

The Essentials of Zen View and Practice

Bodhidharma's Four Statements of Zen

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"Without past, present or future; empty, awake mind."

When Bodhidharma arrived in China (circa 521) he found a dualistic Buddhism much removed from its Zen spirit, either engaged in highly intellectual and speculative metaphysical philosophy, or trapped in compassionless moral precepts ostensibly passed down from the Buddha. The essence of Buddhism, the unified practice and expression of *prajna/dhyana/sila* (wisdom, meditation, conduct) appeared to be entirely absent. It is this cultural context in which the great sage transmitted his great *Four Statements*.⁴⁵

1. A special transmission outside the orthodox teaching of the scriptures (*kyoge-betsuden*)
2. No dependence on sacred writings (*furyu-monji*)
3. Direct pointing to the heartmind (*jikishi-ninshin; kokoro*)
4. Seeing into one's original nature, and realization of Buddhahood (*kensho-jobutsu*)

The transmission of the Buddhadharma (teaching of the Buddha) through sacred scriptures (*sutras, shastras* and *tantras*) is not sufficient according to Ch'an/Zen, and requires the direct "heartmind to heartmind" (*ishin-denshin denbo*) transmission from master to disciple. The first such transmission of the *dharma* was from Shakyamuni Buddha to his *dharma* successor the great Mahakashyapa, the first Indian Buddhist Patriarch. Thus, although the sacred writings of the *dharma* as transmitted through the *sutras, shastras, and tantras* are important, they are not sufficient, and must not be depended upon entirely. First, they must be "introduced" by direct *dharma* transmission from a master.

The Chinese character *hsin* (Jap. *kokoro*), usually translated as "mind," or "heartmind" may also mean "heart, spirit, soul, consciousness, thought," etc. Like such terms in other

⁴ Some contemporary scholars hold that the *Four Statements* actually originated much later, with the Ch'an master Nan-ch'uan (Nansen, 745-835), or with Hui-neng. (Eno, 638-713). Hui-neng's authorship of the *T'an-ching* ("Platform Sutra") is also in doubt. Indeed, some doubt the historical existence of Bodhidharma altogether. Historically such questions are of interest. However, esoterically the historical existence of any particular master, including Jesus or Shakyamuni Buddha have no effect on ultimate truth (*paramartha*) the supreme source *shunyata*, Tao, Brahman, etc) that is the Primordial Wisdom Teaching. Primordial awareness Itself – Tao – is the prior base or source of all apparent phenomenal arising, including the Buddha, dharma and sangha. This supreme source remains unconditional by our relative thoughts and beliefs about it. Therefore, the truths of this great nondual Primordial Wisdom Teaching are not conditioned by specific historical incarnations, interpretations or beliefs. "There are many, many ways for the teacher and the teaching to appear" (Namkai Norbu).

⁵ Compare these *Four Statements of Zen* with the *Three Statements of Garab Dorje* and the *Six Vajra Verses of Vairochana* (Chap. II).

languages, it has exoteric and esoteric denotations and connotations. In Zen it indicates spirit or heartmind union with ultimate primordial awareness itself, with our actual indwelling Buddha Nature (*Bussho*). Bodhidharma's third statement "Direct pointing to the heart-mind" has this connotation. This statement is essentially identical to the first statement of Garab Dorje's *Three Statements Which Strike the Essential Point* in the *Dzogchen* of Vajrayana Buddhism: "Direct transmission of the source of one's original nature" (Ch.II).

In the fourth statement, "Seeing into one's original nature" is *kensho* or *satori* (seeing nature, or direct seeing). As this direct seeing is deepened through practice and training (*zazen*, *koan* training and *dokusan*) it ultimately and in due course becomes the enlightenment-*samadhi* of one's inherent Buddha Nature, and may "progress" to the profound realization of Buddhahood. The paradox here is, of course, that every sentient being is "endowed with Buddha Nature from the very beginning," although one who is not on the path (*bonpu-no-joshiki*) has little or no awareness of it.

The Five Types of Zen

Early in the ninth century the Ch'an master Kuei-feng (Keiho Zenji, 780-841) of the Katakū School classified Ch'an (Zen) into five types according to their substance and purpose. All five utilize the practice of *zazen* (*tso-ch'an*), but to different ends. Some are directed to exoteric, outward, relative-conventional goals, some esoterically, toward enlightenment, and ultimately, Buddhahood.

It is useful to note that all of the major religious traditions make some use of Zen as *zazen* (prayer or contemplative practices). The religions which emphasize *dhyana* or mediation (Taoist yoga, the yogas of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Vedanta* and other Hindu religions utilize *zazen* (sitting meditation) to a greater degree than Islam or Christianity. Yet the esoteric stream of these latter two also emphasize meditative prayer and contemplation (the Sufis and Valentinian Gnostics).

1. **Bompu Zen** (*Bonpu*, or "ordinary" Zen): Zen practice without the motive or intention to liberation, for physical and mental well-being, relaxation, or stress management. *Bompu* does not address the dualistic mass-mind delusion that humanity and Buddha Nature, matter and spirit, are separate. *Bonpu* does not speak to the truth that the Buddha Nature and humanity are an unseparate prior unity.
2. **Gedo Zen** (the "outside way"): Religious teachings outside the Buddhist context. The contemplative practices of Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Shinto, Jainism, the Hindu Yoga Systems including *Vedanta* and others. *Gedo* also includes meditative practices (*yoriki*) pursued to gain "supernatural" powers (*siddhis*), or to be reborn in some "heaven."
3. **Shojo Zen** (Lesser Vehicle, Hinayana Buddhism): Zen practice the motive of which is Arhathood, or enlightenment for oneself only, which differs from the Mayayana ideal of the Bodhisattva whose intention is to continue upon the cycle (wheel of *samsara*) of death

and rebirth for the sake of aiding the enlightenment of all sentient beings. The goal of *Shojo* may be the condition of *Mushinjo* (blank Zen) where the senses and ordinary consciousness are ceased. If *Mushinjo* is maintained at death, it is said that the adept escapes rebirth in *samsara*.

4. **Daijo Zen** (Greater Vehicle, Mahayana Buddhism): The purpose of *Daijo* is enlightenment, the seeing into one's original nature (*kensho, satori*) and realizing the Mayayana Way in the everyday life-world (*mujodo-no-taigen*). Here zazen becomes more than a means to a goal, but is the actual realization of the Buddha Nature (Buddha mind) that lives within each human form and indeed, within all sentient beings. Here the Bodhisattva ideal is active. The practitioner vows to continue on the wheel of death and rebirth until all sentient beings are enlightened.

5. **Saijojo Zen** (Highest or Supreme Vehicle): The great nondual transcendental Zen practice of all of the Buddhas in all worlds, throughout all time. Analogous to *Dzogchen* (Ati Yoga) or the Essence *Mahamudra* of the Inner Tantras (*Anuttara* tantras) of the Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle). Here there is no gaining motive to enlightenment although the Bodhisattva ideal is present. The practice of the path becomes the goal. "Make the goal the path." Both Rinzai and Soto Zen utilize *Daijo* and *Saijojo*. Rinzai places emphasis on koan practice. Soto places emphasis on the *shikantaza* (*shamatha-vipashyana*) zazen practice of Dogen Zenji. *Mujodo no traigen* is the actualization of Saijojo Zen with meditative stabilization—*samadhi*—and its spontaneously arising "wisdom of kindness," compassionate activity in the everyday lifeworld.

Kuei-feng's classification is useful today within the context of Buddhist Zen. Esoterically considered however, the truths of Zen and zazen are the truths of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition and obtain throughout all of the religious and philosophical traditions of Humankind. Yet, throughout this Great Tradition one finds at both the pinnacle and the base of each individual tradition a nondual "highest" or subtlest teaching and practice, the "perfect practice" for the prepared devotee working with a qualified master. This subtlest level of practice may lead directly to liberation/enlightenment. In the *Mahayana* tradition this subtle nondual practice is *Saijojo Zen* and the *Madhyamaka* of the Definitive Meaning. In the *Vajrayana* tradition it is *Dzogchen* (*Nyingma*) and Essence *Mahamudra* (*Kagu*). In the Hindu tradition it is the *Advaita Vedanta* of the great Shankara. In the Taoist tradition it is the *Yoga of the Returning of the Light*.

The Five Levels of the Zen Path

It is wise for the student and the teacher to periodically, authentically discuss (*dokusan*) the aspiration level of the student. In Zen, as in other "spiritual" practice, aspiration arises in five levels or classes. The student's meditation practice will be specific to the level of aspiration. Yasutani Roshi describes five levels.

Level one: The student has no prior experience in any meditative discipline. **Level two:** The student desires to enhance psycho-physical and emotional well-being; to learn to "relax," or to address some specific emotional or somatic complaint. **Level three:** The student has experienced some truth of the *dharma* through prior meditative, prayer, study, or religious experience and desires to continue this growth. The student is free of substance addictions and primary neurotic behaviors and demonstrates some degree of individual responsibility in the lifeworld. **Level four:** The student has experienced basic to profound insight into his/her original nature and actual place in reality; has established stability and responsibility in the lifeworld; has demonstrated and integrated prior meditative and "spiritual" experience, wisdom, and compassion; has an understanding of the activity of the ego and a moderate to intense desire for the highest realization; has a benign, humble and open mind and heart to the teacher or master and to the past and future *dharma*. **Level five:** The student has committed his/her life to the realization of Buddha mind and is beginning to manifest meditative stability and liberation—enlightenment in the lifeworld.

The practice to which the "student" and the "teacher/master" commit (covenant/*samaya*) on the student's behalf is dictated by the stated and demonstrated aspiration level of the student in the present lifeworld.

Yasutani Roshi's Three Pillars of Zen⁶

1. **Strong Faith** (*daishinkon*): In Zen practice, faith must run deeper than mere concept and belief. It is a profound and unshakable faith anchored in the Buddha's enlightenment, but also in the entire tradition of enlightened Buddhas and masters in all world systems throughout all time.
2. **Strong Doubt** (*daigidan*): Doubt is the other side of faith. Strong doubt arises from strong faith, just as every pole of a dualism dialectically gives rise to its opposite. Why does the world appear to be so full of suffering and death, when our faith in the dharma teaches us that the opposite is true? Faith is directly proportional to doubt. Dialectically, the pole of every dualism, every dilemma changes to its opposite (death/life, dark/light, negative/positive) and back again. Just so, doubt becomes faith, faith becomes doubt, and this hectic cycle yields the resolve to continue, all the way to the end of it.
3. **Strong Determination** (*dai-funshi*): From strong faith and strong doubt arises the

⁶ Yasutani Roshi, from Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 1980.

desire and determination to reconcile the psychic tension (cognitive dissonance) between the two. In this spiritual dialectic, we naturally strive for cognitive and spiritual equilibrium (wholeness). The greater our commitment to the process, the greater our determination to balance, then resolve the apparent dualism of the wisdom/*prajna/jnana* and compassion of enlightenment (*nirvana*), with the ignorance (*avidya*) and its suffering in the dualistic world of *samsara*. In *Daijo* it is doubt and fear of rebirth that is the motive to enlightenment. In *Saijojo* it is the profound faith in the knowledge which becomes the direct experience (wisdom) that all beings are inherently Buddha, which motivates and directs us forward in practice. There should be no urgent seeking after enlightenment. In faith and/or doubt we sit, walk and practice moment to moment in our everyday lives with knowing awareness and great confidence, beyond the dualism of faith and doubt, that our inherent Buddha Nature, our actual self-nature is always present at the heart. We return to this view, this "posture", this "seat", even when we forget. *Shashaku jushaku*, just continue in error. Here, "brief moments, many times," is the presence (*rigpa, vidya*), then the distraction (*ma rigpa, avidya*), then the presence, all day, all night, until the presence of the nondual supreme source is integrated and stabilized (*mujodo-no taigen*) in the everyday lifeworld.

The Three Aims of Zazen⁷

These three aims form an inseparable prior unity. Over-emphasis or neglect of any area is counter productive or dangerous.

1. **Joriki:** Development of the power of mindfulness (*shamatha*), and one-pointed concentration through penetrating insight practice (*zazen/shikantaza*). If *joriki* is not constantly expanded by *kensho* and *satori*, it fades and may be lost, or misused.
2. **Kensho/Satori:** The practice of *joriki*, when combined with other aspects of Zen practice (*teisho, dokusan*) leads naturally to *satori* awakening or seeing into our actual original nature, which is seeing the ultimate essence or nature of mind and the *kosmos*. *Kensho/satori* is the *prajna*-wisdom-compassion that arises out of *joriki*. Ultimately *satori* awakening, when practiced moment-to-moment may result in liberation-enlightenment, and even Buddhahood.
3. **Mujodo no taigen:** Potentially, the actualization of *Saijojo*, the nondual Supreme Zen Vehicle, is the continuity of stabilizing (*samadhi*) of the great nondual practice through kind, compassionate conduct in the everyday lifeworld. This is the highest or most direct nondual yoga of Zen practice. It corresponds to 6th stage (or even 7th stage) practice in the Seven Stages of Life (Appendix A). At this lifestage the ego and all dualism is transcended in its nondual source and the ultimate realization that "I Am Buddha," "That I Am" (*Tat Tvam Ami*), "I and the Father are one" is integrated into the aspirant's lifeworld. When *kensho/satori* is fully manifested and demonstrated in all activity and

⁷ Yasutani Roshi (in Kapleau), *Three Pillars* (1980)

action, on a moment-to-moment basis, this is the perfect enlightenment of the perfect practice (*samyak-sambodhi*). This is the practice that may result in Buddhahood, the perfect enlightenment of a Buddha.

Yasutani's Roshi's caution to us regarding certain trends in contemporary Zen practice warrants careful consideration:

The Rinzai sect tends to make satori-awakening the final aim of sitting (zazen meditation) and skims over *yoriki* and *mujodo no taigen*. Thus the need for continued practice after enlightenment is minimized, and *koan* study, since it is unsupported by zazen and scarcely related to daily life, becomes essentially an intellectual game. . . . The Soto sect stresses *mujodo no taigen*, little more than an accumulation of *yoriki* which recedes and disappears unless zazen is [practiced] . . . The contention of the Soto sect nowadays that *kensho* is unnecessary . . . is specious, for without *kensho* you can never really know what the Buddha-mind is.⁸

A teaching that does not arouse a defense of one's comfort zones, is not a useful teaching.

Dogen Zenji (Author's Translation)

⁸Yasutani Roshi, in Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen* (1980)