

ZEN BOW

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TO READ OR NOT TO READ?

Philip Kapleau

If to realize our innate purity and wisdom we need to renounce dualistic thinking, cease playing with concepts, and stop clinging to opinions and beliefs--as the Zen masters endlessly remind us--it follows that indiscriminate reading, a potent incubator of random thoughts, must be sharply curtailed. In the Japanese Zen monasteries novices are encouraged to read only the life stories of the masters and patriarchs in order to inspire them in their own practice. Roshi Yasutani admonishes his students that the less reading they do before enlightenment the better, especially books ABOUT Zen or philosophy, since this type of reading more than any other fills the mind with sticky concepts and notions. Roshi Harada once stated that the Sixth Patriarch's unique experience of enlightenment simply through hearing the Diamond sutra recited could be attributed, in part at least, to his illiteracy, i.e., to the fact that his mind was undefiled by the idle speculations which extensive reading and study foster. Needless to say, Roshi Harada, himself a former college professor, did not advocate illiteracy as an aid to enlightenment.

These stricures against reading in the Zen temple, it should be noted, are aimed at disciples who, since they have ready access to their teacher and therefore can HEAR the truth directly from him, need not get it devitalized from

the printed page. In Zen it is emphasized, "Hear the truth, believe it, practice it." Not read the truth, but HEAR it, for the truth spoken by one who has experienced it has a detonating power unmatched by the written word, no matter how eloquent or elegant. At all events, the prohibition is against unrestricted reading before enlightenment, not after.

To function adequately in society we all need a certain amount of formal education and this of course entails reading and study. Such study and learning can be accomplished much more effectively by a student who has through zazen developed the capacity to restrain random thoughts and concentrate his mind than by one who has not. That so many college students and professors are now regularly practicing zazen in Zen centers throughout the United States only proves the value to them of zazen in their studies and daily lives.

There are other reasons why Zen teachers frown on intemperate reading. The unrestrained, almost compulsive reading of newspapers, magazines, popular novels--almost anything one can lay one's hands on--like excessive drug-taking, dulls the mind and blunts its capacity for creative thinking. Too much reading can lead to a glut-tony for useless facts and a pride in possession of them, qualities hardly conducive to spiritual progress. Again, few working individuals can find time for extended involvement with the printed page and zazen. Or if they have time for both, they will find that long

"The mind of the Zen adept is taut - ready like a drawn bow."

stretches of reading, especially of facts and theories, tire the brain and enervate the body, paralyzing the desire for zazen.

The effect of zazen on the mind and body is just the reverse. Through proper sitting, body and mind are unified and energized even as the nervous system is relaxed and inner tensions eliminated. Mental clarity and physical vigor invariably follow. Nor is this all. In his book SHOBOGENZO Zen master Dogen points out that "If you sit properly, random thoughts will gradually disappear; illusions, delusions, wicked and depraved thoughts will go away by themselves. A pure, unstained, mirror-like, crystal-clear mind will appear. Necessary thoughts and feelings will arise spontaneously, like flowing spring water." Further, one who through zazen experiences the true way "is not disturbed, nor does he disturb. He is filled with happiness, he is serene and pure... He is not bound by anything, nor does he impose restraints on anything."

Muso Kokushi, a Japanese Zen master of the thirteenth century, once spoke of three types of students:

- 1) Those who throw off all entangling conditions to apply themselves wholeheartedly to the practice of Zen;
- 2) those who, not so single-minded, seek a solution in books or other activities;
- 3) the lowest group, those who mouth the words of Buddha or others instead of mining their own treasure.

Nietzsche relates that when his eyesight became too poor to read books he began at last to read himself. True wisdom, after all, consists in the ability to read unwritten books.

If misguided and undieted reading is spiritually debilitating, what kind is strengthening? "That book is good," says Emerson, "which puts me in a working mood." For one who wishes to realize his true nature and not merely theorize about it, that book is good

which, having the deep ring of truth, of unmistakable personal experience, awakens the mind, stirs the heart and fires the imagination. The good book does more than supply tangential information about Zen; it clearly charts the way, then shakes and moves the reader into treading it. In short, it gets him out of the armchair and on to the sitting mat.

Confining ourselves to a limited number of books in the field of Buddhism, with the emphasis on Zen, the following are recommended with a label attached reading, "Warning: harmful if taken in excess." The last six books are in that position not because they are, as books, less valuable than the others but simply because they deal with Buddhism as a whole rather than specifically with Zen. In addition to THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN, the list includes:

1. THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUANG PO ON THE TRANSMISSION OF MIND, translated by John Blofeld, hardcover, published by Rider & Co., London; paperback by Grove Press, N.Y., 1958, 135 pp.
2. THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUI HAI ON SUDDEN ILLUMINATION, translated by John Blofeld, hardcover, published by Rider & Co., 1962, 160 pp.
3. ZEN: POEMS, PRAYERS, SERMONS, ANECDOTES, INTERVIEWS, edited and translated by Stryk and Ikemoto, paperback only, published by Doubleday Anchor, 1965, 160 pp.
4. THE PRACTICE OF ZEN, by Chang Chen-chi, hardcover, published by Harper Bros.; also by Rider & Co., 1959, 199 pp.
5. THE TIGER'S CAVE, compiled and translated by Trevor Leggett, hardcover, published by Rider & Co., 1964, 191 pp.
6. THE ZEN KOAN, by Miura and Sasaki, hardcover and paperback, published by the First Zen Institute of America in Japan; available in the United States, 1965, 156 pp.

7. THE PLATFORM SCRIPTURE, translated by Wing-tsit Chan, hardcover, published by St. John's University Press, 1963, 193 pp.

8. MANUAL OF ZEN BUDDHISM, by D.T. Suzuki, hardcover and paperback, published by Grove Press, 1960, 192 pp.

9. THE EMBOSSED TEA KETTLE (of Zen Master Hakuin), translated by R.D.M. Shaw, hardcover, published by Allen & Unwin, London, 1963, 196 pp.

10. THE WORLD OF ZEN, an anthology compiled by Nancy W. Ross, hardcover and paperback, published by Random House, 1960, 362 pp.

11. THE MATTER OF ZEN, by Paul Wienpahl, hardcover, published by N.Y. University Press, 1964, 162 pp.

12. FOUNDATIONS OF TIBETAN MYSTICISM, by Lama Govinda, hardcover, published by E.P. Dutton, 1960, 370 pp.

13. A BUDDHIST BIBLE, compiled by Dwight Goddard, hardcover, published by E.P. Dutton, 1952, 677 pp.

14. A SURVEY OF BUDDHISM, by Bhikshu Sangharakshita, hardcover, published by The Indian Institute of World Culture, London, 1966, 527 pp.

15. BUDDHIST TEXTS THROUGH THE AGES, ed. by Edward Conze, hardcover and paperback, 1954, 322 pp.

16. THE SURANGAMA SUTRA, translated by Chas. Luk, hardcover, published by Rider & Co., London, 1966, 262 pp.

17. THE PILGRIMAGE OF BUDDHISM, by J.B. Pratt, hardcover, published by The MacMillan Co., 1928, 758 pp.

In THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUANG PO and THE ZEN TEACHING OF HUI HAI we have the purported sermons and dialogues of two great Zen masters of the T'ang period, perhaps better known in the West by their Japanese names of Ōbaku and Hyakujō, respectively. The translations of John Blofeld, a lifetime follower of the Buddha's Way in China and Thailand, have style and distinction. Both books are gems. Happily, they can still be obtained in bookstores

specializing in Buddhist literature.

The material in ZEN: POEMS, PRAYERS, etc., is from Japanese sources and consists largely of writings of the masters. A few of the translations are arbitrary and tend to sacrifice the vigor of the original for the sake of style, but on the whole they are eminently readable.

Although THE PRACTICE OF ZEN is not squarely aimed at practice as the title suggests, it is nonetheless a valuable book. The discourses of the Chinese Zen masters together with their life stories, capably translated by Chang Chen-chi, a Buddhist scholar, are especially helpful for practitioners of Zen.

THE TIGER'S CAVE is a series of able translations of Japanese Zen texts: chiefly a commentary on the Heart sutra (Prajna-paramita), by a contemporary Zen master; YASENKANNA: an autobiographical narrative by Zen Master Hakuin; and a short sermon by the present kanchō (chief abbot) of the Japanese Sōtō sect.

In the Foreword to THE ZEN KOAN we read: "Since the subject proper of THE ZEN KOAN is Hakuin's system of koan study, and since long quotations from his writings comprise a part of Isshu Roshi's text, that great master is in a sense the hero of this book." It is these quotations, and several shorter ones from other masters, which the practicing Zen student will find most informative and inspiring.

Dr. Chan's translation of THE PLATFORM SCRIPTURE at times makes this classic Zen work sound more like an academic text than the practical instructions of a Zen master. Despite this, the book is decidedly worthwhile as an unabridged English rendering of the complete Tun-huang manuscript of the discourses of the great Chinese master Hui-neng, the Sixth Zen Patriarch (known as Rokusō-daishi in Japanese).

MANUAL OF ZEN BUDDHISM: This early work of D.T. Suzuki contains translations of sutras, dharanis, gathas, and

works of both the Japanese and Chinese masters, some of them never translated into English before or since.

THE EMBOSSED TEA KETTLE consists of translations of several little-known writings of Hakuin, the great Japanese Zen master of the eighteenth century. R.D.M. Shaw, the translator, is a retired Protestant missionary who spent many years in Japan. As in other translations of Buddhist writings by Christian clergymen, the flavor is at times more Christian than Buddhist. Still, we must be grateful for this readable translation.

THE WORLD OF ZEN is a handsomely printed anthology, the product of an era when it was more fashionable to discuss Zen than practice it. So while there are many articles about Zen by a variety of interpreters, there is little directly from the masters themselves. Yet the generous selections of Zen-inspired poetry and art, counterpointed against similar writings from Western cultural sources, make this a profitable book for those unfamiliar with the spiritual traditions of both East and West.

THE MATTER OF ZEN: This excellent little volume, by a professor of philosophy who had practiced Zen for several months in a temple in Japan, is one of the first in English to underscore the fact that Zen is not a theory but a practice.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF TIBETAN MYSTICISM: Despite its forbidding title, here is an outstanding elucidation, from the 'inside,' of the doctrines of tantric Buddhism, done with spiritual understanding and unique clarity of style. Lama Govinda, a German-born scholar-monk now living in India, spent many years at the feet of the Tibetan masters.

Within the almost 700 pages of A BUDDHIST BIBLE there is the richest selection of writings from the Southern and Northern schools of Buddhism (Hinayana-Theravada and Mahayana) to be found anywhere, notably: generous portions of the following sutras: the Dia-

mond, the Surangama, the Lankavatara, the Platform (of the Sixth Patriarch), and the Prajna-paramita, plus the Life and Hymns of Milarepa, the great Tibetan master, and other inspiring texts. The English at times is turgid and the book as a whole in need of an editing and an index. But these are really minor shortcomings in an otherwise outstanding translation project of huge proportions. Although A BUDDHIST BIBLE is now out of print, it will undoubtedly be reissued in paperback in the not distant future.

BUDDHIST TEXTS THROUGH THE AGES, edited by the noted Buddhist scholar Edward Conze contains a number of translations from Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese sources of important writings of both the Southern and Northern schools of Buddhism.

The title A SURVEY OF BUDDHISM is misleading. Actually the book is an authoritative exposition in depth of the doctrines, and a few of the practices, of virtually all the schools of Buddhism by an English scholar-monk who spent many years traveling the width and breadth of India.

Mr. Luk, an untiring translator of Buddhist texts, has made a notable contribution to Buddhist literature with his THE SURANGAMA SUTRA, an English rendering from the Chinese based on Zen master Han Shan's sixteenth-century commentary. The Surangama sutra is undoubtedly one of the finest documents ever written. Of all the sutras it is the most venerated in the Mahayana countries, especially by the Zen sect. The sutra describes in detail the various steps leading first to concentration of mind and then to severing the fetters of the illusory ego, culminating in supreme enlightenment. It is climaxed by twenty-five Bodhisattvas reciting the methods by which they attained their enlightenment. This brief summary of the contents scarcely does justice to this magnificent work. Regrettably, the Great Dharani, which is chanted daily in all Mahayana Buddhist monasteries, is omitted from Mr. Luk's translation. The English is on the

whole more felicitous than most of his renderings.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF BUDDHISM is the record of a journey in the late twenties by an American professor and his wife to the Buddhist countries of Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Korea and Japan. Not only does the author skilfully elucidate the doctrines and teachings of the Buddha as understood and practiced in these countries, but with rare sympathy and insight he probes the hearts and minds of the peoples he encountered. Long out of print, THE PILGRIMAGE OF BUDDHISM is worth finding and reading.

THE POWER TO DESTROY AND TO BRING ALIVE LIES WITHIN OUR HANDS

Roshi Hakuun Yasutani

In correctly-oriented Buddhism the fundamental educative principle is summed up in the expression, "The power to destroy and to bring alive lies within our hands." Change this to "I have the power to bring alive and to destroy" and you get an entirely different meaning, something akin to the undesirable power over life and death of a hold-up man. Buddhism does not teach such dangerous nonsense. Taken in its most favorable sense, "I have the power to bring alive and to destroy" implies bringing good into being and annihilating evil, which is still a benign wielding of authority. Although it lies within the imperfect law of the human world, it is not found in the world of spirituality, which transcends law and morality. In any event, it is far less than what is suggested by the statement, "If even the virtuous can attain rebirth (in the Pure Land), how much more so the wicked!" as enunciated by Shinran Shonin, founder of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism in Japan.

Properly, then, the order in Buddhism should always be, "The power to destroy and to bring alive lies within our hands." Destruction is a necessary precondition of vivification. The practice

of Buddhism involves nothing less than slaying the illusory self to which human beings cling out of ignorance, and raising into consciousness their unblemished, perfect Self. Zen achieves this directly, whereas other Buddhist sects attain it in a roundabout way. The Buddhist doctrine of the Void (shunyata), or selflessness, aims at the eradication of the self which is the product of illusion. In the Pure Land (i.e. Amida) sect this is accomplished by submitting ourselves to Amida in the belief that we are the most sinful of men. The doctrine of sange, repentance, which is in every sect of Buddhism, has as its object the annihilation of the cravings of ego. The import of this is quite different from that of zange, or confession, as taught in other religions.

Such expressions in Buddhism as "Throughout heaven and earth I am the most honored One," "All are intrinsically endowed with Buddha-nature," and "We have all been redeemed millions of years ago" reveal the innate perfection, the absoluteness, of our True-nature. Accordingly, emancipation in Buddhism involves wiping away the illusion of ego and vitalizing our True-nature. Or, stated otherwise, it means putting an end to the nightmare of the domination of the ego-I and awakening to our pure Buddha-nature.

In Zen to kill the illusion of ego is described as "the slaying sword," while to revive to our True-nature is called "the resurrecting sword." Yet the sword that slays and the sword that resurrects are not two. This sword does not cut in two but in "one," and the cutting sword does not injure but returns us to our perfect, our real Self.

In Buddhism the slaying sword is synonymous with the commandment to avoid evil--in other words, observance of the ten precepts; the sword that brings alive is synonymous with that commandment which seeks to promote virtue, i.e., the performance of positive acts of goodness; while the third basic commandment, to strive for the salvation

of all sentient beings, involves men of superior character and personality in whom the qualities of the first two commandments have been realized. Taken together, these three are referred to as the fundamental commandments of

purification and are the sum and substance of Buddhism. Without them it is impossible to live a life of purity.

-translated by Philip Kapleau
and Akira Kubota

THE PRECEPTS

Formally to become a Zen Buddhist one must be initiated, i.e., receive the precepts in a prescribed ceremony wherein one pledges to give himself up wholly to the Three Treasures of Buddhism, to keep the ten cardinal precepts, to avoid evil and practice goodness, and to strive toward the salvation of every sentient being.

The ten cardinal Mahayana precepts prohibit 1) the taking of life, 2) theft, 3) unchastity, 4) lying, 5) selling or buying alcoholic liquor (i.e., causing others to drink or drinking oneself), 6) speaking of the misdeeds of others, 7) praising oneself and reviling others, 8) giving spiritual or material aid grudgingly, 9) anger, and 10) blaspheming the Three Treasures. These are the same for laymen and monks.

The observance of the precepts is important not alone for ethical reasons. Because one cannot progress on the road to enlightenment unless his mind is free of the inner disturbance which thoughtless or wanton behavior produces, the precepts are the foundation of spiritual practice. Few novices, however, regardless of the strength of their resolve, are able to uphold every one of the commandments, so transgressions in one degree or another are inevitable. Such violations do not debar one from pursuing the Buddha's Way provided one acknowledges them, truly repents, and exerts himself to live by the precepts in the future. Transgressions become less frequent as one advances on the Way and through zazen gains in strength and purity and insight. But what is permanently damaging--in fact, fatal to one's spiritual progress--is loss of faith in the Buddha, in the Truth he revealed through his enlightenment experience, and in the confirmatory words of the Patriarchs. In this event, full enlightenment, and with it the eradication of the root-source of evil, namely ignorance and delusion, is virtually impossible.

-from THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN

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