



Zen Traces

The Last Dharma Talk

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The question that is asked of this person more often than any other is "What is Zen all about?" or "What is the purpose of Zen?"

Even though words can be a formidable obstacle to the realization of Zen, this short article will be an effort to indicate its intent. Simply stated, the intent of Zen is to bring man into union with life and with himself. Unawakened man sees himself as in a world which is something outside of himself. He operates by trying to manipulate the bits and pieces of the outside world. Some of these pieces he regards as friendly or useful. Other parts he sees as unfriendly or dangerous, and many are of no interest at all. As a result, his struggle is constant. He keeps trying to grasp the favorable portions of the objective world and to avoid or reject its unfavorable aspects. Thus it is that he is in a constant state of turmoil. Even in his inner life he maintains this divisive 'Subject-Object' attitude. He sees himself, he analyzes himself. Thus a division is maintained and the whole man never speaks. Wholeness is not possible unless man is wholly present and not divided by the subject-object illusion. Man's unawareness of the illusory nature of his world is sustained by this attitude. It is in this world of illusion, of strange dreams, that Zen can act as the alarm clock that awakens man to his own true being.

The majority of mankind separate themselves from 'things.' Thus the wholeness of life is missing. Man is unable to give wholly and also unable to receive wholly. In this condition, man lives in a world of boundaries and severe limitations.

No matter how deep his inner yearnings may be, the chasm of separation is ever present and the life of true holiness (wholeness) forever escapes him. In this condition, many feverishly search for gratification of the senses, the Hedonistic escape. Others practice severe self denial, asceticism. Some speak of stoic acceptance. Some look to an 'afterlife' which they claim will be superior to this present limited, finite existence. In all these attitudes, the division is maintained and man is unfulfilled, a stranger in an alien and often hostile world.

Zen does not philosophize as to the 'whys' of this condition. Zen says that you must unravel this Gordian knot yourself. Idle speculations are a way of avoiding the problem and at the same time strengthen the illusion of duality. It is only when man is whole that he truly lives. When life is no longer a collection of colliding pieces, but a living whole, then the universe and man are not alienated. Within himself he is whole and no longer are his energies depleted by inner struggles.

He and the universe function in oneness and harmony is ever present. This harmonious function is beyond the condition of acceptance or rejection. It is here that love in its

fullest sense is present – love as it transcends logic – love as it transcends separateness and yet fulfills it. When we function in Zen, we function as an absolute love of life.

Our anxieties are proof of our separateness from life. When we are constantly scrambling to attain or retain things we consider important, when we fight to avoid the unpleasant aspects of life, we are blinded to its realities and become a puppet of fear. When life is complete from moment-to-moment, where is there room for anxiety concerning tomorrow? To be whole is to live in a transcendent love aspect of life. It is not that life has no problems. Life and the problems are real but the responses are now creative. The ego is no longer the taskmaster and the psychological pain no longer clouds the issues. One of the most important aspects of the Zen state is that it is the state of creativity. More, even though birth and death are part of the pattern of life, one is now in some inexplicable way beyond birth and death.

Man's clouded condition is not one of simple ignorance. There is no factual information that can correct the error inherent in the human condition. To find the truth man must recognize that he himself creates the illusion. He is indeed the problem itself. The solution calls for a dying and a rebirth. This demands that he meets life fully, without interposing all the improvisations he has contrived for meeting life. The "Great Death," as it is called in Zen, is the final abandonment of self. The "Great Awakening" is the rebirth into life of absolute love.

This existential awakening to one's true self is called enlightenment. Whatever his work or his problems may be, they are not felt as some hindrance to be disposed of.

His work and his problems are his life, and he lives them. He lives in the now and not in some amorphous future. As long as man is separated from what he does, there is no creativity. In the creative life of Zen the process is as important as the product. Each stroke of the brush is as important as the final picture.

The unenlightened person feels life is a struggle against the world. Some spend much time trying to bend the world to their will. Some simply let themselves be carried along as they feel that all effort is useless. Both see the world as an outside force. The enlightened person is, of course, one with life and so it is that there is no struggle. This person then lives a life of creativity. Certainly it can be said that true practice starts with enlightenment. This is a 'practice beyond practice.' Zen, then, is a key to wholeness, creativity and true freedom. The truth of Zen is the truth of one's own being, it is a living truth. One must find it by himself and through himself.

A teaching cannot bring us the truth through some process that we follow. We must recognize that all teachings are outside forces that we try to absorb within ourselves. No

truth that is imposed is a living truth for us. No effort, however idealistic, that requires us to conform to specific definitions of truth, can effectively bring about the freedom that is the hallmark of enlightenment.

If the truth cannot be passed on to us as some form of teaching, how can it become manifest? No faculty of man, neither his intellect, his feelings, nor his willing, can bring it about. These are all fragmented expressions of his being and what is required is wholeness. The truth can never be possessed. The intellect cannot grasp it. To see the truth as something that can be apprehended is to maintain the duality and sustain the division. When the intellect reaches the point where it understands that truth or reality is beyond its reach, the way is opened for man's relation to the living truth to be manifest. This is not an intellectual understanding of the truth, but being one with it, a living out of it.

Surely it is easy to recognize that all intellectual knowing is related to idea patterns. What the intellect contacts is not reality, but rather abstracted portions of it. To understand oneself is to accept the limited content of the patterns of the mind. To know oneself is to live in the potential of infinity. The things one wants to understand are things one attempts to own, even if only intellectually. To understand something is to master it or, in a sense, to possess it. Life is constantly moving and changing. The moment you capture a truth it dies and you have only a mummy in the sepulcher of ideation. The living truth must be lived, and cannot be limited or formalized.

Through the intellect man can reach an understanding of life. In fact, there are many possible varieties of understanding. Of course, the intellect always maintains the subject-object division, and in this way, prevents man's conscious union with life – the life of wholeness. Even to look 'within' is not, in reality, much different than looking 'without.' There is a looker and the thing looked at, and so the subject-object illusion is ever present.

Zen presents no formal truth that it claims embodies the truth of reality. Zen seeks reality, the ever moving, living truth of reality, which is creativity itself. Conformity to ideas of truth is destructive to the potential of creativity. Non-conformity is likewise a form, a pattern of rejection, which is equally destructive.

It is in this spirit that, even though Zen is considered Buddhistic, a Zen Buddhist is the follower of the Buddha in that, like the Buddha, he is completely free in his search for truth. Zen is beyond affirmation and denial. When one lives in wholeness, in creativity, one now is 'being.' Zen is saying 'be.' Zen is not trying to accumulate followers but to matriculate them to their own wholeness and creative freedom of being.



Bodhidharma

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