find that the goose represents man and the bottle his circumstances; he must either abandon the world so as to be free of it, or else be crushed by it, but both of these alternatives are forms of suicide. What purpose is to be served by abandoning the world, and what can we achieve if we allow it to crush us? Here is the fundamental dilemma with which the Zen disciple is confronted, and somehow he must find a way through. The moment he finds it there comes the flash of Satori; the goose is out of the bottle and the bottle is unbroken, for suddenly the disciple has escaped from the bondage of his own imaginary prison —the rigid view of life which he himself has created out of his desire for possession. Thus to the question, "How shall I escape from the Wheel of Birth and Death?" a master replied, "Who puts you under restraint?"

Many Western students are under the impression

that Zen "meditation" (i.e. work on the Koan) is a form of self-hypnosis, its object being to induce a state of trance. Acting on this impression, Mr. Arthur Waley has described Zen as "Quietism," Reischauer as "mystical self-intoxication," and Griffiths as "mind murder and the curse of idle reverie" (*Religions of Japan*, p. 255). The exact opposite is the truth; work with a Koan, to be successful, must have none of the passivity of Quietism; as for "mind murder and the curse of idle reverie," a few days' sojourn in a Zen community would dispose of any suspicion of idle reverie, while the accusation that Zen is "mind murder" is no more true than the charge that it upsets all morality. For like morality, the mind (intellect) is a good servant and a bad master, and while the rule is for men to become enslaved by their intellectual modes of thought, Zen aims at controlling and surpassing the intellect, but as in the case of the goose and the bottle, the intellect, like the bottle, is not destroyed. For the Koan is not a means of inducing trance as if some kind of trance were the highest possible attainment for human beings; it is simply a means of breaking through a barrier, or as the Zen masters describe it, it is a brick with which to knock at a door; when the door is opened, the brick may be thrown away, and this door is the rigid barrier which man erects between himself and spiritual freedom. When the door is opened at the moment of Satori, the disciple passes not into a trance but into a new

the Koan. This is what is known as 'letting go your hold.' As you become awakened from the stupor and regain your breath, it is like drinking water and knowing for yourself that it is cold. It will be a joy inexpressible." The important phrase in this quotation is "letting go your hold." For if the Koan is taken to be a way of presenting in miniature the giant Koan of life, the great dilemma and problem at which every being is working, however unconsciously, then, in the same way as life itself, the Koan can never be grasped. The Zen masters distinguished between two kinds of phrases (*chü*)—the dead and the living—the dead being those which were amenable to logical analysis and solution, and the living being those which could never be confined to any fixed system of interpretation. Koans belong to the second type, for they share in life's elusiveness and indefinability. Thus when the disciple comes to the final point where the Koan absolutely refuses to be grasped, he comes also to the realization that life can never be grasped, never possessed or made to stay still. Whereupon he "lets go," and this letting go is the acceptance of life *as* life, as that which cannot be made anyone's property, which is always free and spontaneous and unlimited. The Koan is a way of presenting the central problem of life in an intensified form. For the final impasse of the Koan, of the living phrase, magnifies the impasse always reached by those who try to clutch anything that is alive in their desire that it may be possessed and made to surrender its

And thereafter they refer to their realization in terms of the most ordinary affairs, for their object is to show Zen as something perfectly natural, as intimately related to everyday life, while the Buddha is just "the old man in all his homeliness"; he has been there all the time, for his home is ordinary life, but nobody recognizes him!

There is a famous Zen parable which fitly sums up this particular attitude to life. It is said that to those who know nothing of Zen mountains are just mountains, trees are just trees, and men are just men. After one has studied Zen for a little time, the emptiness and transience of all forms is perceived, and mountains are no longer mountains, trees no longer trees, and men no longer men, for while ignorant people believe in the reality of objective things, the partially enlightened see that they are only appearances, that they have no abiding reality and pass away like drifting clouds. But, the parable concludes, to him who has a full understanding of Zen mountains are once again mountains, trees are trees, and men are men.

Thus while the main characteristics of Satori and Sudden Conversion are the same, they are approached and interpreted in very different ways. In the first place, Conversion is held to come to essentially depraved Man from an external God, while Satori is the realization of one's own inmost nature. Conversion takes place when something comes from outside and transforms the world, while Satori is just

is to miss it altogether. But when the master just gives a smack one cannot hold on to it at all, and for that reason he has really expressed the truth of Zen.

Sometimes the master of a monastery will give a more formal kind of instruction than San-zen. This is the *teisho*—a discourse on the inner meaning of one of the Zen text-books, when the master addresses the whole community gathered together. These discourses are usually given at the time of year when Za-zen is practised more frequently than usual; that is to say, during the weeks when some important event in the life of the Buddha is being commemorated. These periods are known as *Sesshin*, and the monks rise at two in the morning instead of at four, spending almost the whole day in the Meditation Hall. San-zen is held more frequently, and less time is devoted to the ordinary work of running the monastery which usually occupies most of the day. The giving of a *teisho* is attended with much ceremonial and sutra recitation. The monks put on a special robe and go to the lecture hall in a solemn procession; the master arrives shortly afterwards accompanied by two attendants, and having made his obeisance before the image of the Buddha he takes his seat on a high chair, before which a reading-desk has been placed. Then he may read a passage from the Zen records, stopping to explain various points, or else he may deliver a Zen "sermon." If it should be the latter, unusual things are wont to happen. One day a master had just taken his seat when outside

Intellectual analysis may reveal a fraction of their meaning, but essentially they are like smooth balls of steel. The harder the sword of intellect cuts at them, the faster do they jump away.

At the conclusion of the master's discourse the monks recite the "Four Great Vows" before returning to the Meditation Hall—

> However innumerable sentient beings are,
> I vow to save them;
> However inexhaustible the passions are,
> I vow to extinguish them;
> However immeasurable the Dharmas are,
> I vow to study them;
> However incomparable the Buddha-truth is,
> I vow to attain it.
>
> (*Trans.* SUZUKI.)

Apart from these specifically religious and ceremonial activities which have been described, the life of the Zen monk is occupied principally by the work of maintaining the monastery. But in Zen this too might be called specifically religious, for from the standpoint of Buddha-nature no one activity is more religious or holy than any other. Therefore Zen finds religion in everyday activities, laying particular emphasis on this finding, for the general rule is for men to seek religion apart from ordinary life. In the words of George Herbert,

> All may of Thee partake;
> Nothing can be so mean
> Which with this tincture, "For Thy sake,"
> Will not grow bright and clean.