

An Introduction to Zen

By A.E.Abedi

Taoist-Books.com

The Many Views of Zen

We have all heard the story of the 5 blind men and the elephant. It goes something like this; When encountering an elephant for the first time one blind man touched his leg and declared that an elephant was like a tree trunk. Another blind man grabbed the elephant's trunk and declared that an elephant was like a snake. The third his tail and thought an elephant was a rope. The fourth his ears and decided he was like a bird and the fifth his belly and decided he was like a cow. Each blind man had a different understanding and perspective of an elephant depending on his perspective.

Since zen is an experience and not a philosophy (though philosophy certainly seems to be a part of it) a person can develop a different understanding of zen based on their experience. So this section examines zen from many perspectives to make it as easy to comprehend as possible while trying not to fit it within any particular category permanently.

Zen As A Philosophy Of The Mind

Sometimes I choose to describe Zen as a philosophy

I call zen “a philosophy” in the original sense of the word as ‘the love of wisdom’ and a philosopher being ‘a lover of wisdom’. True Wisdom, of course, is indefinable or as Socrates put it, “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing“. By these definitions Zen certainly does seem to qualify as a philosophy.

Wisdom in zen is learning to live in a way that is most conducive to a peaceful state of mind that is accepting of all the good and bad that happens in life which you can rarely do anything about. Zen is not about knowledge or know “the truth of existence” or having any sorts of answers to these sorts of questions.

Alan Watts writes in the first paragraph of his book “The Way of Zen”:

“Zen Buddhism is a way and a view of life which does not belong to any of the formal categories of modern Western thought. It is not religion or philosophy; it is not a psychology or a type of science. It is an example of what is known in India and China as a ‘way of liberation’, and is similar in this respect to Taoism, Vedanta, and Yoga. “

Siddhartha (AKA The Buddha) taught a ‘path of liberation’ in other words, if you follow these certain principles you will achieve this goal i.e. “enlightenment” or “nirvana”. It’s like saying if you hold a baseball bat in a certain way then you will achieve a certain distance for that ball providing you hit the ball thrown at you in a certain way. A slow moving strike of the bat gets you a ball that moves away from you (in the direction of your hit) at a low velocity while hitting the ball harder will get you a higher velocity hit, maybe even a home run if struck just right. The point is that you know that certain actions, when done precisely, will achieve certain specific goals.

In the same way, what Siddhartha was simply teaching (which later came to be called “Buddhism”) was just a set or rules that included moral and ethical principles with philosophical insights to help a ‘seeker after truth’ to focus their minds and find the peace of mind that they were seeking. The ethical and moral rules were for mental balance and not meant to be followed like they were commandments from any God. It was simply advice from a teacher to his students.

Thus;

Zen isn’t a religion

Buddhism has neither creed, code, nor cult. There is nothing that is binding upon the Buddhist, nothing they are supposed to believe in. There is no authoritative code, and there is no positive doctrines that the believer has to ascend to, It’s true that Buddhists do observe certain precepts of moral and ethical behavior, however they don’t regard the observation of them as following a divine will. It’s simply a pledge you take to yourself. And, furthermore, Buddhism has no particular cult. That is to say, there are no specific sacraments or forms or worship that are binding upon all Buddhists. You might then say that Buddhism is a form of philosophy, but again this would not be quite correct because what we understand by philosophy in the west is the elaboration of certain ideas, certain theories about the nature of the universe, the nature of man or the nature of knowledge. And Buddhism is not particularly concerned with elaborating ideas.

The nearest thing in our culture to Buddhism, although it isn't exactly the same, is probably psychotherapy. And the reason is that what constitutes the essence of Buddhism is not beliefs, not ideas, not even practices, but a way of experiencing” Allan Watts – Buddha and Buddhism¹

Where I differ from Alan Watts and why:

While “philosophy” is not Alan Watt's chosen word for the zen path. when he tries to connect it to a modern example, I think it is an appropriate name for zen for our time as having a philosophy to deal with life in an effective and, dare I say, BALANCED manner... requires a personal philosophy. It's all about how we, as a culture, "see" it, i.e. our “philosophy” about it. Psychotherapy as a modern science has lost all the credibility that it had in Alan Watts time and no there is no cultural position, at the moment for philosophers, so let *finding and teaching paths of liberation* be the new way of describing philosophy. At least for this book.

In Alan Watts time psychology was at the cutting edge of mental science. Hypnosis was entering its modern form. Carl Jung's ideas had spread. A man named Timothy Leary and used an unknown drug called LSD to prove that he could use it to have rehabilitation success rates for prisoners that, until that time, were simply unheard of (and probably still are). In any case, Timothy Leary spent a decade in jail for having a pinch of marijuana on him (which is now legal in several States) and LSD was banned making further research on it illegal.

As psychology was brought to a halt from Big Government on drug research and it's effect on human psychology, another front for psychotherapy opened up which also emerged with unheard of success rates called Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), which led to the modern popularity Hypnosis. Turns out this is something most people can learn in a weekend (the Ancient Greeks had dream temples based on a self-hypnosis concept that was unregulated whatsoever) and one can become pretty good at hypnosis and NLP in just a few months. The techniques work irrespective of theories in textbooks one has about a patients neurosis. Thus making it unprofitable - to the extreme - for big companies. Fortunately, NLP has been around for so long that many people in the psychology profession use it though not in psychiatry as their trade is in drugs and like how everything looks like a nail to a hammer, all the solutions of a psychiatrist's involves drugs.

Here is an extract from a more mainstream source of information;

Article:

¹ A lecture from 1960

Why Psychiatry Holds Enormous Power in Society Despite Losing Scientific Credibility It helps to be funded by Big Pharma.²

While Big Pharma financial backing is one reason psychiatry is able to retain its clout, this is not the only reason. More insidiously, psychiatry retains influence because of the needs of the larger power structure that rules us. And perhaps most troubling, psychiatry retains influence because of us—and our increasing fears that have resulted in our expanding needs for coercion.

But before discussing these three reasons, some documentation of psychiatry's lost scientific credibility in several critical areas.

Psychiatry's Lost Scientific Credibility

*DSM Invalidity. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic bible, the DSM, was slammed by the pillars of the psychiatry establishment. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the highest U.S. governmental mental health official, offered a harsh rebuke of the DSM, announcing that the DSM's diagnostic categories lack validity, and he stated that "NIMH will be re-orienting its research away from DSM categories." Also in 2013, Allen Frances, the former chair of the DSM-4 taskforce, published his book, *Saving Normal: An Insider's Revolt against Out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life.**

Psychiatric Treatments May Cause Increased Suicide. The FDA—despite protests by the psychiatric establishment—has issued "black box warnings" about the potential for increased suicidality for patients under the age of 25 who use antidepressants. In 2014, AlterNet reported about a University of Copenhagen study comparing Danish individuals who committed suicide to matched controls between the years 1996 and 2009. The researchers found that taking psychiatric medications in a prior year was linked to a 5.8 times increase in suicide; contact with a psychiatric outpatient clinic was associated with an 8.2 times increase; visiting a psychiatric emergency room was linked to a 27.9 times increase; and admission to a psychiatric hospital was linked to a 44.3 times increase in suicide.

While correlation by itself does not necessarily mean causation, an accompanying editorial in the same journal where the article was published pointed out that

² Alternet January 6 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/why-psychiatry-holds-enormous-power-society-despite-losing-scientific-credibility>

associations with the features detailed in this particular study indicate a good possibility of a causal relationship. Among the reasons why psychiatric treatment could well cause increased suicide, besides the adverse effects of medication, is the stigma and trauma of treatment, as the editorial authors state: "It is therefore entirely plausible that the stigma and trauma inherent in (particularly involuntary) psychiatric treatment might, in already vulnerable individuals, contribute to some suicides."

Corruption of Psychiatry by Big Pharma. Big Pharma heavily funds university psychiatry departments, sponsors conferences and continuing education for psychiatrists, advertises in their professional journals, and pays well-known clinicians and researchers to be speakers and consultants. I documented in 2007 and updated in 2012 how virtually every way the public and doctors get information about mental health has been corrupted by drug company dollars. In 2008, congressional investigations of psychiatry revealed that major psychiatric institutions such as the American Psychiatric Association and several "thought leader" psychiatrists, including Harvard psychiatrist Joseph Biederman, were on the take from drug companies, creating obvious conflicts of interest and further damaging psychiatry's credibility.

For all the above reasons, and others, I differ with Alan Watts on calling Zen 'like psychotherapy'. Philosophy seems to have no positive or negative connotations in our culture, in our time, as it simply doesn't exist on a basic educational level so no one has had a chance to destroy it yet. So philosophy is the best word for our time, I think.

How Zen Differs From Traditional Views Of Philosophy

Since this is a path of mental liberation it is meant to be experienced and only talked about enough so that it CAN be experienced.

A philosophy, while originally meaning the love of wisdom (which is an infinite search for knowledge, i.e. with no end in sight if Socrates wisdom is anything to judge by), it is now about beliefs that are wrapped around something the "philosopher" has taken to be an inarguable fact (to students of philosophy who generally exist as a tiny minority in college populations).

Descartes, for example, began his philosophy with the assumption that "*I think therefore I am*"³ and goes on from there piling one assumption upon the other. Clearly Descartes hadn't heard of meditation in his time. Millions of people have

³ Meditations on First Philosophy by Rene Descartes (1641)

learnt how to stop their endless mind chatter and silence the mind since Descartes time. Add the science of meditation to the facts available to us and Descartes philosophy falls apart like a game of Jenga where the foundation stick, holding everything together has been pulled out thus making the entire structure fall.

Philosophy rests on assumptions and is often subject to such problems. To begin with Descartes stops thinking when asleep and consequently ceases to exist every night. So his philosophy had many holes in it but for people of his time, all high on coffee and conversation as their main past times, this must have been acceptable. Zen also rests on assumptions but the end point isn't a theory of the universe or of existence but one of experience.

Since the experience of Zen is the same, even if a different set of assumptions are used to get you to that experience, it is still the same thing. In fact, Zen can be said to have a fluid philosophy in that how it is taught differs greatly from teacher to teacher and time to time.

Zen is about letting go of thoughts and often includes meditation practice of no-mind and no-thoughts. Descartes wouldn't exist in Zen, or at least his philosophy wouldn't or couldn't exist. Yet I can put zen practice into words and thus have formed my own philosophy of how to explain zen (or 'dhyana" in meditation, i.e. it's originally a meditation technique extended to all aspects of life). In other words, just because Zen doesn't fit the format of philosophy doesn't mean it can't be talked about and explained in a philosophical manner that gets the meaning across.

The Difference Between Spirituality In The East VS The West

In the east, particularly Ancient China, spirituality is about a mental attitude that is maintained. While in the west, spirituality has this otherworldly tinge around it. A Saint in the west is "Holy", a "Man/Woman of God", "Untouchable by the Devil" etc. A Saint in Ancient China of the Taoist or Zen path are often represented by smiling and laughing individuals who are even portrayed being clumsy or drunk. In the west the idea of "holy" separates the individual from ordinary acts and he is often portrayed with a halo around his head with everyone around him in awe or being clumsy or caught up in the world. This idea of holy doesn't seem to have existed in Ancient China beyond a form of ancestor worship common to ancient tribal peoples, i.e. one respected and revered ones lineage, both personal lineage and cultural lineage. If you compare and contrast these two concept of holiness you realize that one is "holy" while the other is just human.

That is the basic point to be understood here, Taoist “spirituality”, which has been carried on by zen, is distinctly human in every way. While the west reveres its spiritual leaders as holy men or women, in the east they are revered as accomplished human beings who have learned to flow with life. In the west the spiritual people are above the people. In the east the “spiritual” people are more human than anyone else. They lack the basic inhibition trained into people as youths so they live instinctively rather than through a belief system.

I have been putting spiritual in the parenthesis like this “spiritual”, because the differences between east and western conceptions of spirituality is so large that I feel uncomfortable using the same word as it doesn’t convey the meaning of the words in it’s context.

Zen Can’t Be Described Thus, ‘Those who know do not speak’

Many People will recite as if by rote that, “One who knows does not talk. One who talks does not know.” suggesting that a true zen practitioner says nothing.

I would like to point out to those individuals that this quote that they think describes all of zen is chapter number 56 of the 81 chapter Tao Te Ching... so the source document contradicts them on this claim. Also, the rest of the stanza goes something like this:

1. One who knows does not talk. One who talks does not know. Therefore the sage keeps his mouth shut and his sense-gates closed.

In other words, what this ancient zen POEM is describing, what seems to be, a meditation technique and probably is one of the source documents for the “vow of silence” practice that some monks are famous for. A look at the rest of the chapter suggests that the writer is describing a meditation technique based on the idea of ‘words can cloud your experience’ and what a person can gain from this practice and what sort of results one can observe for such a person;

2. "He will blunt his own sharpness, His own tangles adjust; He will dim his own radiance, And be one with his dust."

3. This is called profound identification.

4. Thus he is inaccessible to love and also inaccessible to enmity. He is inaccessible to profit and inaccessible to loss. He is also inaccessible to favor and inaccessible to disgrace. Thus he becomes world-honored.

Another translator (Legge) puts it as:

He who knows (the Tao) does not (care to) speak (about it); he who is (ever ready to) speak about it does not know it.

Yet another, more poetic, translation of the same chapter of the poem;

He (who knows it) will keep his mouth shut and close the portals (of his nostrils). He will blunt his sharp points and unravel the complications of things; he will attemper his brightness, and bring himself into agreement with the obscurity (of others). This is called 'the Mysterious Agreement.'

(Such an one) cannot be treated familiarly or distantly; he is beyond all consideration of profit or injury; of nobility or meanness:--he is the noblest man under heaven.

Clearly the point of chapter 56 out of 81 of the world's oldest zen poem isn't that one can't speak about zen but more along the lines of, '*one shouldn't be talking as much as practicing it*'.

“Zen Is So Mysterious”

Other people will say that zen is so mysterious that you have to talk in it in the negative, i.e. describe what it's not like rather than what it is like because there are no words to describe the experience. Problem of just talking in the negative is that you are still using words and words convey a conception so you are providing a person with mental impressions you have just chosen to accept these descriptions as the right way to give a person mental impressions about zen.

You can talk about zen by describing it just like just like you can describe the taste of strawberries by saying sweet and tangy. You still can't convey the accurate experience of eating a strawberry but you can provide mental impressions (words/ descriptions) that indicate the right direction to look in, like a finger pointing towards the moon.

Words lack the ability to convey the experience of eating and tasting a strawberry. In the same way you can never understand zen by words alone because it must be experienced.

“Were language adequate, it would take but a day to fully set forth the Tao [The Path Of Zen]. Not being adequate, it takes time to explain material existences. Tao is

something beyond material existences. It cannot be conveyed either by words or by silence” Chang Tzu

The Concept Of The Self (Or Lack Of It) In Zen

In ancient India a concept developed called Maya which means illusion, i.e. since the world is considered to be impermanent (constantly changing) and you can interpret the world in any way with your mind, it is considered to be an illusion.

For example a tree can be seen just as a separate plant or as something which connects with the earth and sky and the animals around it; (i.e. a tree can be seen as an object OR as a pattern of the environment which will disappear when the pattern changes such as a change in the weather patterns which can change patterns of growth from green regions to desert and back again as it does in changing ice ages).

Thus a common though ancient perspective on attachment was formed that if you hold onto your psychological and mental foundations, your images to reality, you are holding onto something that will dissolve away... eventually. SO you are holding on to something which is inherently unstable, whether it be life which comes and goes with birth and death or the features of the landscape around you.

Even mountains grow or shift and/or erode over time, though generally too slowly to notice unless man changes its nature, by say, cutting all the trees then a safe mountain can become a mudslide hazard and fall apart etc.

This understanding of the fluidity of life and living life, not as a Utopia but an ever changing pattern, is at the root of the ancient psychological position of learning to be 'detached' from the world (the practice of non-attachment).

Siddhartha (AKA The Buddha) essentially agreed with this philosophical position of ancient Indian philosophy but took it one step further by saying that not only is the world an illusion but so is the self (the part of us that we refer to when we say "I").

To put it in other words, you are not the person you were a year ago and you can probably see the ways in which you have changed or grown in the last year or 10 years or 30 years. You probably see the world in a different way than you did a year ago or 10 years ago or 30 years ago. Since you see the world differently you have a different image of yourself as well in relation to the world. You, at the very least, DEFINE (see) yourself differently than you did a year or 5 or 10 or 20 or 30 years ago.

What you are capable of, what you are, what you like most... all of these definitions tend to change for **every** person given enough time or given changes in circumstances of life.

The ancient philosophers noticed that as soon as you 'imagined' an event happening to you or your role in any situation, you first have to PLACE yourself IN it;

i.e. you have to imagine your role or character, then you decide what to do or how to feel. Now, this tends to happen very fast for most events as your story and behaviour has already been established over time.

In other words, every time you imagine yourself or a situation that you are in, you are, in a sense, recreating yourself (which is what a Zen practitioner means when they say "death & rebirth").

In the Scientific American MIND magazine an interview with neuroscientist Eric Kandel also proves the same concept of Siddhartha's which is now a fundamental part of Mahayana Buddhism or simply 'Zen Buddhism'.

Here is how Eric Kandel defines the memory you have of your "self":

Scientific American Mind magazine in an interview with the Nobel laureate Neuroscientist Eric Kandel⁴;

Mind: We tend to think of memory as a kind of library that holds a record of events and facts that can be retrieved as needed. Is this an accurate metaphor?

*Kandel: No, memory is not like that at all. **Human memory reinvents itself all the time.** Every time you remember something, you modify it a little bit, in part dependent on the context in which you recall it. That is because the brain's storage is not as exact as written text. It is always a mixture of many facades of the past event: images, pictures, feelings, words, facts and fiction—a "re-collection" in the true sense.*

Modern neuro-science agrees with the Zen Buddhist idea of an impermanent self. As Eric Kandel points out that, "Every time you remember something, you modify it a little bit, in part dependent on the context in which you recall it." In other words you recreate your image of yourself to fit the new situation. If the self was something permanent and real, then your image of yourself would always remain the same. The

⁴ In Search of Memory: An Interview with Nobel Laureate Eric Kandel By Steve Mirsky, May 24, 2006

fact that you can consciously or unconsciously change your image of yourself and react to situations in a new way - or just create a new you - proves that the self is something you make up as part of living in society.

What does this mean? This means that you are not limited to being any particular 'self' or person. If you feel like you have low self-esteem you can change that self. If you feel like you are not comfortable in social situations, you can change that image too. Any limiting image you have of yourself can be changed as you create your 'self' or how you want to be.

This is how Alan Watts described the illusory self from a zen perspective which was illuminating for me and may it be for you too;

“The ability of a pattern to contain elements that represent its former states is what we call memory. In engineering language we would call it feedback, because feedback is the system whereby any system of energy is enabled to record the results of its own action so that based upon that record it can adapt, and as it were, make plans for the future. It can in other words, correct its action. So because human beings have memory, the capacity of the pattern of the nervous system to record its former states, the human being can make predictions about the future and in general control its activity.

But from this extraordinary marvelous ability there arises a confusing by-product. And that is this feeling that here is a constant entity, like the screen of a television. In other words, because a certain element of permanence runs through these changing patterns, this permanent behavior of the pattern, or permanently repeating behavior of the pattern, gives the impression of some substantial mind stuff or mind entity underlying the pattern and upon which the pattern is recorded. It's the same sort of illusion that arises when, for example, I take a flashlight and rotate it in the dark, and you see a continuous circle of light. It appears that the light leaves a track behind it because the moving light leaves a memory upon the retina of the eye, and that is what gives us the illusion of seeing a constant circle of light.

And so a similar illusion arises from the repetitive pattern of the nervous system, and gives us the impression that there is this constant thing, the experiencer, who lasts, and endures like a substance from the past, through the present, and into the future.”

Alan Watts – Lecture on Mahayana Buddhism

Zen Is Iconoclastic

Iconoclastic means a person who likes to break idols. A zenist likes to break mental idols.

Since everything has its being in a mental conception (a belief or a label to categorize experience is what gives an object its meaning), there is nothing zen can't go beyond. Nothing in the material world is meant to last and ideas are from the material world so they aren't meant to last as well.

In *Religion of the Samurai*⁵, Kaiten Nukariya writes;

The Scripture is no more nor less than the finger pointing to the moon of Buddhahood. When we recognize the moon and enjoy its benign beauty, the finger is of no use. As the finger has no brightness whatever, so the Scripture has no holiness whatever. The Scripture is religious currency representing spiritual wealth. It does not matter whether money be gold, or sea-shells, or cows. It is a mere substitute.

And;

Zen is completely free from the fetters of old dogmas, dead creeds, and conventions of stereotyped past, that check the development of a religious faith and prevent the discovery of a new truth. Zen needs no Inquisition. It never compelled nor will compel the compromise of a Galileo or a Descartes. No excommunication of a Spinoza or the burning of a Bruno is possible for Zen.

On a certain occasion Yoh Shan (Yaku-san) did not preach the doctrine for a long while, and was requested to give a sermon by his assistant teacher, saying: "Would your reverence preach the Dharma to your pupils, who long thirst after your merciful instruction?" "Then ring the bell," replied Yoh Shan. The bell rang, and all the monks assembled in the Hall eager to bear the sermon. Yoh Shan went up to the pulpit and descended immediately without saying a word. "You, reverend sir," asked the assistant, "promised to deliver a sermon a little while ago. Why do you not preach?" "Sutras are taught by the Sutra teachers," said the master; "Çastras are taught by the Çastra teachers. No wonder that I say nothing." This little episode will show you that Zen is no fixed doctrine embodied in a Sutra or a Çastra, but a conviction or realization within us. To quote another example, an officer offered to Tüng Shan (To-zan) plenty of alms, and requested him to recite the sacred Canon. Tüng Shan, rising from his chair, made a bow respectfully to the officer, who did the same to the teacher. Then Tüng Shan went round the chair, taking the officer with him, and making a bow again to the officer, asked: "Do you see what I mean?" "No, sir," replied the other. "I have been reciting the sacred Canon, why do you not see?" Thus

⁵ The Religion of the Samurai, by Kaiten Nukariya, [1913] - Chapter 3: The Universe If The Scripture Of Zen - See Taoist-Books.com for full book download.

Zen does not regard Scriptures in black and white as its Canon, for it takes to-days and tomorrows of this actual life as its inspired pages.

What Is Nirvana?

Nirvana is a very revealing word. It simply means to *extinguish* or to *blow out*. In other words, it's to let go of yourself and experience the world directly without ego or any story to explain the world whatsoever, thus having 'blown out' the structure that was holding your world view together, setting you free of ignorant beliefs.

Put another way, Nirvana is to live without an ego or even a personality as it has extinguished. You live directly from the mind. You live "at cause" with the world, you being the one being "caused" to do things, as described in the yoga sutras, "*for those beings who are merged in unitive consciousness, the world is the cause*". How can it be any other way? When your personality and attachment to desires and results is gone you can't help but pick up stuff from the outside to fill the void. You live like the description in the Tao Te Ching managing your *affairs without doing anything*⁶, *as you have no desire for or against managing your affairs.*

What is "Enlightenment"?

Enlightenment has been described as a mental trick that takes you from being a frustrated member of the rat race to just a person living life. Bodhidharma simply defines enlightenment as '*awareness, supreme awareness*'.

Other's will describe it as '*being aware of and living from your Original Mind*', for example zen scholar D.T. Suzuki uses the word "Reason" as the proper translation for the 'tao' in his translation of the Tao Te Ching indicating he thinks Tao refers to the zen state. Suzuki also described enlightenment as "*the same as ordinary every living except you are two inches off the ground*". He's referring to the mental weight of one's worries or beliefs being released. It's like discovering you were walking around in lead shoes and you feel lighter after taking off the lead shoes and walking around.

In zen, enlightenment can come to anyone at any time. As one writer explains it's about attaining enlightenment or awareness of the Original mind or "*mushin*":

⁶ Chapter 2 verse 3 of the Tao Te Ching as translated by J. Legge in 1891

In the attainment of this state of mind (mushin), some are quicker than others. There are some who attain to a state of mushin all at once by just listening to a discourse on the Dharma, while there are others who attain to it only after going through all the grades of Bodhisattvaship⁷ such as the ten stages of faith, the ten stages of abiding, the ten stages of discipline, and the ten stages of turning-over. More or less time may be required in the attainment of mushin, but once attained it puts an end to all discipline, to all realization and yet there is really nothing attained. It is truth and not falsehood. Whether this mushin is attained in one thought or attained after going through the ten stages its practical working is the same and there is no question of the one being deeper or shallower than the other. Only the one has passed through long ages of hard discipline.

Basically it says that no matter how much you meditate or don't meditate, 'when you get it, then you get it'. Since zen is a state of mind which is natural, it simply has to be understood to be practiced and thus the smart ones will get enlightened fast and the slow witted will get it slowly or never. But once zen is attained, it is the same for everyone in it's basic understanding and experience.

One ancient master describes the enlightened philosopher in this manner:

Knowest thou that leisurely philosopher who has gone beyond learning and is not exerting himself in anything?

He neither endeavours to avoid idle thoughts nor seeks after the Truth;

[For he knows that] ignorance in reality is the Buddha-nature,

[And that] this empty visionary body is no less than the Dharma-body.⁸

What is reincarnation?

In zen, death & rebirth (reincarnation) is seen as a psychological phenomenon following from the illusion of the self.

An ancient Zen Scholar, Hui-Neng's Tan Ching, Writes;

What is Paramita? This is a Sanskrit term of the Western country. In Yang it means "the other shore reached". When the meaning (artha in Sanskrit) is understood, one is detached from birth and death. When the objective world (visaya) is clung to, there is the rise of birth and death; it is like the waves rising from the water; this is called "this shore". When you are detached from the objective world, there is no birth and

⁷ In this context it just means an apprenticeship

⁸ Yoka Daishi's "Song Of Enlightenment" - Manual of Zen Buddhism by Suzuki

death for you; it is like the water constantly running its course: this is "reaching the other shore". Hence Paramita.⁹

The idea being expressed here: When you cling to the world you have to create to create a self to deal with each new situation, thus you experience 'death and rebirth' (of the ego). When you let go and dwell in the zen state your consciousness stays steady and thus you don't experience birth and death (of the ego).

For example: When you try and do good deeds you are trying to create a new self. By working on being better and better, you are destroying an old way of being (the old 'self') and you are creating a new one. Your 'self', i.e. how you define or imagine yourself to be, is going through death and rebirth.

Zen Model: Ten Oxherding Pictures

Key: The Cow or Ox represents the mind. The Person is you or the one seeking to learn about the mind and experience zen (which is a mental experience). You can imagine the cow/ox as a bicycle or a car and get an idea of the learning process these series of images seek to explain.

1

The first picture, called 'the Searching of the Cow,' represents the cowherd wandering in the wilderness with a vague hope of finding his lost cow that is running wild out of his sight. The reader will notice that the cow is likened to the mind of the student and the cowherd to the student himself.



⁹ Hiu Neng's Tan Ching - Manual Of Zen Buddhism by Suzuki

*"I do not see my cow,
But trees and grass,
And hear the empty cries
Of cicadas."*

The person is unaware of his or her mind except as a word or something they have been told they "possess".

One is embedded in communal life, following societies norms of what's right and wrong. Including what one should hope for, think or dream about i.e. following what they are told without any thought except where allowed by society itself. The person reacts to life instinctively like an animal in its natural habitat.

If the mind were a bike or a car: This is the time when you know nothing about riding a bike or driving a car.

2

The second picture, called 'the Finding of the Cow's Tracks,' represents the cowherd tracing the cow with the sure hope of restoring her, having found her tracks on the ground.



*"The grove is deep, and so
Is my desire.
How glad I am, O lo!
I see her tracks."*

Here one begins to learn about the mind (themselves). You figure out what you mind is composed of by what you react to in fear, pain or pleasure. You learn that all senses feed the mind with information. You know you can think logically about stuff and thus logic is an aspect of the mind. In other words, one learns about their mind

by learning what sorts of behaviours, thoughts and actions count as mental activity. These are the footprints of the mind

If the mind were a bike or a car; Now you begin to learn how the bike or car operates without actually beginning to learn how to operate one yourself. You learn about riding a bike and driving a car intellectually (mentally) first.

3

The third picture, called 'the Finding out of the Cow,' represents the cowherd slowly approaching the cow from a distance.



*"Her loud and wild mooing
Has led me here;
I see her from afar,
Like a dark shadow."*

The more you study the philosophy of the mind or engage in discussions about the mind and its attributes, the clearer becomes your understanding of it.

Being able to see your cow means you are beginning to get an idea of what your mind is. In other words, the mind is getting to know itself.

If the mind were a bike or car; Here you begin to learn how to ride a bike or drive a car by practicing regularly.

4

The fourth picture, called 'the Catching of the Cow,' represents the cowherd catching hold of the cow, who struggles to break loose from him.



*"Alas! it's hard to keep
The cow I caught.
She tries to run and leap
And snap the cord."*

You seek to take control of the mind. You understand you have to silence it but it keeps chattering on. You discover trying to grab ahold of the mind with the mind is like a snake eating its tail (a catch-22 situation). It's like how difficult it is to quiet the mind when you first learn how to meditate. In fact, learning to meditate and fight while not letting the mind get in the way of fighting (sparring/practice) was probably the technique being employed. A basic meditation technique, called zazen, would also be a part of the Samurai's practice here.

If the mind were a bike or a car; Now you are beginning to get the hang to riding the bike or driving the car.

5

The fifth picture, called 'the Taming of the Cow,' represents the cowherd pacifying the cow, giving her grass and water.



*"I'm glad the cow so wild
Is tamed and mild.
She follows me, as if
She were my shadow."*

You have begun to gain control of your mind. You can sit in meditation for a while. You can change bad habits into good habits. You can flow when working (or fighting if a Samurai) or doing any activity to some extent. You move smoother and your reflexes are faster. You have a mind that you have some control over.

If the mind were a bike or a car; You have become a fairly good bicycle rider or car driver by now. You drive easily and freely wherever you want to go.

6

The sixth picture, called 'the Going Home Riding on the Cow,' represents the cowherd playing on a flute, riding on the cow.



*"Slowly the clouds return
To their own hill,
Floating along the skies
So calm and still."*

You have a complete grasp of zen philosophy and practice. You have attained "the flow". You can do your meditation easily and it feels as if no time passes because you're enjoying it. You can fight (or engage in your profession) without thinking, having become an expert. You can change your mind, in accord with circumstance, instantly. Habits are easy to change.

If the mind were a bike or a car; You are now so good at your bike and/or car that you can do tricks. You now have real skill.

7

The seventh picture, called 'the Forgetting of the Cow and the Remembering of the Man,' represents the cowherd looking at the beautiful scenery surrounding his cottage.



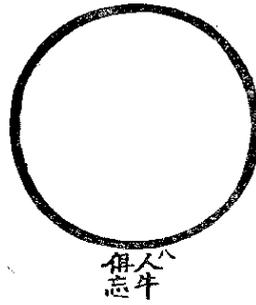
*"The cow goes out by day
And comes by night.
I care for her in no way,
But all is right."*

One has mastered zen in daily life and can now do all the daily activities and chores that is normal to everyday life as if one were on vacation or if the the mind has no attachments (non-attachment is mastered). You just do what needs to be done.

If the mind were a bike or a car; You can do really good tricks on your bike or in your car. The bike has become an extension of your body as if you and the bike were one.

8

The eighth picture, called 'the Forgetting of the Cow and of the Man,' represents a large empty circle.



*"There's no cowherd nor cow
Within the pen;
No moon of truth nor clouds
Of doubt in men."*

You attain the supreme flow of zen where both you and your mind don't exist. You just live in the world as if it were an extension of you.

Here you see beyond the categories and labels created by your mind to explain things. Everything just is.

Rather than using the mind to control the mind one just lets go. Without the mind to create a conception of the self, the self no longer exists. Without the mind creating labels to structure observation (the impressions from the senses) there is no external world. The external world has no meaning, it's an illusion.

If the mind were a bike or a car; You and the car don't even exist. Well, the analogy breaks down here but the idea is that you transcend both yourself and the world, mentally, i.e. it's a meditation technique result called dhyana in Yoga and Zen in Japanese.

9

The ninth picture, called 'the Returning to the Root and Source,' represents a beautiful landscape full of lovely trees in full blossom.



*"There is no dyer of hills,
Yet they are green;
So flowers smile, and titter rills
At their own wills."*

Your consciousness is irrevocably changed by the meditative experience but as you come down from your state of meditative ecstasy you discover that nothing has changed. the world is the same as it was before. There is no deep meaning to life or events. No gods or goddesses or angels. Everything just is as it is.

If the mind were a bike or a car; You discover the bike/car exist. Despite disappearing they have returned. You drive/ride when you need to.

10

The tenth picture, called 'the Going into the City with Open Hands,' represents a smiling monk, gourd in hand, talking with a man who looks like a pedlar.



*"The cares for body make
That body pine;
Let go of cares and thoughts,
O child of mine!"*

As human beings we tend to be communal in nature and the full experience of learning comes when we cease to become the student and become the teacher. In other words we complete a natural human cycle of learning a skill and passing it on to the next generation. Once a person learns zen one teaches zen. That is the path.

We have come full circle in this simpler and more natural path of learning about zen, how to dissociate from the world and the labels we impose on it to returning back to the world.

If the mind were a car or bike; Now you teach what you have learned.