Zen of Vital Freedom

By

Prof. Reiho Masunaga D. Litt.

1 Zen Beyond Zen

I

Zen helps find one's true self through zazen (cross-legged sitting) and makes it live in daily life. Zen should play an important role in breaking the deadlock of mechanical civilization, correcting the false direction of science, and surmounting the conflict of ideologies.

Zen originally arose from forest philosophy of India, combined with the pragmatic culture of China, and, undergoing various developments, penetrated into the esthetic atmosphere of Japan and took form in Zen art. This Zen art was characterized by simplicity, profundity, creativity and vitality. It had the special quality of transcending rigid formalism and enabling one to live in vital freedom.

Chinese Zen began with Bodhidharma whose Zen style emphasized enlightenment and training based on the true self. The basis of Chinese Zen was firmly established by the sixth patriarch Hui-nêng (638-713) Hui-nêng's Zen, penetrating into the non-duality of meditation and wisdom, advocated becoming a Buddha through abrupt enlightenment. It puts emphasis on living truly in daily activities.

In the Tang and Sung dynasties Zen divided into five schools——Rinzai (Lin-chi), Igyō (Wei-yang), Sōtō (Tsa'o-tung), Ummon (Yün-mên) and Hōgen (Fa-yen) ——according to the individual characteristics and teaching methods of the Zen masters. The Rinzai school was austere and severe, often using staffs and shouts; it tried to find enlightenment through the kōan. The Igyō school featured intense question and answer sessions between master and disciple; it used many signs, especially the circle. The Sōtō scbool used

the five-rank theory and strived for thorough practice through emphasizing the self-identity of training and understanding. The Ummon school, by using sudden exclamations, tried to stop dualistic delusion. The Hōgen school expressed Zen by Kegon ideas.

Igyō and Hōgen schools quickly declined. But a common thread ran through all five schools. This was the belief through zazen that this mind itself was the Buddha and the conviction that one's everyday mind was the way.

During the Kamakura period the Rinzai and Sōtō schools were transmitted to Japan. In the Tokugawa period the Ōbaku school——an offshoot of Rinzai——came across from China. In Japan the founder of Rinzai was Eisai (1141-1215); of Sōtō, Dōgen (1200-1253); and of Ōbaku, Ingen (1592-1673). At present Zen is the second largest religious order in Japan. There are 6,000 Rinzai temples, 15,000 Sōto temples, and 500 Ōbaku temples. Zen believers number about 8,000,000. The Rinzai school, tying up with the Shōgunate and Daimyō, once flourished vigorously. The Sōtō school avoided close contact with authority. It spread mainly among the common people. The Ōbaku school, like the Ming dynasty Zen in China, combined with Nembutsu.

In Japanese Buddhism, Zen and Nembutsu preserve the religious life. Zen is an immanent religion that realizes the dignity of man and seeks the true self within. Nembutsu is a transcendent religion that awakens man to his sins and seeks a saviour outside.

II

Zen expressed its characteristics by such Sung catchphrases as "No dependence on the words and letters of the scriptures," "Special transmission outside the classified teachings," "Direct pointing to the mind of man," and "Seeing one's true self and becoming the Buddha,"

But Dōgen, the founder of Sōto school in Japan, sharply opposed these slogans. He took a standpoint transcending the Zen of the past. Dōgen was unique in many ways. Rejecting fame and profit and shunning authority,

he perfected his personality. He emphasized thorough practice and tried to express Zen itself in daily life. By deepening religious thought, he became the forerunner of Japanese philosophy. He wrote many things. But his Shō-bōgenzō, written in Japanese in 95 fascicles, is recognized as a treasure house of profound thought. The Uji essay, in which Dōgen discusses time, is especially noteworthy. I feel that it compares favorably with the time doctrines of other religions.

"No dependence on words and letters of the scriptures" means that the contents of the sūtras are not the final ground in so far as they are relative. "Special transmission outside the classified teachings" means that the doctrines of the sūtras and the classified systems of various schools are not taken as the ultimate authority and that the true law is transmitted by other means. "Direct pointing to the mind of man" means that experiencing the Buddha-nature that dwells inherently in man. "Seeing one's true self and becoming the Buddha" means that manifesting Buddha-nature is itself becoming the Buddha——in fact, is the Buddha himself.

In this way the true law must be transmitted from mind to mind and from personality to personality. This is called transmission of the true law.

III

As shown above, Zen does not give final authority the letters of the sūtras and to the teachings derived from them. But it does not object to using them. "No dependence on words and letters" does not mean no use for words and letters. Zen merely rejects clinging to words and letters without understanding their limits. Schleiermacher said: "All sacred scriptures are the mauroleum of an ancient religions. At one time a great spirit dwelled within. But now they are nothing but empty monument. If this spirit still lives and works, how can we put great value on weak print and dead letters? Those who believe in sacred scriptures do not have religion. Those who do not need any scriptures but who can make the scriptures themselves have religion." The sixth patriarch Hui-nêng said, "Those who are not enslaved by the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra but who use it freely are

true Buddhists." We must not cling to the letters of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra but fully experience its spirit with our body. Lin-chi I-hsüau said, "The three vehicles and twelve teachings are merely paper for wiping dirt." A Buddhism based on the sūtras was rejected as vain argument by the Zen sect, which stood for a special transmission outside the classified teachings. But the Zen sect took pride in wondrous profundity in patriarchal transmission. In this way Zen and other teachings became opposed, and patriarchal words were substituted for the sūtras. As a result the true meaning of Bodhidrma's coming from the West became bost. Dōgen returned to the spirit of Bodhidharma and vitalized the teaching and abolished the conflict between Zen and other teachings. In this way he propagated the whole of Buddhism.

Therefore, in the Bukkyō fascicle Dōgen says: "You must understand that such things as the three vehicles and twelve teachings are the eyes of the Buddhas and patriarchs. How can those who do not realize this be the descendants of the Buddhas and patriarchs?" Again Dōgen showed the inseparable ties between one mind and the Buddhist teachings. He thought that saying that one mind is transmitted outside the teachings was not true Buddhism. In this respect he says, "Even though advocating the false theory of special transmission outside the classified teachings, You do not grasp its true meaning because you do not understand Buddhism inside and out." To put one mind outside of the teachings is not true Buddhism. With this approach Dōgen criticized as false the traditional catchphrase, "Special transmission outside the classified teachings."

In the Bukkyō fascicle, Dōgen again says; "Zen masters have used such phrases as 'Direct pointing to the mind of man' and 'Seeing one's true self and becoming the Buddha' because one mind is the highest vehicle. They offer no vital road for transcending this world. They do not represent the total activities of the body." In this way Dōgen rejected such catchphrases as "Direct pointing to the mind of man" and "Seeig one's true self and becoming the Buddha."

It is said that the Zen sect, which teaches "No dependence on the

words and letters of the scriptures" emphasizes "Transmission from mind to mind" and"Seeing one's true self" in its trainmg. The Rinzai Zen style, which flourished in the Sung dynasty, aimed at enlightenment through the kōan. But Dōgen severely criticized such enlightenment, seeking Zen with these words: "Nowadays foolish priests in Sung China say enlightenment is the true object. Saying thus, they vainly seek enlightenment. But they do not seem to be in the shinning light of the Buddhas and patriarchs." Bodhidharma taught no-seeking conduct as one of the four activities. Therefore using the kōan to gain enlightenment is clearly against the spirit of Bodhidharma. Originally kōans were models and examples based on the sūtras or on interviews and actions of the Zen masters. Gradually the number of kōan increased to 1,700.

Zen trainees must not cling to the rigid form of the kōan but must vitalize them in daily life. Since kōan are various problems of human life, we must solve them in day-to-day conduct. To formalize the kōan and make them means to enlightenment departs from the original meaning. A Zen that pays too much attention to solving kōans one by one becomes step-like and loses the original meaning of abrupt enlightenment. Dōgen tried to return to the original source of Buddhism before it was stained by division, to live the great way of Buddhas and patriarchs instead of entering into a narrow path, and to adovocate Buddhism as a whole instead of remaining in one corner of the teaching system.

Accordingly Dōgen gave primary importance to a zazen of basic conduct that eliminated the opposition between kōan-training (kanna) Zen and silent-illumation (mokushō) Zen. His Zen was not a zazen of doing nothing in silent illumination. It was instead zazen of original enlightenment and wondrous training (self-identity of enlightenment and training), Of this, Dōgen says in Bendowa: "The view that training and enlightenment are not one is heretical. In Buddhism these two are the same. Because this is training, enfolding enlightenment, the training even at the outset is all of original enlightenment.....Because it is already enlightenment of training, there is no end to enlightenment. Because it is training of enlighten-

ment, there is no beginning to training. ..... If you throw away superior training, original enlightenment fills your hand. If you abondon original enlightenment, superior training permeates your body. ..... The devices and training that I teach now manifest all things in original enlightenment and express unity in action."

The true Buddhism taught by Dōgen makes faith a condition. This faith is the belief in the true self within. This true self is the "Religiosität" of human beings and points to real humanity. So far as you have your base in this original enlightenment, you have no need to seek enlightenment outside. Within training is enlightenment, and enlightenment enfolds training. Training and enlightenment are self-identical. It is training based on enlightenment and enlightenment within training. Sitting is itself the conduct of Buddha; therefore it is zazen that does not aim at becoming the Buddha. This is called plain zazen. Plain zazen is unstained action that does not recognize any opposition between training and enlightenment.

But if one is not careful there is danger that this will become a zazen of merely doing nothing. Therefore, Dōgen did not neglect training. In Bendōwa, he says, "You must understand that the Buddhas and patriarchs emphasized the need for intensive training that is inseparable from enlightenment." Self-identity of training and enlightenment is not a mere concept. It must be expressed as the Buddha's conduct. Dōgen, therefore, emphasized thorough training.

Dōgen criticized the one-sided Zen of the past, which had lost the original meaning of Buddhism. He says in the Eiheikōroku, "In the catchphrase 'Direct pointing to the mind of man', there is a gulf between heaven and earth. In 'Seeing one's true self and becoming the Buddha' a slight gap becomes large." "This mind is itself the Buddha" —— a phrase respected by Sung dynasty Zen —— was also criticized by Dōgen. He says in the fifth section of Eiheikōroku, "This mind is itself the Buddha' is far separated from true Buddhism as heaven from earth." Dōgen denied any dualism between body and mind. He always used such expression as "body and mind of the Buddhas and patriarchs," "skin flesh, bone, and marrow of the Bud-

dhas and patriarchs," and "training of body and mind." He strongly avoided abstracting the mind only. Dōgen, therefore, criticized the view that called Zen the Buddha-mind sect and contrasted it with the Buddha-word sect, which emphasized the words and letters of the sūtras. In the Bukkyō fascicle Dōgen says, "Why do people now call it the Buddha-mind sect? Why should the Buddha have gone out of his way to call the mind a sect? How can a sect be a mind? If there is a Buddha-mind sect, there must be a Buddha-body sect, a Buddha-eye sect, and a Buddha-ear sect." In this way Dōgen rejected the differentiation into the Buddha-word sect and Buddha-mind sect.

Dōgen, therefore, in an effort to vitalize the great way of Buddhas and patriarchs and the whole of Buddhism, rejected the contrast between Zen and other teachings, between the Buddha-word sect and the Buddha-mind sect, between the names of the five schools, and between the Sōtō sect and the other sects. Dōgen, in short, criticized a Zen what had become exclusive and intolerant and was tending toward rigid dogma. He pointed to the shortcomings in the characteristics associated with Zen in the past and advocated a Zen beyond Zen.

The Zen now best known in the West is kōan Zen and kenshō Zen. This Zen has departed from the original Zen and gradually become rigid and dogmatic. Western thinkers who enter Zen in order to find freedom may become enslaved by one-sided Zen. They may find less freedom than before. The essence of Zen is not to cling to any object but instead to live in vital freedom. Modern Zen should transcend rigid form and dwell in motion. It must move with the times, embracing all sūtras and sects. Zen must be open to all people and not be exclusive. It tries not only to return to the source but also to develop the spirit of Buddhism in history. In the past Zen tended to emphasize sticks, and high-sounding words and to ignore thorough practice and etiquette. The "beat generation" in America has been attracted by some of the old Zen characteristics and have made a travesty of them. For correct practice, the logic must be valid, and the thought profound. Dogen's Shōbōgenzō, containing deep philosophical in-

sight, seems to fulfil this requirement.

II Philosophy of Full Function

I

This present moment is the point where we must commit our entire body and mind. At this point there is no complete freedom of choice: it has the essential character of offering one choice out of two. It comes but once-never repeating itself.

It seeks an answer to life and death. It dwells not in a dualistic outside world but in an absolute world of innerness. This subjective actuality cannot be a thing; while remaining within it enfolds the outside.

It is not an abstract generalization but a concrete world of time cut off as now and place as here. It is a part of the whole and carries the whole as an individual unit. It is not a monad. The individual unit lives in the part concretely and links up with others in space. Though links with a higher world, it eludes our reach through mere ideation. A turning back of the self is imperative. What is needed is a renewal of life. Through this profound experience transcending individuality, man unifies himself with the life of the cosmos.

So far as it is the source on which our experience is based, it is of a higher dimension than the base. At the same time it joins us at a lower dimension. There we see both the transcendence and immanence of basic life its continuity and non-continuity. A man who sloughs off his selfish desires and does what he has to do meshes vertically with life as whole and horizontally with each individual. This very moment, therefore, not only individual but transcend time categories and becomes the eternal present. The present is truly the daughter of the past and mother of the future. Similarly this place called here continues endlessly. In a higher dimension it jibes with the universal world. In this way the here and now become the focal point of the world and the universe.

This moment and this place are the the center of the maṇḍala (circle), One moment is 10,000 years; the 10 directions are before our eyes." The individual aspect is enfolded in the unitive aspect, and while preserving the self; we embrace others. Chatic unity divides and develops vigorously in history. But this division is embraced again in the integral unity of a higher dimension. Our world and life go constantly from division to oneness. When we touch the depth of the self and become the thing itself, we directly apprehend that heaven and earth are of the same root and that all things are one. It is a world where mutually conflicting entities come together by self-identity. Self-identity does not mean a unity of two or more things of different dimension in a parallel line. It is instead a solidly intertwined relation.

II

But this still remains in the world of principle and actuality unified. We must consider that this world "now" and "here", limited by time and space, in itself a world unlimited in space and eternal in time. This is absolute actuality——the world of all things unimpeded. In this world each differentiating this is mutually identified and interpenetrated, and each things is absolute, the one and many are self-identical. The realm where the one and the many are self-identical. The realm where the one and the many are self-identical falls within time and also within the eternal now transcending time. It falls within space but also within the unlimited world transcending space.

But an individual, while living as an individuality, is not limited by this.

The heavy burdens of the relative world do not press him down. He can instead absolutize everything. When we penetrate into each absolute actuality by various practices, the state that we realize here is itself the natural world. Specifically, it is a world of many places; it penetrates our individuality and becomes at the same time an absolute world of full living.

The objective actuality that presses on life and death eliminates the self, and in accordance with the truth, enables us for the first time to turn necessity into possibility and change passive into active. This point is also stressed in the philosophic discipline that tries to establish a basis for vital practice. It also resides in the idea of the self-identity of absolute contradictions. The self, while constantly developed from the world, also produces itself as a subjective existence. We cannot control historical actuality resulting from past necessity. But it can become the means for the self's making possible future decisions. While enduring the heavy pressure of actvality and find the place where we can maintain control.

III

Religion values the basic unity of human life. It develops according to man's physical and psychological experience of life. Religious practice tries to return to original wholeness things that have been divided into subject and object. Religious rebirth is a turning of life, realized through nothingness. It is a moving experience growing out of commitment. It is the spark of life arising from contact of mind and mind.

True experienc smolders for the first time in contact with basic life. While we wonder in the delusive world, this experience lacks fullness. And mere objective knowledge does not bring it close enough. This sublime experience grows out of the unifying activity of reason, feeling, and will. It raises intensity of awareness to a peak. Through this experience, subject and object fuse. There is self-identity and interpenetration. We thus plumb the truth of life. This experience, meshed with basic life, has unlimited power; It expresses itself as practice of life. This is called the expression of full function. It means expressing our whole self. From here springs all actions in life and universe. Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in (1063-1135) said "Life expresses full function; death expresses full function." He made it clear that Buddha-nature expresses itself fully both in life and in death. True life moves on, never stopping for a moment, whether arising or decaying. It is man's original face. We live moment by moment, and we die

moment by moment. Life and death are momentarily life and momentarily death. There is death in life, and life in death. But the idea of the self-identity of life and death still does not penetrate to basic life. When we face life and death we must experience it clearly and plumb it thoroughly. We can thus free ourselves from life and death. We live completely in the present, where the remote past and the distant future are linked. Here thrives the philosophy and religion of full function.

In the Bhaddekaratta surta of Majjhimanikāya, there is this passage: Do not pursue the past; do not seek the future. Do with all your best what you must do to-day. Who can know the death that may come tomorrow. (atītaṁ anānvāgameyya, nappatikaṅkhe anāgataṁ, ajjéva kiccam ātappaṁ, ko jaññā maraṇaṁ suve?) While we live, we should work with all our effort. When we have to die, we should get it over with quickly. Here and now, we must be loyal to ourselves. As Schiller says; "Do'nt worry about the distant future. Grasp this moment. Then it is yours." (Nicht in die ferne Zeit verliere dich, Den Angenblick ergreife. Der ist dein) To live fully in the real moment is to vitalize the past and fulfill the future.

IV

Text-Zenki (Full Function)

Ultimately the Great Way of the Buddhas comes down to emancipation and expression in daily life. In this emancipation, life frees itself from life; death frees itself from death. So there is leaving life-death, and there is entering life-death. Together they form the final stage of the Great Way. Throwing away life-death and crossing life-death-together they form the final stage of the Great Way.

Expressing it here——that is life; life-that means expressing it here. When expressed here, it is life fully expressed and death fully expressed. This function makes life well and makes death well. At the moment expressed, it is not necessarily large, not necessarily small. Neither is it always universal nor limited. It is not always long; it is not always short.

This moment of life in this function. This function is in this moment of life.

Life neither comes nor goes. It is not expressing; it is not becoming. But this life is the expression of full function. And death is the expression of full function. Understand that among the immesurable things within the self, there is life-and death. Quietly consider this. At this moment of life, can it be said that all things living concurrently accompany this life, or that they do not? Not a single moment or thing stands apart from life. Nor is there a single event or mind that does not accompany life. Life is like getting on a boat. On this boat, we ourselves use the sail and control the rudder. Although we push with the pole, it is the boat that carries us. Without the boat we are not. By getting on the boat we make it a boat. This is the moment that you must study and understand. At just this moment there is nothing but the world of the boat. Heaven, water, and shore-all these fuse into the instant of the boat.

This differs from a boatless instant. And so we make this life arise, and it vitalizes our own life. In ridding the boat, body, mind, and world all become instruments of the boat. The entire earth and sky become instruments of the boat. We as life and life as us are like this. Zen master Yuan-wu Ko'-ch'in (1063-1135) said, "When life comes, express it fully. When death comes, express it fully." Let's clarify this saying and study it. To study means this:

The truth of "When life comes, express it fully" does not hinge on beginning or end, Even though it is the entire vastness of earth and sky, it does not hinder full expression of life, nor does it hinder full expression of death. The truth of "When death comes, express it fully"— though it is all of the great earth and sky——does not hinder full expression of death, nor does it hinder full expression of life.

Life, therefore, does not hinder death, and death does not hinder life. The vast earth and sky dwell both in life and death. But it is not just one aspect of the great earth or one aspect of the entire sky that is fully expressed in life and fully expressed in death. Although not one, it is not

self-identity. Although not self-identity, it is not the many.

So the full expression of all things is in life and also in death.

Even without life or death there is expression of full function. In expression of full function there is life and death. The full function of life-death, therefore, dwells in a wrestler bending and stretching his arms. It dwells in someone groping for his pillow in the night.

In this is expressed the wonderous light. Some believe that just when it is expressed, because it is fully expressed——there is expression before expression. But before expression there is expression of full function.

Even though there is expression of full function before, it does not hinder the expression of full function now. And so from this standpoint, full function is vitally expressed.

Note on Zenki

Dōgen wrote this essy on December 17. 1242. near Rokuharamitsu temple. He used it to teach the followers of Yoshishige Hatano. The essay is based on Yuan-wu K'o-chin's saying: "When life comes, express it fully, When death comes express it fully," To this, Dōgen added his own ideas. He emphasized the need for 1) grasping life fully, 2) manifesting it in experience, 3) penetrating life and death as they arise, and 4) expressing full function through the self-identity of life and death.

These ideas helped Dr. Kunihiko Hashida, the eminent biologist, found the secret of life after a long, hard search. Not only Dr. Hashida but many Zen masters have beᵊn able to deepen their understanding through this essay.

An intensive study of this essay may bring out some parallels with the esthetic philosophy of Aemrican thinker John Dewey (Art as Experience) Drawing such parallels would help establish a firm and natural base for the development of Zen in the West.

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