THE ZEN CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS

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IN THE PAST FEW DECADES THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASING INTEREST in Zen, not confined only to students of Asian philosophy. The peculiar fascination for minds of Zen lies in the fact that it is markedly different from any other form of Buddhism, one might even say from any other form of conventional religion or philosophy.

In its methods of instruction Zen is unique. It dispenses with all forms of theorizing, doctrinal instruction and strict formality; these are treated as mere symbols of wisdom. There is a radical departure from the old pattern of monkish brotherhood, whether Christian or anything else, in that the Zen monks have not always engaged in offering prayers, doing acts of penance or performing other so-called deeds of piety nor in studying canonical books. For Zen is founded on practice and on an intimate, personal experience of reality, a vigorous attempt to come into direct contact with the truth itself without allowing theories and symbols to stand between th knower and the known.

This paper is concerned only with the concept of emptiness (Sanskrit, *sunyata*) in Zen Buddhism. The interest is based on the belief that only an understanding of this doctrine will give a clue as to what Zen itself is.

Although there are many schools of Buddhism, each with something different to offer, all generally agree on a few general concepts deemed fundamental to Buddhism.[1] These include belief in the theory of Karma translated to mean not only action but also includes what all that an individual being speaks and thinks. According to this theory all the phenomena of the universe or of the universe of an individual sentient being are the manifestations of his mind. Whenever he acts, speaks or even thinks, his mind is doing something, and that something must produce results, no matter how far in the future. Belief in this theory is the basis for belief in another doctrine — the doctrine of reincarnation, according to which past Karma will determine the form of future existence. The present life of a sentient being is only one aspect in this whole process. Death is not the end of his being. It is only another aspect of the process. What an individual is in this life, comes as a result of what he did in the past, and what he does in the present will determine what he will be in the future. This chain of causation

[1] For a general discussion of the fundamental concept of Buddhism see Fung-Yu-Lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. II (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953) pp. 237-292.

is what is called the wheel of Birth and Death. It is the main source of the sufferings undergone by individual sentient beings.

This theory of causation that all things depend on causes and conditions for this origination, provides the starting point for the viewpoint that what is produced by causes is not produced by itself, and does not exist in itself. Because all things are produced by causes and conditions they do not have any independent reality; they do not possess any self-nature. When these causes and conditions disappear, these things also disappear. Hence they are said to be empty. This theory implies the falseness of physical existence — the impermanence and non-reality of the whole phenomenal world.[2]

Ignorance of the true nature of things according to Buddhism is the main source of man's misery. All things in the universe are manifestations of the mind and are illusory and impermanent, yet the individual ignorantly craves for and cleaves to them. This fundamental ignorance is called non-enlightenment. From ignorance come the craving for and cleaving to life because of which the individual is bound to the eternal wheel of Birth and Death from which he can never escape. The only hope for escape lies in replacing ignorance with enlightenment.

Zen like all other various Buddhist schools attempts to contribute something to this enlightenment. Zen is a Japanese word derived from the Chinese *Ch'an* or *Ch'an-na,* which is a transliterated form of the Sanskrit *dhyana.*[3] The translation of *dhyana* is meditation or a concentrated state of consciousness, which is misleading for what Zen proposes to do is to bring about enlightenment through the awakening of a higher spiritual power so as to bring about union with reality itself. This power called *prajna* in Sanskrit is regarded as the highest form of intuition humans are capable of possessing.[4] By exercise of this intuitive power an individual can attain what is known as the "supreme enlightenment".

Briefly, Zen, a sect which belongs to the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, teaches that man suffers because of his craving to possess and keep forever things which are essentially impermanent or empty. The most important possession regarded by man is his own person. He identifies himself with this person and regards it as his castle into which he can retreat, isolate and assert himself against external forces. What man fails to see is that it is not possible for him to isolate himself from life and that only a false sense of isolation is achieved by identifying himself with this castle, the person. For the Buddha taught that all things including this castle are essentially impermanent. Because this castle is impermanent, it has no abiding reality;

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[2] See Kenneth W. Morgan, editor, *The Path of the Buddha* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956) pp. 24-26.

[3] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1958), p. 3.

[4] *Ibid.*

it is empty of any self-nature. A phenomenal human being is only a conglomeration of the five aggregates: material body, sensation, perception, predisposition, and consciousness. At any moment a man is but a momentary collection of these five aggregates, a combination of physical matter and mental energies as forces. As these change every moment so does the composition. He is only a continuous living entity which does not remain the same for two consecutive moments, which comes into being and disappear as soon as it arises.[5] This is also true of all things in the universe, they are all illusory and impermanent, yet the individual ignorantly craves for and cleaves to them. The frustration to possess things whether a person or a thing is the immediate cause of suffering, for as soon as man tries to possess them they slip away. 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 the person is empty, and is no more the Self than any other changing object, what then is the Self? The answer to this question is not very clear, but the Buddha taught that when man no longer resists life from behind the barrier of his person he finds that the Self is more than his own being, it includes the whole universe. In other words, in contrast to the philosophy of isolation the Buddha proclaimed the unity of all living things. Enlightenment is the attainment of understanding — that all separate entities are without self and without permanence. But this denial in Zen is completed with an affirmation. While denying the existence of the self in any particular thing, it finds it in the totality of things. Allan Watts in his book, *The Spirit of Zen,* attempts to shed light on the process of enlightenment or of coming into direct contact with the truth itself. He wrote:

> "Thus enlightenment is to deny the self in the castle, to realize that Self is not this person called "I" as distinct from that persons called "You", but that it is both "I" and "You" and everything else included.... Life is therefore affirmed by declaring that all things are taken separately, there is no self".[6]

In Zen as well as in all Buddhist sects belonging to the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, this fundamental unity which pervades all the differences and particular of the world is present in all sentient beings. This reality is called the "Mind" or the "Buddha-nature". Every sentient being possesses this reality, only he does not realize that he has it. This ignorance is what binds him to the wheel of Birth and Death. The necessity therefore is for him first to realize that he has it originally within him, and then by learning practice to "see" his own Buddha-nature.

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[5] Morgan, *op. cit.,* pp. 24-26.
[6] Allan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1955), p. 22.

The truth of Zen, it is often said, is missed because it is so obvious. Thus a poem by Hakuin translated by Professor Suzuki entitled the "Song of Meditation" runs like this:

> 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.[7]

The great truth of Zen then is to be found everywhere — with everyone and everything, whether its presence is realized or not. It is no more the property of wise men than of fools and lunatics, for the Buddha-nature is common to all. The rare treasure is the capacity to see the Truth. Man often misses the truth for he is too proud to look for the sublime in the ordinary affairs of his life. He does not see it in human beings, least of all in himself or in the incidents of every day life.

Thus Zen found the followers of the Mahayana looking for truth in the scriptures, in holy men believing that they would reveal it to them if they lived the good life. But Zen taught that nobody could find the Buddha in any heavenly realm until he had first found it in himself and in other sentient beings, and nobody could expect to find it in a hermitage unless he is capable of finding it in the life of the world. For the first principle is that all things, however insignificant and evil they appear to be, contains the Buddha-nature.

Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of the Zen school of Buddhism in China and regarded as the real founder of Zen sect, wrote a verse before he was appointed patriarch which expresses his understanding of Zen and the emptiness of mere conceptions and analogies.

> Neither is there Buddhi-tree
> Nor yet a mirror bright
> Since in reality all is void
> Whereon can the dust fall? [8]

In contrast a learned scholar Jinshu wrote advocating learning and the practire of *dhyana* as a necessary means to enlightenment:

> And the body is like unto the Buddhi-tree
> And the mind to a mirror bright
> Keep it clean all the time
> And let not dust accumulate.[9]

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[8] Fung-Yu-Lan, *op. cit.*, p. 391.
[9] *Ibid.*

Hui-neng although not necessarily against *dhyana* discipline emphasized the importance of *prajna*-intuition. The mind-mirror, according to Jinshu was liable to be stained by external objects and extreme care had to be taken to guard against this possibility. Hui-neng on the other hand, found the mind-mirror forever in a state of purity and beyond the possibility of defilement by external objects. Going even further, he claimed that there was from the first nothing to be described as a bright mind-mirror. This negation did not mean that he advocated nihilism. His was a form of transcendentalism, transcending all forms of relativity or what the Buddhist call the doctrine of "emptiness". Emptiness is not outside this world. Still, it has to be distinguished from relativity, which is a characteristic of the world of human beings. Not belonging in the category of relativity, emptiness is not at all communicable in any ordinary logical way. It is inexpressible in words and inconceivable in thought. But because we human beings all aspire to perfect communication, we attempt to use a medium, language, to impart our experiences. Because the experience is not something intellectual which can be imparted, we are bound to fail in our attempts to communicate, for whatever communication that is at all effective, takes place only between minds that share the same experience. As a result, Zen often remains silent and claims for special transmission outside doctrinal teaching.

> No dependence on letters or words
> Pointing directly at the mind in everyone of us
> And seeing into one's nature, whereby one attains Buddhahood."[10]

Emptiness is a metaphysical term, and the followers of Zen who are more concerned with individual personality, identify Emptiness with "mind" or the "Buddha-nature." "Pointing directly at the mind" means attaining it by the awakening of *prajna*-intuition, though there is really nothing to take hold of or to attain as "mind." Mind is no-mind, and this reality is *sunya*-empty, or void, the mind being *wu* (non-being) possesses no attributes about which anything can be said.[11] It can be called "mind" or referred to by any other name since we wish to speak about it and give it some designation. The result is, as the Ch'anists and Taoist often say, that one "falls into the net of words". The patriarch Ma-tsu, a disciple of the disciple of Hui-neng was once asked: "Why do you say that the very mind is Buddha?" Ma-tsu replied: "I simply want to stop the crying of children." The student asked further, "Suppose they do not stop crying?" "Then not mind, not Buddha," was the answer.[12]

Ma-tsu was also asked the question, "What kind of man is he who is not linked to all things?" The patriarch answered: "Wait until in one gulp

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[10] Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[11] In the Taoist system there is a distinction between *yu* (being) and *wu* (non-being). See Fung-Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1960), pp. 100-101.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

you can drink up all the water in the West River, then I will tell you." [13] Since such an act is obviously impossible, Ma-tsu is simply letting the student know that what he is asking about is not answerable. For he who is not linked to all things is one who transcends all things.

To express the idea of *wu* another story is told that once Budhhiharna who, according to legend, introduced Zen into China, was brought before the Emperor Wu. "The emperor anxious to meet the sage and to obtain approval of his devout works told the sage about the temples he built, the holy scriptures he had copied and the monks and nuns he ordered to be converted. The emperor asked, 'Is there any merit Reverend Sir in our conduct?' 'No merit at all,' answered the sage. The emperor was upset and thought that such answers were contrary to the teaching of Buddhism, and he asked further, 'What then, is the holy truth, the first principle?' 'In vast emptiness there is nothing holy.' " [14]

Since the First Principle is not something about which anything can be said, the best way to express it is to remain silent. Thus the Zen masters often resorted to silence or negation to express the truth. Being inexpressible and inconceivable, this reality can only be apprehended by intuition directly, completely, and instantly. Intellectual analysis can only divide and describe and scratch the surface but cannot apprehend the fundamental reality. The early masters of Zen devised a means of passing on their teaching which can never be explained away by the intellect. Since the knowledge of the reality is knowledge that is non-knowledge, it follows that it cannot be apprehended through the use of the intellect. The aim therefore of Zen is to throw off all the external paraphernalia which the intellect has woven around the soul and to see directly into the innermost nature of our being.

Conscious efforts also in reciting the sutras, worshipping the Buddha images or performing the rituals are really of no avail and should be abandoned. Instead, one should allow the mind to operate freely spontaneously and naturally. The mind must be calmed and must not have conscious thought. In any conscious thought there is the ego at work, making for the distinction between subject and object. Conscious thought also begets *karma,* which ties one down to the endless cycle of birth and death and breeds attachment to external objects.

Doshin, the fourth patriarch of Zen in Japan, is said to have understood how the teaching and discipline of Zen were to be oriented. To the question of how one can attain to clearness and purity of mind, he answered:

> No invoking the Buddha's name, no contemplation on the mind, no deliberation, no scattering of thought, only let things flow on as they would, never let them pass away nor let them stay on; be one, be alone, clean all of appendages, and ultimately the mind will all by itself be clear unspoiled.[15]

[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Watts, *op. cit.,* p. 29.
[15] Suzuki, *op. cit.,* pp. 24-27.

Hui-neng expressed the same view when he gave the instructions to realize "no-mind," "no form," and "no abiding," and to keep *prajna* ever flowing with no obstructions.[16] To realize this is to follow the "concentration exercise in "one-ness',, defined by Hui-neng as disciplining oneself in "straight forwardness." [17] When a man is altogether free and has no attachment to any object, he can perform his task without deliberate effort or purposeful mind. He lives a life of no-merit or purposelessness. This is exactly what the Taoists called *wu-wei* (non-action) and *wu hsin* (no mind).[18] This is also what Tao-Sheng, a Chinese Buddhist teacher, meant when he said that "a good deed does not entail retribution." [19] When one acts spontaneously, without deliberate effort, choice, or discrimination, one is practicing *wu-wei* or non-action and at the same time practicing wu-hsin or no mind. Following these principles of *wu-wei* and *wu-hsin* means that one has no craving for, or cleaving to, things, even though one may pursue various activities. Under these circumstances, one's *karma* will not entail any retribution or effect. The aim in doing things then is not to obtain good effects, no matter how good these effects may be in themselves. Rather the aim is to entail no effects at all. When all one's actions entail no effects, then after the effects of previously accumulated *karma* have exhausted themselves, one will gain emancipation from the wheel of Birth and Death and achieve enlightenment.

To achieve Buddhahood, there is no place for deliberate effort. The only method is to carry on one's ordinary and uneventful tasks; thus a Zen master when asked, "What is the Tao?" replied immediately "Usual life is the very Tao" [20] It meant simply to carry on one's ordinary and uneventful tasks like wearing one's clothes, eating when hungry, sleeping when tired. All one should do is to pursue the ordinary tasks of one's everyday life, and nothing more. What the Zen masters emphasized is that to achieve reality does not require special acts such as the ceremonies and the prayers of institutionalized religion. One should simply try to be without a purposeful mind or any attachment to anything in one's daily life. Cultivation then results from the mere carrying on of the common and simple affairs of daily life.

Though all the Zen schools have the same aim which is the realization of the innermost mind, they differ in the methods and techniques to reach that end.[21] The Lin-chi or Rinzai branch for instance makes use of the shout, the stick, and the *koan* methodology, in which the masters may pose a riddle or a problem like "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "How do you get the goose out of the bottle without breaking the bottle" [22]

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16 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
17 *Ibid.*
18 Fung Yu-Lan, *op. cit.*, p. 249.
19 *Ibid.*
20 Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
21 Suzuki, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
22 Watts, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-70.

There is really no intellectual solution to the riddle. The *koan* is meant to stimulate the student to the realization that logic, reason, and conceptualization are stumbling blocks to his awakening and to induce him to resort to resources other than logic and reason, resources that he has hitherto not utilized. This branch of Zen also accepts the idea that words are not necessary to express the truth.

When the Zen follower apprehends the Buddha-nature within himself, he experiences an awakening or an enlightenment called *satori* in Japanese, an awareness of the undifferentiated unity of all existence. He is now one with the whole universe. He sees all particulars and differentiation merged into one fundamental unity. He is no longer troubled by problems and incidents. Such a man practices what the Zen masters call *no-mindness* and *no-thought-ness*. He is also a man who has realized the doctrine of *sunyata*, the emptiness and impermanence of all things. He is a man who has found spiritual freedom, for he is free of all intellectual and material encumbrances. Realizing the evanescence of the outer world, of his own ideas, and of the ego itself, he ceases to cling to these transient forms. 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. For included in the realization of the concept of emptiness is a complete affirmation and acceptance of life, with its magic-like transformations and unending changes. In other words, non-attachment does not mean running away from things to some peaceful refuge, for it is impossible to escape from our own illusions about life. They remain with us everywhere we go. Non-attachment therefore means not running away from life but keeping pace with the rhythm of life, for causeless and unconditional freedom comes through complete acceptance of reality.

Thus, the Zen student gains all, by denying all—for ordinary possessiveness is lost which consists actually of denying the right of people and things to live and change. Hence the only loss in Zen is the loss of this denial.

The concept of emptiness in Zen therefore brings awareness that life is something essentially ungraspable and indefineable—never for a moment remaining the same. Thus when the Zen masters tell their pupils to "walk on" and to "let go"— it is only one way of telling them to accept life as that which cannot be made anyone's property, which is always free and unlimited.

When at last it is realized that life can never be caught, a joining of "self" and "life" into close unity and rhythm, a direct contact with the changing and moving process which is the Buddha-nature perpetually manifesting itself is effected. To know the Buddha-nature is to know life apart from interruptions, the chief of which was the concept of the self as an entity distinct from life, occupied intently with its own private reactions to reality as distinct from reality itself.

From all these, it can be deduced that Zen can be defined as the unity of "self" and "life" into so close a unity that the distinction between the two disappears. In the words of Professor Watts, this state of unity is "a state of One-ness in which all distinctions of "I" and not-I, knower and known, sees and seen are set aside." [23]

The Zen masters assert, however, that this apprehension does not mean the acquisition of something new; it means only the realization of something that has always been present in him. The only trouble is that he has not been aware of this, because of ignorance and folly. In this state of awakening, when the mind is calm and tranquil, when the conscious self is eliminated, the mysterious inner mind takes over, and the actor performs his action automatically and spontaneously. Such a state of awakening can be repeated many times.

Now in what ways has Zen, particularly the concept of emptiness, been translated into thought and action?

It may seem strange that Zen exerted any influence at all in Bushido the "way of the Warrior," but it was chiefly Zen that was studied by the samurai. According to Ienaga Saburo, a specialist in the history of Japanese thought, only those who "feel the extreme of suffering" can grasp the meaning of the logic of negation or denial.[24] For it is only they who can understand Buddhism's basic dialectical movement — a movement consisting of absolute denial of the actual and as a result of denial the return to absolute affirmation on another plane. Thus, according to Ienaga, Prince Shokoku Taishi who transcended his time, was the first to clearly understand the Buddhist logic of negation when he said that "the world is empty and false, only the Buddha is true." [25]

This is simply saying that the negative aspect of Zen, the giving up, was only another way of expressing the positive fact that to give up everything, is to gain all. It is the view of Ienaga that the contradictions of suffering could not really be felt in the deepest sense by the aristocrats. As a result of this, it was not the nobles but those who despaired of their salvation who first grasped the doctrine of denial — the warriors, the hunters, the monks who had broken their vows, the prostitutes, etc., whose very way of life bound them to the cycle of birth and death and who had very little hope of salvation. They readily understood the logic of negation, a denial that value resides in man and that salvation can be achieved alone through human effort.

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[24] Robert Bellah, "Ienaga and the Search for Meaning in Modern Japan," *Japanese Changing Attitude Toward Modernization*, Marius Jansen, editor; (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 382.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 380.

For the samurai, the problem was one of preserving their mental stability.[26] They were constantly facing death for in a feudal Japan internal wars between rival *daimyo* (barons) often occurred. The Zen concept of emptiness sustained them in two ways: Acceptance of the concept of *sunyata* made possible the disciplining of themselves in "straight forwardness" or "single-mindedness" of going right ahead without looking back once the course is decided upon. They also gathered strength from a concept that gave them a certain philosophical understanding of the question of life and death. For the most capable and efficient samurai was one who would not hesitate to give up his life when the occasion called for it. Here again, emptiness sustained them, for it taught that life and death were but aspects of the same existence and asserted that denial of existence of self in any particular thing is to gain unity with life.

"The samurai is good for nothing unless he can go beyond life and death. When it is said that all things are of one mind, you may think that there is such a thing as to be known as mind. But the fact is that a mind attached to life and death must be abandoned, when you can execute wonderful deeds."[27] This is simply a repetition of Hui-neng's instructions to realize "no-mind" and "no-abiding."

This was stated by the great Zen master Takuan, and it simply means that when one attains the state or mind of "no-mind-ness," all things are accomplished. It is a mind released from the thought of death, a mind no longer bothered by questions of immortality.

Let us now consider the relationship between the principle of emptiness and the art of swordmanship. The practice of this art like all the other arts studied in Japan are not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for purely aesthetic enjoyment. They are also meant to train the mind, indeed, to bring it into contact with the ultimate reality.

People of the West, particularly, may wonder how Zen came to be so intimately related to the art of killing. They are puzzled as to how Zen can endorse the art of swordmanship as Buddhism is considered a religion of compassion. Students of Oriental culture however, come to understand the relationship when they learn that whatever field of art the Japanese may study they always emphasize the importance of the "subjective" side of it, giving only a secondary, almost negligible, consideration of its technique. In other words they give an added significance to art by turning it into an opportunity for their spiritual enhancement, and this consists in advancing toward the realization of the Tao or the Heavenly nature in man or the emptiness or suchness of things.

In feudal Japan the "sword is considered the soul of the samurai."[28] The sword became intimately connected with the life of the samurai and

[26] For discussion of Zen and the samurai see, D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Panthem Books Inc., 1959), pp. 62-85.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

became the symbol of loyalty, self-sacrifice and benevolence, as well as the symbol of dignity and honor.

In his book, *Zen Buddhism and Japanese Culture,* Mr. Suzuki quotes from a letter written by Master Takuan to Yagyu Tajima concerning the close relationship between Zen and the art of swordsmanship. The letter touches upon the essential teaching of Zen, i.e. the concept of emptiness as well as the secrets of art in general. [29] In this letter Takuan advised Tajima to attain a certain state of mind known as *mushin. Mushin* literarily means "no-mind." It is the mind negating itself, letting go itself from itself, a solidly frozen mind allowing itself to relax into a state of perfect unguardedness.[30] In Buddhism, as explained previously, this means transcending all forms of life and death, good and evil, being and non-being. Attainment of this state of mind is important for the master knows that technique alone will never make a man the perfect sword player. The spirit of inner experience (*satori*) must back the art, and this spirit is gained only by looking deeply into the inmost recesses of the mind. This spirit is grasped only when one's mind is in complete harmony with the principle of life itself, that is when one attains *mushin* or "no-mind."

When this is attained, the mind moves from one topic or object to another, flowing like a stream of water, filling every possible corner and consequently fulfilling every function required of it.[31] This is also what Takuan meant when he gave the instruction to maintain "absolute fluidity" of the mind.[32] When the mind fails to attain *mushin,* the mind is intellectually burdened; it cannot move from one object to another without stopping and reflecting on itself, thus obstructing its innate fluidity. The mind then coagulates before it makes a second move, because the first move still lingers there—"which is *suki* for the swordsman—the one thing to be avoided with the utmost scrupulosity." [33] This corresponds to the mind conscious of itself. It was emphasized that thinking although useful in many ways, must be discarded on occasions when it interferes with the work at hand. On these occasions, it must be left behind, and the 'unconscious" or the mysterious inner mind must be allowed to come forward. In such cases, the self is forgotten, and it becomes an instrument in the hands of the "unknown." This unknown power has no ego-consciousness, and consequently no thought of winning or losing the contest, whatever the contest maybe, because it moves at the level of non-duality, where there is neither subject nor object. Applied to swordsmanship, when the unconscious is allowed to come forward the sword will move where it ought to move making victory inevitable.

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[29] *Ibid.,* pp. 95-100

[30] *Ibid.,* p. 110. *Mushin* is actually identical with the Taoist and Buddhist principle of *wu-hsin* or "no-mind-ness."

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 111

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 108

[33] Suki, literally means any space between two objects where something else can enter. See Suzuki, *Ibid.,* p. 143.

In Japan and also in China therefore the arts are not a matter of technology but of spiritual insight and training. Swordsmanship is no exception. It is a deadly art, for when a man makes one false move he is sure to lose his life. What Takuan and the other masters are telling their pupils is that technique alone is not sufficient. It is necessary to acquire an inner light on the psychology of swordsmanship. On the basis of experience among swordmasters, it is contended that the beginner however fearless and strong he maybe at the start, loses his self-confidence and loses self-consciousness, as soon as he begins taking lessons. He becomes aware of all the technical possibilities by which his life may be endangered. The result is that he is worse off than before he started in spite of his newly mastered technique of training his senses to be alert to keep a sharp watch on his opponent, and of correctly parrying his opponent's thrusts. He is now forced to concede that he is at the mercy of everyone who has a superior technique — someone more agile and practised than he. Now he sees no other way open to him but to practice unceasingly until he acquires a brilliant technique. Still in spite of this he is no nearer to his goal of acquiring the secret of swordsmanship.

The reason, according to Takuan, is that he cannot stop himself from watching closely every movement of the sword of his opponent, always thinking how he can best come at him, waiting to strike when his opponent drops his guard. But as soon as this happens, he is sure to be beaten, for he has failed to keep his mind in a state of "perfect fluidity," causing his mind to stop no matter how briefly. This psychical stoppage is explained as coming from a much deeper source.[34] When there is the slightest feeling of fear or attachment to life, the mind loses its fluidity. On the other hand, when the mind is free of all fears and attachments, it will not know any hindrances, any inhibitions or stoppages. The swordsman is warned to keep his mind always in a state of emptiness so that his freedom of action will never be obstructed. To keep the mind in a state of fluidity therefore is to realize the concept of emptiness. When the sword is held by a swordsman who has attained the state of spirituality of no-mind-ness or emptiness, then "he holds it though not holding it." [35] It is as if the sword wields itself. When one is not conscious of using the sword, being empty of all thoughts and all sense of insecurity arising from fear and all desire to win, then "both man and the sword turns into instruments in the hands as it were of the unconscious and it is this unconscious that achieves wonders of creativity." [36]

Here the swordsman's movements are compared to flashes of lightning "when a flint strikes steel, no movement is lost before a spark issues from

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 144
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 146
[36] *Ibid.*

the contact." [37] Between one movement and another there is not a hair-breath's interval. This is an expression of the fluidity of the mind, not stopping with any object, having no time for deliberation. When the mind calculates so as to be quick in movement, the very thought makes the mind captive, making the mind stop. This is a sure sign of one's being moved by something external.

That is why Takuan and the other masters kept on dilating on the doctrine of emptiness, which may appear to many as something quite remote from daily experience. They emphasized that this doctrine which is the metaphysics of *mushin* or no-mind-ness is actually closely related to the problems of life and death. This fact was recognized by the great masters like Yagyu Tajima, Takuan, Shunzan and others. Both Zen and the Sword's Way are one in the sense that both ultimately aim at transcending the duality of life and death. To transcend the thought that is a great inhibitory factor in the free and spontaneous exercise of the technique acquired, it was recognized that the best way for the swordsman is to discipline himself in Zen, for Zen is not a mere philosophical contemplation on the evanescense of life but a most practical entrance into the realm of nonrelativity.

The practicalness of Zen is again demonstrated when we examine the art of archery. Here again we see a close connection between Zen and archery. As in the art of swordsmanship, the technique has to be mastered, but once this is done again as in the art of swordsmanship, the mental attitude of self-forgetfulness, i.e. an absence of the feeling that "I am doing it," must be attained.

In a little book entitled *Zen in the Art of Archery,* Mr. Herrigel gives an account of how he made use of archery as an avenue towards the understanding of Zen. [38] He described the course which a pupil of the art of archery has to complete. For the Japanese, according to him, archery is not only a pastime nor is it a purposeless game, but rather it is a matter of life and death. The art of archery is not an ability a sportsman can acquire, more or less, by bodily exercises but an ability whose origin is to be found in spiritual exercise and whose aim consists in hitting a spiritual goal. Fundamentally, therefore, the archer aims at himself. Archery then becomes a matter of life and death because it is a "contest of the archer with himself," and this kind of contest is the "foundation of all contests outwardly directed," for instance, at another bodily opponent. [39]

The explanation as to why the contest is between the archer and himself may first sound enigmatic. To the masters, the contests of this kind "consist in the archer aiming at himself, and thus at the same time, becoming simultaneously the aimer and the aim, the hitter and the hit." Using

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 102
[38] Eugene Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).
[39] *Ibid.*

some of the often used expressions of the masters, one says that "it is necessary for the archer to become, without being conscious of it" an unmoved center." It is then that the "supreme and ultimate miracle happens. "Art becomes artless, shooting becomes not-shooting, a shooting without bow and arrow." [40]

This art then, along with the other arts presupposes a spiritual attitude, and each man cultivates it in his own way. If one really wishes to be the master of an art, technical knowledge of it is not sufficient. One has to transcend technique so that the art becomes an "artless art" growing out of the unconscious.

Applying this to the art of archery, the way of the "artless art" Mr. Herringel tells us is not easy to follow. The first thing that the master wants his pupil to take note of is the "noble forms" which the bow assumes when drawn to its full extent — the bow encloses the "All" in itself.[41] That is why it is of utmost importance for one to learn how to draw it properly. To be able to draw the bow "spiritually," that is, without any kind of effort, involves long periods of practice and repetition. In the next stage which is the loosing of the arrow, the important point to be noted is the fact the certainty of hitting seems to depend on the shot's being smoothly loosed at the right moment, when the tension spontaneously fulfills itself. It is at this point that the influence of Zen begins to make itself felt in archery. The first step, the drawing of the bow, leads to a loosening of the body, without which the bow cannot be drawn properly. In the second step, when it is necessary that the shot be loosed right, the loosening of the body must be accompanied by a spiritual and mental loosening. Again, as in swordsmanship, the secret consists in attaining a state of mentality or spirituality which is a result of the mind acquiring the state of no-mind-ness or *mushin*. It results in the pupil letting go of himself, a stage on the way to emptiness and detachment. The master never tires of repeating to his pupils that all right-doing is accomplished only in a state of true purposelessness in which the doer can no longer be present as himself. Just as the sword wields itself in the art of swordsmanship so also here in archery, in the words of the master of Mr. Herrigel, "It takes aim and hits, 'It' takes the place of the ego, availing itself of a facility and dexterity which the ego only acquired by conscious effort." [42] And here we are reminded that "It" is only a given name for something which can never be really grasped or fully understood, and which only makes itself known to those who have experienced it.

Just as Zen has influenced the civilization of the Far East in the military arts, so do we find that Zen has influenced the civilization of the East in the field of aesthetics. It was Zen which produced the other-world-

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 30
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 30
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 101

liness of the tea ceremony, the arts of garden building and flower arrangement, the work of the Sung and *sumi-e* painters.

The element of negation is still at the base of the art of the tea ceremony as is also the case in the art of landscape gardening and flower arrangement. All these arts start from the dialectical basis of seeing in the smallest things the largest and the greatest or seeing through a stone or a stick the whole universe — all in an attempt to mirror the Universal from the Particular.

Tea was introduced to Japan from China by Eisai, the founder of Rinzai Zen, and the tea ceremony began over six centuries ago.[43] The Zen monks started the practice of drinking tea, and they would pass a large bowl of tea from one to another in the Meditation Hall of their monasteries. They would drink to refresh themselves during their hard struggle with the koan. Soon it was something much more than a drink made from dried leaves, it became associated with all those things which bring quietness and peace of mind. It was not before long that the practice of drinking tea took place in a tea house, "the Abode of Emptiness," an inconspicuous, thatched hut, hidden away in a corner of the garden, usually under a pine tree. The House is of such fragile structure that it immediately suggests the transitoriness and impermanence of things. In conformity with the ideal of simplification and harmony which symbolizes the art of tea, it was essential that the Tea House should be stripped of all unnecessaries and also that it should harmonize with its surroundings as if the hut were part of nature, as natural as trees and unhewn rocks.

In the tea room itself the atmosphere was one of calm and solitude, no bright colors are used, for in the tea-ceremony we find Zen in its most peaceful aspect. There is only the dull yellow of the straw mats, the restful grey of the paper walls. A painting usually adorns the tea-house. As a matter of fact, it was from the requirement for the pictures in the tea house that the monochrome Zen paintings grew.

The tea house was made beautiful with flowers, and thus grew up the art of flower arrangement. The gardens near the tea house were also an expression of the simplicity and modesty which are characteristics of Zen art.

The equipment for the tea ceremony and the ceremony itself all express profundity in simplicity. The bowls in which the tea was served are made of crude thick porcelain of the color of autumn leaves fashioned with great care in sharp contrast to the exquisite "egg-shell" china decorated with flower and birds so highly prized in the West.

The use of simple equipment in the ceremony is an expression of Zen's reverence for the ordinary things of life, for the object of the tea ceremony is to exalt the simplest and most inexpensive materials by making the highest possible use of them.

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[43] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture, op. cit.*, p. 272.

The host and his guests assembled in the tea house experience together their identity with the universe and taste the pleasure of the oneness of self and others in the great emptiness. In this way, the tea-ceremony has come to be regarded as the best way to refresh the spirit. It affords a temporary escape from cares and distractions of life. According to Mr. Suzuki, in the tea-ceremony we find expressed an element he termed "tranquility" an important factor making up the spirit of the tea. [44] As the term is used in the tea, its implication is "poverty", "aloneness", "simplification". There is an attempt to awaken an "active aesthetical appreciation of poverty," [45] the creation of an environment in the tea-ceremony in such a way as to evoke the highest spiritual freedom and detachment, of separation from evanescence of the objective world.

A close link between Zen and painting is also revealed particularly in the work of the Sung, *sumi-e* and a few contemporary school of modern painting. In the history of landscape painting the works of the Sung masters are generally acknowledged to be the best, and in this type of painting we see the finest flowering of the Zen spirit. To the landscape artist, nature is to be converted to the plane of ideals; all mountains, trees, rivers and lakes are but creations of the mind and subject to the law of impermanence. In the Sung landscape, mountains are to be seen as if floating in the distance, having no real existence. Thus the basic Zen doctrine of emptiness is illustrated. As Professor Suzuki points out, the painting Ma Yuan of the solitary fisherman on a boat is probably the supreme example of this art.[46] In the middle of the lake, a fisherman sits in his boat, rod in hand. The boat is lost in the lake, whose banks are not visible; the water is indicated only by a few lines along the boat. All the rest is emptiness.

Towards the end of the Sung Dynasty, Zen began to die in China and the real tradition of the Sung was taken up in Japan by *sumi-e* and latter-day avant-garde artists who are committed to Zen and who find the Zen still relevant today.

The realism of the Chinese spirit of which Zen is an embodiment brought Buddha down to earth, recognizing him in the everyday reality, in man, animal, plant, flowers, mountains, streams, and so on. Zen opened up an entirely new field for Buddhist art. But the every day can become Buddha only after it has been transcended. The great Zen master Dogen said, "To say the oak in my garden is Buddha would be more than pantheism, unless we have made the pure eye, that other eye, our own. Our other eye must have seen Buddha first, and identified him with the oak in my garden. And to see Buddha is to become Buddha. For one must be Buddha to recognize him." [47]

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 284
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] Suzuki, Zen and Japanese Culture, op. cit., p. 22.
[47] Tore Haga, *Avant-Garde Art in Japan* (New York: Harry N. Abram, Inc., 1962) p. 22.

At the every end of the difficult path of contradiction Dogen continues, all dualism "between the particular and the general, between man and nature and between the I and the Buddha" are transcended. [48] With our eye purified, we can, Dogen says, experience the direct "encounter" and hence possess intuitive knowledge of the world's reality. This is what a Chinese painter probably meant when he said, "When I paint the river in the spring, my soul enters into the current, the flowers on the banks open at my will and the water is agitated at my bidding." [49]

Again this is what is meant when it is said that to draw bamboos is to become a bamboo and to forget that you are with it while drawing it — this is the Zen of the bamboo, this is moving with the rhythmic movement of the spirit which resides in the bamboo as well as in the artist himself. What is now required of him is to have a firm hold on the spirit and yet not be conscious of the fact. This is a very difficult task achieved only after long spiritual training.

Such vision of reality if it were to be recorded in painting had to be done in the shortest possible time. In executing his paintings, the Zen artist manipulates his brush with the utmost freedom, speed and spontaneity. There is no time for deliberation or hesitation. The inspiration of the artist moves his hand automatically. The paintings of the *sumie* school are executed in this manner. The medium they use is black Chinese ink, and they paint on a particular type of paper, soft and absorbent, often referred to as rice paper. [50]

A stroke once made in this type of paper can never be effaced. The stroke must be drawn swiftly and deftly otherwise the result will be an ugly blot. With such materials it was absolutely necessary for the artist to paint as if a whirlwind possessed his hands. This technique suited the Zen masters perfectly for it required the artist to record his vision on paper while it was still fresh and full of the spontaneity of life itself.

Thus to the Oriental, the concept of contradiction presents no problem, since this notion has long been sanctioned by Zen. The Oriental has also the advantage of being familiar with essential means of artistic expressions, which Michel Tapié identifies as "lyrical graphism and qualitative space.[51] As for graphism, according to Tapié, the Zen monks continue to make use of it as "paroxysmic means" of free and intense expression. As for space, it has always been a characteristic of Zen painting which the Haboku school made the essence of their painting.

For the Chinese Sung painters, and the medieval Zen painters as Sesshu (1420-1506) Tohaku (1539-1610), Hakuin (1685-1768) and others, as

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 24
[49] Ibid.
[50] Key M. Thompson, *The Art and Technique of Sumi-e* (Tokyo, Japan: Charles Etuttle Co., 1965) p. 9.
[51] Tore Haga, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11

well as their modern successors, Insho Domoto, Onishi, Imai, Arai etc., painting is a way of practicing Zen. Insho Domoto, one of the great masters of traditional Japanese painting, is considered by many Japanese as the last master possessing complete knowledge of the secrets of the technique of Sumi painting.

All of these painters have demonstrated through their work their acceptance and understanding of the doctrine of negation or emptiness. For far from maintaining that they are the center of the world, these medieval and modern artists live in their works, moving completely in unison with the rhythm of things in the universe, penetrating them.

Having noted the contributions Zen and the concept of emptiness has made to the building up of Japanese culture, it is significant to note that the other schools of Buddhism have limited their sphere of influence almost entirely to the spiritual life of the Japanese people. Zen has gone beyond it. Zen has entered internally into every phase of the cultural life of the people. This is as true of the art of archery, as of ink painting, of the art of flower arrangement, no less than the art of poetry, the tea ceremony and swordsmanship. All of them presupposes a spiritual attitude, an attitude which in its most exalted form is characteristic of Zen Buddhism.

We must also take note of the role of the arts in Buddhism. While art is art and has a significance all its own, it cannot be denied that Zen made use of the arts as avenues through which the realization of the "Heavenly Nature" in man is accomplished. Viewed in this manner, art becomes only a pretext through which life opens up its secrets to us. Thus, in archery for instance, bow and arrow are only a pretext for something that could just as well happen without them, only the way to a goal, not the goal itself. Objectively speaking, it would be entirely possible to make one's way to Zen from any of the arts that have been named.

On the other hand, if one wishes to master an art, technical knowledge of it is not enough. It is necessary to transcend technique so the art becomes an "artless art" — where there is free and spontaneous exercise of the technique acquired. To do this is to recognize that the best way is to discipline oneself in Zen or, more specifically, in Zen's doctrine of negation or emptiness. For realization of this concept brings about an intuitive or experential understanding of Reality which can be verbally formulated in the phrase, "All in One and One in All." This is a state of "One-ness" in which all distinction of "I" and "not-I" are set aside. When this is thoroughly understood, then creative genius is born.