

# The Secret of Zen



Pine Hill 栳山

# Dedication

namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to Him, the Gracious One, the Exalted One, the Perfect  
Sambuddha

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# Preface

The typical preface asks the writer to say something about their reasons for undertaking the labor of writing the book. I think this is a good idea. The preface also wants the writer to explain, if pertinent, the method used to write the book. But first I would like to explain the method I used. I will get back to the reason for writing the book after I explain the method.

For me Zen is deeply personal which means there is a substantial depth that one has to penetrate, introspectively, in order to get near Zen's mysterious world just as one might wish to meet a great teacher having to travel many miles over a dangerous terrain. I realize that writing from this depth a lot will be misunderstood by the reader. Or the reader may draw a blank. Both are problems that I have very little means to overcome.

What I have put down on paper originated from my innermost self which has spent a long time in the mysterious world of Zen which is beyond words and concepts. We could say of this world that it is completely spiritual which is beyond the ability of the senses to make contact with.

Nevertheless, I have tried to find the right words to explain the wordless and transcendent realm of Zen and what it takes to enter this *terra incognita*, hoping that the reader will understand and respect the depth of Zen; not to take it lightly.

Let me say also to the reader that there is a real secret to Zen of which I am intimate with. The autobiographical part of the book is my discovery of Zen's secret. It is neither a diary nor a journal but a looking back or reminiscence. Much to my own shock and surprise, one night, many years ago, I was open just enough to see what Zen was hiding after many years of almost a fruitless struggle trying to grasp what Zen was really about.

In the book, I try to talk to the reader in a personal and engaging way. I assume that the reader is curious to know Zen's secret who has read a few books about Zen. This makes the form of this book different from most books about Zen. It is almost like the reader and I are sitting

face to face. In this setting, I want these words to penetrate the deepest part of the reader as much as possible, the part that is spiritually asleep and needs to be awakened.

I think of myself as being like the faint sound of a little bird outside the reader's window that is causing them to wake up from their spiritual slumber. The advantage that I give the reader is that, personally, I went from dark to light, or said another way, I went from ignorance to uncovering the secret of Zen. In that regard, I know what it is like to be in the dark and then see what I could never have imagined in many lifetimes.

At first, I tried to arrange the book by putting each chapter in a kind of linear order. But that wasn't all that successful, nor was it entirely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, there is an underlying order that is more like a golden wire going through different jewels that make up a necklace. Needless to say, the placement of the jewels is important and could even be symbolic or arranged in various other ways.

If the way I write this book seems somewhat unpolished and awkward it is because the words I put down answer to a higher reality that is beyond the reach and range of language. Zen, I can tell you, doesn't depend on written words. What it conveys is wordless. It is only when the books, with all their words are, eventually, put aside after one goes to their wits' end in trying to solve Zen's secret. But, paradoxically, this has the effect of drawing one closer to Zen's secret. When we are truly engaged with Zen's path, as odd as it sounds, Zen finds us. This suggests that the secret of Zen cannot be trapped as if it were some kind of wild animal. Even this book cannot trap it—nor can you the reader.

My reason for writing this book is that I believe there are people, like myself, still in this world who have believed for a long time that something important is missing in both Buddhism and Zen; that Buddhism and Zen have been taken over by people with a particular view of reality that the Buddha taught against, finding such a view harmful to enlightenment and wisdom.

Certainly, at one time Zen had a tremendous appeal in China and for the right reasons. But in the West things are much different than in the China of Zen master Huineng. In this world of mysticism, where words and thought cannot enter, Zen's gate was open to all subject like

it is in the West. Happening to hear a passage from the *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedika Sutra*) was enough to change a coarse illiterate into a Buddha.

I want to show the reader what is missing. At least I will try. I hope that one day a few readers can personally discover the profound secret of Zen as I did and join this ancient lineage.

# Introduction

What is a secret? The general definition is something that is not properly understood; a mystery if you like. Said again, a secret can be anything hidden or concealed. In the context of Zen Buddhism it refers to your fundamental nature or essence that is concealed from you in various ways but, mainly, by all aspects of your mental activity, even the most subtle. Zen wants you to awaken to this hidden, fundamental nature which is its secret (at least for those who don't know it). It is not as if Zen is keeping this secret from you on purpose either. The problem is, you are keeping Zen's secret from yourself. The practice and study of Zen is about helping you to uncover this nature—your nature! Only you can, personally, uncover it.

Zen's secret is especially the basis of koans (more on that later) which are always alluding to something mysterious and transcendent beyond ordinary comprehension. Even your senses cannot connect with Zen's secret which only act to hide the secret. Yet, each of us is immersed within this secret like fish in water. No matter what you may think about Zen or imagine it to be, you are not yet privy to Zen's secret. At least not yet.

Neither is Zen's secret something like a lucky interpretation you might come up with from reading a lot of books about Zen and Zen koans. Still, no amount of study and speculation will reveal the secret of Zen to you. What matters is how you use what you study about Zen and whether or not you are deeply engaged with it. For example, how do you proceed with the words of Zen master Yunmen who said, "Every person originally has this radiant light"? Does this sound strange to you? Still, despite what you may think about what Yunmen said he is giving you a clue to Zen's secret in an attempt to awaken you (keep in mind that you are in a condition of complete spiritual amnesia).

Yes, right now you can join a Zen center or read a dozen or so books about Zen in the hope that you will understand more about Zen. But neither the books nor the Zen center will bring you closer to what

Joshu's *No* (無) means or his *Yes* (有) means when he was asked by a monk, "Does a dog have Buddha Nature?"

Face it, you are looking through the prism of modern culture together with its ideas, fictions, and biases which your intellect is using to try and crack the secret of Zen. It's not going to work. You're just guessing when it comes to Zen—nor are you engaged with Zen in the sense of a life and death struggle. You haven't the slightest clue where Joshu was really coming from when he uttered his strange replies.

I hate to tell you this, but you are a typical modern intellectual trying to force your way through Zen's mysterious barrier (關) that hides the secret of Zen. Your superior intellect won't work. I should mention that this is a very strong barrier, one that you can not pass through with the ease of a gentle breeze. Only if you become a Buddha (one who is awakened) will you fully comprehend where Zen master Joshu was coming from when he answered the monk's question. You're not there yet. You still have a long way to go.

Do you still want to know the secret of Zen? I suspect everyone wants to, including you. People are naturally curious. But for now, let's get down to brass tacks. Here is the problem that you face. You would like to know the secret of Zen but, right now, you're unwilling to give up everything; to really get engaged with finding the secret. Now don't get me wrong, I don't mean give up your family or quit your day job as proof that you are engaged. By everything I mean give up your assumptions and opinions about Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. Trust me, you have a lot of them. These preconceived ideas and opinions also give Zen's barrier its great strength which is why Zen's secret remains a secret and almost laughable from the side of knowing Zen's secret.

Already you assume too much and take too many things for granted in your exploration of Zen. Although you live and work in the everyday world you have to prepare yourself for the fact that in the world of Zen Buddhism, things are much different. It's a world of abandoning. All of your assumptions are going to have to be painfully let go of until you have nothing more to let go of. You might find yourself one night in tears with nothing to hold on to. This is where the path of Zen wants to take you. Do you have the necessary faith for



this dark night? It's the only way you can meet Zen's secret face to face which can only be accessed by spiritual intuition (more on intuition later).

Still, deep down inside, you might still believe that Zen is easy as you read these pages. You might even believe that you have great perceptiveness. Zen, if you are lucky, will show you that you have very little of what it takes to behold Zen's secret. Keep in mind, also, that Zen is not going to help you like a parent. You have to adapt to it, completely. It will show you no pity and more than often it will show you the hardest path to take, a rocky, uphill path. Zen, like the earth, owes you nothing. Above all, be honest with yourself. Maybe you're not ready for the journey which is the adventure of a lifetime. Do you have enough enthusiasm and faith in your self that there is, in fact, a sudden awakening which will reveal the secret of Zen to you?

## Chapter one: Is Zen a religion?

Before you became interested in Zen you probably thought of yourself as being either an agnostic or an atheist (I told my friends when I was seventeen that I was an agnostic). This is not unusual. In fact, most people who are attracted to Zen do not like religion. They either regard themselves as being agnostics or atheists. Some are even anti-religious. Some argue that Zen is not a religion at all but is closer to being a kind of mental therapy. Others see Zen as a way to live your everyday life learning to be in the here and the now. But whatever you may think about Zen could be a distorted view of Zen which fails to understand what Zen says about itself. In other words, the literature of Zen has a unique context which is often misunderstood. This context is neither philosophical, in the western sense, nor is it like a religion that worships god or many gods.

Moderns tend to identify religion as being a system of sacred beliefs and observances in addition to the worship of a supreme being. Rites and rituals also play an important part in religion. Does Zen fit into the general framework of religion? Yes, you could say that it does, with some notable exceptions one being neither Buddhism nor Zen. Buddhism believe in a creator god.

Both Buddhism and Zen are not like a typical western religion but both are, nevertheless, *religious*. As odd as this sounds, most religions today are not all that religious. To be religious means to contemplate the nature of ultimate reality and your relation to this reality that lies hidden within you. If we take the religious out of religion then the overall definition of religion becomes too limiting and too restrictive. Religion has to include the religious.

The literature of Buddhism and Zen, as far as containing religious terminology, which are epithets for ultimate reality, has many examples. These examples are, *nirvana, the unborn, the increate, the immortal state, the ultimate goal, the unconditioned, ultimate truth, beyond thought, the changeless, the transcendent, the One Mind, the true Mind, the Mind-ground, Suchness, Bodhi-mind*, etc. While these terms are considered to be like fingers pointing to the moon,

nevertheless, they point to something you can personally intuit thus awakening to the secret of Zen; seeing it firsthand.

To accept that Zen is religious also means that you've also engaged in deep existential questioning which concerns first-person knowledge and direct experience, for example, *Who am I* (essentially)? Or it can be something like, *What is the meaning of life* (its essence)? Or another example, *What happens when I die* (what survives)? You could almost say that being religious and existential questioning go hand in hand. You might even say that religion without sincere existential questioning is not really religious nor are you living life as it should be lived.

Especially in regard to Zen, all your existential questions are answered when you attain *satori* which means to awaken to your true nature. This is the revelation of Zen's secret. It is the ultimate religious experience, also. And according to the Buddha it all takes place in this fathom-long body of yours that is endowed with perception and mind. You have not only the true nature within you which is like a hidden jewel that you have yet to discover, but you also have the ability to become awakened thus becoming a Buddha when you decide to make the effort.

Those who are interested in Zen but dislike all religion and even religious practices are following the wrong path. They have no business studying Zen. They will only lead others astray and turn Zen into something it is not. As much as they dislike the idea, Zen is a religion and one that is unique and unlike most modern day religions.

Also it is worth pointing out that Zen is a Buddhist tradition that goes back all the way to the Buddha when still Siddhartha, he used *dhyana* (Zen) to achieve awakening and become the Buddha. At no time was Zen and Buddhism ever separate. You can think that Zen is Buddhism and Buddhism is Zen. Zen was also called the Mind tradition 心宗 and the Buddha Mind tradition 佛心宗.

## Chapter two: A few words about the mystical

While many would like to hold the opinion that Buddhism is more of a philosophy than, strictly speaking, a religion, Buddhism is the Indian expression of mysticism which makes it, therefore, deeply religious. Your goal on the path of Zen will be a journey to a mystical, transcendental experience which is beyond philosophical speculation. This is apparent from the teachings of the Zen masters. Their mystical intuition verified the teachings of the Buddha which also maintained a continuity between the Buddha and subsequent Zen teachers. For you, the true teaching of the Buddha has to be directly experienced; not just talked about or speculated on. If Zen Buddhism has a PhD program it is uncovering the secret of Zen.

When the mystical, transcendental side of Buddhism and Zen is ignored or neglected, Buddhism and Zen exist in name only. The Buddha and the Zen masters, by teaching this mystical path, are teaching you how to realize, personally, what transcends this unsatisfactory life of birth and death. When you finally realize the secret of Zen, you also see your true body which is incorporeal and very much different than your present body consisting of 37.2 trillion cells.

What now stands in your way is an immense jungle of false assumptions. Couple this with the five hindrances (*panca nivarana*) that make the seeing the secret of Zen nearly impossible. They are 1) sensual desire, 2) ill-will, 3) sloth and torpor, 4) restlessness and worry, and 5) doubt. You might recognize these as your sexual desire, being angry a lot, laziness and passivity, being nervous, being unsure of your self. There are more. But these are the basic ones. It is a mistake to imagine that Buddhism or the practice of Zen can help you overcome these hindrances. This is a matter of your personal character, for example, how you were raised, and your karma which is your innate ability or inability to understand the mystical path that leads to enlightenment.

You have it within you to prefer good character over bad character; to develop your character in such a way that it matures as you grow older. You may believe it is your prerogative to do as you please but you are just covering up for your failure to overcome the five hindrances. The Buddha's teaching does not have any place for those of bad character, that is, those who have fallen victim to the five hindrances.

The Buddha divided people into two groups, those of noble character (*arya*) who were spiritually inclined, and those of worldly character (*prithagjana*) who are attached to the conditioned world; who couldn't conceive of a world beyond it if their life depended upon it. Most of all, such people over identify with their physical body of birth as being who they are. By the way, you don't have to be a monk or a nun to have noble character, you just have to enter the mystical stream of Buddhism. To use a modern analogy, it is like someone who understands that the real source of music from their radio is a radio wave which cannot be detected by the human senses. Without it, the radio has no music to amplify and play. On the same track, people who do not seek to know what animates their hands and feet, which cannot be detected by the human senses, will never come close to knowing Zen's secret.

The worldling likes to believe that the mystical side of Zen is open to their intellectual investigations or they believe that Zen is not mystical. It is merely practical. Worldly people are pretty much deluded. However, if you wish to learn the secret of Zen it's not true that worldly people can become enlightened or that Zen appears to be practical and ordinary. Worldly people think this way because their mind prefers to think in worldly ways and fantasize on worldly values and things. They like to make the subtle simplistic and imagine their idea about what Zen is, is the correct view. But Zen rightly claims to be the method Siddhartha used to become awakened, that is, become a Buddha. If you read the discourses of the Buddha there is nothing in his words either simplistic or practical and everyday. There is a real split between what the Buddha taught and what worldly people imagine Zen is. Yes, something is wrong with this picture.

## Chapter three: Zen is really about intuition

First let me say that I will tell you many times in this book that Zen is about, specifically, *spiritual intuition*. Please don't confuse it with sitting in meditation. All traditions of Buddhism practice seated meditation. It is quite common in all Buddhist countries to sit on the floor in a Buddhist temple. Intuition and seated meditation are not exactly the same. Having said that, the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma was an early teacher of Zen in China which for him was the Sanskrit word "*dhyana*" which in Pali is "*jhana*". Bodhidharma belonged to the Lanka School (楞伽宗) named after the *Lankavatara Sutra*. He said that *dhyana* means seeing the Buddha-nature within yourself. This special seeing is more, accurately, intuition. But how is this Buddha-nature seen? Certainly not with the eyes or by sitting ramrod straight on a pillow trying to achieve a state of quietude (*jing* 靜). Nor is it a special kind of somatic feeling. Admittedly, this nature is not easy to behold. It can only be realized through intuition. The Buddha intuited this nature which is why he was called "Buddha" as did Zen masters after him like Bodhidharma, for example, and others who followed in his footsteps.

To repeat myself, the only way that you can come to know your Buddha-nature is by intuition. The kind of knowledge that you derive from your senses and intellect is limited. Let's call it sensory knowledge. Intuitional knowledge is not the same—not even close. You could even call it *mystical knowing*. For the average person they have an inherent capacity to know their real nature, which is transcendent, by intuition. But most could not care less about using this inherent capacity that lies unused within them. They are too busy being caught up in worldly illusions, entrapped by their samsaric consciousness of birth and death. What is more, such people find it hard to believe that they have this ability already within them.

It is important to keep in mind that the English word "intuition" comes from the Latin word, *intueri* which means to look at, gaze, pay

attention to, consider, contemplate. According to *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, intuition is described as “the act or process of coming to direct knowledge or certainty without reasoning or inferring; immediate cognizance or conviction without rational thought.” This is nothing less than direct knowledge—a super knowledge. Intuition, you could say, leaps over reasoning and inferring. Almost instantly you see what the Buddha saw when you become enlightened.

Historically, the Buddha's practice of *dhyana* came from an older Indian tradition of contemplation by the same name. Overall, this practice can be thought of as a process of introspection whereby one abandons all forms of mentation leading to direct intuition of the absolute.

The four *dhyanas* of the Buddha-to-be described in the early discourses of the Buddha were deepening levels of inner-awareness which had nothing to do with the physical act of sitting which seems to be the practice today. These levels of *dhyana* were still constructed and impermanent according to the Buddha but necessary. Think of *dhyana* as something like leading an ox to a watering hole. Then the ox, on his own, has to bend down to drink the cool thirst quenching water. Likewise, you the student, are led by the Buddha's teachings so that you turn inwards, getting closer and closer to the goal. It is up to you to intuit Zen's secret, directly converging with it. This intuition, you could say, is a return to the one which supersedes all things; which has always been present, except that it is concealed by your constant mental activity.

Those who lack the basic intuitive capacity for Zen tend to be over analytical. They can't see the big picture much less the forest for the trees or intuit the sound of one hand (a beginner's koan). They like to breakdown something into its various parts as if the whole is just the sum of parts. You see these kinds of people in Zen who go into an analysis of Joshu's *No* (無). But this word only hides Zen's secret! It acts like a barrier.

Remember how important intuition is. A part of you is always trying to inhibit your intuition as if to say no to it. This same part might even insist that you use gradual, step-by-step reasoning as if this is the only way you can arrive at truth. Sorry, but in Zen you have

to go by way of intuition. This is the only means you have to uncover the secret of Zen. But don't confuse intuition with instinct or a sudden judgment, either, it's not found here. The unique operation of intuition begins from the inside of you as you work on trying to uncover and learn Zen's secret. It ends when you find Zen's secret within you: an indescribable transcendent presence. This is true *mystical knowledge*. It is way beyond the intellect.



## Chapter four: Beginner's Zen

First of all, not all beginners are the same. According to Buddhism every person has different karma. Nobody is the same in that special regard. For some beginners, their karma won't be all that good. By this I mean, they have a hard time understanding the basic teachings of the Buddha. For other beginners, their karma is good. They catch on quickly like Zen master Huineng who, before he unlocked the secret of Zen, was selling firewood in the city when one day he happened to hear a customer reading from the *Diamond Sutra* and, as a result, became enlightened. Later on he became a great Zen master helping many people.

Perhaps you could be a beginner whose mind is like an upside down cup. This means that you can't receive and fully understand Zen's teachings much less intuit Zen's secret. Unless the cup is turned right-side up there is no chance of it being filled. Such a beginner's mind cannot change so as to adapt to Zen's demands. Nothing of what this kind of beginner understands about Zen is anymore than an inversion of Zen's true teachings.

Then there is another kind of beginner that has a mind like a filthy cup. No matter what the beginner receives as the teaching of Zen it becomes corrupted. If you are this kind of beginner you are a person who, habitually, misinterprets and misrepresents the teachings of Zen. You are reading into Zen, various meanings that are distorted and even wrong. You might also be a beginner that is like a cup that is cracked. All the teachings that you receive eventually leak out and are forgotten.

A beginner's mind has to be like the right kind of cup. Your mind cannot be inverted. Instead, it must be open and receptive. Also, you cannot be reading your own ideas into Zen. Zen has to be permitted to speak for itself—and you must listen with an unbiased and open mind. Your mind also must be able to retain the teachings. You cannot afford to hear the teachings one day then forget them the next day.

If you are the type of beginner who is of the belief that mastering Zen is more like learning to be a physician or an attorney, you are sadly mistaken. Zen for any beginner, even a well educated beginner,

will always be difficult because realizing the secret of Zen transcends the conditioned world which includes birth and death. Fundamentally, Zen's path is going from the mundane to the transcendent. Again, if a beginner harbors the belief that they can still be worldly unlike the Zen masters of the past who were monks and nuns and still become awakened, they are mistaken.

As a beginner you have a rough road ahead of you although you may not realize it yet. For a while, Zen will be like a nice walk in the park but then it turns, eventually, into an uphill climb. You find it difficult going at times. Then the path becomes even steeper. The nights the answer that you are looking for.

You still haven't made it to where Zen's secret is more likely to be accessed which is a place of solitude. It's a truism to say that the more you wish to know Zen's secret, the more you will incline towards solitude so that you might look deeper within yourself without a lot of distractions. This is something that typical beginners don't want to hear. They like their Zen group and the fellow-feeling. Such beginners believe that they are seriously studying Zen. This works in the beginning because the practice of Zen consists in little else than joining a Zen center and doing zazen (seated meditation) when there is time. It might even include a trip to Japan or some other country where Buddhism is the dominant religion. But the authentic beginner seems to know that Zen's secret cannot be unlocked by this approach.

Remember, not all beginners are alike especially if you join a Zen center. You will meet some people who have various kinds of mental issues. These people believe that Zen can help them to some degree. But one of the biggest problems many beginners face, which includes even those people who are veterans, is they have their minds already made up with respect to what they believe Zen is supposed to be. As we might expect, they only want to learn what reinforces their personal beliefs about Zen. Nor could you say that such people have an open mind either. It is rather shut and limited.

## Chapter five: Your first lesson in Zen

I bet you've read D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, Cleary and a few other authors who are popular in the modern Zen community. You need to keep in mind that their books are about historical figures who knew the secret of Zen; people who said things like, *True Reality is the substance of thoughts. Or, No-thought is nothing other than true Mind.* Right now, you can only imagine that you understand these words. To be honest, you don't know what these words actually mean that were uttered long ago. Likely, you will never know if you don't jettison all the wrong assumptions about Zen that you have stuffed between your ears.

At some point in your attempt to learn of Zen's secret you have to go beyond reading about Zen because Zen does not depend upon written words. Words are not enough. Words can point to objects that you already know such as a cup or a bowl. You learned the names of these objects when you were growing up. Also, words can point to actions in the example of walking or sitting down. Words can describe abstract, immaterial ideas or concepts such as love, freedom, commitment, truth, etc. Words can also describe places that you might like to visit. Words can also influence your imagination and speak about worlds that don't exist. Words can also be inadequate. They can also be used to lie and to deceive. You can even deceive yourself with words. Always keep in mind that words can only hint at Zen's secret. Using words to unlock Zen's secret is like shooting a BB gun at a steel door trying to open it.

If you are lucky enough to meet a good teacher, they might possibly know the secret of Zen. But now let's be honest. Your chances of meeting with a real teacher, the kind you've read about in books about Zen, who is enlightened, is slim. Even during the golden age of Zen enlightened teachers were few in number—maybe a handful. It's safe to say that the teachers you encounter today do not know Zen's secret. Having said that, I suspect that you will bow down to the first Zen master you meet, awestruck! Still, you have to admit that some of what they say might be true or some of what they say might be wrong. How do you know which is which? Be honest, you don't know. Once

the Buddha said, *While certain things might be thoroughly believed in, they could be false. On the other hand, certain things not thoroughly believed in, could be in fact true.*

With your first lesson in Zen, you will have enough to know in what general direction Zen is headed and that Zen is going to be difficult. What makes Zen so difficult is that it rests upon a mystical intuition. Let me repeat myself. Zen rests upon a mystical intuition. This intuition reveals Zen's secret. Those who have had this intuition are called Buddhas or sometimes in the Zen literature, Zen patriarchs. Those who haven't had this intuition are ordinary people who may or may not be interested in Zen and even wear robes—very fancy ones. Believe it or not, there are some traditions of Zen that don't believe in enlightenment. This kind of Zen is more about *quietism*. Some of these practitioners, in the past, even called enlightenment madness. Ignore them. You have bigger fish to fry!

Let's back up a little. Do you know what Zen really means? I shall assume that you don't. Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of this Chinese character 禪 which in English appears in Zen books as sometimes 'Chan'. Originally Chan was "chan-na" 禪那 which represented the vocal sound of the Sanskrit word dhyana which Siddhartha Gautama (c. 485–405 BCE) used to achieve Buddha-hood when he sat under the Bodhi Tree for 49 days. Later 禪那 was shortened to just 禪 or Chan which we know today as Zen.

The culmination of Zen in Chinese is, 明心見性. Roughly it means, *clarify mind intuit your true nature*. For you, Zen is an extraordinary mystical intuition whereby the very substance of your thoughts, in all of its luminosity, is revealed to you for the first time, after a long inner search. It is also your true nature. Seeing this nature transmits the secret of Zen to you both suddenly and unexpectedly. You've now gained final insight into your true nature and will understand why the Buddha held up a flower and blinked, and why Kashyapa smiled in response. But this is only the beginning of a new, higher journey. Knowing Zen's secret, you are now like a baby lion but nevertheless a real spiritual lion. As you gradually transcend your reckless, former habits that made up the unenlightened person you once were, one day, you will become a mature Buddha and make the

lion's roar (not a baby lion meow). In Zen this is called, *sudden enlightenment to be followed by gradual cultivation*. But you are not at this place yet. You can only imagine you are which is what all beginners do.

Please trust me, you're far away from awakening to the secret of Zen. To be frank with you, I am not expecting you to actually succeed. Sure, I want you to make it, don't get me wrong. But Zen is a hard road to travel—lots of diversions. Unless you are willing to put yourself at risk in terms of assumptions about yourself, the world you inhabit but more, importantly, assumptions about Zen, forget it! This may not sound like much, yet. But as you grow older becoming more settled in your various opinions and assumptions you are less likely to give them up. Eventually, they turn into stumbling blocks.

To be honest with you, one day if you wish to know the secret of Zen you will have to be put between a rock and a hard place—a crisis like no other. This is a situation in which you will come to doubt your abilities which includes all of your clever interpretations of Zen as if you came to Zen already awake and not fast asleep, lost in dreams. Nothing can get you out of this predicament except awakening to your true nature. Remember, Zen Buddhism is all about a mystical intuition. *Dhyana* helps get you there.

Don't expect anything from me except to point in the general direction that you should take, admonishing you, also, for being lazy, out of shape, dull witted, too emotional, with a noticeable lack of courage, fearing to risk everything to uncover the secret of Zen. I should add, Zen is not for those who lack mental toughness; who have purposely limited themselves; who are like great birds that are afraid to fly almost panicking when they look at the great depth below them.

Go on, read all the Zen books you wish. Feel good about the Zen stories you read. Have your favorites. Now imagine you're in ancient China, a monk or a nun on your way to visit a great Zen master, walking many miles maybe for days. Imagine next that you are sitting in front of this great teacher who you hope will awaken you. This is your chance! Ask him a question from your heart of hearts. Here is one. "What is my Buddha-nature?" Next, this great teacher then asks you, "What moves your body's limbs to and fro?" Can you see the problem that is confronting you with his reply? You never thought

about this before. You can't answer except to guess and that is not good enough for Zen. Zen is very subtle and demanding. This teacher already knows you have not realized, first-hand, this mysterious nature which, by the way, comes in various names such as 'pure Mind,' 'Mind-ground,' 'One Mind,' and many other names. You are still not privy to Zen's secret.

Now the question arises, how much are you willing to plumb the depth of your self to realize Zen's secret? Obviously, not very much if you are content to stay at the level of words found in many books about Zen including the many concepts and opinions they evoke in your mind. I bet you have convinced yourself that just sitting on a cushion with your legs crossed for long periods of time is going to help to learn Zen's secret. Some teachers of Zen in China believed this was all that you had to do. Zen had no secret they believed. Stay here if you wish. You will waste your precious human life following a fantasy. Whatever physical posture you take is unimportant. This will not take you beyond the samsaric cage that you live in with its endless cycles of birth and death.

Keep in mind that your very attempt to understand Zen your way only acts to obstruct and hide its secret from you even more, making it seem completely absent when you look for it within. This means that something has to change. It can't be Zen so it has to be you. You have to change. But how willing are you to change and adapt to Zen's path?

Traditionally in old China, you have to find a Zen master after you have become an ordained monk or nun. Think of the monastery as being more like boot camp in the military. You had to learn the monastic life which traditionally took fifty-three days and would vary in severity depending on the ordination master who could be more like a military drill instructor.

Not being an ordained Buddhist monk or nun, and basically always wanting things to go your way (a narcissist?), you lack the necessary character for the long, difficult march of Zen. For example, you are not very humble; you are impatient, resentful, and somewhat arrogant—the list goes on. Because of your less than adequate character you will eventually fall by the wayside. You haven't got what it takes to realize Zen's secret, or the Buddha's secret, I should add, who was the first teacher of Zen.

Face it, you need to build up your character and toughen up because eventually you should lead the life of a hermit so you can devote yourself to religious discipline, the goal of which is to make a breakthrough: seeing your true nature thus realizing Zen's great secret. By the way, only then will all the Zen koans be unlocked and Buddhism understood as it is meant to be understood. Until that glorious moment comes for you, you have no idea where the words of the Zen masters or the Buddha are coming from. The mysterious source their words came from is closed off to you by your very wish to have it understood your way. And don't be so damn defensive and protective of your false path!

## Chapter six: Adapting to Zen's path

Today's Zen institutions have either consciously or unconsciously decided to adapt to the ways of the world so that Zen is supposed to help you with your everyday life teaching you how to get along with people that you either don't like very much, such as a co-worker, or people that irritate you in college. It's also supposed to help you handle your everyday, psychological tensions including anger and depression. Also, Zen is supposed to help you stop your addictions such as smoking or substance abuse. In a nutshell, this is the psychologization of Zen. It's Zen made for westerners. The core of it, however, is missing.

To be frank with you, none of this is what Zen is supposed to do! Zen wants you to have all your ducks in a row before you undertake the upward climb of Zen's path. Zen requires a person who is hardy and tough, yet humble and open to radical change—not some crybaby who can't let go of their toys. Yes, it's typical to want some help if you have mental problems. But in Zen, it's different. You are pretty much on your own. It is assumed that you are a mature person. Think about it, it's your responsibility—not your teacher's—to raise yourself up by your own bootstraps. Without a love for this arduous, mysterious path of Zen you will eventually falter. Wanting to learn the secret of Zen should be foremost on your mind. Everything else is secondary.

When Zen adapts to the ways of the world it turns into something akin to an outpatient clinic for the mentally disturbed. Zen on this level is really making a concession to worldly values and worldly people who could not care less about Zen's real goal whereby we, intuitively, come to see our true nature and come to realize the secret of Zen. As odd as it sounds, Zen's secret has almost been banned by modern Zen! You should keep in mind the story of the Buddha. Remember that Siddhartha finally took up *dhyana* after he had practiced difficult and painful austerities even attaining the meditation called "*asphanaka*" in which Siddhartha cut off inhalation and exhalation, a meditation that is connected with the ether (*akasha*). Are Zennists these days like Siddhartha? I think you know the answer. Many are too namby-pamby.



As long as Zen continues to adapt to the ways of the world, turning away from its past when Zen monks and nuns wanted to unravel the secret of Zen by seeing their true nature, Zen is not Zen anymore. It's something else. This is evident when some modern day Zen master preaches, "Yet Buddhahood is how you deal with your boss or your child, your lover or your partner, whoever." This is not Zen.

You have to keep in mind that a path can also mean a way of life. In the example of Zen, this is a life dedicated to realizing, finally, what Siddhartha realized under the Bodhi Tree. Those who live and understand this Zen way of life firmly believe that they, too, can awaken to their true nature finally seeing what Zen is all about realizing its secret.

Let's say that you have decided to go backpacking into the mountains for a few days or a week in order to meditate and study a discourse by the Buddha or a sermon by a Zen master. If you did that this would be adapting to Zen's path. Although you still don't know Zen's secret, nevertheless, you are searching for it day and night. But that's what you're supposed to do! Siddhartha searched for it as did the old Zen masters. In this regard, it is a unique way of life that is really a spiritual quest, something on the order of a heroic journey within the unexplored depths of your being.

Taking up Zen's path is reflected in your personal life. First of all, you don't allow yourself to be besieged or influenced too much by the world around you such that you postpone your journey or neglect the path. Importantly, this path is not about escapism, either, always feeling the constant need to be entertained rather than face reality. In addition, those who would argue that seeking the secret of Zen is a form of escapism are people who are not living up to their own human potential seeming to cower before it; people who if they were birds could not fly and would tell you not to fly.

This unique path also involves the study of the Buddha's words and the words of traditional Zen masters, masters like Huineng, Mazu, Huangbo, Linji and others which can act as a measure of your progress or lack thereof. When your mind becomes more familiar with Zen's path a certain passage in a text will make sense to you for the first time. This is because your mind is *there* whereas before it wasn't. If the Buddha's words and the Zen books that you read are difficult to

understand and you find yourself guessing a lot, your mind is not yet there. You might have a long way to go. Maybe in five or ten years you might understand what you didn't understand before. Do you understand these following words?

*Fundamentally, this pristine nature is in everyone but still they do not recognize it. Those who have awakened to it are called Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This nature is not a temporal thing; nor is it conditioned. It is beyond human knowledge and understanding. It neither falls into the category of existence nor non-existence. It is beyond birth and death. It transcends even consciousness which is subject-object knowing. When subject and object merge, the pristine nature which is single and one is revealed for the first time. This is the source and origin of all things.*

For the unawakened these words sound beautiful and charming. Still, they are not clear and could be very well misunderstood. Ordinary people don't know of a fundamental nature. This is not part of present day culture which, in many respects, is caught up in materialism which eventually leads to nihilism (meaninglessness). Even during the time of the Buddha India was not without its share of materialists just like today. These are people who believe that there is no spirit that gives life to all creatures. They also believe that when you die, that's it! These same people are deeply espoused to appearances or *maya*. They could not care less about transcendent gnosis by which you are able to discover Zen's secret.

At the same time, it must be kept in mind that Zen's path is not so narrow that it excludes more than it includes. It requires of you an open mind. This means interacting with the world around you while, at the same time, being always focused on the inner goal which is seeing your true nature which is Zen's great secret.

No pleasure, however sensuous or enticing, should divert you from the path, but it often does. You have to be vigilant. Temptation will always come your way. Still, this huge world in front of you is just a dreamlike appearance which should not affect you to the degree that you willingly give up your sacred quest becoming over time caught up in the illusion.

The everyday world offers many paths and many choices for you. But in these many everyday paths there is a hidden Zen path not like the others. If you are serious about Zen you have to choose this path even though you might be on other paths. You must be constantly aware looking for your true nature; believing that it is pure and clear and cannot be detected with the senses or fit into some kind of conceptual framework. Whatever work you are doing at the time, there is a way to live and work on your everyday path, while still being on Zen's path which aims for the sudden intuition of your true nature. The people that you meet and work with are not looking for Zen's secret as they work, but you are. You're earnestly looking for your true nature all the time even if you work in a factory or pick cherries in an orchard. This is a major part of Zen's path and practice.

## Chapter seven: Walking with Siddhartha

While you are trying to adapt to Zen's path in which you are a beginner in your spiritual development you have some personal work to do. You have to keep in mind that Zen is just a particular practice that falls under the banner of Buddhism starting with Siddhartha. There have always been Zen or *dhyana* teachers in Buddhism who also read the Buddha's discourses. Eventually, they made their way to China. It is a mistake to believe that Zen originated in China or is a separate teaching outside of Buddhism, or you can hate Buddhism but love Zen. How idiotic is that? Yet it goes on in some circles of Zen today, so beware.

You have to learn the important material of Buddhism, its nuts and bolts. It's not all that difficult but its not simplistic either. The core can easily be missed. There are some underlying important principles that don't change. They are in Zen, too, because Zen is always about how to attain the enlightenment of Siddhartha.

First of all, Buddhism means something like "*awaken-ism*" which teaches people how to awaken to true reality which is who they really are. Yes, I know this term sounds odd. But bear with me. In Sanskrit, 'Buddha' can mean "awakened" which implies that Siddhartha was still spiritually asleep when he began his spiritual journey. In other words, he was unable to see his true nature. You could even say that Siddhartha suffered from spiritual amnesia such that he could not remember his true nature. What covers up this nature or ultimate reality, so that it appears almost entirely absent, is your constant mental activity that is always being affected by the conditioned world. Your very thoughts, in other words, only hide your innate *Buddhaness*.

Just like Siddhartha whose spiritual quest to realize his true nature began with an existential crisis, which is a pessimistic outlook on life stemming from the very fact of life's finitude (most notably death), many people are aware of the same crisis but have different ways of handling it. Most never resolve it in the way Siddhartha did. These people just get better at avoiding the crisis through various kinds of temporary diversions.

In Siddhartha's India, one means of resolving this existential crisis was by renouncing the secular life, living in seclusion in the forest as a wandering ascetic called a *śramaṇa*; seeking liberation from this woeful life of suffering and rebirth. It was a quest for a higher life, a life beyond the secular life. Siddhartha chose the *śramaṇa* way of life in which he wore the garb of a *śramaṇa*, begging his food while dwelling in a lonely, unfrequented forest. He also sought out teachers of this tradition and became their student. However, he was not satisfied with their teaching. For him, their enlightenment didn't go deep enough. Eventually, what he discovered on his own went far beyond his teacher's attainments. This was the secret of Zen which was revealed to him in an extraordinary mystical intuition of ultimate reality which was helped by *dhyana*.

According to one Zen master the practice of *dhyana* is the practice of abandonment which explains why ascetic practices are aimed at learning to do with less rather than adding more to your life which only makes it that much more complicated and harder to let go of. Over time you learn to do without. It prepares you for something much more profound. At some point on the path, you have to abandon all conditioned phenomena including your thoughts and concepts that you have been holding on to. This abandoning is total and sudden. It happens in a split second. This sudden sweeping aside of everything reveals the secret of Zen, that is, your true nature. This is the sudden awakening that Zen talks about. It will illuminate the entire universe. You will see the one true nature of everything yet not destroy or alter a single thing. Only you and the Buddhas will know perfectly well what it is.

When you reach this nature, directly, which is also the Buddha-essence and the secret of Zen, there is nothing more for you to abandon, nor is there anything for you to maintain for fear that you might lose or forget this pristine nature. You've reached ultimate reality, a position that because it is the fundamental nature or essence of all phenomena, including even your most profound and subtle thoughts, has no opposition. It surpasses all formations from the gross to the most subtle. This is also the universal compassion of a Buddha since it also radiates forth like the sun to make beings wake up, revealing the realm of the enlightened.

Much of what the teaching of the Buddha covers is how to overcome the powerful and intoxicating tendency to become attached to this conditioned world which inevitably leads to corruption (*kleśa*) such as greed, hostility, delusion, vanity, wrong views, doubt, sloth, restlessness, shamelessness. This is all part of your human passion, passion being a state

whereby you are constantly acted upon and beguiled by what is external to your true nature. You are being led astray, in other words, from the path of Zen by your allegiance to the conditioned world. How can you ever expect to have the same intuition Siddhartha did by worshipping at the altar of human passion which is tied to conditioned existence?

Also keep in mind that the goal is not about perfect moral behavior but whether or not you are able to intuit your true nature which is unborn and unconditioned being also beyond the reach and range of human passion. Keep in mind that the most perfect moral behavior will not guarantee your awakening. Buddhist morality is more of a process whereby you speedily learn to outgrow what you once were passionate about—you had to have it! This passion then changes into looking deep within for your true nature this being the person that you really are. With regard to the conditioned world, including your body of birth, you regard all these many things as *not mine, this I am not, this is not my self*. Does this sound familiar? It is a path of negation—the negative way. What is happening is you are gradually learning to give up your addiction to what is conditioned and, instead, turn to what you are, fundamentally, which you have lost sight of which is unborn and unconditioned. You have to discover who you really are; not keep attending to whom you think or imagine you are like some deluded narcissist.

With the present state of human corruption Buddhism is more interested in appealing to people who are in the midst of an existential crisis; who also realize that they have been deceived by a corrupt, secular world which never stops worshipping at the altar of conditionality and finitude. Such people would prefer to dwell in a lonely, unfrequented forest like Siddhartha did so that they might devote their waking hours to seeking their true nature. This is the most difficult part of Buddhism because you are going against the stream. According to the Buddha, *The way which goes against the stream is a profound one, very difficult to see. Those who are afflicted with passion will not see it; they are enveloped by a heavy darkness.*

If you manage to awaken to the secret of Zen, you will see just how the teachings of the Buddha and the Zen masters all come from this awakening. Suddenly, you see the forest for the trees, so to speak. In this regard, the teachings can only make an indirect reference to the secret of Zen like a finger pointing to the moon and warn you, at the same time, about what you should not do, for example try to see your true nature through the invisible cage of language and concepts which you've been trapped in for a long time. The Buddha has said on one occasion that, *true reality is beyond words.* This means that the phrase "true reality" is not the actual state of true reality which is the secret of Zen. It points to it. The secret can only be accessed by mystical intuition which you have yet to accomplish.

The world you were born into and live in right now which is perceived through your senses and by means of discrimination using words is empty of true reality. It is an illusion the essence of which is real but not the appearance in the analogy of gold and a gold statue. As humans become more deeply involved in the illusory side of life they become more susceptible to corruption and less able to accept even the possibility of a transcendent essence which is also their true nature. This is why Buddhism eventually declines. People only want a particular religion to help them get what they desire; to make their illusory dreams come true. But all this ends in suffering since one is still tied to what is conditioned and illusory rather than unconditioned and real.

## Chapter eight: The message of the Buddha

According to the religious literature of Buddhism, Siddhartha used *dhyana* or Zen to become awakened whereby the illusory activity of thought is all at once dissolved revealing ultimate reality. From that time to the present we can put together the real message of the Buddha which is less about a particular religion with its tenets, which came later, and more about a means to a mystical intuition of ultimate reality which made Buddhism, Buddhism, and led to Zen.

Another name for Siddhartha's mystical intuition of ultimate reality is nirvana. As simple as it gets, the Buddha taught the realization of nirvana, that is, the unconditioned (i.e., the transcendent, ultimate reality, the absolute, the unborn, etc.). The unconditioned is hidden by the conditioned (the world of birth and death.) such that we only know and crave the conditioned, being totally ignorant of the unconditioned.

With his intuition of the unconditioned, the awakened Siddhartha, now a Buddha, could understand how sentient beings misapprehend who they truly are including the world around them which was never other than conditioned. Siddhartha understood that this misapprehension always leads to *samsara* this being the cycle of repeated births and deaths that each individual undergoes until they attain nirvana having realized the unconditioned.

Also, the Buddha could see that there is a difference between the world of appearance and what appearance is composed from. He understood that desire is always limited by and directed to appearances which are never other than always changing, unsatisfactory, and not who sentient beings really are. This kind of desire is doomed from the beginning never to get beyond appearances (i.e., the conditioned). For the serious student of Zen, while the history of Buddhism is wonderful to read for inspiration, as a serious student you must commit yourself to intuiting what Siddhartha realized under the Bodhi Tree.



If like Siddhartha, you seek to have an intuition of the unconditioned, that is, nirvana it will be realized in your innermost self according to the teachings of the Buddha; certainly not outside of you! Keep in mind, too, that nirvana is neither a state of absence nor nothingness. Although nirvana is ineffable and certainly difficult to wrap your mind around, it is not so when you approach it by *dhyana* which reveals also the secret of Zen. Nirvana and the secret are one and the same. It is important that you have faith in your self so that you have the ability to realize nirvana and, at the same time, have the secret of Zen revealed to you.

The attainment of nirvana acts to remove desire for the conditioned such as the *five constituents* (in Sanskrit they are *skandha* often translated as “aggregates”) that comprise your life, namely, *corporeality, feeling, perception, volitional formations* and *consciousness*. Eliminating desire for the conditioned life, as if these constituents were really you, you come to find that the unconditioned—not the conditioned—is your fundamental nature this being the secret of Zen that you are. You no longer regard the five constituents as who you are which are never other than impermanent and suffering and not your real self. It is the unconditioned that is your true nature—your real self. All Zen masters worth their salt intuitively realized the unconditioned within their innermost self.

The message of the Buddha should not be thought of as being either complex or simplistic but instead simple and to the point. Nirvana is the real goal of Buddhism which transcends the five constituents which are fundamentally empty and insubstantial. While there are many other names for nirvana such as the ‘immortal,’ the ‘unborn,’ the ‘increate,’ its realization is the paramount teaching of Buddhism. In later Buddhism, called *Mahayana*, nirvana acquires other names. But from the personally realized secret of Zen there is only one attainment which is ineffable; which a thousand names cannot adequately describe.

If the Buddha could talk to you right now he would tell you that what blocks the path to nirvana is what you have grown to believe is the truth which you refuse to let go of. This includes the belief that your life ends with your physical death and there isn’t another life after this that bears the mistakes you’ve made in this life. In the meantime,

you have a strong desire to make the most of your limited life trying to enjoy it as much as you can. But this is not a part of the message of the Buddha. If your mind is here then neither Buddhism nor Zen is for you. Apparently, the thought as not entered your mind that you are really desiring and chasing after empty things, like a mirage in a desert, which means that you don't see things that you desire as mere configurations of the unconditioned. You act more like a child in a toy store under the spell of all the toys they see. They are substantial for you but an illusion for the awakened.

It is only from nirvana's side that you can see and understand what truth is and who you really are which is why the highest teaching of Buddhism is always nirvana. This also means that the only way to nirvana is by *dhyana*, which is less of a dependence on words and the concepts they evoke and more of a reliance on mystical intuition whereby mental activity is, suddenly, swept aside. As a result, what remains is your true nature this being the secret of Zen.

*Dhyana*, which moves in the direction of mystical intuition, is not to be confused with sitting cross-legged like a statue of the Buddha. For Siddhartha and Zen masters *dhyana* was meant to suspend thought which is the process of thinking which hinders intuition. You should always keep in mind that intuition is direct knowledge that transcends reasoning and inferring. When thought stops, entering into *no-thought*, suddenly, what is revealed is the very substance of thought which is logically unthinkable and inconceivable. In Buddhism this is often referred to as Mind that is awakened (*bodhicitta*). This Mind is unconditioned, unborn, and increate. It is closer to the idea of spirit.

## Chapter nine: Some wrong impressions about the Buddha's teaching and Zen

It is a truism to say that the Buddhism of the Buddha is much different than the Buddhism today. Over time, wrong ideas get introduced into Buddhism when, in fact, they are not part of Buddhism. Unfortunately, they also become part of Zen. Only if you realize the secret of Zen can you begin to see what original Buddhism was like and how much today's Buddhism is not like original Buddhism. This is a change, by the way, that is corrupting Buddhism. Buddhism is more like a country that had its golden age and is now in its decline. This decline is due in large part to trying to force Buddhism to adapt to the ways of the modern world.

As we might expect, Buddhism ends up appealing to the wrong types of people while the practice of Zen, itself, which Siddhartha used to become enlightened, turns into something it was never meant to be, essentially, a sect of learning how to sit cross-legged on a cushion trying not to fall asleep; believing that you are a Buddha as long as you sit with your back ramrod straight. Even worse, some who practice Zen these days say Zen is not Buddhism so they refuse to read the discourses of the Buddha. They don't realize that Zen is just a Japanese word for *dhyana* which Siddhartha used to awaken to the absolute and become a Buddha.

Let's be honest, did the Buddha actually teach that your practice should consist mainly in cross-legged sitting (*zazen*), having faith that you are already a Buddha in which sitting helps you to unfold and reveal more and more of your innate *Buddhaness*? No he did not. *Dhyana*, as discussed earlier, means in Chinese, 明心見性, "*clarify mind intuit [buddha] nature.*" So what does sitting have to do with making your mind clear and pure? The awakening, that is intuiting your true nature, leads right to the mysterious secret of Zen. It has nothing to do with the physical practice of sitting cross-legged on a cushion, having faith that we are already Buddhas to some degree.

In fact, such a physical practice is a defilement because it depends upon the five constituents, most notably, corporeality (*rupa*). This constituent, including the others, is conditioned whereas the enlightened state is unconditioned. How does one then arrive at the unconditioned by relying on the conditioned? To put it simply, you arrive at the unconditioned by sweeping away the conditioned which is always coupled with the activity of thinking and raising thoughts about this or that. If you imagine that the activity of thinking and raising thoughts is like a field of changing colors, which are more alluring and captivating than the most beautiful rainbow, how do you then see the pure Mind which is colorless and the source of all colors by relying on colors? In fact, the field of changing colors only has to stop for a split second to see the colorless spiritual source. This is what awakening is like.

In learning about Buddhism you have to have an open mind not a closed, prejudiced mind. The biggest danger lies in believing the Buddha taught something which, in fact, he did not teach. One glaring example, is the belief that the Buddha taught there is, ultimately, no permanent, unchanging self or *atman* which, if this were true, would mean that the Buddha taught the doctrine of materialism (*ucchedavada*, i.e., annihilationism) which denied the self or *atman*. To boot, the materialist was very much of a skeptic when it came to the transcendent. If he couldn't see it, it did not exist. The materialist, you could say, relied on the evidence of their senses. But the six senses can never reach nirvana!

The Buddha never once taught that there is absolutely no self. Instead, the Buddha taught that the five constituents, mentioned earlier, are not your self and you need to stop identifying with them as if they were your self. Logically, the Buddha had positive knowledge of the self, for how else might he know what is not the self? This is why he said that each of the five constituents is not our self. In no way were they like the self or *atman* which he was familiar with.

The Buddha taught that unenlightened people mistake what is not their self, namely, the five constituents which are unsatisfactory, impermanent and conditioned, for their self. They are inverted, in other words. For example, they cling to the world as if it were eternal and

reject the eternal as if it were a figment of their imagination. These same people do not realize that hidden within them, as if covered over by a dark, heavy veil, is who they really are. But until this veil is removed, completely, they will never discover who they actually are. They will continue to mistake what is false for what is true going down the wrong path as a result. The Buddha once told a person named Radha to view the five constituents as Mara (the Buddhist devil), see them as the killer. Those are pretty strong words but the Buddha had to let Radha know that he was mistakenly clinging to the devil.

Many who take up the practice of either Buddhism or Zen Buddhism are uncomfortable with the idea of rebirth or in Pali, *punabhava*. In their mind, they figure that since Buddhism denies the self, therefore, there is no actual transmigrant that goes from this life to the next. Their adage is: *No self; no rebirth! No problem.* But this is not true. The self is not the transmigrant in Buddhism that goes from one life to the next. It is *consciousness* that is the transmigrant which in Sanskrit is *vijnana* which means something like subject-object knowing which is always dualizing. This is the fifth constituent after *corporality, feeling, perception, and volitional formations*. The Buddha even likened consciousness to a magician's illusion. How consciousness works as regards rebirth is summed up quite well from this passage by the Buddha: *Just as a silkworm makes a cocoon in which to wrap itself and then leaves the cocoon behind, so consciousness produces a body to envelop itself and then leaves that body to undergo other karmic results in a new body.*

Also it is worth mentioning that the doctrine of materialism does not believe in rebirth. For the materialist, when the body breaks up at death nothing survives the death of the material body. Materialism was apparently popular in ancient India during the time of the Buddha. Even the idea of a transmigrant was out of the question whereas for the Buddha,

consciousness (*vijñāna*) was the transmigrant that survived death.

When you consider that the majority of people who study Buddhism and Zen are constantly caught up in wrong opinions about Buddhism, this is all the more reason for you to make sure that you are following what the Buddha and the Zen masters actually taught, and not what you imagine they taught adding more wrong ideas about Buddhism and Zen.

You have to think logically, too. Don't forget that. For example, who is it that takes refuge in the *Triple Gem*, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha if not your real self? Of the five constituents is it corporality or some other constituent that takes refuge in the *Triple Gem*? But don't these constituent belong to Mara the killer who will delude and destroy you if you take the five constituents to be your self?

When you believe that Buddhism and Zen are meant to serve your immediate and special needs becoming a kind of smorgasbord for you to pick and choose from, you have fallen into error. It also means that you have unrealistic assumptions both about Buddhism and the practice of Zen. Only if these assumptions are challenged and shown to be wrong can you hope to better understand your self and the correct path.

When you read Buddhist and Zen texts you, essentially, have everything you need to unravel the secret of Zen—in fact, you have more than you need. But many people are incapable of accepting the parts of Buddhism and Zen they don't like or don't understand then make up reasons to doubt the texts they read. Some of their reasons have to do with translations. They imagine the translations are mostly of low quality and could be a lot better. So why accept as true what is problematic?

But the problem the typical practitioner faces is not one of bad translations but their clinging to wrong ideas about Buddhism and Zen which are outside of Buddhism. They don't want to read Buddhism and Zen in their proper context which is about awakening to your true nature; seeing this nature face to face which unlocks Zen's secret. This is why many who practice Zen today, eventually, form the opinion that Zen is teaching us that there is no special attainment required. We don't have to intuit our true nature. We are Buddhas already; we just need to believe it.

## Chapter ten: Making excuses

To make excuses is to want to be free from the imputation of a conscious fault. As regards Zen, it means that you want to be free from the fault that your interest in Zen is only superficial and it will never get any better. But then you protest! You say that you like to read books about Zen and find it interesting to study. Is this supposed to mean that you are not superficial? But this doesn't mean that you are getting closer to Zen's secret which involves some major life changes. Face it, you are just collecting a lot of information about Zen and Buddhism. You haven't really changed enough to be able to tackle Zen's secret.

It goes without saying that the culture that you live in has a great impact on what you should do and how you should think about things, even Zen. You need a job, for example. You have to make money. You might need to buy a car. You might want to get married and have a family to feel fulfilled. In light of this, it is easy to come up with excuses as to why you've decided to study Zen in a half-ass way just reading a few books and doing twenty minutes a day of seated meditation. You probably feel that, right now, there are more important things that you need to do. But what you are really saying is there are more exciting things for you to do than explore Zen in any great depth.

Maybe what is happening here is that you believe that you can have the same enlightenment as a Zen master who has unlocked Zen's secret while, at the same time, living the life your culture wants you to live. Are you sure you're right about this? If you are still a young adult and have a few more youthful years to enjoy why not use some of that energy for the sake of wisdom? Why not jump into Zen with everything you have? Go for it!

Give yourself five or ten years to uncover the secret of Zen. By all means live like a hermit for a couple of months in the mountains far from the city. But I think I know you. You've got some good excuses as to why you can't. You are not going to change even if I am right. Maybe you feel like you should go to college right now and take philosophy or psychology. Still, you have to admit that those who

sought the secret of Zen in the old days didn't go to college. They became a monk or a nun, prepared for the long journey. In the China of that era you could live a monastic life free of charge. You just had to keep your nose clean and pursue the path with everything you had. No fooling around.

These days, the worst thing you could do is join some Zen chat room on the Internet and argue about whose interpretation of Zen best corresponds with what the Zen masters of old China taught. It is an excuse that doesn't seem to be an excuse on the surface but, nevertheless, it is. It's an excuse because it deceives you into believing forward progress is being made, something like the painting of a sailing ship on the high seas. But you are not moving just like that ship in the picture. You are stuck in what you imagine Zen to be without ever uncovering, directly, what the secret of Zen is. In other words, you have situated yourself into a virtual world where you are acting like a Zen master even though you are far from the other shore of Zen's secret.

Giving reasons why you cannot, at this time, pursue Zen's secret is very clever on your part. But this is still making excuses. However, if we put this into the context of planning to climb a mountain like Denali in Alaska in the coming year a better picture of you comes forth. First of all, to climb a mountain like Denali you have to acquire some proficiency in mountaineering skills which is not easy. You will have to go on some kind of prep course given by the people who are operating this expedition. And you'd better be in top physical shape. Playing video games, not exercising, buying a book or two on mountaineering, maybe buying an ice axe to impress your buddies, will not prepare you for the long climb to the summit of Denali. Face it, at this point you are in the process of letting yourself down even getting depressed about it.

I sense a deeper part of you knows that if you elect to climb the mountain of Zen to uncover its secret your whole life is going to be turned upside down. Naturally, this will turn on your excuse making machine, a machine that one day you may have to dump if you hope to realize Zen's secret. And you might be right to think that you are not yet ready to get squeezed between a rock and a hard place (remember earlier when I told you that one day if you wish to know the secret of



Zen you will have to be put between a rock and a hard place?) What did I mean by this?

If you've studied Zen just a little bit you've probably heard of the Zen term, "great doubt" 大疑 which is more like going to your wits' end having exhausted your intellectual skills in trying to solve Zen's secret your way. This will be a spiritual crisis of the highest order for you. Don't even try to imagine it. But undoubtedly you will. By the way, this is a part of the intellect that is really your enemy and not your friend. What is going to be put between that rock and a hard place will be you and that intellect you are holding on to which I have to add, is a very wily excuse maker who doesn't want you to let go of it—it needs you and all your thinking! The intellect would rather you fail than having you let go of it.

The bigger question that you need to ask yourself is why do you want to postpone this great adventure of searching for Zen's secret? What do you hope to gain in the long run? Is it just more time so you can enjoy the life of a worldly person where there is no adventure; no entry into the world of chance where trust and commitment are a prerequisite; where success and failure are intertwined as you come near the goal of Zen? This is not a good idea if you wish, fully, to realize Zen's secret. Why just dabble in it?

If this is where you are now, you will never comprehend the secret of Zen. At this stage, like most people who have failed to comprehend Zen, you will get the bright idea that there is no secret to Zen and no enlightenment! You will comb your little library for quotes by Zen masters where it seems that they are saying there is nothing to realize. Essentially, Zen has no secret. You may further reason that the purpose of the Buddha's skillful teachings and the skillful teachings of the Zen masters was just to get people like you to accept that your monkey mind is the same as the Buddha's mind! This is perhaps the excuse of all excuses. Don't believe it.

There are cunning traps even within the institution of Zen that you must be wary of. Not all institutions of Zen acknowledge that Zen has a secret that is hidden by a mind enthralled with the external world. This mind of mental activity resist or even refuses to look beyond the superficial aspects of Zen. People like this have a fear to go much deeper into themselves, fearing to fall into some kind of abyss. Maybe

it's like a fear to go downstairs to the basement. To unlock a door that everyone told you to leave alone. Do not, whatever you do, unlock it. These people much prefer you to follow what is going on between your ears which is a mind filled with superficial thoughts and mental images, even of Zen. If Zen is written by those who discovered Zen's secret it is also written by those who were unable to realize Zen's secret; who believed that sitting cross-legged was all that was necessary.

## Chapter eleven: A Zen you can try but don't buy

Zen master Dahui (1089–1163) was a notable and great Zen master who fought against a pernicious view of Zen called *silent illumination* which involved just sitting cross-legged for long periods of time with the back ramrod straight. Dahui considered silent illumination to be heretical insofar as its goal amounted to *quietism* in which one tries to become, inwardly, empty and still, this state believed to be the Buddha's actual enlightenment.

Those in the past who defended this quietist Zen believed that enlightenment is only a construct. There wasn't an actual enlightenment, in other words. Of their own practice, what these quietists believed is that enlightenment was really about calming down one's mental activity which can only be achieved through the exercise of physically sitting still as much as possible. This kind of Zen is represented by the Japanese Soto tradition which originally was developed in China and known as the Caodong tradition. This tradition of Zen could be thought of as just another excuse for not doing the hard work of Zen, trying to discover the secret of Zen by way of intuition which is what Siddhartha did and great teachers like Huineng and Dahui.

Zen, presently, seems to be already on its last leg because of the dominance of Soto Zen which had its birth from the womb of Caodong being brought to Japan by Dogen. Soto Zen has spent many years selling its exercise of cross-legged sitting called zazen and shikantaza to the west while, at the same time, ignoring kenshō 見性 which in a nutshell means to “intuit your true nature” this nature being the secret of Zen that hides within each of us. Those who take up the study of Zen based on zazen; who ignore the more important part of Zen which is kenshō, collectively, are destroying the Buddhist tradition of Zen.

Couple this with the fact that Buddhism is being rapidly secularized such that even nirvana is being put on the back burner. What takes nirvana's place is seated meditation which aims a quietude. This means that the modern use of Buddhism ends up stripping away

any hopeful expectations such as attaining insight into one's true nature this being nirvana. But this is little more than a benign form of nihilism directed at Buddhism. It is something along the lines of learning how to cope with samsara while never escaping from it which only *kenshō* is capable of.

You need to understand that not every form of Zen is good nor every form of Buddhism. Both can be hollow like a can of tomatoes that has a label glued onto the can but with no tomatoes inside. It is one of those situations where "caveat emptor" applies which is Latin for "Let the buyer beware". In a way you are entering a contract with Zen. This means that you need to make sure the teaching will help you to uncover the secret of Zen. But if you business. I hope you will sooner than later realize that you are not really learning Zen.

## Chapter twelve: Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife

The title of this chapter is taken from a line in Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." It fits well with Zen's path which is the path of Buddhism. It teaches escape from samsara, a Buddhist term which is under appreciated by both modern Zennists and Buddhists. If you are one of the more fortunate ones (a person who has good karma), you get the impression, as you grow older, that you are gradually having to adapt to life in a well disguised madhouse, this being modern culture, which is made to look like a funhouse. It may even dawn on you that it's time for you to escape from your culture. In this madhouse, most people are too far gone to recognize what has happened to them or to do anything about it even if they did recognize the problem. But you conclude, and rightly so, it's time to escape, to get far away from this madding crowd. To be sure, the secret of Zen will not reveal itself if one adapts to life in the madhouse.

The idea of escape, from a Buddhist point of view, means to avoid future pain or misfortune and, hopefully, overcome samsara. Similar to this, if you see a flashing warning sign as you drive at night warning you to take the detour on the right side of the road, this can be thought of as a timely warning, helping you to escape from a likely accident in the immediate future.

We live in a world with many such warning signs. There are many things we should avoid doing lest we bring harm to ourselves or to others. In this regard, our culture is escapist insofar as people are trying to avoid future suffering. Here are some examples. Don't drop out of school. We'd better leave now a storm is brewing. Cigarettes can be hazardous to your health. Avoid unprotected sex. Get your teeth checked and cleaned. Don't travel to this country there is a civil war going on. Don't drink the water. There are many more examples.

To know who you truly are, which means to solve Zen's secret, it is necessary for you to escape from the madhouse that you're an inmate in. If you do not manage to escape then who you imagine you are is

not who you truly are and where you are is not really where you should be. And what you take to be meaningful and necessary is really meaningless and unnecessary. This is true from the side of Siddhartha's awakening whereby he became the Buddha. It is also true from Zen's side. To know, firsthand, Zen's secret is to know who you really are—your primordial self or nature. It is also to see that your happy funhouse world was all along a disguised madhouse.

Remember earlier when I discussed the five constituents that comprise your life, namely, *corporeality*, *feeling*, *perception*, *volitional formations*, and *consciousness*? Guess what, they are not really who you are, far from it. You have mistakenly identified with them as who you are when, in fact, they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not who you are. The Buddha sheaths are taken away, no core remains), and a magician's creation. It is like you are inside of a human looking robot. You only have knowledge of the robot's abilities and powers. The world you see through the robot's sensory machinery is all the world you know right now. Now imagine some human looking robot comes along who says that, fundamentally, you are not this robot. He even warns you of the peril of attaching to this robot. He teaches the following:

*Students, corporeality is impermanent. Feeling is impermanent. Perception is impermanent. Volitional formations are impermanent. Consciousness is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not who you really are. These constituents because they are impermanent and what is impermanent is suffering should not be identified with as being who you are. Always remember that corporeality is not yours so abandon it. Feeling is not yours so abandon it. Perception is not yours so abandon it. Volitional formations are not yours so abandon it. Consciousness is not yours so abandon it.*

Do you see how close this takes you to Zen? Do you remember earlier when I told you the practice of *dhyana* is the practice of abandonment which is really an escape process? At least you know what not to identify with as being who you are. Attaching to corporeality, for example, is not going to help you with seeing, firsthand, Zen's marvelous secret. It's blocking you as are the other constituents.

The ignoble strife of the madding crowd arises from clinging to what is a false self, namely, the five constituents which are empty and devoid of self. If the constituents are empty and not who you are then it follows from this that what you really are is not the constituents which are empty. Here is where Zen's secret lies.

If you wish to avoid future pain you have to escape from the madhouse which is hidden by the funhouse that you are used to indulging your senses in, out of habit. The world you are situated in, presently, is not going to help you escape, and that goes for the way you use your mind to solve problems. The way you have been taught to use your mind must be transformed if you wish to discover Zen's secret.

## Chapter thirteen: Looking beyond the cage

Each of us lives our whole life in an invisible samsaric cage which never lets us escape from birth and death. This cage is also made with special bars. They are made from language including even your very own thoughts and ideas. This cage has a built in bias. It likes words that are connected to things that you can grasp; words that have corresponding objects. In this regard, it tends to devalue anything that cannot be expressed in language and grasped by you.

So where does the secret of Zen stand in relation to this all encompassing cage? While this cage doesn't seem to have an exit no matter how you look at it, nevertheless, it has an exit but not in the way you might imagine. As you've already guessed, Zen's secret, stands outside of the cage. If you wish to truly know your self it cannot be found within the cage.

As a general rule, the cage also has a totalitarian aspect to it where individuals are made to feel limited and restricted. Stay in the cage! in other words. The individual almost never learns who they really are from inside the cage. Mysticism, religious contemplation, and philosophy have little or no place in this cage because they teach escape from the cage.

When you elect to go after Zen's secret which puts you on a quest to seek a reality beyond this cage, to some people you may seem like the half-mad Don Quixote who read too many books about knight-errantry in which his brain was always filled with fantasies. Still, by accepting the cage there is no way that you can possibly intuit the secret of Zen since you are living in a system which has nothing to do with your true nature. It even runs counter to it.

Logically, Zen has to teach you how to escape from the cage that you have learned over the years to trust and obey as you might a great and powerful ruler. It is like when Siddhartha decided to leave his father's palace and seek the truth beyond its walls since the truth cannot be found in a world that is impermanent and suffering. This meant that Siddhartha put his faith elsewhere in the life of an ascetic



and the practices of an ascetic until by means of intuition (*dhyana*) he saw beyond the cage of samsara. He beheld true reality which was also the substance of thought which is, logically, unthinkable.

When your interest in Zen begins to grow, at the same time Zen begins to push back on you; to press in on your cage which is defended by your intellectual abilities with its numerous clever reasons which don't want you to escape. However, the more your faith and interest in seeing Zen's secret deepens, your world inside the cage begins to lose its charm. You want to leave it because as you eventually discover, it is not helping you to uncover the secret of Zen. The answers you expect are not forthcoming. Even if you try sitting in meditation doing zazen at best you are only able to achieve a greater degree of quietness which feels like a peaceful detachment from the pressing problem of Zen's secret. By no measure is this a repetition of this exercise only reinforces a part of the cage that you really need to get beyond.

For those who are most advanced, whose faith is deep that there is an actual direct witnessing of Zen's secret, a major crisis is inevitable. This is what Zen's history should teach you. The path of Zen is like a climb up the side of a great mountain. It is fraught with unexpected dangers no matter how much you prepare for the journey. But this is also the truth of the most average life in which misfortune can be just around the corner. For Zen, however, the crisis is important. It happens when Zen's path begins to move into a dominant position. It is as if one part of your brain that is given to indulging, intellectually, in bits and pieces of reality begins to sense something greater and ominous is about to turn its world upside down. More on that later.

## Chapter fourteen: What it takes

A personality suited for Zen is one that is never easily disappointed or depressed; that in the face of countless ups and downs still manages to have a great deal of respect and gratitude toward the teachings of the Buddha and the Zen masters. It is also one whose faith never diminishes. But why is this? It is because on your journey you will have lots of fake enlightenments—too many to count. It's like getting excited at finding gold but only to discover that you've only found fool's gold (iron pyrite). If you've seen only fool's gold and not real gold it will be difficult for you to let go of your belief even though you worked many months or maybe years to find this fool's gold. But you have to let go of it. You are far from finding an El Dorado. In some of the Buddha's discourses he teaches that there are ten false enlightenments for each one of the five constituents making a total of fifty false enlightenments!

Also it is necessary to have a strong inclination towards intuition where the new is discovered or where a great, unexpected breakthrough is made which might at first seemed impossible. Zen's method is not through the analysis of the various parts or their possible connection with each other as if trying to construct an accurate picture of Zen's principle. In fact, the parts have very little to do with the kind of intuition that Zen demands. Zen's secret is like looking at an out of focus picture such that you can't tell what it is at first. Sometimes you can almost make out what the picture is, but still you are unable to recognize it. At other times, it almost seems that the more you look at this picture it becomes even more blurry and out of focus! Let's imagine that after many years of looking at this out of focus picture, one day, without thinking about it, you see what the picture is. Yes, the picture is still blurry and out of focus but you know what it is without the slightest hesitation, even though others can't make out what it is. With directly intuiting your true nature, the teachings of Buddhism and Zen make perfect sense whereas before they didn't.

Zen's secret is only revealed to you, personally, when you make a substantial intuitive leap going as it were from dark to light. Studying all the words and their various meanings found in Buddhism and Zen

will never show you what Siddhartha realized under the Bodhi Tree. These are only parts of the teaching not the whole. They do not stand alone so much as they stand within the context of ultimate reality. It also might take many years for you to awaken to Zen's secret. In light of this you have to be strong in other ways, for example, having a lot of faith and courage to keep on going. You have to be prepared for a very long journey. No doubt you will find yourself reading a lot of Buddhist works, including Zen koans and sermons. It's a normal reaction. You may find yourself doing a lot of seated meditation. That is a normal reaction, too. Only direct intuition of Zen secret is going to reveal its secret to you which comes, suddenly, in the blink of an eye. But what a secret it is. You could not unconventional and novel.

A personality also suited for Zen is also going to have to accept the fact that learning the path of Zen in a Zen setting, such as a monastery or a Zen temple, is not a super highway to the secret of Zen. It is just part of the process. Zen, eventually, requires that you awaken on your own. Even now in China a monk or nun will go into retreat to try to awaken on their own after years of disciplining their senses so they won't become sidetracked by worldly things and desires. They are fully aware that when they see things they can become obstructed by seeing and be seduced by what they see. Their ability to resist the intoxication of the worldly life is strong. If you have not had this kind of training, then you are likely to fail.

## Chapter fifteen: When you go in circles

Imagine that you've been walking for a long time in an old growth forest with no high ground by which to get a good view of the lay of the land. Then it begins to dawn on you that you might be lost. Next, you discover that you've been going around in a circle covering the same ground as you did before. At this point, almost in a panic, you know that you'd better find another means to get out of this forest—walking in circles doesn't work when you are lost.

In Zen, coming to the conclusion that you've been going in circles can be a good thing, a kind of a wake up call. It means that you've acknowledged that you are not making any real progress as you expected, in fact, you are deluding yourself. One reason might be that you are engaged in Zen at a superficial level and hadn't realized it. Zen was more of a curiosity for you at the time. It had not yet become a life and death struggle for you. And what could be more superficial than sitting in zazen in the belief that you are gradually growing into a Buddha?

It is better to wake up to the fact that you are going in circles, making no real progress, than doing the same dead-end practice day in and day out thereby deluding yourself. Waking up, finding yourself profoundly disheartened or in a panic, means that you are now beginning to engage with a deeper part of yourself. It is like you just woke up and realized, let's say, the house is on fire! Something is wrong, you've got to do something extraordinary.

Stopping yourself from going in circles means that you can now see that you have been pursuing Zen using your old worldly ways of tackling a problem. It might dawn on you, also, that Zen's secret can only be revealed through direct, personal, intuition not through doing the same thing over and over again. Yet, this is what many Zennists are doing today and did in the past. They put on the appearance of making great effort, but never got to intuition. It is like being lost in the old growth forest, mentioned earlier. So what do you do—what's the solution? You walk even faster in a circle! How crazy is that?

It would be better to call the Zen tradition 禪宗 the intuitive tradition so has to distinguish it from the practice of cross-legged sitting or zazen. Making Zen to be about the sitting posture serves only to hide the truth of Zen, that it is the means Siddhartha used and Zen masters used to become enlightened which is really the way of intuition, not sitting. In the past the Buddha said that *if religious practice were physical then walking, standing, sitting, lying down, looking around, would be religious practice.*

That zazen has taken over the general meaning of Zen is perhaps for the reason that zazen doesn't need very much explaining whereas intuition does. Turning back to the old growth forest example, how we find our way out of this forest is more complex than walking in a walking to avoid walking aimlessly, then calm down. Next, try to remember how you got to where you are. There are more things to do. But what is of importance is that intuition is being called upon. You might observe smoke arising or hear a dog barking in the distance. This is your intuition invisibly at work which is engaged with the whole, not the parts. It is intuition that, in fact, leads the way, not zazen or analytical thinking which tries to solve the problem by breaking down the problem into smaller elements. Zazen and analytical thinking can also work to inhibit intuition.

The everyday world you live it is governed by analytical thinking and reasoning. While many people are drawn to Zen they also want to analyze Zen as if to find its secret. The term 'analyze' can be traced back to the Greek verb, *analyein* which means to break up or to loosen. But what Zen points us to is not subject to any kind of analysis. Yes, you can analyze and deconstruct the words of Zen masters and the Buddha but you are still not even close to Zen's secret which only intuition can access.

As strange as it sounds, what Zen will do to you, in fact, is make sure that you are going in circles. But there is a method here (in a further chapter I will go more in depth on koans). Putting you in a circle is done through koans which are baiting analytical reasoning or the same, are baiting your intellect enticing it into the old growth forest we talked about earlier so it will go in circles again and again. In other words, Zen wants you to get lost which then forces you to find your way out, that is, to solve Zen's secret (it's the only way out). If this

were military training it would be like putting you through a training course on how to find your way out of any jungle or forest.

While you may feel confident that you know what koans are about you shouldn't. Every koan was, in fact, composed from the side of Zen's secret that came by way of sudden intuition. If you already know the secret of Zen the koan is almost laughable. You can see how it baits the intellect causing it to become lost within itself just going around in circles. The koan's baiting power to allure and charm the intellect so that it becomes lost within itself is amazing. This forces the intellect, finally, to give up and turn to intuition. What else can it do? In the example of one student, he made forty-nine attempts to penetrate the koan: "The eastern mountain sails on the river." Once an elderly monk on his ninety-seventh attempt, penetrated the koan he was given! These students went around in circles for a long time, their intellects working almost night and day to solve a particular koan.

Every word or gesture that came from the old Zen masters had its source in the direct intuition of Zen's secret. As a result, they glowed with a mysterious power. Still, their words were like bait for the intellect of the students which put each student under tremendous pressure to seek the mystery of Zen, intuitively, which many were unable to do. Today, student's of Zen have almost no idea what intuition is about and how it pertains to finding the koan's mysterious answer. All they know what to do is sit. And if that doesn't work, sit even more for longer periods of time! Do you see what is happening? It's a refusal to take the road of intuition which is central to traditional Buddhism and Zen Buddhism.

There is a story in *The Transmission of the Light* book about the Buddha holding up a flower and blinking whereupon he transmitted Zen's secret to Mahakashyapa who just smiled in recognition. This was not about zazen—it had nothing to do with this physical exercise. Nor did the Buddha give a long speech. Yet, the Buddha and Mahakashyapa intuited the same mysterious thing. They both intuited something profound that words and oddball gestures such as blinking could only hint at. This wasn't about sitting. It was about intuition. What is easy to miss about Zen is intuition or in Sanskrit, *dhyana*. Without a doubt, Zen is not really about putting a lot of time in sitting ramrod straight on a cushion. This, in itself, is going in circles, never getting out of the dark forest of ignorance.

## Chapter sixteen: Down the rabbit-hole

If you decide to live alone like a hermit in the woods, or study with a teacher in some remote temple, or even study Zen in a monastery, your life is going to become somewhat like Alice's life in Wonderland. You are going to go down the rabbit-hole which means that nothing will be as it appears, or the way you expect it to be. At times, it may even seem like nonsense to you. Zen teachings are said to be "strange words and extraordinary actions". The normal 'you' that you're used to starts to fade away when you decide to go down this rabbit-hole. For a time you might become a little disoriented or confused and sometimes wonder if you made the right decision.

Your 'normal' above the rabbit-hole consciousness with its manners and routines which you love is going to change and in some cases change radically. The restrictions that you will face are many from the length of time you are allowed to sleep to your immersion in the Buddha's discourses. Logic will have completely different premises. This subterranean world is meant to turn you around, to reorient you. As you go deeper you are really going higher. But in your old world, the more you chased after things and attached to the outer, physical person, unbeknownst to you, you were falling headlong into the abyss which in Buddhism is called *samsara* which is an endless succession of rebirths—a kind of trap from which there is no escape if you buy into it.

The Zen life, which is about going down the rabbit-hole, is a life of allowing your self to intuit the absolute which Siddhartha intuited under the Bodhi Tree and taught this light to the many. What Siddhartha and the Zen masters intuited is of profound importance. Let me give you a brief example of what I mean. It is not the reflected images in the pond that you should marvel at or pay attention to but seeing the water through these reflected images. Likewise in Zen, you want to intuit, personally, what is most fundamental upon which rests the busy, everyday world of birth and death including the starry heavens above. This intuition, which is Siddhartha's intuition, enables you to see through the illusory veil becoming detached from the



enchanting, spell-like quality of appearances. It also allows you to escape samsara because you've emptied out all of samsara to reach nirvana which is your true nature.

Still, the world of Zen can, at times, be more like Alice's life down the rabbit-hole than the life you are used to. As you study Zen you will find that the words of the Zen masters are hard to penetrate and to make sense of. For example, someone asked a Zen master, "The Way, what is it?" The Zen master replied, "Don't mention it, don't mention it." This situation can, at times seem more like Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat who has an odd way of responding to Alice's questions.

Eventually, as you get more used to life down in the rabbit-hole you begin to have small intuitions which, unfortunately, don't add up to the big one. Still, they are valuable. The big intuition surpasses all the previous small intuitions. But thankfully, maybe you are beginning to understand how important intuition is and why Zen is about intuiting your true nature—not about sitting on your rump on a special kind of Japanese style pillow. Until you get there, you are always trying to find out where these crazy Zen masters are coming from but to no avail. Still, you keep on trying to see their logic. This is a good thing.

As you spend a few years down in the rabbit-hole the space around you gradually becomes sacred which means that you are putting aside the ordinary which always acts to obstruct the path. If you are a hermit living in a beautiful place, this is easy to understand. If not, you have your work cut out for you. When the Buddha talks about *going to the forest, to the root of a tree, to an empty spot* he is talking about a place appropriate for the Zennist; one whereby you can be more open to intuition. This is not like studying in college. There is no test except intuiting the secret of Zen. Zen is open to everyone who wants to go by way of intuition and is closed off to those who scoff at it.

Another way to look at life in the rabbit-hole is that it is like being lost in an unfamiliar city. The language used is familiar but has unconventional meanings. These meanings are not for you but for those who have awakened who, perfectly, understand where Zen is coming from. Let's call this approach the 'Zen immersion program' which is a sink-or-swim approach. Either you awaken (have satori) or

you remain asleep. In the meantime you are like a stranger in a strange land. There is no in-between for you, although one tradition of Zen teaches that you can sit your way to enlightenment which is a gradualistic approach. But the Buddha never taught such a path inasmuch as it is dependent on a particular, physical posture.

## Chapter seventeen: A pessimistic outlook on life

As crazy as it sounds a pessimistic outlook on life grants you somewhat of a better insight into the reality of your life. The Buddha's four noble truths, which one day in the future will prove to be true, begins with the truth of life's suffering in the form of the five constituents mentioned previously, namely, *corporeality*, *feeling*, *perception*, *volitional formations*, and *consciousness*, which are illusory. These are your life. Not only does the Buddha teach that these constituents are prone to suffering, but that you have to transcend them in one fell swoop to reach nirvana. In a flash, you enter the unconditioned (nirvana) leaving behind the conditioned world which includes these five constituents.

If you prefer these five constituents that make up your life instead of Zen's path, which intends to transcend them, you are heading to a dark place which is a place that you will always be deceived by. You are not facing reality in this direction of travel. These constituents that make up your life will, inevitably, take you to the abyss if you depend upon them which is also attachment. The worst of the five constituents is consciousness which the Buddha says is like a magician's trick, that is, an illusion. It is something like the Holo-deck in the television series *Star Trek*. The Holo-deck creates a virtual world in which physicality and physical motion seem to be quite real, except for those who are playing in the Holo-deck who know it is all an illusory. In real life, you are not sure its all an illusion like in the example of the Holo-deck. Pain and having a natural fear of death makes it all seem so real and necessary despite the fact that corporeality *is* like foam, feeling is like a bubble, perception is like a mirage, volitional formations are like a plantain-tree (i.e., when the leaf- sheaths are taken away, no core remains), and consciousness is like a magician's trick.

Your Pollyanna view of reality is never other than overoptimistic and unrealistic. The path of Zen wants you to face the facts of this life, to see the conditioned world like Siddhartha saw it, who eventually

awakened to the unconditioned (nirvana), transcending the life of suffering that doomed everything that was conditioned.

Also, it would be a mistake for you to assume that this is your last life so why not live a hedonistic life? But Siddhartha was well aware of the hedonists of his time who were also materialists. Their solution to life's suffering, and with it samsara, was just to believe that when you die, that's it. Problem solved. Hence, there is no such thing as samsara which is the cycle of unending births and deaths. But the Buddha did teach the transmigration of consciousness. This is what is getting reborn. It is a subject that is always connecting with an object in which the relationship is unbreakable. This is because they are a seeming division within the original one. This is an unwholesome division. It is one that is antagonistic, negative and unsatisfactory. The secret of Zen also reveals the original one in which subject and object mysteriously converge with each other then disappear back into the original one.

Buddhist pessimism is really about not buying into the proposition that the conditioned world—a world of suffering—is the only world and that this life of ours ends with death. End of story. Sorry, but the story continues for you because you haven't been able to get beyond the sphere of samsara where the cycle of birth and death continues. Realizing Zen's secret, that is, nirvana, transcends samsara which is always suffering (*nir* means transcend all, *vana* means suffering,). When you fail to see that all things are empty and have no reality is because such people do not yet have the pure unobstructed eye. They only have the eye of flesh. They grab onto what is an illusory world, including their own bodies which they believe are real. This, I hasten to add, is a typical human way of life.

Your human sentiments which are biased towards the everyday world will always, in some degree, struggle with Zen's path. And when they become almost hostile to Zen's path your human sentiments will try to make the search for truth seem unimportant. However, by being pessimistic as if it were a handy tool for staying on Zen's path, allows you to see the world the way it really is. Taking a quick peek or looking longer at the dark side of your life helps you, personally, to make the necessary adjustments of how to stay on the path convinced

that suffering is just around the corner and you will eventually get there.

Does this mean that our world is evil? Yes, in the sense that somewhere on the planet there is evil going on, some of even huge like a war. The good side only lasts a short time. Eventually, your youth turns into old age where death is much closer to you. If you deny the truth of this conditioned world in which suffering comes to everyone, over time, your efforts to maintain your facade of happiness will fail. How will you eventually discover the secret of Zen with such an attitude? Logically, to see the way things really are helps to snap you out of your Pollyanna view of reality.

## Chapter eighteen: The problem with appearances

A Buddha is one who awakens from the spell of appearance by realizing what truly transcends appearance. Appearance includes everything from the stars above you to your most sublime thoughts and concepts. Yet appearances are nothing more than originations that depend upon the truly real which, to this day, you've never made direct contact with. You are always in a spell, enchanted by appearances which includes not only your corporeal body which you naturally crave, but everything else that your corporeal body senses which includes the big world out there that you mistake for true reality. You're like a child in a large toy store attracted to all the eye candy.

Eventually, you have to face the fact that appearance is never other than impermanent, disharmonious and not who you are. Still appearances can be enchanting and powerfully engage you, leading you astray. You are not immune to their power—you would be foolish to believe that you were. You are still in the grip of a spell that you have yet to awaken from. So, do you believe that you can awaken by letting yourself become even more enchanted by appearances?

How can you expect to break this spell so as to awaken? Logic says that rewarding yourself for how much you can get attached to appearances is not working for you. The outcome will be implicitly negative. Being attached to appearances is what got you into this samsaric mess in the first place. Using drugs and alcohol, or craving sex, for example, are instances of rewarding yourself which could harm you in the future. How so? You keep rewarding yourself when you do these things. It's like you are saying to yourself, "If it feels good do it some more." As a result, you delude yourself. The danger that you face is becoming so infatuated with appearances that you cannot awaken from the power they have over you.

Turning away from the enchanting power of appearances is about engaging in certain actions in order to avoid being overly attached to them. This process is implicitly positive in the long run. By training yourself now to curtail your desire for appearances, which are

conditioned things, you avoid future pain that comes with the loss of those conditioned things. The Buddhist way of life is, essentially, one of reminding yourself to practice detachment from the world of appearances, thus, avoiding undesirable outcomes in the future. This way of life helps to get you to awakening. The less appearances you are attached to, the better. During enlightenment, all appearances are suddenly removed. If you have too much attachment to them, guess what? No sudden enlightenment.

Many who take up the path so they can realize Zen's secret become monks or nuns. It helps to cut down on the bad habit of becoming more and more attached to appearances. It is better to learn to do with less than always wanting to accumulate more. By traveling light, so and concepts which block you from seeing your true nature.

## Chapter nineteen: Are you guessing?

When scholars write books they are in essence saying, “This is a really good guess. It is rational and has the support of my peers.” If you really want to study Zen and learn its secret, guessing won’t be enough. For you, Zen’s secret will be like seeing a precious jewel of great wealth in your hand. Yes, there it is—no more guessing! Only then will you know what Zen masters were hiding. Zen masters can only make allusions to this jewel because of its pure and universal nature that only a few have beheld in their lifetime. Unbeknownst to you, the very means that you are using to find this hidden jewel only serves to hide it that much more. You will never find Zen’s mysterious jewel this way. What you are left with is a guess—lots of guesses. A path of guessing is not the way. But thanks to people like you, the secret of Zen is always kept secret.

The guessing that you do relies upon your thoughts and various assumptions about Zen that you have loaded into your noggin. Here is what I mean. Let’s say that during the evening you are reading a book of koans such as *The Blue Cliff Record*. Each koan you discover makes some sense but to be honest, no sense. Something is missing. You lack the context of the koan. By context I mean that you are unable to see through what all the interrelated parts of the koan are connected. Instead, by adding your own context to these koans, you end up making the koan appear incoherent and almost unintelligible when in fact it is not that way.

Each koan in the past was composed by someone who realized the secret of Zen. Each koan, then, is a demonstration of the secret. It also has many ways to confuse you but only because you rely on various presuppositions that you have about Zen which are never other than confusing. No Zen master has ever told a Zennist that he or she can realize Zen’s secret by approaching it with their thoughts and various opinions and assumptions. The means they want you to employ is *no-thought* or *no-mentation*. This is the only way guessing can be eliminated and the secret revealed.

Don’t you find it odd that Zen has books of koans such as *The Blue Cliff Record* that only serve to hide the secret of Zen, forcing you to



guess what the possible answer to the koan is? But Zen has an implicit rule. Never stop someone hellbent on trying to use their thoughts and concepts to find Zen's secret because one day their thoughts and concepts will give out. Only then can the secret of Zen be revealed. In Zen this is called "great doubt" which means that you have to doubt, totally, the efficacy of the means that you are using to unlock Zen's secret. You could almost call great doubt the great crisis which is arriving at a point when you are at your wits' end—I mean really at your wits' end not just talking yourself into this crisis. You should have no way left by which to answer the koan.

Not only koans have a single, overarching context but also the various sermons given by Zen masters have the same context which is Zen's secret. When it seems to you that there are creating a mass of confusion. You can have as many chances as you want to try and guess Zen's mysterious context so that you will know Zen's mysterious secret. Still, you will never get it. Even though your very thoughts and concepts are composed of the substance of true reality, you will still remain in the dark. It is somewhat like a man riding an ox in search of an ox.

When you begin to see that your constant guessing only ends up with no knowledge of Zen's secret, it is only then that you are beginning to admit to your self that your way of doing things isn't working as you earlier expected it would. Zen is not an easy path if you are a stubborn person who refuses to admit that their way of doing things is the wrong way. Do you really believe that the history of Zen was about a lot of people who eventually discovered Zen's secret? You are wrong if you think this way. Yes, there were great teachers but they were few. Making matters even worse, how do you tell an unenlightened teacher of Zen from an authentic Zen teacher?

The difference between guessing and actually seeing your true nature which reveals Zen's secret is like night and day. But you could also say that it is like the difference between a glowworm and the sun.

## Chapter twenty: What's it like to swim before you know what swimming is really like?

It is natural to want to know what something is like before you actually do it or get there. A great German philosopher called this "knowing before you know." It's like a young kid who wants to know what it is like to swim so he can also use the diving board like all the older kids but is still afraid to go into water over chest high. Eventually, with the help of the swimming instructor this kid eventually learns how to swim and use the high dive having no more fear of deep water.

It is natural, but not very smart in Zen, for you to want to know the secret of Zen before you make the great effort to know it, personally. So what do you do? You might ask a lot of questions hoping for the right answer. For example, you might ask a Zen teacher what awakening is like? Or ask other questions such as does an enlightened person have special, mystical powers? Or do they still crave things like a good beer and sex?

There remains a huge divide between your questions which want definitive answers and the actual intuition of your true nature which reveals the secret of Zen. Still, you are not going to give up. You believe that you could partially imagine what awakening is like before you get there. So what do you do? You read a lot of books about Zen to help you get an idea of what enlightenment is like. Still, you are far away from being a real, dedicated Zennist.

But why is it that you want to know before you know? Is there some kind of fear behind this? Is this a kind of fear of the unknown? It could be. Looking back to the young kid there was in him an unconscious fear of drowning. Not all children are like little ducks who take to water without any fear. If you have read books about Zen training, you know it is not easy and can even seem unnecessarily rough. Is this bringing up the fear of the unknown? It could be. As a matter of fact, you only come to know that it was fear of the unknown

when you live in solitude with only your self to answer to as you pursue the secret of Zen. You hope that you have enough faith and courage to continue.

With any kind of new challenge we would like to know what we are getting into whether it is learning how to swim as a kid, or to seek enlightenment as an adult in which you may have to cut all of your ties to the past in order to see your true nature and, hopefully, learn Zen's secret. But there is a world of difference when you commit yourself to the quest. You have got your little cabin in the woods away from the madding crowd, eighty pounds of brown rice, some canned goods, kerosene, enough firewood and a few books on Zen. And you are now alone to face your self and, hopefully, realize Zen's secret.

## Chapter twenty-one: You have an ally.

When you learn by long practice to pay more attention to the deeper part of yourself, you will sense your ally (Socrates had one). This part of your self only begins to be noticed when you are alone in your stillest and darkest nights, which you have yet to experience since you probably live in either the suburbs or a busy city. I suspect that you still find such a lifestyle attractive. This could mean that you are more like a child at this point in your life who is still immature; who has many fears and is not ready to leave home. Eventually, you have to grow up and face what you fear the most. But keep in mind that you have an ally.

Your ally is your higher self which the Buddha calls “lord” or the “protector” which in Sanskrit is *natha*. This term can also mean a “refuge.” Its opposite *anatha* means unprotected or helpless which comes with fear and anxiety. But all of us have this ally—so do you. But this doesn’t mean much if you don’t access it and have to rely on others to be your lord in the matter of acquiring spiritual knowledge about Zen. It’s not really going to work out for you although I suspect you are dumb enough to believe that it will!

The Buddha once said that all creatures potentially have the buddha-nature. This nature is always trying to get through to you even though you cut it off most of the time. Your ally reminds you of it. Sometimes the ally whispers to you but you don’t hear it yet. You are still too enthralled with the world of the madding crowd (remember the chapter?). If you had any awareness of this ally it would be constantly showing you what a lazy, out of shape, dull witted, emotional cripple you are. In response, you would push yourself as hard as you could, for example, getting up at five-thirty in the morning to meditate and study then cut firewood for a couple of hours. Your ally would be constantly telling you that you don’t understand what the Buddha said in the discourses. Also, the ally would be there to tell you that you are far from knowing the secret of Zen.

Without this ally you can easily delude yourself into believing that you understand the teachings of the Buddha and even imagine that you know the secret of Zen or have a good idea of what it is. This is a

poison that you gulp down when you rely on books and your own interpretation as your means of learning the secret of Zen. Setting out to find the secret of Zen is not so much about an investigation through books as it is a deep dive into your self. This deep dive only commences when all ordinary, intellectual roads to the secret eventually come to a dead end. In other words, the secret of Zen must be directly apprehended by intuition.

Remember how important intuition is. A part of you is always trying to block the path to intuition. It might even insist that you use step-by-step reasoning as if there are other ways at arriving at truth. In Zen you have to go by way of intuition. This is the only means you have to uncover the secret of Zen. Your ally is important because the ally warns you when you are trying to cut off intuition.

It is something like the inner voice of a conscience, only a conscience that keeps you on the straight and narrow path telling you to keep looking within for pure Mind. This continuous effort of sustained focus and attention to intuit pure Mind brings you, eventually, to great doubt which I have mentioned earlier when, suddenly, your mental activity stops and you intuit Zen's secret.

You could even call the ally your spiritual conscience in addition to your lord and protector. It naturally arises as a result of the loss of your connection with true reality. Your physical existence and its life in the natural world represent your fall into nature which is impermanent and suffering. Your spiritual conscience is, constantly, opposed by what keeps you unawakened, which is working overtime to suppress your spiritual conscience. It represents your biological drive which is concerned about your ability to survive and reproduce.

## Chapter twenty-two: Koans

Looking at the Chinese characters 公案 that make up the word koan, it brings with it the context of a legal case in the sense of a precedent. In addition, you might think of the koan answering process as something like a spiritual trial including a judgment with a punishment. You are probably familiar with such koan collections as the more popular *Mumonkan* and the *Blue Cliff Record*. Many koans come from the *Record of the Transmission of Illumination* (景德傳燈錄) going back as early as 1004. The title further suggests a mind which is illuminated and therefore radiant or luminous. This idea goes back to the Pali discourses of the Buddha in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, *The Book of Ones (Sutta 51)*. As you might guess, intuiting this luminous mind, which is hidden within you, means that you now know Zen's secret. But you're not there!

The enigmatical and paradoxical stories or dialogues that make up koan collections, which are difficult to understand, are a means of forcing you to rely on your intuitive abilities which are little used in modern culture. You need to keep in mind that for those who know the secret of Zen the koans are neither enigmatical nor paradoxical. Each koan is an expression of awakening to Zen's secret amounting to a soteriological transformation. By contrast, if you fail to use your intuition adequately in this Zen trial or test, the judgment is swift and the punishment harsh which is more samsara, although you may not believe it.

More importantly, all koans are based on what is called the *huatou* which in Chinese characters is 話頭 which gives the sense of 'what is first' or is 'leading words' but also includes concepts. In Zen, this refers to what is primary or is before mind's activity (also pure Mind). Logically, mind's activity only serves to hide the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) which is synonymous with Zen's secret. Basically, the *huatou* is transcendent. According to one Zen master the *huatou* is the real substance of the universe, the first principle, which is

the expression of ultimate truth. It can only be transmitted spiritually since it is wordless and not tied to thought.

Koans without the guidance of a Zen master who has firsthand knowledge of the *huatou*; who also knows the answers to all the koans, makes your own efforts even more difficult since you are relying on yourself (the not so good part). Need I go further in telling you about yourself? Still, not all is in vain for you. There is another side to koans that is little discussed. They help to frustrate your intellect which is always standing in the way of your intuition forcing it into a kind of special double-bind which can lead to a sudden transformation whereby the secret of Zen is experienced, directly. Unfortunately, your intellect imagines that koans are interpretable like a riddle that all they require of you is ingenuity. As a result of your belief in your ingenuity, your intuition is shut down so that the real answer to the koan is never met with. In addition, you begin to accumulate theories and eventually saturate your intellect.

Believe it or not, it takes a long time to shift your mind over to an intuitive mode since modern culture has a powerful bias towards the analytical approach. When confronted with koans, this analytical approach tries to break down the koan into its various parts then reassemble them—but always in a way that never solves the koan.

If you can, imagine each koan as being like many chests or like steel boxes that come in a variety of shapes. Now imagine that there is only one key that will unlock them all. Let's call this key the *huatou*. While the forms of the koans all appear different they reveal the exact same thing which is the secret of Zen!

But there is more to Zen than trying to answer various koans, hopefully, to awaken to Zen's secret. It begins with right consideration (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*) which is the first part of the noble eightfold path (*arya-astanga-marga*). It culminates in right *samadhi* (*samyak-samadhi*) which is the actual stopping or cessation of mind's activity which has constantly been hiding and obscuring your true nature, burdening you with more theories.

If, on the other hand, right consideration is inadequate being done with little care or enthusiasm, nothing follows from it—certainly not unlocking the secret of Zen. Right consideration is more about you taking up reflecting on this mysterious nature that lies hidden within

you which is Zen's secret, that is, the *huatou*. This also requires working hard day and night to realize it, directly, this being *right samadhi*. In Chinese Chan this kind of spiritual hard work is called *gongfu* (工夫) which is not the same as the *gongfu* of martial arts. If you manage to unlock Zen secret, all the *gongfu* that you did in the past; all the effort that you made, will seem as nothing. Why is this? Because what you imagined Zen's secret was like was not like that at all.

You must always consider that your true nature is without any obscuring defilements—totally pure and invisible—in addition to being supramundane, transcending your mundane world in every possible way. This helps you to begin to shift away from your limited, former habit of perceiving the world. If you then feel like you are getting no place with your efforts it means that your enthusiasm is not there. You are deceiving yourself. You still love the world more than you love Zen's path.



## Chapter twenty-three: Getting sidetracked

Enthusiasm for Zen can, over time, wane for various reasons one of which is because you are, foremost, a biological creature with strong sexual urges. This comes under the banner of Darwinian fitness. Your biological window is only going to open so long before disease, aging and death grab hold of you. Looking at the opposite sex, imagining having sex with someone special, and much more, all stem from these powerful, hard to control, biological urges.

These urges just do not stop because you want them to stop. Even when you wear the robes of a monastic. Even in a Zen monastery sex goes on. It is not unheard of. There are scandals. It can become a major problem if you become sexually involved with someone. At that point, you have become sidetracked. Sexual ecstasy has caused you to become distracted from your main goal which is to uncover the secret of Zen. Think of it like a trap intended to keep you in samsara. You just took the bait, a bait that you could not resist which is what bait is supposed to do.

It is also easy to get sidetracked by getting too involved with the day to day politics of a particular Zen center or Buddhist community, or even a particular teacher. An important thing to remember, a Zen or Buddhist community should not be confused with the Sangha of the Triple Gem which is a spiritual community made up of those who have had a spiritual awakening. Nor should the Sangha of the Triple Gem be confused with a monastic body controlled by a set of rules. There is a lot to get involved in a typical Zen community or any Buddhist community for that matter. The people who meet there are in many ways like you. It soon becomes a family. Now you are running the risk of getting sidetracked!

You can also get easily sidetracked by falling into one particular practice such as doing a lot of seated meditation or zazen believing that it is enlightened practice. The sitting posture, itself, can be thought of as a kind of special ritual. So what? How is just sitting the same as intuition? Zen, which I have said earlier mean intuition, is all about

realizing your original nature, directly, thereby ceasing all confusion. What do you think is more important, the sitting posture, a kind of ritual, or intuition? Physical sitting has its limitations but being focused on intuiting your true nature can take place all during your waking hours. This is where you should be.

Another way to get sidetracked is say to yourself that after you go to college, become successful in your career, and raise a family, then you will devote yourself to unlocking Zen's secret. But this is like digging a well when you are thirsty. You've clearly decided to take the path of the Buddhist devil Mara. You mean you could not spare a few years of your youth to take Zen's path (the path of Buddhism also)? Maybe you were never that committed to Zen. You were curious about it but not curious enough to take it up, seriously. And maybe also, is about. Maybe it doesn't. Why take such a risk?

Another strange way of getting sidetracked is to believe that Zen is all about learning how not to give a fuck. Think of it this way, Zen is about allowing free rein to your thoughts and inclinations, as it were, living in the moment this being a kind of *naturalism* without any thought as to future consequences. The future just takes care of itself. But without the demand to realize the secret of Zen this naturalism will eventually collapse into a kind of *ontological nihilism* in which one believes that there is *no-truth-all-the-way-down* which is endemic in today's culture. It's not a good place to be. It is not a strength but a weakness of spirit. The easy chair has become preferable to the upward climb.

## Chapter twenty-four: The person within matters not the robe

Whether you make your robes on a sewing machine with the help of an abbot, a monk or a nun or buy your robes, including your *rakusu* which is a miniature version of robes, you are wearing a symbol that represents an aspiration for awakening to Zen's secret. In, itself, a robe is just cloth which could be used or new, or even a shroud.

Over time the Buddhist robe came to symbolize something like the renunciation of the life of materialism or even the overcoming of samsara in which the robe symbolized something like a spiritual placenta that transforms the one who wears it eventually into a Buddha. But symbols like the robe are not true reality, this being Zen's secret. It is merely a visible sign for something completely invisible and transcendent that is found within. There is no bridge from the robe to enlightenment.

The one who wears the robe is not made perfect by wearing the robe. Wearing the robe cannot banish greed, malice or stupidity. In fact, the robe will tell you little or nothing about the person who is wearing it and whether or not he or she is awakened. The Buddha even said that a *person is not easily known by outward form nor should you trust a quick appraisal*. The robe could well hide one who is uncontrolled and deluded.

The secret of Zen cannot be put into sacred objects like a Buddha statue gilded with gold. Nor can it be revealed to you by wearing a new robe or an old patched robe for a long period of time. But knowing this doesn't make you immune from being deceived. There is a lot of eye candy in a Buddhist temple including the tradition of Zen if you go to Japan. Robes and religious objects are just a part of that eye candy.

Much of what goes on in a temple or a Buddhist monastery is foremost a ritual (行持) which involves the manipulation of symbols. In the midst of this, however, Zen's secret remains hidden inside of you. It is very real even though you are ignorant of it, and it is

certainly transmitted when, in your innermost self, you catch a sudden glimpse of it.

In a way, the robes the monks and nuns wear, including all the Buddhist glitz and rituals are a means of pushing you to take enlightenment, seriously. They bring a certain seriousness that you need. Maybe after a few years of wearing the robe you might decide to become a hermit living in the mountains taking all that you've learned which is helpful, then push yourself to unlock Zen's secret, all while still wearing your robes.

For those of you who have never worn Buddhist robes; who might be trying to have the best of all possible worlds by studying Zen without becoming a monk or nun and living the life of a semi-hedonist, you might in the future be able to unlock Zen's secret. But it is doubtful. Such a life is for the curious, only. It is not the dedicated adept who has decided to make realizing the secret of Zen their life's goal. But then there is always that possibility that in order to awaken to Zen's secret.

Zen, more specifically, aims at the individual and not the group. We find in Buddhism terms like *pratyatman* and *adhyatman* which refer to our personhood, that is, our most intimate self which is where awakening has to take place. However, a lot of what goes on in the various institutions of Zen is related to the group, the teacher, and to the Buddhist community itself. These are all social interactions. Intuiting the secret of Zen is for the sake of first-person knowledge. It is beyond any imaginable sociological context. Such knowledge can't be shared with others and certainly not with a community of monks and nuns. If you hope to realize Zen's secret, your journey will have to go to the very depths of your personal being. You will have to go into seclusion.

## Chapter twenty-five: Sudden awakening

In the study and practice of Zen, one tenth of a second is plenty of time to see something extraordinarily profound—something that you've never seen before and maybe even thought it was impossible to realize. In Chinese, this sudden enlightenment whereby your true nature is revealed in a flash is called *dunwu* 頓悟. By such a sudden intuition you become a Buddha according to the legendary wall-contemplating Bodhidharma.

Researchers have found that it takes about a tenth of a second or about 100 milliseconds to judge the human face as to various qualities such as attractiveness or even aggressiveness. This is very important because this is about the time it takes to recognize your pristine true nature after years of trying to see it and often failing.

If the serious student of Zen has been searching for their true nature, which is the same as pure Mind (remember, there are many other names), they have also gone through the preliminary trouble learning what pure Mind is not. You can call this a path of negation. It's very important. Over time, if you want to become a serious student you have to let go of all your presuppositions about this nature until there is nothing left to cast aside.

Hopefully, in your endeavor the negative begins to turn towards the positive. There is a real attainment. You are trying to see your true nature but seem to know, at the same time, that you are still falling short. Overtime, nevertheless, you have the faith that it takes, eventually, to see this pristine state which is who you really are but which remains mysteriously embedded and hidden within you which cannot be drawn out by either words or thoughts.

Your search could last for five or maybe even twenty years which, mainly, consists of scouting for clues as to what this spiritual nature might be like, which involves a lot of reading and thought including a lot of disappointments.

For the serious Zen student, at times, it almost seems like they are on a wild goose chase. Maybe it is all a big joke. Surprisingly, for many students of Zen this thought has come across their minds several

times. For those Zennists who have concluded that Zen is some kind of spiritual joke to teach people to accept this world they live in and one day will die in as the true world means that they have failed Zen, miserably. You don't want to go here.

Such people are little more than what the Buddha called them a long time ago, namely, a *prithagjana* which can mean a fool or in general, a worldling. This is only to suggest that when one takes up the study of Zen they must have both great faith and great courage to support their faith. For without great faith and great courage, no *kenshō* will come in a tenth of a second, a point at which one sees the true nature of reality in contrast with the illusory world of birth and death that seems so real.

## Chapter twenty-six: Tiers

You have to understand that there are a number of levels of Zen Buddhism. Tier 1 is the moment of Siddhartha's awakening (*bodhi*) whereby he became the Buddha who then went on to teach others how to awaken (his great compassion). Obviously, you are not there yet and can't possibly imagine what his awakening was like. You would only be guessing—never certain.

Siddhartha's awakening ever remains a mystery for the unawakened for the simple reason that it cannot be shown to others or offered, especially with language and metaphors. For it is always beyond everything perceived and conceived. It can only be, indirectly, hinted at and only then with a great deal of difficulty because of the human tendency to misunderstand in addition to the tendency of mistaking the finger, which draws our attention to the object pointed at and the object, itself, in the example of the moon. The body of the Buddha's teachings springs from tier 1 but they are not in themselves tier 1.

Tier 2 is when you come to the deep personal conviction, after studying the Buddha's discourses, that Buddhism is asking you to awaken, personally, to ultimate reality which can only be uncovered within you by *dhyana* (profound intuition) which is a removal process. This means transcending mental activity, which includes thoughts and concepts, including mental confusion. In tier 2, you are now fully committed to uncovering the secret of Zen. You will be in some kind of retreat far from the city; maybe somewhere in the country or in the mountains. At this point you are on your own. You have to uncover the secret of Zen on your own. No one is going to hand it to you—not even the Buddha to come, Maitreya could help you.

Tier 3 has not arrived at tier 2—and knows absolutely nothing about tier 1. Tier 3 is mainly concerned with external, perfunctory practices, moral behavior, reading and chanting scripture, translating, participating in discussions about Buddhism, etc. The life of a monk or a nun would be also included in tier 3. Just as in China becoming a monk or a nun is important in the beginning if you are going to find a Zen (Chan) teacher.

Tier 4 can be characterized as “pop Buddhism” and by implication, “pop Zen.” Here, individuals (more at beginners) hesitate as to whether or not to take up tier 3. They have a lot of wrong opinions about Buddhism and about life in general. They even argue against the proposition that Zen has a secret which awaits to be uncovered by the serious student. They tend to be young and immature people who haven’t graduated from the college of hard knocks yet. Most of them are somewhat incorrigible and defensive; in truth, defending their youth and its shallowness. Still, they have some wisdom seeing the writing on the wall. Life is not going to get any better as they leave home to become real adults with adult responsibilities.

The one tier that ever remains off-limits is the first tier. Yes, you can speculate about it but no matter what the literature says, no ordinary mortal can wrap their head around it. You have to be somewhere in the second tier to begin to appreciate just how other-worldly the first tier is.



## Chapter I: The author's journey

I can't remember the name of the college course. It was about philosophy, but western and asian. It is where I also learned about Zen for the first time. The teacher of the course gave several lectures on the subject of Zen which I found to be very interesting. He personally knew the Japanese Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki. Zen, I have to confess, was the only subject that caught my attention. The professor also informed the class that when he was young, he took a class in Germany given by the great German philosopher Martin Heidegger who, I found out many years later, had an interest in Zen. How much, I don't know exactly. The story is that Heidegger had read D. T. Suzuki's book *Essays in Zen Buddhism* which had been given to him by the Japanese philosopher Nishitani. I should mention also that my teacher had eaten ice-cream with Mr. Suzuki in Hawaii!

Looking back to that youthful time, the only thing that set me apart from others of my generation was my growing obsession with trying to understand where, exactly, these Zen masters were all coming from. Thanks to my philosophy teacher's advice, I read some of Suzuki's books to get a feel for Zen. But it didn't help all that much. I sensed there was much more to Zen that I wasn't seeing. Its context was something I could only vaguely sense. Even my teacher's explanations were of little or no help although he tried. I realized I needed some help from someone who had studied Zen, the Zen that I was reading about. Zen was certainly a mystery for me but one that continually aroused my curiosity and then some.

As good fortune would have it, I eventually found a small Zen temple not too far away from where I was living at the time. I phoned up the abbot to schedule a visit. He wanted me to be there at six p.m. sharp the following day. I arrived and parked my car in front of the temple which was a regular middle-class home. What was unique about it, it had a Japanese garden in front, including a wooden fence with an old wooden gate which I entered through only to find a little pond inside that was fed by a little stream with a small waterfall. There were beautiful plants all around.

I rang the doorbell. A young monk wearing black robes with a shaved head answered the door and invited me in. I took off my shoes and followed the monk into a room where the abbot was sitting in white robes. I was later told the monk was the senior monk. It was everything I expected or better said, everything I hoped Zen would be about. Both the senior monk and the abbot were very relaxed and cordial.

The temple was connected with the Soto Zen Mission in San Francisco. To make a long story short, within a week or so, I was kicked out of the temple one night after being read the Zen riot act by the abbot, then told never to come back. I was devastated. This was actually a test thanks to the help of my mother who persuaded me to return. So I went back. I earnestly wanted to study Zen. I eventually took what is called *jukai* 受戒 which literally meant to “receive precepts” this being the “three refuges” consisting of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha and the five precepts. There was some other stuff which I don’t remember. In a nutshell, I went through a ceremony by which I became, officially, a Buddhist. Eventually, I had my head shaved and received robes.

I lived with the abbot for little over a year, learning what I had imagined to be the Zen way of life. Mainly, it consisted of being continually focused and aware of what you were doing from setting down a coffee cup to loading the abbot’s dishwasher and making his coffee. It didn’t take me too long to understand what I had to do and to keep doing it. It was not what I had expected. But insofar as I didn’t expect very much I remained open.

Sitting meditation or zazen, which was a part of the daily routine, was little more than a kind of ritual for me. I imagine I sat because, supposedly, Siddhartha sat under the Bodhi Tree. So according to this logic if I sit a lot I can also become a Buddha like Siddhartha over time. To be honest, I never bought the idea that sitting in a particular posture with my hands placed in a certain way is what turned Siddhartha into the awakened one — the Buddha.

At the temple, we did zazen maybe three times a day, sometimes more, but not consistently because the abbot made Japanese style gardens to help with the temple’s expenses. That meant the three of us worked together. In my mind, that sufficed for meditation. I enjoyed

moving stones around and, just as much, watching the abbot placing the stones in exactly the perfect spot. When I tried my hand at it, the abbot always corrected me. I could never get it right. But I was never undaunted by the experience. I thought I was learning Zen! This is what I wanted.

The abbot put me in charge of the temple's meagre library which meant I could read all the books on Buddhism and Zen I wanted. One book I became fond of at the time was titled, *The Sutra of Wei Lang* (or Hui Neng) that was translated from the Chinese by Wong Mou-Lam in 1944. The first chapter aroused my interest the most. It was about the awakening of the Sixth Patriarch (Huineng) which in the book he termed "Essence of Mind (literally, self- nature)." It proved to be quite interesting and beneficial because I began to form the strong belief that Zen is aiming at the same realization the Patriarch had.

The more I became familiar with the contents of the library the more I was convinced that Zen was the exact same path Siddhartha took who used *dhyana* to achieve enlightenment. It came as somewhat of a shock to me that the Patriarch had his initial awakening without practicing *zazen*. Evidently, upon hearing a verse from the *Diamond Sutra* while he was selling firewood in the market he became enlightened. In a way, *zazen* was more of a symbol for intuition. In time, it had become ritualized into a physical practice which meant keeping one's legs crossed and one's back ramrod straight. Many years later I read somewhere that when the Sixth Patriarch saw a monk sitting cross legged, he took his staff and beat that person until they got up.

Another book at that time which caught my attention was *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. It introduced me into a different way of looking at our common everyday world which we take for granted. What I initially drew from it is that all phenomena are unreal except for Mind-only or Mind purely itself. The world that we perceive out there is really the product of discrimination. In fact, external things, even my thoughts, do not really exist in reality. There is only one true reality. It is pure Mind. I have to confess the ideas in the book were, at the time, difficult for me to grasp. Looking back to those years a number of books became my lodestar which was to guide me where I needed to be despite all the confusion and turmoil that surrounded me because of the Vietnam War in which I became immersed like everyone else in my generation.

## Chapter II: Wild black lines

Eventually, the abbot and I had a parting of the ways. The abbot had fallen in love with the senior monk who after much consternation and deliberation decided to leave the abbot because it was not a way a life that he wanted. All this he confessed to me. I was sad to see him go. We had become friends of the spirit you could say. After this, any belief that I had in my head that the abbot was a Zen master soon evaporated like the morning dew on the lawn.

Still continuing with my Zen studies, by this time I realized that there was a decisive insight that must be attained. Somehow I knew it to the marrow of my bones. This insight I reasoned was just like Huineng's awakening when he was selling firewood having heard a verse from the *Diamond Sutra*. It was not a long drawn out realization but came, instantaneously, and unexpectedly. The abbot never once emphasized the importance of Zen's sudden awakening which for me was the alpha and omega of Zen Buddhism. Only by means of this sudden awakening could Zen's secret be unlocked and disclosed to me. This was the foundation upon which the koans were constructed and authentic Zen transmitted.

To make a long story short as luck would have it, some years later I happened to attend an evening lecture at San Jose State College which was given by Bishop Nippo Shaku (1910– 1991), of the Nichiren tradition. At the time, I believe that he was teaching at the California Institute of Asian Studies. When I first saw him, he looked liked a bespectacled Sumo wrestler in his black robes. However, when he began his lecture, I immediately got the impression that he knew what he was talking about. He certainly knew more than the abbot who smoked too many cigarettes and drank too many bottles of beer (after the senior monk left the abbot drank a lot of cheap beer trying to drown his emotional pain).

One lecture I remember in particular was a lecture about the ordinary human mind of birth and death. He began the lecture by showing us this crazy looking, poster size ink brush painting he had made with black ink. It looked liked something Jackson Pollock might have done if he had been born and raised in Japan.

Bishop Nippo went on for a long time talking about the ordinary mind represented by the heavy, wild black lines which I took to be my thoughts—the very activity of thinking. Then with a grin, looking at the class he said, “And here is your pure Mind” pointing to the white paper. Right then and there, it suddenly dawned on me that there is a real insight I must have. I have to look into my own mind (yes, my ordinary Jackson Pollock mind) and try to see this pure Mind in which there were no thoughts.

## Chapter III: Climbing then falling

After Bishop Nippo's lecture I concluded that I had to go into retreat. As I look back, it was all set up for me—maybe some good karma in my past. My family had an old house in the foothills of California. My dad bought it around the time of WWII hoping that in the future he could turn it into a health spa since the quality of its mineral water is what made it famous during the 19th century. He called it the “ranch.”

Specifically, the ranch was located in the motherlode of California, between Copperopolis and Knights Ferry. It was an old house next to a stream with two spring houses connected by a small concrete bridge. Maybe a hundred feet from the house was an *adit* which in mining terms is a horizontal opening into a hill or a mountain with a single entrance. It was like a cave.

I thought of the adit to be like Bodhidharma's cave on Songshan (Mt. Song). His cave went back some twenty-three feet. The adit where I did seated meditation went back some forty- three feet. It was cool in the summer and stayed comfortable in the winter. At the end of the adit I put up a small, crude Buddhist shrine that I had made from old wood I had found around the ranch. I spent many hours there, and between Copperopolis and Knights Ferry, also walked many miles alone, maybe running into a coyote once in a while. This was my walking meditation which I greatly enjoyed.

Being in solitude and being alone have somewhat different meanings. Solitude is living alone being surrounded by nature. In my case, my nearest neighbor was seven miles away. Being alone, on the other hand, is just learning to stay away from other people. It could be living by yourself in a studio apartment. The key to solitude is being with nature. The great American mystic Walter Russell once said, “Nature is a most jealous god, for she will not whisper her inspiring revelations to you unless you are absolutely alone with her.” I found his words to be very true. Something unexplainable happens to us when we put ourselves into her hands. The foreboding that one may have in the beginning is transmuted into forbearance and a kind of authentic openness. It worked in my case.

I had arranged for a friend to bring me supplies once every two weeks. I lived off mainly white flour, white rice, Japanese pickles called *takuan* which was named for the Zen monk who is credited with its invention, and wild watercress which was in abundance. I drank lots of tea. It helped me during my time when I sat in the adit doing meditation. With such a diet and given my walking which could be many miles, I got thin as a rail. But I was in very good shape physically. Spiritually, I realized I was about to go up or go down. It was either a climb to the top of Mt. Wisdom or a headlong fall into the abyss. At the time, I hadn't realized that to get to the summit of wisdom it is necessary to go fall into the abyss.



## Chapter IV: No in-between

In retreat at the ranch, the first thing that I noticed was the silence. Several flies in the room where I planned to do my studying were not unnoticed by my ears as well as the sound of breeze blowing through the dry grass I heard through the opened window. Eventually, with all the sounds of the different birds and the coyotes at night, including a bullfrog by the spring house who thought it was Mario Lanza, nature became for me a busy place once I got used to it. I even heard the bats making noise who found a home between the aluminum roof and the wooden shingles that the aluminum covered. Over time I knew most of the sounds.

As a rule I got up before sunrise to meditate either in the house or in the adit. By the time I got done meditating it was starting to get light outside. I had more studying to do. But more important than the books I read and reflected on, I looked within for the *pure Mind* that was supposedly somewhere between my two ears. This was what I learned from Bishop Nippo's lecture. I began to see what, clearly, were the heavy, wild black lines. In fact, they were always there. The Buddha called them defilements or in Pali, *asava*, insofar as they only acted to hide pure Mind—not reveal it. They also had an intoxicating power of their own. They seemed necessary although they blocked my access to pure Mind.

Having nobody else around except myself helped to make me more of a friend to my self—I mean I had to take care of myself, I couldn't afford to get neglectful or sloppy. This friend became my higher self or ally. It made sure that I kept on task. "Remember why you are here—you're trying to realize pure Mind," it would seem to whisper to me not infrequently. I never cut myself any slack. I kept a schedule. It gave meaning to what I was trying to accomplish although I had not the slightest idea what pure Mind was and how to see it in the midst of all these heavy, wild black lines that confused me.

After a while the schedule brought with it a certain kind of monotony but never to the point of boredom. Yes, there was a lack of variety but I was on a spiritual mission. It had one aim: to see pure Mind. Everything I did was for the sole purpose of having an intuition

of pure Mind. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that within my noggin pure Mind was there. There was something, too, that I was doing that kept missing it. Reading koans or the sermon of a Zen master made it only that much more apparent that I was just going around in circles. I was trying to see pure Mind as I wanted to see it or see it the way I imagined it should be.

Sitting more and more in the adit didn't help as I imagined it would. The natural silence of the adit seemed to make my body quieter. That was interesting. Apparently, my body was trying to adapt to the natural silence of the adit by being, itself, more and more still. Every time I left the adit I imagined myself coming out of a rock birth canal. Exiting the adit, the and the foothills possessed a kind of beauty that made everything seem like an illusion. In this beauty I thought I could almost see pure Mind. Not only did my thoughts still hide pure Mind but so did the world as I walked back to the ranch.

After one or two meditations, I usually walked to the spring house to wash my face to wake myself up for the next part of my daily schedule which might consist of reading a discourse of the Buddha or maybe some verses from the *Dhammapada*. I looked forward to making pancakes and then having tea afterwards. I burned a lot of incense, too—first thing when I got up. It was the same brand that the abbot used at his temple. It acted as a kind of link to my romantic idealized view of Zen.

During the daylight portion of the day I made sure I had enough small pieces of firewood to cook with. What I enjoyed was taking a long hike, maybe a few miles. One day, for example, I would hike maybe north a few miles or south, then the east and after that, west. The walking was a kind of meditation that helped me to take my mind off of mundane worries that were like the buzzing flies. Sometimes I would sit under a pine tree and read out loud from the *Dhammapada*. I liked to hike to this hill maybe once a week where there were some pine trees.

Sometimes I would follow a small stream for a while then sit in meditation by a little waterfall giving myself up to its sound as if it were cleansing me. But always the wild black lines were there which represented my thoughts: a never ceasing activity of thinking. I was powerless to stop the thoughts. Still, I had come to believe that pure

Mind was right here. I was doing something wrong. But I had no idea what, exactly, I was doing wrong. With Zen it seems to be the case that you awaken or you don't. There is no in between.

## Chapter V: Nothing gradual here

One of my favorite Zen books during this time in retreat was *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* that had been translated into English by John Blofeld. It seemed to offer clues as to what this pure Mind was that I was searching for. Huang Po said that “this pure Mind is the source of everything.” But then he went on to say that it, “shines forever and on all with the brilliance of its own perfection.” What did that mean? I wasn’t sure what it meant. How was I to see that brilliance in the space between my two ears? At times it seemed that the more I read the more difficult the path became. I was not getting a handle on what this pure Mind was although I couldn't stop reading the book.

Huang Po also spoke about the One Mind. He said, for example, “Only awake to the One Mind, and there is nothing whatsoever to be attained.” Again, what did his words mean for me? What was the difference between awakening and nothing to be attained? I guess I am spiritually asleep living in a dreamworld. If I attained anything in that world it would be made of fairy dust! How do I wake up from this sleep so that the One Mind is easily recognized? Does the dreamer just say wake up? I couldn’t see that working for me.

My studying consisted of reading by a kerosene lamp in the evening. The lamp was about the equivalent of a 15 watt light bulb. It didn’t take me long to adjust to reading in this dim light. With so much silence around me my reading was more focused than usual. Still, many times I would have to reread the page again. I just couldn’t understand most of what I was reading. This was especially true with the *Lankavatara Sutra* which was a translation made by D. T. Suzuki.

Sometimes I would reread some important parts from *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* few then move on to the *Lankavatara Sutra*. I also had a copy of his book, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*. This Sutra was a very esoteric discourse. I had never read anything like this before. I was drawn to it for some strange reason. As usual, I could not get my head around it. It made sense to me then no sense. I was missing something. Still I went back for more. All the books sitting on my small bookshelf had become like great Zen masters, and I was this

spiritually retarded student suffering from spiritual amnesia who could not see the obvious which was pure Mind!

As I studied more, it became apparent to me that if Zen, at first, developed from any school it was the Lanka School named after the *Lankavatara Sutra*. This was the school that Bodhidharma belonged to. The specific Zen School 禪宗 came much later which was also called the Buddha Mind School 佛心宗. It had become obvious to me, also, that everything I had been reading thus far, to use the words of D. T. Suzuki from his book, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, rested on the fact that the various notions of Buddhism, “cannot be grasped and taken into one’s life in their true perspective unless a spiritual insight is gained, understand Buddhism with all of its complexity, including Zen, I knew that I first had to somehow see this pure Mind. I could not, so to speak, reverse engineer Zen so as to reveal its essence. It was impervious to this sort of treatment including analytical reasoning which was always based on the written word.

Zen, I also discovered, had nothing of the usual learning curve. Learning the history of Zen or learning Pali or classical Chinese, yes, there was a learning curve. But as far as making headway in the sense of getting closer to pure Mind, there was no curve. Nor could there be a gradual approach to intuiting pure Mind, any more than there is a gradual approach to remembering where you put your car keys that you need right now, or remember that guy’s name who is standing in front of you, whose name you used to know quite well.

## Chapter VI: Looking into that space between my ears

As my retreat at the ranch became more like a fixed program, it seemed like every day I was running out of options by which to unravel Zen's secret, seeing firsthand, pure Mind. I was not aware that I was coming into any sort of crisis which I was to learn many years later is necessary, but it can't be willed as if to talk yourself into it. In the meantime, the more I read the Zen masters and the discourses of the Buddha seeking pure Mind, I seemed to become more out of kilter. What came to grow inside of me was more of a sense of loss. I was missing something vital and felt it all the more as I became involved in my quest for pure Mind.

Being in solitude at the ranch, I could not escape from my growing predicament. I was stuck with myself seeking to realize pure Mind and not having any success. In that situation I would not allow any diversions for myself: a temporary escape from the task at hand. I pushed myself to see pure Mind which lay hidden within me while, at the same time, seeming to drown in all the wild black lines of thought.

Yes, I could understand a tiny bit of what I was reading during the long evenings by a kerosene lamp sipping tea or rolling a cigarette. But it was just bits and pieces, hardly, of any real value. I couldn't see the mysterious underlying principle through which the, seemingly, disparate elements cohered. I lacked satori, that singular moment when Zen's mysterious barrier suddenly disappears and Zen's secret is revealed whereby Zen becomes very logical with no more confusion.

What do you do when you sense that you are going in circles trying to find your way out of the dark forest of thought? I started to read koans more and more. Maybe I could find some clues in the book *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* which came in a slipcover that was a beautiful Japanese style box sheath. It was four Zen books in one, two of which I spent a lot of time on. *The Gateless Gate* and *101 Zen stories* were the two books I would read a lot and, occasionally, the *10 Bulls*.

I was drawn to both books although I got no immediate satisfaction from the koans in *The Gateless Gate* 無門關. A better title would have

been *Forty-eight Impenetrable Barriers*. This is what Mumon in his comment to the first koan, *Joshu's Dog* is clearly suggesting: *To realize Zen one has to pass through the barrier of the patriarchs*. That made some sense to me but then Mumon throws in the paradoxical as an afterthought: *Enlightenment always comes after the road of thinking is blocked*. For me, that harkened back to Bishop Nippo's lecture with his poster size ink brush painting of heavy, wild black lines. Could it be that there is a sudden disappearance of the black lines—I mean all these thoughts in my noggin? That put me right back into pure Mind which I only knew as two words and a concept that was not the real thing. It was just a big black, squiggly line.

Deluded Zen, I soon discovered, is about forming black lines in the belief that they are pure, white paper. I had to wake up fast to the fact that I was doing this. In other words, I was deceiving myself. The higher self in me, a kind of ally, affirmed it. I didn't try to override my ally's judgment. What was I defending if not my delusions? That seemed to be a stupid, counterproductive practice. I also began to sense that any and all thoughts about pure Mind acted as a barrier and, at the same time, I was putting all of my thoughts into pure Mind.

I also came to understand that some of the koans could seem to be interpretable in the example of *Joshu Washes the Bowl*. But was it? By that time, going through a lot of koans, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the same key unlocked all the forty-eight koans. But I didn't have the key. I sensed, however, that pure Mind was the key; not pure Mind of thought (the black lines) or some kind of mental image, but the real, direct experience, of beholding it face to face.

Eventually, I began to see the world around me differently I think in part to meditating in the adit. After being in the dark except for a lighted candle for a little over an hour, coming out the entrance made everything look beautiful but with an otherworldly kind of quality. I wondered if the rock that surrounded me had some effect on my psyche. It didn't take long for the world around me began to be like the wild black lines that hid the essence of the universe. Whatever this essence was I was not able to make contact with it. I assumed the purity of Mind to be beyond even my powers of imagination to envisage much less realize it.

I had no ability to outsmart Zen which calls upon us to use our intuition which is seldom used these days. Still, the koans and the Zen sermons I read every day offered no clues. I began to think about my life worried that I would not make it past the wild black lines seeing pure Mind. Keeping busy seemed to help such as cutting firewood or walking to the little stream down the road where there was a lot of wild watercress. It had a wonderful hot, pungent taste. I ate it uncooked or sometimes cooked putting it on my rice.

Keeping myself busy was key in staving off my doubting thoughts—I just could stay in bed bemoaning my predicament. But that was not right. It helped to make physical demands on my body. My thoughts about pure Mind were, nevertheless, all related to this earthly life that took me to an impenetrable barrier that I could not, as yet, get through nor fully understand.

The words I read in Zen's various sermons only drew my attention to this barrier that the Zen masters had broken through to a world that I was unfamiliar with; a world that I could only imagine and thus become even more deceived than I was before. The words of the Zen masters were like traps that I kept getting caught in and had to get out of. They were not doors or portals to pure Mind. I was just learning the confines of my earthly prison which had blank windows that my imagination would fill in. But the pictures it painted were no more than the wild black lines which I had learned to recognize. Nevertheless, I was growing more frustrated over time. In spite of this, I was not deterred. I was still seeking pure Mind, looking into that space between my ears.



## Chapter VII: Over and over again

It was hard for me to accept, at first, that I was making the same mistake, over and over again. Nevertheless, over time at the ranch, surrounded by nature, a trace or maybe a pattern started to emerge that I was, in fact, repeating the same mistake. As I sought to see pure Mind by the usual means I was actually exacerbating the problem to the point where I began to sense that my efforts were becoming unproductive and futile.

The pure Mind that I was seeking was not in thoughts or thoughts as concepts. That is what Zen was telling me from my readings. Still, I was using them. While watching all this, in the background was *me* which I only knew, indirectly, through thousands of different thoughts such as thoughts of my past, that is, thoughts of my boyhood, thoughts of growing up and going to school and now thoughts of finding pure Mind. With all these thoughts, to be honest, I had never met my real self, personally, face to face! In the meantime, who I really was, was 'x' seeking pure Mind.

Daily, the wild black lines of thought made up my entire existence yet something told me that I was not seeing the big picture. But the more of me was still undaunted. Making pancakes in the morning followed by tea—what a delight! That helped. Rolling a cigarette, reading a few pages from John Blofeld's book *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai* then trying to get rid of these deluded thoughts (aren't all these thoughts of mine deluded?) and trying to get to the very root which for me was pure Mind, I was not having any success. But my faith was still strong.

At some point I began to look for pure Mind as if it were something more than an abstract thought. As crazy as it sounds, I looked for it into the axe I was sharpening as if it could be there. Maybe it was in the cigarette I was rolling. When I went down to the spring house to fetch a bucket of water I looked into the well for pure Mind. When I dipped my bucket into the well, I listened to the splashing sound. Is pure Mind here? I looked into the dirt road I was walking on or the trunks of the oak trees. When I sat in meditation in the adit I looked at the candle illuminated rock wall for pure Mind.

One day on one of my walks, I discovered a beautiful little grotto with a waterfall of about eight feet or so. The waterfall poured into one pool of water which fed a smaller pool over which was a tree branch that reflected, perfectly, into the pool. I imagined that pure Mind was like the pool while the branch with its leaves was thought. In no way did the still water interfere with the reflection of the branch; nor did the branch cause ripples. From this I began to wonder if my sensory world wasn't like a huge reflection on the mirror of Mind. I began to think to myself that the branch's reflection on the surface of the pool was mesmerizing almost to the point where the water disappeared. Still, I could manage to see the water as in, this is the branch-reflection; this is the water. But I couldn't as yet see pure Mind.

What if all that we perceive through our senses and by thought was only a reflection thrown on pure Mind like a movie shown on a white screen? I began to draw close to the idea that the senses including my world of thoughts and imagination, were mere images that appeared on this screen. I was trying to see the screen minus all these images. I was not having any luck of seeing this screen, however. I was creating more black lines of thought.

At some point in time it occurred to me that I was building a prison for myself—not from the outside—but working from the inside. Every brick was a thought so that when I was done I would be totally imprisoned surrounded by all my thoughts! I didn't want that. I had to stop this. But real stopping meant for me seeing my pure Mind which was, at this point in my retreat, becoming more difficult as I grew to know that my thoughts were these wild black lines.

Being up at the ranch by myself made me completely dependent upon myself. I was a questioner who had, also, to find the right answer. I had to answer my own questions and overcome my own doubts. Nothing out in nature would help me or so I believed. Over the weeks I adopted Mother Nature as my teacher and friend, plus I had my ally who was tough on me; who would not cut me any slack. My attention had to be directed to finding pure Mind.

## Chapter VIII: This is my time

About fifty-feet from the eastern side of the ranch house was a small creek that was my playground when I was a boy. I especially liked to make little rock dams or look for a turtle or polliwogs. My sister and my cousins often played there when we would go up to the ranch with our parents for a day or two. The creek had a small waterfall of about two-feet. During my retreat I still went to this spot, occasionally. Sometimes I might see a beautiful orange dragonfly called a flame skimmer. He followed the creek beginning from the spring house to just below the waterfall going back and forth.

I can remember being fascinated by a little whirlpool that was spinning around to the left side of the waterfall. The debris that was spinning around consisted of small twigs with some dirty, whitish foam. Evidently, not all the water wanted to go down stream. Some of it managed to resist; trying to go upstream which created the dynamics of the whirlpool. This little whirlpool, I imagined, was myself. I couldn't return to the past and didn't yet know the mysterious beyond wherein lay Zen's secret (down stream). The past I was sure of—it had already happened. But would I awaken tomorrow or the next week or in a couple of months to pure Mind? I didn't know. I knew that realizing pure Mind was my only escape.

My retreat world helped me to close off my desire to escape back into the world of the madding crowd, a world of little whirlpools like me. But if I left my retreat for a month or so, this would only be a diversion: a running away from my quest to see pure Mind. I couldn't afford that. This is my time. Do or die! Trying to push forward, I was still turning around and around caught up in the wild black lines as I attempted to see pure Mind which I had to confess seemed to turn into a path of will as if I had the power to will the black lines away (which I didn't).

It didn't take me long to realize that by using my will I would be deceiving myself once again. I reflected that in order to stop my thoughts, which were Nippo's heavy, wild black lines, the thoughts would have to arise from an unconscious level. How could my will go to the unconscious? It could only deal with thought as they occurred. I

began to reason that this would be like trying to pat-down ripples on a pond with my hands which would only cause more ripples.

At this point I began to wonder if pure Mind and thought (the black lines) were spiritually distinct. This idea had occurred to me before but not like this. I was going back to the drawing board in other words. At the abbot's temple, I remember reading in the *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* by Suzuki that *citta*, a Sanskrit word that could mean either 'mind' or 'thought' depending upon the context. This helped. My noggin began to clear up. What if pure Mind was the essence or substance of thought in the same way that water is what waves M?

All these swarming thoughts in my head would have to come to a sudden halt resembling a still pond empty of ripples. *Citta*, as thought, which is other than the pure Mind I was focused on, would logically have to be brought to a sudden halt. This stopping then would be *acitta* which would reveal pure Mind. What is *acitta*? I reasoned it meant something like, *no-thought*. This could only mean that *acitta* was, in fact, inconceivable for thought, and was pure Mind or the very substance of thought! This helped but it made my task even more difficult. I concluded that I am to realize, directly, the very essence of my thoughts which is inconceivable. But I was still in the dark as to how thoughts stop so as to reveal pure Mind. I was entering new territory. Who had ever heard that Zen is about intuiting the very essence of thought or, the same, the very substance of thought—I means what is thought made of?

The individual thought, in this regard, was more like a snowflake. What I didn't know is that the snowflake-thoughts of mine were composed of water only (i.e., , pure Mind). The snowflakes were an artistic formation of water and nothing beyond it. I reflected on this more. My five senses and their respective objects such as the eye and visual shapes, ear and sound, nose and odors, tongue and taste, the body of skin and touch is what I could not get beyond. Then an additional sense I was facing was the mental sense with its various objects such as thoughts, imagination, and concepts, including my will and inclination.

Over time I was starting to see how trapped I was in my senses and by my mental activity which I relied on to help me realize Zen's secret.

I don't know how many times this thought came to me but I knew that I wasn't really getting anywhere. I was on a strange merry-go-round and couldn't get off. I could only move from horse to horse. My frustration began to grow with my approach to Zen's secret. But what else was there? The six senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and my mental activity, the six sense, which seemed to be my only tool for learning the secret of Zen, seemed to be useless!

## Chapter IX: Take away the illusion

I was residing in a limited body subject to death, living in a house which gave me limited shelter but nothing like a refuge free of suffering. I meditated in an adit that went back 43 feet in hard rock. It would help me to calm down and focus my attention, but that's all. Maybe tonight I will leaf through Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)*. Maybe I can find a clue to help me. I lit the kerosene lantern, rolled a cigarette and leafed through the book hoping to find an interesting tidbit. After a while I decided to sit in meditation in the adit.

I lit the hurricane lantern and headed for the adit past the two spring houses. Outside in the dark I could only see a crescent moon. The stars were bright and filled the sky. I walked up the slope and came to the adit's entrance. There was a manzanita tree with its smooth reddish trunk seeming to guard the entrance. I entered the adit and lit the candles on the shrine which were in front of my hand carved Buddha. And there I sat while a long stick of incense burned. I blew out the flame in the hurricane lantern.

For some unexplained reason I was able to meditate exceptionally well this night in the adit. I felt like I was the plumb bob on the end of a plumb line going down deeper and deeper into my being. Everything became more still the deeper I went. However, as deep as I managed to go I didn't find pure Mind. It wasn't inside this carcass of mine. I was just a bag of skin, innards and bones. That's all I discovered. Maybe an hour later I relit the hurricane lantern, blew out the candles and walked back to the ranch house.

As odd as it sounds, my once dear body I realized was not who I was, fundamentally. I was in this body but not off it. It seemed that I was more like a radio signal that had entered the radio. I could see all the radio parts but not the signal which I was later to learn was where my self was to be found.

I think I know what the Buddha was talking about when in Horner's translation of *The Middle Length Sayings* I mistakenly believed that my corporeal body was my self. I had identified with this material body as being who I was, the same with my feelings,

perceptions, habitual tendencies and even my consciousness. But I was wrong. These five groups that I was grasping at were not who I really was. But then who was I? Who was reading the words of the Buddha? Who had taken *jukai* back in 1965? Who was listening to Bishop Nippo's lecture that night at San Jose State?

What if it turns out that this pure Mind is really who I am which is other than who I believe I am right now? Who cares about the names? *One Mind, Buddha-Nature, or Atman*. Words, they say in Zen, are like the finger pointing to the moon. Okay, I think I get it. The moon in the sky is what I need to see. But the image I see reflected at night in the stream between bridge that connects the two springs. The reflected moon in the water is like a thought or a concept of the real moon above. Somehow I need to raise my head up! A thought of the moon or pure Mind is not the real moon above or pure Mind. More and more I saw that I was immersed in a grand illusion and that maybe I was trying to connect with what the illusion is made from. But that hinged on what the philosopher Plotinus said, "Take away everything!" For me it was, take away the illusion to find the unremovable essence. With that another day in my illusory world began. I was its prisoner but only because I was asleep, almost beyond waking up.

Yes, waking up is hard to do especially when you are in a dream so very real and believe you are awake! Didn't the Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra* tell us, "*that all phenomena have the nature of illusion and dreams, that they are pithless as the stem of the plantain, and similar to an echo*"? I had to include myself in that grand illusion, even all those changing wild black lines of thought in my head.

When I came to dead ends like this I had to go walking for a couple of miles. I would always walk in one of the four cardinal directions. It was much easier to deal with my illusory body than with my ever flowing and sometimes turbulent mind. It seemed to me that the path of Zen put a lot of emphasis on overcoming this illusory mind —those wild black lines that I was struggling with. When I walked a lot my mind would get peaceful but it never stopped. Peaceful meant low level agitation. I had worries to contend with, too. Let's call it the worry of a failed life.

My walk found me in one of my favorite spots, a little hill with several pine trees on it with abundant pine needles that I could use for

a meditation cushion. Meditation in these kinds of spots seemed to make stillness easier to achieve although the black lines were still there. I had already learned how to put my monkey mind into chains. But the monkey and I had not been transcended like both the Ox and the Man in the “Ten Oxherding Pictures” in D.T. Suzuki’s book, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. I could only imagine what it would be like. Still that’s not good enough for Zen.



## Chapter X: A dunce before great wisdom

At this point the future of my retreat was a mixture of hope and pessimism. As for today, if someone had visited me at the ranch and wanted to know what my practice was like I could only say that it was a special kind of de-conditioning. I know that is an odd way to put it. But the way the Buddhas see the world it is never other than conditioned or the same, composed just like my body is a composition of trillions of cells.

Ultimate reality—and yes, pure Mind—is unconditioned and simple. It is reached by a process of de-conditioning. This is what real meditation or *dhyana* is all about. This further means that you just don't sit on a cushion in an adit to quiet or still those black lines of thought, but also while you walk; while you cut firewood; carry two buckets of water back to the house. Even when you make pancakes you still your thoughts. The same goes with making tea and rolling a cigarette or two!

The de-conditioning process itself is not enlightenment. It only makes it possible for pure Mind to be intuited since the former mentally agitated barriers have been weakened by repeated stilling offering much less resistance. It's like the difference between a stormy sea and a calm sea with small waves. This is hard to do if you prefer to live among the madding crowd imagining that you have control over your mind the way you do in retreat. Sitting in meditation in the adit for two forty-minute periods set me up to extend that stillness right down to rolling a cigarette or making a cup of tea. But this is only part of the process towards intuition, besides looking at the world as a huge, impermanent illusion with nothing guaranteed except death.

It didn't take me too long to have a real aversion towards the ways of the world seeking, instead, supreme liberation which is why I went into retreat considering my youth and the drives that come with it. But I had no idea how difficult it would be to realize pure Mind, and how my habit of always attaching to the thick black lines of thought could not be knocked down so easily. No matter what I read by Zen masters,

I could tell they could see what I couldn't see and was struggling to see especially with the koans. Even their gestures seemed, somehow, to issue from the core of their awakening. And here I was a dunce before great wisdom. I knew what their words seemed to mean but not what these Zen masters had personally realized, call it the awakened state.

At the ranch I had my own small temple, namely, the temple of self-admonishment. This was at the back of the Buddha's words or the words of the Zen masters I was reading. I well understood that you couldn't pretend awakening or that you understood the secret of Zen. Short of that, the path was about taking yourself to task on a daily basis; reminding yourself that those thick black lines were not pure Mind which could only be intuited.

Overall, what had happened to me thus far was more like the parable in the *Lotus Sutra* where a group of people are being led by a guide through a dark forest of evils to the Isle of Jewels. Eventually, the group becomes weary and dispirited. They want to turn back because the journey through the forest was too difficult. Then the guide tells them there is a great city not too far from where they are. They can lodge there. What they don't know is that the guide makes an illusory city for them where they can have enjoyment and rest so that they might regain their strength for their arduous journey ahead. When the guide sees that their fatigue is gone, he then causes the magic city to disappear. He then tells the group that the great Isle of Jewels is quite near and that with great effort they will reach it.

The Buddha is the guide and people like me are those seeking the pure Mind (the great treasure and secret of Zen). The magic city is Buddhism. My time with the abbot must have been my life in the magic city. I surmised that the lecture with Bishop Nippo was like taking up the journey through the forest of evils to reach the Isle of Jewels.

One day I decided to walk to Knights Ferry and pay a visit to the general store and maybe take a dip in the Stanislaus River.

## Chapter XI: To learn how to see

I crossed the stream hoping to make good time on my journey to Knights Ferry. I had my rucksack, a metal cup to get water from a pipe that came out the side of a hill just past Tommy's ranch, in addition to bringing some tobacco and paper to roll a few cigarettes. I also had a few bucks to buy some essential items (Dinty Moore canned stew). I figured the walk was about eight miles over rolling hills with an occasional Meadowlark to keep me company and brighten my spirits with its beautiful, uplifting song.

As I made my way over one hill I stopped to watch a horse running almost as if it were playing, not having to wear a saddle anymore or carry a cowboy around who wanted to check out the fence looking for breaks. Much to my surprise the horse suddenly leaped into the air, kicked its hind legs then let loose a loud, echoing fart! It was beautiful. My thoughts almost stopped. I laughed.

The scenery, as usual, took my mind off those black lines of thought and my growing pessimism. I was beginning to think, now and then, that I was an idiot. I didn't have the brains or the good karma to realize pure Mind. Nevertheless, I kept walking and forced these thoughts down. What else could I do? I had given them my life all these years. I even felt comfortable with them. And now I wanted to abandon them—get past them. I wanted to see their mystical source. But they wouldn't heel all that much. Sure, I could still them but apparently that was not good enough to see the secret of Zen that they hid from me.

I finally made it past Tommy's ranch. Not far was the pipe with the fresh water coming out of it. I eventually reached it; took out by metal cup from the rucksack and drank my fill. My thirst was gone. I eventually reached the general store, made my way up the steps, went inside and found a few canned goods that would be a change from the rice, pickles and watercress. I paid for then then unslung my rucksack and put them inside.

I decided to sit down at this old round table that I figured my dad sat at during the 1930s or maybe earlier. Soon, a couple of cowboys sat down, then the Olympia beer man came into the store and gave

everyone a free can of beer. I couldn't believe it. I was drinking a cold beer after my long walk. It was the best beer I ever had but I think for the simple reason that I had been walking for a long time and hadn't had a beer for months—call it a beer fast. Somehow getting jaded is easy to do. Just keep doing the same thing over and over again like drinking beer and playing music day in and day out.

I decided to take a walk through the covered bridge that helps to make Knights Ferry a tourist attraction. I remember driving through the bridge just after I got my driver's license. What fun that was in my 59 Volkswagen. So now I am a bit older looking for ultimate reality having fallen short of the goal but still optimistic although I was sailing in uncharted waters understanding that the best Zen books and their words were not going to help me all that much. I was sailing without a compass looking for pure Mind.

The thought of walking back to the ranch depressed me a little. I know why. The part of me that found comfort in the madding crowd—the city life—had been reactivated by my walk to Knights Ferry. Still ally, that is, my higher self or *natha*, was in charge trying to protect me from myself, that is, from my passions. Passions are a tricky thing. For me it meant being under the influence of what is other than pure Mind.

I rolled one last cigarette with some of my Prince Albert smoking tobacco which I had grown used on the retreat. As I was rolling the cigarette I went back to trying to realize pure Mind being aware of the thick black lines of thought that were like a barrier; a powerful barrier that I couldn't pass through try as I might. Where was pure Mind in all this mess? On last puff and I was off, headed back to the ranch. I would make it back just before sunset.

Walking back I remembered part of a verse from the Dhammapada. *Forests are delightful to the arhat but ordinary people find no delight there.* I was not an arhat. I found some delight in Knights Ferry watching people swim in the river, especially the girls. I found delight in the cold beer I had. But to be honest, I also was beginning to find delight in solitude. There was a positive side to solitude. It is like my spiritual senses were growing. I think Thoreau said something like, *It's not what you look at—it's what you see.* I still wasn't seeing pure Mind even though I looked hard for it, day in and day out. I looked for it

evening my thoughts. Still, I was beginning to learn how to see. I saw things differently when I was in Knights Ferry.

## Chapter XII: An omen

I opened the door and unslung my rucksack. Put its contents on the kitchen table (my prized Dinty Moore stew). Nothing had changed. My books were on the table by the kerosene lamp in the front room where I left them earlier before my walk. I lit some incense. The sun was setting. I was hungry. I made a small fire in the stove, opened a can of stew then warmed it up in a camping pot. I also put some water on to make tea. For some unexplained reason a burst of sadness hit me. I took it as a reminder I still had not solved Zen's secret. I was no better than a rank beginner (to be honest, a total failure at this point). I managed to let this feeling go. I would rather keep moving forward than looking backward. I had faith enough to make the leap. I just wanted to see what all these Zen masters saw.

I finished the can of Dinty Moore. Did the dishes. Had some tea. Then rolled a cigarette. I eventually lit the kerosene lamp. I was looking through Suzuki's translation of the *Lankavatara Sutra* for something profound. A single verse would do at this point. Then I came across this verse: *The Dhyanas, the immeasurables, and the no-form Samadhis, and the thought-cessation—all these are not at all found in Mind-only.* What did this mean? This didn't seem encouraging. I could see that my powers of analytical reasoning were not helping me. I was frustrated. More thinking was not the answer.

Then, suddenly, my vision got foggy. But it wasn't my vision. I looked at the book and it seemed to be shimmering. I immediately stood up and looked at the book and the table. I saw a kind of mini aurora borealis going on with sort of a whitish color. It almost looked like someone in a robe. I rubbed my eyes. The image persisted. I stepped back farther. There it was, some odd phenomenon I couldn't explain. I was more delighted than anything. I took it as an omen to continue my studies. The image only lasted for a minute or two

Where this phenomenon came from or where it went I could not say. I had no idea. Like the thoughts arising in my head I was only privy to see an appearance—not the source which I was seeking, this mysterious pure Mind. So how important could it be except as a reminder to me to continue with my studies without flagging. Yes,

there were forces in me that were less than enthusiastic which had to be met with a greater, overcoming force. Simply put, great faith.

One thing contributing to my creeping tendency to lose my enthusiasm was in my reading of Zen books! It seemed that the more I read the more confused I became. Every instance added doubt. It began to accumulate, though not at first. What, for example, did Mumon mean when he wrote this? *To realize Zen one has to pass through the barrier of the patriarchs. Enlightenment always comes after the road of thinking is blocked.* I take it the barrier is a koan but also *Mu*. It is also like a gate that has a lock that I need a key to which I did not have.

If I pass through the barrier I will be able to see Joshu face to face. But he is dead. This Joshu has to represent the Buddha, the pure Mind itself, which is hidden from me by my thinking (those thick black lines). But I was thinking more than ever before! I can't stop.

The next day, getting up before sunrise as usual I sat in meditation. I was still sleepy. As I sat meditating I found myself going back to the idea that my body is like a radio of which I was only aware of the radio parts and the music—not the invisible signal. And I was using radio terminology, so to speak, to determine who I was. It never works that way; still I was looking for pure Mind (the radio signal) by means of the parts (all my thick black lines of thought). Then I remembered Mumon's words, *enlightenment always comes after the road of thinking is blocked.* I had no clue as to what it meant to have my thinking blocked. I sure couldn't block it.

Maybe when a Zen master hit the student, at that right moment it acted to stop their thinking so they could experience pure Mind which is empty of thought. I pondered on this for a few minutes then stopped my meditation, stretched my legs, got up and walked down to the spring house. I poured some cold water in a basin then washed my face. I went back up to the ranch house, read a little, then made a fire to cook some pancakes. I had decided to go to the little hill with the pine trees on it. A walk is always uplifting for my body that seems to get tired of leaning over a table reading.

## Chapter XIII: A defiling, hiding process

I put *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* into my rucksack with some incense. I included a canteen of weak tea. Out the door I went heading for the hill with the pine trees. Maybe it took me about forty-minutes to get there but I didn't care how long it took. It had become like the adit and the grotto. I climbed up the rocks and got under the pine trees. I unslung my rucksack and made a pillow of pine needles to sit on and read. I lit some incense. I opened Blofeld's translation and read:

*This Mind, which is without beginning, is unborn and indestructible. It is not green nor yellow, and has neither form nor appearance. It does not belong to the categories of things which exist or do not exist, nor can it be thought of in terms of new or old. It is neither long nor short, big nor small, for it transcends all limits, measures, names, traces and comparisons.*

This was the pure Mind that I was looking for. I must have read this passage four or five times. I couldn't get near to Mind because Mind is transcendent. It is not like the lower mind I was using. This was the ordinary mind of wild black lines of thought. Then I read on the next page:

*To make use of your mind to think conceptually is to leave the substance and attach yourselves to the form.*

Yes, that was what I was doing, thinking, conceptually. I was attaching to characteristics (yeah, those black lines) forgetting the essence. It was like I was looking at a beautiful gold statue—so beautiful I couldn't see the gold. The shape blinded me as to what the statue was made of. Next, I considered how many years it took me to get addicted to thinking conceptually, generating those thick black lines. Even though I realized I was conceptually pursuing pure Mind I had no way to stop. This inability was driving me nuts. But I had to keep making effort even though I was not getting any place—lost in some deep dark forest I didn't know how to get out of.



I took comfort in the belief that many others like me in the past had gone through this struggle. It seemed to me that my intellectual process had taken over which was not going to stop. It had a lot of momentum behind it. This is somewhat like a car with the throttle stuck. If I were behind the wheel I could only hope, eventually, the car would run out of gas. Minus the fuel, the car would then coast to a stop. How much fuel I had in my tank I had no idea.

I sat on the pine needles for a while, neutrally, watching my mental activity, then dozed off. I hadn't napped too long before I woke up. Sitting up, the breeze felt nice on my face. Then for a moment it seemed that the world and I almost stopped. I could recall several of these special kinds of moments during the retreat. They just happened, unexpectedly. It's like you were getting close to something profound but because of old habits couldn't go all the way or the same, you weren't open enough.

I left my little pine tree hill. Walking back, eventually, I could see the ranch house with its shiny aluminum roof my Uncle Charlie and my dad put on back in 1947. A flood of old memories came back to me. Milking goats with my Uncle Charlie; watching Uncle Charlie and my dad cutting firewood and many more such thoughts. This time was now all gone. It was 1969. We had just gone to the moon — one giant leap. And I was not leaping or stepping. I was looking into my self for pure Mind, maybe the substance or essence of the universe. At this point I couldn't think of failure.

The sun was setting. I opened the door, unslung my rucksack and returned the contents back to their proper place. I fired up the stove with some kindling wood then put a small chunk of oak on the fire. I cooked some rice, opened a can of red beans and put a kettle of water on for washing the dishes and making some tea.

After my meagre meal, some tea and a cigarette, I decided to read more of *The Golden Age of Zen*. I happened to read about Fo-yen's *two diseases in connection with the practice of Zen*. He said, "The first is to ride an ass in search for an ass. The second is to ride the ass and refuse to dismount." It dawned on me that if I, personally, knew what

this elusive pure Mind was, I wouldn't be like this crazy guy in search of an ass while riding one. For me ass-riding was more like using thought to find thought's essence, being unable to stop thinking about this essence which only hides it. This also had to be what Hui-neng's "*no-thought*" was alluding to: a mystical kind of *dismounting*. I thought to myself, what if the universe hides the essence in the same way that thought hides the essence. But how do I dismount from thought or this universe?

Strange as it sounds, this was kind of uplifting for me. Why it was, I wasn't sure. But it was like I heard a faint click on the big safe that hides Zen's secret. Maybe I got one number right. In a way, I had to crack this mysterious safe. I had to find the right combinations. But underlying this was my problem with being like Fo-yen's ass. Thinking was a defiling, hiding process if one were looking for the very substance—the stuff of thoughts.

## Chapter XIV: A growing doubt

That I lost track of the days was common. The calendar on the kitchen wall meant nothing to me. Still I pushed forward—ran a tight ship. But what did my efforts all add up to if not a growing doubt as to my abilities to advance on Zen's path? At the time, it became more like a voyage to the shore of pure Mind. I was in a small boat crossing a great ocean. The shore that I sought and the one I had left were no longer in sight. There was nothing on the horizon except more of the same. It was a kind of limbo state. Oddly, I felt that I couldn't go back anymore. It was too late. I still wanted to see what Siddhartha and the Zen masters saw.

I had the simple faith that I was supposed to awaken to something inside my thick skull that I could not see at this point. Those wild black lines of thought were still getting in the way, hampering my progress. This is what I had no doubt about. At this point I also realized that my imagination was posing a danger to my progress. I was not ready to settle down on some aesthetic experience as being satori which might be no more than the result of autosuggestion. I had plenty of those aesthetic moments. Not one helped me to see where koans were coming from. Not one explained why the Buddha turned a flower in his fingers but only Maha-Kashapa smiled at this revelation. What was transmitted? Yes, it was Zen's secret that was transmitted, but what was it?

I could only surmise that I was meant to transcend myself: to attain an ungraspable content. I was on a voyage far beyond this shore of human understanding. Most of all, I had to be without presuppositions. Only then would I come to this mysterious shore. But as these lofty words of mine seemed to fly to heaven I was still in my cocoon made of thick black lines of thought.

I marveled at how humans like myself rely on thought and all that it is capable of when it comes to understanding the absolute or in my case, pure Mind. But the question never gets asked, "What is thought

—all of your thoughts—composed from?” I had come to understand that the wisest minds of my day waved the question off as a school boy question. But I couldn't.

In this state of mind I decided to roll a cigarette. I remembered some lines from T.S. Eliot. *And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.* There was something mystical about this line; something very profound. Remembering this poem I could always sense a depth beyond my quotidian mind. How wonderful to imagine knowing this place for the first time!

I felt my self to be this tiny entity that was totally surrounded and imprisoned. My senses enclosed this tiny entity and so did my unending thoughts. But I was not this sensory world there. Yep, it was back to Mumon's barrier! Mumon knew the secret that freed one, I was sure of that but he just couldn't hand it over to Zen students as if it were a piece of candy. It was up to you to see it for yourself. It was the same thing Siddhartha saw and ever Zen master after that.

During this time I was more and more learning to face my self. I didn't have to please the abbot; jumping through his hoops like a trained dog. I was now looking into the mirror of my self. There was no one there but me. This became: *You have no one to blame but your self.* This makes the path more streamlined. But, by no stretch of the imagination is it just seclusion for its own sake so as to avoid interaction with others which is always difficult.

Others are always, more or less, diversions especially when you are on a spiritual voyage which is a dangerous crossing over. It is not like living in a cheap hotel or renting a room fearing every face that you look at, unable to look into their eyes.

## Chapter XV: In the theatre of the absurd

I always liked Schopenhauer's line that went, "Genius is like a marksman who hits a target which others cannot see." I had the sense that I was shooting arrows in the four cardinal directions then going out on a hike to see what I had hit with my genius aiming which was always nothing. I had become more like a clown in the theatre of the absurd. But I was convinced that my thoughts were not just made of fairy dust. There was something there even more real than thought, itself. But, paradoxically, it was totally unthinkable! It was possible to get there but not in an ordinary way. That was my faith. I knew that I had the discipline because I kept repeating my search for Zen's secret in the same way. But maybe that isn't the right discipline. But what else is there?

Sometimes I got the impression that I may come to a kind of *dark night of the soul* which for me would be a total absence of the possibility of seeing Zen's secret. There would be no hope. Not the slightest. I didn't want to think about this. If it were true what could I do? For me this would be a life without even the possibility of meaning.

It was back again to the drawing board (I was doing this a lot). I was reading John C. H. Wu's book, *The Golden Age of Zen*, and came across Bodhidharma's "four-point program." One thing I knew for sure from reading it, Zen was a special transmission outside all of the Buddhist scriptures and teachings. All the sacred words of the Buddha put into books were only words that pointed to patterns of thought or concepts trying to help me remember by self-nature or Buddha-nature. The real transmission would be something wordless even unthinkable. Whatever it was I felt that koans were always demonstrating this strange transmission.

The next day was noticeably cooler. Summer was changing into autumn. I still hadn't discovered Zen's secret. I had gone to the adit early this morning looking within my human mind for true,

unthinkable, pristine reality that transcended it! I couldn't see it but I had the faith to know that it was there (a mystic's faith). How strange then to be surrounded by a living body that was constantly in a flux of physical sensations and mental activity seeking what is beyond it.

I judged that faith is an essential part of the spiritual life if one is going to realize Zen's secret. I can't rely on my senses. The secret of Zen is not a visual thing or something that a person can hear or touch; nor is it something thinkable or conceivable. This is why faith is so important.

The farther I walked down the path of Zen gradually abandoning all hope in my senses and thought, the more faith became necessary and the courage to rely on faith alone. This "Relinquish all hope, ye who enter here."

Dante's words for me applied to hope in our senses and our thoughts which make up the human mind. As tempting as it was for me to place hope in my senses as a means to unraveling Zen's great secret, I had to let go of hope. Hope I saw to be different than faith. Faith is for the spiritual journey—hope applies to man's sensory world which turns out to be, in the long run, hopeless and filled with suffering.

It was easy for me to let go of hope in the five senses but not the last which is mind or in Sanskrit *manas* which, in the widest possible sense, includes my thoughts, my intellect and even my imagination. I had no idea how to relinquish hope in my mind. But I could see from reading about Zen masters that the sixth sense had to be transcended somehow. There was something much higher in back of it all.

## Chapter XVI: A growing hopelessness

How many times have I read the koan section in the book *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* I can't say. It was enough to be frustrated, constantly. I speculated the best minds could not unravel these koans. There was no place that my intellectual crowbar could pry the safe door open to see, at last, Zen's great secret. But I noticed one thing that was happening. The more I studied these koans the more I sensed a growing hopelessness in my ability to find the right answer to a single koan. I felt as if I were Alice in some kind of weird Buddhist wonderland. What Zen masters said made less and less sense to me the more I read.

What was even stranger is that I keep going back to these koans. I was like a starving old dog gnawing on a dry, sun bleached bone. I could smell the scent of Zen. But there was no marrow left in these dry bones. I had to get away from these koans—but I couldn't. I also had to realize Huang Po's pure Mind which is the source of everything!

I had entered something like the jaws of a vice. Still, I kept turning the handle of this strange vice almost every day. My only temporary escape was to take walks to various spots that I enjoyed or sit in the adit which at least brought me a little bit of peace. Otherwise, I was becoming more and more aware that I didn't have what it takes. No matter how many times I tried to force my way through Zen's door that kept me from its secret, I couldn't do it. My spiritual conscience was telling me that I was failing. (Only many years later was I too see that Zen is truly a path of abandoning.)

My vehicle of optimism was running out of gas. It could tell. The gas gauge was on the big E. In this desolate place with its hawks, owl, bats, rattlesnakes, coyotes and scorpions, far from the madding crowd, there was not one gas station. I began to cry, maybe a few tears at first.

Then I began to weep bitterly. I could not control it. Tears came gushing out. My crying was loud. I kneeled beside my bed as if in

prayer. My only thought at the time was if I were this stupid at least I could help others. That is all I could really manage. I was drained. My gas tank was close to empty.



## Chapter XVII: Something unexpected

The next day, I got up as usual and did all the things I normally might do except for studying Buddhism. I spent more time sawing firewood, cutting the long dry branches into smaller manageable sections. Afterwards, I went to the spring house to take a cold bucket shower.

Then I walked back to ranch house and put on my clothes. It was time to roll another cigarette. My mind was relaxed; more open than focused on reading a Zen koan where I had become more like an old dog gnawing on a dry bone. I looked out the window at the almond tree. Made some smoke circles. I think my car finally ran out of gas. I got out of it. What more could I do? found no answer.

That evening, just before I hit the sack, I decided to read a comic book. I put the kerosene lamp on the large black steamer trunk that was beside the bed. I picked up an Avengers comic book I had and began reading it. It was easy. It was nothing like trying to read the *Lankavatara Sutra*! And it was not like the koans. I was nice and cozy. I felt like Thomas Huxley's little child prepared to give up every preconceived notion, reading my comic book!

As I was reading the comic, I came to this one frame where the background sky was yellow. As I looked at it, suddenly, I saw it! Something, unexpectedly, profound just happened, it came into my presence or maybe I came to it. Nevertheless, it was unapproachable. In one second I entered the presence of pure Mind, the pure Mind that Bishop Nippo was pointing to in his lecture. I was dumbfounded.

Then what seemed to be about five or ten minutes later, my body became strangely energized by what can only be described as radiant, transcendent light pouring into me. Not only did it grow in intensity, it stayed this way all throughout the night and into the morning. Its intensity gradually diminished the next day.

Before I blew out the kerosene lamp I gassho-ed towards Bishop Nippo's direction who had given this idiot the clue he was looking for. I could finally see what the wild black lines were made of. They were like crests of water which we call waves only in my case phenomenal waves of pure Mind which was waveless.

This was Zen's secret. I saw it. But it was nothing visual. It went beyond my senses including my intellect. Yet, it was still there. It went beyond my thoughts. My awareness detected nothing whatsoever—yet, there it was!

The next day, first thing in the morning, I decided to look at *Zen Flesh*, *Zen Bones* and see what the koans had to say—the barriers I couldn't overcome. And there it was. Every koan alluded to what I had witnessed last night. Some of the koans were quite ingenious. Other koans were just plain obvious. Still, they had one thing in common, this pure Mind. It further dawned on me that all the discourses of the Buddha were either about what I was could be open enough to realize pure Mind which comes in many different names but is the same for all who realize it.

Knowledge of this pure Mind remained with me even though the clear light eventually diffused. And from awakening to pure Mind, seven years later, I would become transformed again, only more so, and more profoundly by some Buddhas. What I had been heir too, was like an ID card that I would have to show when the Buddhas showed up! I had become a cardholder of the Buddha lineage!

The most astonishing part of my journey looking back to my time with the abbot and even before is that is the amount of faith that I had in the Buddha's teaching. I sure didn't know it at the time. And yes, it takes an extraordinary amount of faith and courage to become that genius marksman who hits a target which others cannot see.

Leaving behind 1969, all through the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s I worked in a cannery. Every year when I got laid off, I headed to the ranch and the adit—and this time I could read the discourses of the Buddha with a lot more grasp of his real message. It didn't take me

too long to understand that without this awakening, most who take up Buddhism have no understanding of its real context. They imagine they do but this is part of their delusion. They are stuck in the imitation of Zen. These people have no idea who puts on the robes of a Buddhist, who moves their body about during the day, who sits in meditation, cleans the temple or squeezes out some shit from their ass.

## Chapter XVIII: Afterward

Succeeding at Zen is like nothing a beginner could possibly imagine. It's not like going to a school or a college and getting a diploma. It's not stuffing one's head with ideas on top of ideas or trivial information. It is a process of looking inside of oneself; looking for the essence of everything which is beyond the world of language and concepts. In Zen's world, the serious adept is not interested in studying the many shapes of thought in the form of various concepts. This only evokes more thoughts and more concepts. The adept who has undertaken the path of Zen is looking for what thoughts are composed of which is unthinkable, radiant and boundless. The secret of Zen lies where there is *no-thought* which is unborn and unconditioned.

As I began to look around to see who might be open to such knowledge, I found only a few people. Regrettably, in today's culture few are interested in a path that requires intuition.

And why is that? Our educational system is almost totally geared towards the left hemisphere of the brain which is language dominant. It's all about the reading and the analysis of words. But what if the words are used to describe what lies beyond the reach of words including our six senses? How does one get to it? Obviously, by spiritual intuition.

Buddhism grew up in the world of the Vedas and the Upanishads. It was never far removed from the religious culture of India which was biased towards the right hemisphere of the brain which paves the way for intuition. Many of the Upanishads alluded to what is transcendent; beyond the world of language.

With this jewel I discovered that night at the ranch, the fog of what I thought and even imagined Buddhism was lifted. However, my adventure did not end with this jewel. In fact it had just begun. It went from sudden to gradual. According to Zen master Shenhui, "Sudden

enlightenment is like child-birth, which is a sudden affair, but the child will require a long process of nurture and education before he attains his full bodily and intellectual growth.”

My body was old karma; my habits were old habits as well as many of my ideas which still had to be reformed to match up with this pristine jewel. These habits cannot be brought under control easily. During this long process of reeducation I came to know the real Buddha. It alone could distinguish essence from appearance.

With this jewel, the more I read the Zen masters it became apparent that they were writing about what I had intuited. It was so obvious. They were always alluding to this jewel again and again. But for the beginner or the old veteran, sadly, they cannot see it no matter how much they read and study the koans—or sit in zazen. And this brings me to the importance of going into retreat, withdrawing into solitude. It is the only way that satori can be accomplished. It puts the odds in favor of the adept.

During our interactions with others we are always deceiving ourselves more than we can imagine. But when we are alone and our nearest neighbor is a few miles away, this condition changes things. Knowing there is no one around to help us tends to make us much more self-reliant, conscientious and contemplative which is almost impossible in an urban environment.

Some I am sure will scoff at my need for going into retreat; even going so far as to make up arguments to defend their views on the importance of belonging to a group. But the Buddha said *either go to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to a lonely spot, and revolve the matter in the mind*. To a certain extent Sartre's famous quotation rang true for me, "Hell is other people." Other people represented the world of the lower self, certainly not the higher self or the self that is lord (*natha*) which I discussed earlier in the book.

I think we tend to forget what sociological animals we really are. With our birth, we are thrown into a world where human-to-human interaction is constant. Many, I dare say, even crave it. But there is a

limit as far as Buddhism is concerned to just how much human interaction is beneficial and where it can become pathological in the example of 'transference' which keeps the student in a state of dependence upon a teacher because the student feels the need to be connected with someone they look up to; who has the power to enlighten them.

When I went into seclusion many miles away from the world I was used to which involved sitting alone many times in the adit, it had the effect of bringing about a faster than usual quieting of my mental activity putting it into of a state of non-anxiety. As a result, when I read the Buddha's words or a Zen master's sermon I seemed to consider the text more, deeply.

This jewel which I had access to was also my closest friend. I went to it often throughout the day. It was always pure, unoriginated, impersonal, and stainless. No matter how much grimy work I did in the cannery after 1969 this jewel was there to wash me off. What I could not know at the time that my accessing this jewel, continually, was like an SOS signal that went forth to the world of the Buddhas.

In 1976, the Buddhas showed up. It was called *Light of Mahayana (mahayana-prabhasa)*. It wasn't like a physical light. I could only describe it as pure spirit so powerful that it was always present such that phenomena appeared within its power and majesty. It was superabundant to say the least. It came with bliss so powerful that I had to sit down at times until I got used to it. In other words, my perception was flipped around. I was looking at the conditioned world *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, from the side of the eternal which not only revealed itself but the conditioned, temporal world as well.

The event of meeting the Buddhas in 1976 was odd in that it was also vatic. I was told about the future which included a personal computer named McIntosh! Eventually, it all came true. Meeting with this light or spirit was so mind boggling that it has remained foremost on my mind even to this day. It was still, essentially, the jewel which I intuited in 1969, but not the size of a mere glowworm. Now it was like the sun only invisible.

The Buddhas have sustained me over the years. I was like their errant kid in the beginning. But as I grew older and older with my hair turning more gray each year Buddhism became more elegant and much simpler. Our phenomenal world is only a composition of spirit or pure Mind. This even includes our most sublime thoughts which are nothing more than congealed spirit which only acts to hide spirit.

Wiser in my old age I am reticent to speak very much about the Light of Mahayana except to say that for a short period time the light of the Buddhas was transferred into me which provided me enough clues so that I could back-engineer the real teachings of the Buddha which was the secret of Zen (also Siddhartha's secret).

I don't expect too many people to understand what I have written and to appreciate its value as religious literature. I expect more people to be uncomfortable with what I have said especially those who claim to be following Zen or Buddhism in general. But these people are perhaps the worst when it seriously comes to cracking the secret of Zen. They are so fixated on their six senses, the most problematic one being the sixth which is mentation, that I dare say they are incorrigible as a consequence of this fixation.

Buddhism in a nutshell is really the science of spirit which begins with how to access it which is accomplished through spiritual intuition. Given that science means "the state or fact of knowing" it stands to reason that through intuition we come to know spirit for the first time, that is, we have true, personal knowledge of spirit, directly.

Spirit grows in magnitude as it penetrates through the dark veil of ignorance. The Buddha said, *Gone is the darkness, arisen is the light, as it does for one who dwells serious, ardent and composed in the self.* In other words, the world does not disappear. By realizing this growing spiritual body, the ordinary world is transformed into a world of spirit while for the spiritually blind, their world continues on as usual, who only see phenomena which is also darkness and gloom.

A culture's greatest triumph is the revelation of spirit or pure Mind —not thought or temporal knowledge. These are mere configurations

of spirit. The human being is for that matter a configuration of spirit which lies hidden by a world of thought. Thought, mankind believes, will open the door to all knowledge but this is not true. But, in fact, thought has made a barrier that mankind cannot pass through and beyond. Thus, spirit remains forever hidden from human inspection.. Only the sages have passed through this barrier.