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Teaching Zen to Americans

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Abstract

Teaching Zen to Americans

By Kim Boykin

Teachers in the Zen Buddhist tradition have used a variety of strategies for describing Buddhist practice and its relationship to enlightenment or buddhahood. In examining the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought and teaching that leads to and includes Japanese Zen, I find three main varieties of “instrumental” (goal-oriented) descriptions of Buddhist practice as a means to attain enlightenment: (1) practice as a means to attain *prajñā* (the wisdom of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness); (2) practice as a means to “uncover” inherent buddha-nature; and (3) practice as a means to “realize” inherent buddha-nature. I also find a “noninstrumental” description of Buddhist practice as manifestation or expression of inherent buddhahood—a description exemplified by the teachings of Dōgen. I then focus on descriptions of practice in three classic texts of American Zen: *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki, and *Everyday Zen* by Charlotte Joko Beck.

I argue that all teachers in the Zen tradition, even those who describe practice as instrumental for attaining enlightenment, are challenging, to one degree or another, an instrumental orientation to Buddhist practice in particular and life in general—that is, an orientation of striving to attain a goal—and in the American context, Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* and Joko Beck’s *Everyday Zen* offer interesting new pedagogical strategies, challenging the instrumental orientation more strongly than do most of their predecessors other than Dōgen, while also incorporating an instrumental element that Dōgen eschews almost entirely and that is probably important for the instrumentally oriented Zen student.

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
“Practice and Enlightenment”	
Instrumental and Noninstrumental Teachings	
Overview	
Previous Work Related to the Topic	
2. “Practice and Enlightenment” in the Asian Development of Zen	14
Practice as Instrumental for Attaining <i>Prajñā</i>	
Practice as Instrumental for Uncovering Buddha-nature	
Practice as Instrumental for Realizing Buddha-nature	
Practice as Noninstrumental	
Practice as Both Instrumental and Noninstrumental	
Challenges to Instrumentality	
3. The Modernization and American Immigration of Zen	72
The Modernization of Buddhism in Japan	

Buddhism Comes to America

Modernized Japanese Zen Comes to America

4. Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen* 98

The Three Pillars of Zen and the Popularization of the Practice of Zen

Practice as Instrumental for Attaining *Prajñā*

Practice as Instrumental for Realizing Buddha-nature

Practice as Instrumental for Realizing Buddha-nature *and* as
a Manifestation of Buddhahood?

Two Truths about Practice

How to Practice to Attain Enlightenment

Stressing the Instrumental

5. Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* 138

Shunryu Suzuki and *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

Descriptions of Practice in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

Suzuki's Complex Presentation of Practice

How to Practice to Resume One's Buddha-nature

Suzuki's Integration of the Instrumental and Noninstrumental

6. Charlotte Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen* 167

Charlotte Joko Beck and *Everyday Zen*

Practice as Instrumental for Attaining *Prajñā*

Practice as Instrumental for Realizing the Perfection of Things as They Are

Two Truths about Practice?

How to Practice to Realize the Perfection of Things as They Are

Joko's Integration of the Instrumental and Noninstrumental	
7. Conclusion	197
Challenges to Instrumentality in the Asian Development of Zen	
Challenges to Instrumentality in Modern American Zen	
 Appendix: Ch'an/Zen Lineage Chart	204
References	208

1

Introduction

“PRACTICE AND ENLIGHTENMENT”

A perennial issue in the thought and teaching of Zen Buddhism is the tension between two basic teachings of the tradition. First, Zen teaches that all beings inherently have the nature of buddhas—awakened or enlightened beings. Second, Zen teaches that we need to engage in practices such as meditation, listening to the teacher’s talks, and following the moral precepts. But if the ultimate aim of Zen is buddhahood and all beings inherently have the nature of buddhas, why does one need to engage in the practices of Zen, practices that can require a great deal of effort and discipline? Why exert oneself in this way if not as a means to attain buddhahood?

This question plagued the young Dōgen, who would later found the Sōtō school of Zen in Japan, and led him on a journey from Japan to China in search of an answer. Buddhist scholar Francis Dojun Cook renders Dōgen’s question as “If one is in fact a

Buddha right now, why practice at all?”¹ and Zen teacher Philip Kapleau renders it as “‘If, as the sutras say, our Essential-nature is Bodhi (perfection), why did all Buddhas have to strive for enlightenment and perfection?’”²

This issue in Zen teaching—the tension between teaching the importance of practice and teaching that beings are inherently buddhas—is sometimes referred to as “practice and enlightenment.” This tension could be seen as a sort of doctrinal or metaphysical or philosophical issue in Zen teaching: how to philosophically reconcile a claim that beings inherently have the nature of buddhas with a claim that practice is necessary. But this tension can also be seen as an issue about how Zen students engage in Zen practice, or orient themselves toward Zen practice, and this practical and pedagogical angle is what especially interest me.

On the one hand, Zen teachers sometimes stress the importance of engaging in the practice of Zen, encouraging an attitude of effort and discipline and, usually, of striving to attain a goal—the goal of enlightenment. On the other hand, Zen teachers sometimes stress that buddha-nature, or the nature of an enlightened being, is inherent in everyone, encouraging an attitude of acceptance and letting be and letting go of a supposed need to strive to attain a goal. Scholar John McRae, in examining teachings on “the basic attitude one that should be adopted toward Buddhist spiritual cultivation,” calls this issue “a notoriously refractory subject.”³

I have struggled with the refractory subject of “practice and enlightenment” myself over many years—in my own Zen practice, in my teaching of beginning Zen

¹ Francis Dojun Cook, *How To Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Zen Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), 8.

² Philip Kapleau, ed., *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 5.

³ John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 66.

practice, in my academic study of Zen, and in trying to explain Zen to beginners in my book *Zen for Christians*⁴—and I have been intrigued by the various ways that Zen teachers in the American context have dealt with this issue.

In this dissertation, I first examine the various descriptions of practice in relation to enlightenment that are found in the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought and teaching that leads to and includes Japanese Zen. Then I focus on the descriptions of Zen practice in relation to enlightenment in three classic texts of American Zen Buddhism: *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki, and *Everyday Zen* by Charlotte Joko Beck.⁵ These books have been important to me in my own Zen practice and have been widely influential in American Zen. I was pleased that Zen teacher James Ishmael Ford ratified my selection of American Zen classics in his 2006 book *Zen Master Who?* He begins by saying that among the numerous books on Zen practice, “some, like Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, and Charlotte Joko Beck’s *Everyday Zen* deserve to be called true Western spiritual classics.”⁶

INSTRUMENTAL AND NONINSTRUMENTAL TEACHINGS

In the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought and teaching that leads to and includes Chinese Ch’an, Japanese Zen, and American Zen, I have found a variety of strategies for describing Buddhist practice in relation to enlightenment. An important

⁴ Kim Boykin, *Zen for Christians: A Beginner's Guide* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

⁵ Kapleau cited above; Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997); Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989).

⁶ James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who?: A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2006), xiii.

distinction in the dissertation is between what I will call “instrumental” and “noninstrumental” descriptions of Buddhist practice.

On the one hand, Buddhist teachers often describe Buddhist practice as *instrumental*—that is, as a means to an end, as a way to attain a goal—specifically, the goal of awakening, or enlightenment. For instance, in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Hakuun Yasutani says in his lecture on the “Theory and Practice of Zazen” that “the most effective means” for awakening “is zazen” (Zen meditation) and that “not only Shakyamuni Buddha himself but many of his disciples attained full awakening through zazen.”⁷ Thus described, Zen practice is a means to the end of awakening, or enlightenment. Zen practice is instrumental.

On the other hand, Buddhist teachers sometimes describe Buddhist practice as *noninstrumental*—that is, *not* as a means to an end but simply as a manifestation or expression of our inherent buddhahood. For instance, in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki says that the way of Zen “is not to sit to acquire something; it is to express our true nature. That is our practice.”⁸ One does not engage in zazen as a means to an end but simply to express one’s true nature. Thus described, Zen practice is *noninstrumental*.

In Chapter 2, I will examine the various pedagogical strategies for describing Buddhist practice and its relationship to enlightenment that are found in the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that leads to and includes Japanese Zen. First, I explain the three main variations I have found on the instrumental description of practice: practice as instrumental for attaining *prajñā* (the wisdom of emptiness), practice as instrumental for

⁷ Kapleau, 31.

⁸ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind*, 53.

“uncovering” one’s inherent buddha-nature, and practice as instrumental for “realizing” one’s inherent buddha-nature. Next, I examine the noninstrumental description of practice as a manifestation of inherent buddhahood. Finally, I examine texts that have made use of *both* instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of practice.

CHALLENGES TO INSTRUMENTALITY

In one sense, all teachers in the Zen tradition, even those who describe practice as “instrumental” for attaining enlightenment, are challenging, to one degree or another, an instrumental orientation to life in general and to Buddhist practice in particular—an orientation of striving to attain a goal, working to fulfill a desire.

The basic Buddhist teaching of *trishna*, or craving, is relevant here. The first two of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism teach that life is permeated by suffering or dissatisfaction (*duhkha*) and that this suffering is caused by craving (*trishna*)—that is, possessive or aggressive desire, which is based on a mistaken sense of the nature of “self.” *Trishna* has sometimes been rendered in English as “desire,” but this translation can be misleading. Just by virtue of being living beings, there are things we want and try to get—for instance, food, water, shelter, sex, companionship, to experience more pleasure, to experience less pain, to stay alive—and of course, we are more complicated being than that and have many other sort of desires as well. Buddhism does not necessarily see a problem with desiring per se—that is, with simply wanting things and trying to get them. The problem, according to Buddhist teachings, is when desire is rooted in the attachments or aversions of the “self,” when simple desire becomes

particularly possessive or aggressive or desperate, when one believes that one's satisfaction in life, or one's freedom from suffering, depends on satisfying one's desires. This kind of desire is "craving"—and perhaps most of our desires are at least tinged with this spirit of craving. So Buddhism offers a diagnosis that the cause of suffering is craving. An instrumental orientation to life—simply trying to fulfill goals—can be the root of human woes, if it has the wrong spirit about it, which is all too likely to be the case. In this sense, a challenge to instrumentality is an integral part of Buddhist teaching.

The Buddhist teachers I examine in this dissertation, even those who describe practice as instrumental for attaining enlightenment, present at least one particular sort of challenge to instrumentality in practice. They challenge a Buddhist practitioner's potential craving to develop or remake or reform or overhaul the self. This is perhaps a more subtle and sophisticated craving than a craving for more money, power, or sex, but it is still a craving.

In the first of my three varieties of instrumental rhetoric—practice as a means to attain *prajñā*—all phenomena, including the "self," have always been "empty," and thus practice is not a means to make oneself "empty"; it is simply a means to realize the emptiness that has always been. So even this "instrumental" description of practice challenges an instrumentality that would aim to change one's essential nature.

The second and third varieties of instrumental rhetoric—practice as a means to "uncover" or "realize" buddha-nature—make use of the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of buddha-nature, a core teaching of Zen: that all beings inherently have the nature of buddhas, that is, awakened or enlightened beings. (In the issue of "practice and enlightenment," the teaching of inherent buddha-nature is the "enlightenment" piece.) In

these strategies for describing practice, since all beings inherently have the nature of buddhas, practice is not and cannot be a means to “attain” the nature of a buddha; practice is simply a means to “uncover” or “realize” the buddha-nature that has always been. In some fundamental way everything is already fine. One does not need to make any substantive changes to reality or to oneself in order to be liberated; one’s intrinsic nature is enlightenment; one inherently has the nature of a buddha.

We see this teaching, for instance, in the *Platform Sutra*, on which Hui-neng, known as the Sixth Patriarch of Ch’an in China, says to his students, “You have in yourselves the attributes of inherent enlightenment.”⁹ Similarly, Lin-chi (known in Japanese as Rinzai), the ninth-century Chinese founder of the Lin-chi school of Ch’an, says, “Followers of the Way, you who are carrying out your activities before my eyes are no different from the Buddha and the patriarchs,” and he says that the person listening to his talk “has never lacked anything.”¹⁰ Even the great eighteenth-century Japanese Rinzaï Zen master Hakuin, who relentlessly urges students of Zen to practice in order to awaken, says: “It makes no difference whether you call it the Shining Land of Lapis Lazuli in the East or the Immaculate Land of Purity in the South; originally, it is all a single ocean of perfect, unsurpassed awakening. As such, it is also the intrinsic nature in every human being.”¹¹

In the contemporary American context, too, Zen teachers teach their students that they inherently have the nature of buddhas. For instance, in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki says, “To be a human being is to be a Buddha. Buddha nature is just

⁹ Philip B. Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 143.

¹⁰ Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 53, 45.

¹¹ Norman Waddell, *The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Hakuin* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 49.

another name for human nature.”¹² Similarly, in *Everyday Zen*, Charlotte Joko Beck says that our “true nature” is “no self—a Buddha.”¹³ Even in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, which, like Hakuin, relentlessly urges students of Zen to practice in order to awaken, Hakuun Yasutani teaches that “the nature of every being is inherently without a flaw, perfect, no different from that of Amida or any other Buddha.”¹⁴

So again, at least in this one way, even Buddhist teachers who use what I have called “instrumental” descriptions of Buddhist practice are challenging their instrumentally-oriented, enlightenment-seeking students—challenging a craving to change the basic nature of the “self.”

And yet, in these instrumental descriptions of practice, the instrumentally oriented mind is still allowed a goal: to realize or uncover the ultimate nature of reality and thus become enlightened. The student presented with these “instrumental” descriptions of practice is presented with a challenge to instrumentality—for example, the teaching that one already has the qualities that one is trying to attain, that is, the qualities of a buddha—and yet, the student can essentially bypass that challenge to instrumentality by engaging in practice instrumentally, as a means to attain enlightenment.

The noninstrumental strategy challenges even that remaining opportunity to approach practice instrumentally, teaching that Buddhist practice is not even a means to attain enlightenment. Beings are inherently buddhas, and Buddhist practice is simply a manifestation or expression of that inherent buddhahood. So the noninstrumental rhetoric is, naturally, an even stronger challenge to an instrumental orientation to practice than are the varieties of instrumental rhetoric. The student is taught that practice should be

¹² Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind*, 48.

¹³ Beck, 175.

¹⁴ Kapleau, 31.

engaged noninstrumentally. However, when practice is described as noninstrumental, it becomes difficult to explain to anyone with a fundamentally instrumental mindset why one should bother engaging in Buddhist practices. The instrumental mind is offered no goal to aim at.

Chapter 3 examines the modernization and Westernization of Buddhism in Japan and the United States and the migration of Buddhism, especially modernized Japanese Zen Buddhism, to the United States, focusing on the ways in which Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism, was being presented and reformulated as “modern,” that is, as eminently rational, empirical, and practical and fully compatible with scientific and technological—instrumental—modes of thought.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine the pedagogical strategies for describing Zen practice and its relationship to enlightenment in (respectively) Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, and Charlotte Joko Beck’s *Everyday Zen*. The strategy in *The Three Pillars of Zen* is, for the most part, a familiar strategy from the Asian history of Zen, but *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* and *Everyday Zen* have interesting new ways of handling the issue of “practice and enlightenment” and challenging instrumentality.

Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen* teaches (mainly) that practice is instrumental for realizing buddha-nature. While there is a challenge to instrumentality implicit in the teaching that all beings inherently have buddha-nature, the student entering into Zen practice is mainly encouraged in an instrumental orientation: to practice as a means to attain the all-important realization of that inherent buddha-nature.

Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* teaches that practice is instrumental for "resuming" one's inherent buddha-nature—so there is an element of instrumentality—but Suzuki teaches that one must practice with a noninstrumental attitude. So the student must wrestle with noninstrumentality from the start but can also have a sense that there is something to be attained through practice.

Charlotte Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen* teaches that practice is instrumental for attaining "the enlightened state," which Joko generally describes as the realization of the perfection of things as they are. So the student can engage in practice instrumentally—with a sense that there is goal to be aimed at—and yet that "goal" is a noninstrumental orientation to life, a realization that in some fundamental sense nothing needs to be attained; and the specific practices Joko teaches are simply practices of observing what is, attending to the present moment.

In chapter 7, I conclude that Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen* offer a new pedagogical strategy for challenging students' instrumental orientation to life in general and Buddhist practice in particular. In somewhat different ways, the strategies in these texts combine a stronger challenge to instrumentality than is found in the other "instrumental" strategies I have examined while also offering an instrumental angle that is probably important at least for beginning students and that is *not* offered by the "noninstrumental" strategy.

The dissertation also includes, as an appendix, a lineage chart of most of the Ch'an and Zen teachers mentioned in the dissertation.

PREVIOUS WORK RELATED TO THE TOPIC

Surprisingly little scholarly work has been done on Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, or Charlotte Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen*.

The only secondary source I was able to find that focuses on Philip Kapleau, Hakuun Yasutani, or *The Three Pillars of Zen* is a 1995 article by Robert Sharf about the Sanbōkyōdan ("Three Treasures Association") founded by Yasutani.¹⁵ However, Yasutani and Kapleau appear in numerous historical accounts of Buddhism in the United States.¹⁶ Some prominent themes in the discussions of these teachers and their lineage are the participation of laypeople as opposed to just monastics; the combining of elements of Rinzai and Sōtō Zen; Kapleau's efforts toward the Americanization of Zen; and other innovations and reforms of this lineage.

The only secondary source that focuses on Shunryu Suzuki is David Chadwick's 1999 biography of Suzuki, *Crooked Cucumber*,¹⁷ but every historical account of Buddhism in the United States includes a discussion of Shunryu Suzuki and the institutions he and his students founded.¹⁸ Some prominent themes in the discussions of Suzuki are his importance (along with Taizan Maezumi) in bringing Sōtō Zen to

¹⁵ Robert Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22, nos. 3–4 (Fall 1995), 417–458.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 91–91; Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 17–19; James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 67–68, 188; and Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 231–242.

¹⁷ David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 96–101; Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 14–15; Coleman, 67, 69–72; and Fields, 225–231, 256–272.

prominence in the United States (as opposed to the Rinzai Zen of D. T. Suzuki); Suzuki's focus on zazen (sitting meditation) and proper posture in zazen; and how the rules Suzuki established as part of his Zen training challenged American individualism and especially the spirit of the San Francisco counterculture of the time. Both James Williams Coleman's *The New Buddhism* and Rick Fields's *How the Swans Came to the Lake* give a bit of attention—several paragraphs each—to a noteworthy feature of Suzuki's teaching, relevant to my project: that for Suzuki “there was no particular goal” to zazen, “nothing to be achieved,”¹⁹ that simply to take the posture was to have the enlightened state of mind.

The only extended examination of Charlotte Joko Beck's life or teaching is the chapter about her in the 1987 book *Meetings with Remarkable Women: Buddhist Teachers in America* by Lenore Friedman, who is not a scholar of religion but a psychotherapist. Joko gets an occasional mention in the scholarly literature on Buddhism, usually in the context of discussions of Western Buddhist teachers who are moving away from Asian ways of practicing Buddhism,²⁰ Western Buddhist teachers who make connections between Buddhist practice and everyday life,²¹ or women Buddhist teachers in the West.²²

As far as I can determine, not a single dissertation has been written about Philip Kapleau, Shunryu Suzuki, or Charlotte Joko Beck.

¹⁹ Coleman, 71; Fields, 229.

²⁰ E.g., Coleman, 126; Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 102.

²¹ E.g., Donald Rothberg, “Responding to the Cries of the World: Socially Engaged Buddhism in North America,” in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 276.

²² E.g., Coleman, 150; Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 78; Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 102.

Little scholarly work has been done on the thought and teaching of *any* Zen teacher in the United States, unless you count D. T. Suzuki, who was a scholar of Zen, not a Zen master. (Numerous dissertations have been written about D. T. Suzuki and also about Beat poet and Zen Buddhist Gary Snyder.²³) Despite the fact that I am most interested in American Buddhist thought and teaching, the bibliography on American Buddhism that I compiled for one of my doctoral exams consisted mostly of works that are historical (e.g., Richard Hughes Seager's *Buddhism in America*), sociological (e.g., Steve Tipton's *Getting Saved from the Sixties* and James William Coleman's *The New Buddhism*), or both (e.g., Thomas Tweed's *The American Encounter With Buddhism*), simply because this is the sort of scholarly work that has been done on American Buddhism.

This project is the first in-depth scholarly examination of the Zen teaching found in three classic texts of American Zen: *The Three Pillars of Zen*, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and *Everyday Zen*. The dissertation highlights and analyzes a prominent issue in Zen thought and teaching, the issue of “practice and enlightenment,” surveying the whole sweep of the Asian development of Zen before focusing on how this issue plays out in Zen teaching in the American context.

²³ I found at least nine dissertations on D. T. Suzuki and more than thirty that focus on Gary Snyder, plus many others that discuss Snyder, in a search of “Dissertation Abstracts” (<http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/>) and the appendix listing “North American Dissertations and Theses on Topics Related to Buddhism” through 1997 in Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (Surrey, UK Curzon, 1999), 267–311.

2

“Practice and Enlightenment” in the Asian Development of Zen

In this chapter, I examine various pedagogical strategies for describing Buddhist practice and its relationship to enlightenment that are found in important Buddhist schools, texts, and teachers in the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that leads to and includes Japanese Zen.

I begin with an examination of the “instrumental” presentation of Buddhist practice: describing practice as a means to the end of enlightenment. I have found three main varieties of instrumental rhetoric, representing slightly different nuances within the general strategy of presenting practice as instrumental. First, practice is sometimes described as instrumental for attaining *prajñā* (the wisdom of emptiness) and thus enlightenment. The *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition, the Heart Sūtra (which sometimes is and sometimes is not considered part of the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition), and Nāgārjuna’s Mādhyamika school exemplify this version of the instrumental strategy. Second, practice is sometimes described as instrumental for “uncovering” one’s inherent buddha-nature and thus becoming enlightened. The *Tathāgata-garbha* Sūtras and the Yogācārā School

exemplify this version of the instrumental strategy. Third, practice is sometimes described as instrumental for “realizing” one’s inherent buddha-nature and thus becoming enlightened. The Chinese text *The Awakening of Faith* and the teaching of Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin exemplify this version of the instrumental strategy.

Next, I examine the “noninstrumental” presentation of Buddhist practice, which is found in its purest form in the teaching of Dōgen—the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen in Japan—who describes practice not as a means to the end of enlightenment but as a manifestation, or expression, of one’s inherent buddhahood.

Finally, some prominent texts in the Asian development of Zen have made use of *both* instrumental and noninstrumental presentations of practice; that is, they teach both that practice is a means to the end of enlightenment and also that practice is *not* a means to the end of enlightenment. It may be that these texts are simply mixing or juxtaposing instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of practice, despite the apparent contradiction of saying that practice both is and is not instrumental for attaining enlightenment. But I will propose that, in at least some cases, these texts may best be understood as implicitly making use of the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of the Two Truths—the conventional truth and the ultimate truth—to present practice as instrumental when seen from the “conventional” perspective and as noninstrumental when seen from the “ultimate” perspective. In this final section of the chapter, I will revisit Nāgārjuna’s Mādhyamika school and examine *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* and the record of the teachings of Lin-chi (Rinzai).

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR ATTAINING *PRAJÑĀ*

The first instrumental description of practice that I will discuss is the description of practice as a means to attain *prajñā*—the wisdom of emptiness—and, thus, enlightenment. This appears to be the primary pedagogical strategy in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Heart Sūtra, and Nāgārjuna’s Mādhyamika school, which is based on the *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings.

The *Prajñāpāramitā* Tradition

The *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches that the practice of *prajñāpāramitā*—the perfection of the wisdom of *śūnyatā* (emptiness)—is a means to attain *prajñā*.

The voluminous *Prajñāpāramitā*, or *Perfection of Wisdom*, sūtras, which are probably the earliest of the Mahāyāna sūtras,²⁴ were composed over many centuries, beginning around 100 B.C.E.²⁵ As Charles Prebish says, the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras “are aptly named, due to their special interest in understanding the nature of wisdom or *prajñā*.”²⁶

The Sanskrit word *prajñā*, usually rendered as “wisdom” in English, has somewhat different meanings in different contexts. In the Indo-Tibetan context, *prajñā* generally refers to a particular mental state, or state of consciousness, that results from

²⁴ Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), 40. Prebish says simply that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is “the first Mahāyāna literature.” Charles S. Prebish, *Historical Dictionary of Buddhism* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 214.

²⁵ Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 218; Williams, 41.

²⁶ Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 214.

analysis or investigation—specifically, the correct discernment of the way things actually are. Specifically, *prajñā* is the state of consciousness that understands *śūnyatā*, or emptiness—that is, the absence of “self,” or essence, or inherent existence, in all phenomena. According to Paul Williams, *prajñā*, understood in this particular way—as the apprehension of *śūnyatā*—is the chief concern of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.²⁷

Prajñā sometimes refers not just to the apprehension of the ultimate truth of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, but to a one-pointed meditative absorption on that truth. Even so, *prajñā* is a state of consciousness that results from analysis or investigation, though in this case, as Williams observes, “the analysis has been refined, as it were, out of existence, it has transcended itself, and the mind is left in one-pointed absorption on the results of analysis.”²⁸

Williams notes that while the first *prajñā*—the apprehension of *śūnyatā*—is conceptual, the second *prajñā*—meditative absorption on *śūnyatā*—in which the analysis has been “refined out of existence,” is non-conceptual. This “gulf between conceptual and non-conceptual,” he says, seems to have led certain Buddhist traditions, notably some forms of Ch’an, to conclude that *prajñā* cannot even be the *result* of analysis but is, rather, “a natural response to *cutting* all analytic and conceptual thought.” So this is a third sort of *prajñā*: meditative absorption on *śūnyatā* that is a result of cutting all conceptual thought. According to Williams, there are precedents for this third understanding of *prajñā* in Indian thought, but “the particular emphasis on anti-

²⁷ Williams, 42, 43.

²⁸ Williams, 43–44.

intellectualism and cutting conceptual thought in some Chinese traditions may have been the results of unconscious Taoist influence.”²⁹

In any case, *prajñā* is the wisdom of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, and the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature has a special focus on *prajñā*.

The *pāramitās* are the “perfections,” or virtues, practiced by bodhisattvas in the course of their spiritual development toward buddhahood. In the Mahāyāna tradition, *prajñāpāramitā*—the perfection of *prajñā*, that is, the perfection of the wisdom of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness—is one of the two principle *pāramitās* of the bodhisattva, along with the perfection of *karuṇā*, or compassion. It is through the practice of *prajñāpāramitā* that one attains buddhahood, and, as Williams says, *prajñā* occurs in the context of compassion, “the context of the extensive and compassionate Bodhisattva deeds, the aspiration to full buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.”³⁰

As Williams observes, the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras speak from the perspective of the Buddha—the perspective of *prajñā*—but say little about how to attain *prajñā*.³¹ All the commentators I’ve read agree that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature teaches that *prajñā* needs to be attained or developed through spiritual practice. Charles Prebish says, for instance, that *prajñā* is “an expected consequence of serious Dharma study and rigorous meditational practice,”³² and Damien Keown says that “although all beings possess *prajñā*, it is usually underdeveloped and needs to be cultivated through the practice of insight meditation (*vipaśyanā*) or similar forms of mental training.”³³

²⁹ Williams, 43–44.

³⁰ Williams, 45.

³¹ Williams, 49.

³² Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 213.

³³ Keown, 218.

The *Prajñāpāramitā* literature teaches that *śūnyatā*, or emptiness—the absence of an essence or “self”—is the true nature of all phenomena. Practice is not instrumental for making things empty or making the “self” empty; everything is already, inherently empty. One only needs to realize this emptiness. That is, one needs to attain *prajñā*—the wisdom of emptiness—which is the primary attribute of a buddha, and it is through the practice of *prajñāpāramitā* that one attains *prajñā*. Practice is instrumental for attaining *prajñā* and, thus, buddhahood.

The Heart Sūtra

The Heart Sūtra is one of the most well known Buddhist scriptures and one of the most important Mahāyāna sūtras.³⁴ The Heart Sūtra is widely considered to present the heart, or essence, of the voluminous *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.³⁵ Charles Prebish calls the Heart Sūtra “essentially a one-page condensation of Mahāyāna philosophy, especially emphasizing the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).”³⁶ In the Heart Sūtra, the practice of *prajñāpāramitā*—the perfection of the wisdom of emptiness—is presented as the way to attain *prajñā* and, thus, enlightenment and buddhahood.

I had initially planned to include my discussion of the Heart Sūtra in the previous section, as an example of the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition, but one scholar, Jan Nattier, has argued that the Heart Sūtra is almost certainly not an Indian composition but rather a Chinese composition back-translated into Sanskrit,³⁷ so perhaps the Heart Sūtra is not

³⁴ *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1991), 84. Donald Lopez calls it “perhaps the most famous Buddhist scripture.” Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Heart Sutra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 3.

³⁵ See, e.g., Lopez, *The Heart Sutra Explained*, 7, 30; and Keown, 106.

³⁶ Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 135–36.

³⁷ Keown, 106; and Jan Nattier, “The Heart Sūtra: A Chinese Apocryphal Text?” in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15 (1992), 153–223.

necessarily a good example of *Prajñāpāramitā* thought. A recent translator of the Heart Sūtra, Red Pine, examines Nattier's argument in depth, given that her position "has found a number of advocates among prominent buddhologists," and presents an alternate way of accounting for the facts Nattier uses, concluding that she has not actually proven that the Heart Sūtra was originally a Chinese composition and that, in fact, it is easier to believe that the Heart Sūtra was originally a Sanskrit composition—though he admits that the matter has not been settled.³⁸

In any case, among the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, the Heart Sūtra is the most familiar to contemporary Zen practitioners, and it is recited regularly in Zen monasteries, so it is worth examining, whether or not it should be considered representative of the Indian *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition.

In the Heart Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, addresses Śāriputra, a chief disciple of the Buddha. At the beginning of the Heart Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara, who is "contemplating the meaning of the profound perfection of wisdom," tells Śāriputra that to practice *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom, one should correctly view all phenomena as empty of inherent existence. Avalokiteśvara is challenging Śāriputra's reification of and attachment to phenomena, urging Śāriputra to see phenomena from another perspective: the perspective of *śūnyatā*.

Avalokiteśvara then runs through the main categories of phenomena in the philosophy of the Buddhist Abhidharma—of which Śāriputra was a master—telling Śāriputra that "in emptiness" none of these exists. Avalokiteśvara says that in emptiness, the five aggregates (*skandhas*)—that is, the five basic components of reality—do not exist. Likewise, in emptiness, the links in the twelvefold chain of dependent origination

³⁸ Red Pine, trans., *The Heart Sutra* (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 2004), pp. 22–26.

(*pratītya-samutpāda*) do not exist. Furthermore, in emptiness, the Four Noble Truths do not exist. All of these are ultimately empty of inherent existence.

Avalokiteśvara then says that bodhisattvas “depend on and abide in” *prajñāpāramitā*, and because “their minds are without obstructions, they are without fear.” That is, bodhisattvas have developed the perfection of *prajñā*, which means that their minds are freed from the obstruction of erroneously attributing inherent existence to phenomena. Freed from this mental obstruction, bodhisattvas are also freed from fear—though Avalokiteśvara does not offer any explanation of this connection between *prajñā* and freedom from fear.

Thus far, the two main translations of and commentaries on the Heart Sūtra that I examined, by Donald Lopez and Red Pine, essentially agree. They have an interesting difference of opinion, though, about what Avalokiteśvara says next, about nirvāṇa. According to Lopez, Avalokiteśvara says of bodhisattvas that “having completely passed beyond all error they go to the completion of nirvāṇa.”³⁹ That is, bodhisattvas attain nirvāṇa. According to Red Pine, however, what Avalokiteśvara says is that bodhisattvas “see through delusions and finally nirvana.”⁴⁰ Not only do they see through their delusions regarding the manner of existence of samsāra, they also see through their delusions regarding the manner of existence of nirvāṇa. As Red Pine says, “nirvana is simply the final delusion.”⁴¹ Lopez might agree that delusions about nirvāṇa are the final delusions, but his translation does not highlight this point. Similarly, Red Pine might agree with Lopez that having seen through all delusions (including delusions about

³⁹ Lopez, *The Heart Sutra Explained*, 20.

⁴⁰ Red Pine, 3.

⁴¹ Red Pine, 136–137.

nirvāna), the bodhisattva thereby goes on to nirvāna, but Red Pine’s translation doesn’t say this.

In any case, Lopez and Red Pine agree that Avalokiteśvara next says that through *prajñāpāramitā*, all buddhas attain perfect enlightenment. Lopez’s version: “All Buddhas who abide in the three times”—that is, the past, present, and future—“have been fully awakened into unsurpassed, perfect, complete enlightenment through relying on the perfection of wisdom.”⁴² Red Pine’s version: “All buddhas past, present and future also take refuge in Prajnaparamita and realize unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.”⁴³

The Heart Sūtra is a challenge and corrective to Śāriputra—and anyone else—who reifies and attaches to phenomena, including the teachings of Buddhism. The Heart Sūtra teaches that *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, is the true nature of all phenomena. Practice is not instrumental for making things empty; everything is already, inherently empty. One only needs to realize, or awaken to, this emptiness. That is, one needs to attain *prajñā*—the wisdom of emptiness—which is the primary attribute of a buddha, and it is through the practice of *prajñāpāramitā* that one attains *prajñā*. Practice is instrumental for attaining *prajñā* and, thus, buddhahood.

Nāgārjuna

Nāgārjuna, who lived in about the second century C.E.,⁴⁴ was the founder of the Mādhyamika,⁴⁵ or “Middle Way,” school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Paul Williams calls

⁴² Lopez, *The Heart Sutra Explained*, 20.

⁴³ Red Pine, 3.

⁴⁴ Garfield says Nāgārjuna lived “in approximately the second century C.E.” Jay L. Garfield, trans., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 87. The *Shambhala Dictionary* says, “Hardly any reliable dates for his life (2d/3d century) are known” (151). Prebish says Nāgārjuna “lived sometime between 150 and 250 C.E.”

Nāgārjuna “the first great name in Buddhist thought since the Buddha.”⁴⁶ Most schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism consider Nāgārjuna one of their patriarchs, and all are in some way indebted to him.⁴⁷ In the Ch’an/Zen tradition, Nāgārjuna is counted as the fourteenth patriarch in the Indian lineage; and Nāgārjuna’s chief disciple, Āryadeva (also known as Kanadeva), is counted as the fifteenth patriarch. (The lineage of the Indian patriarchs of Ch’an is largely fictitious, but as John McRae says, these lineages were, for the Ch’an school, “polemical tools of self-assertion, not critical evaluations of chronological fact according to some modern concept of historical accuracy.”⁴⁸)

The *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings are the foundation of Nāgārjuna’s Mādhyamika school,⁴⁹ which emphasizes *śūnyatā*—the emptiness of all phenomena—“as its major doctrine.”⁵⁰ Williams says that the Mādhyamika school “represents the philosophical systematization and development” of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras.⁵¹ Nāgārjuna’s most important work is the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* (“Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way”).⁵²

According to Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga’s *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, the teaching of emptiness in the Mādhyamika school was “a renewal of the Early

(*Historical Dictionary*, 195). And Keown says “it is generally accepted that he lived during the late 2nd century CE.” (185).

⁴⁵ Regarding the spelling of *Mādhyamika*: Williams, Keown, and the *Shambhala Dictionary* distinguish between the school, spelled *Mādhyamaka* (with an *a*), and a follower of the school, spelled *Mādhyamika* (with an *i*). Prebish’s *Historical Dictionary* and the Mādhyamika texts I am using here use the spelling *Mādhyamika* (with an *i*) for both, and I am following their example.

⁴⁶ Williams, 55.

⁴⁷ Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, Vol. I: *The Aristocratic Age* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974), 66.

⁴⁸ John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), xix.

⁴⁹ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, Vol. 1: *India and China* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 41; Williams, 30.

⁵⁰ Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 174.

⁵¹ Williams, 30.

⁵² Garfield, 87; *Shambhala Dictionary*, 151.

Buddhist effort to explain Nirvāna in terms of what it was not.” Nirvāna is not a place, or even “a transcendental stage,” but an “attitude of mind.” Specifically, nirvāna is “merely the attitude wherein false discriminations and illusions of conceptualization are dropped.”⁵³ Nirvāna is not some other realm but simply seeing things as they actually are.

A central teaching of the Mādhyamika school is the equating of samsāra (the cycle of rebirths) and nirvāna (liberation from the cycle of rebirths). For example, in the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, in Chapter XXV, on nirvāna, Nāgārjuna says:

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence and nirvāna.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvāna and cyclic existence.

Whatever is the limit of nirvāna,
That is the limit of cyclic existence.
There is not even the slightest difference between them,
Or even the subtlest thing.⁵⁴

When I first read these verses, I wondered if Nāgārjuna meant that we are inherently liberated and, thus, that one cannot speak of “attaining” liberation. If that interpretation is correct, then these verses negate an instrumental understanding of Buddhist practice. That is, if liberation is inherent, then nothing, including Buddhist practice, can be instrumental for “attaining” liberation.

However, some scholars of Buddhism have argued that these verses should indeed be understood in a way that comports with an instrumental understanding of practice. According to Jay Garfield, a translator of the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna’s equating of samsāra and nirvāna means that “there is no difference in entity between nirvāna and samsāra; nirvāna is simply samsāra seen without reification, without

⁵³ Matsunaga, Vol. I, 69.

⁵⁴ Garfield, 75 (XXV:19–20).

attachment, without delusion.”⁵⁵ That is, Nāgārjuna is teaching that nirvāṇa is simply saṃsāra seen as it really is. (Garfield calls this “one of the most startling conclusions” of the text.⁵⁶) So nirvāṇa is indeed attainable: it is attained by a shift of perception.

Paul Williams interprets these verses in the same way, drawing on the interpretation of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the founder of the Geluk order of Tibetan Buddhism (the order to which the Dalai Lamas belong). In *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Williams says that according to a commentary by Tsongkhapa, these verses “are not to be taken as the expression of some mystical identity. Rather, *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are identical in the sense that they have in all respects the same nature—absence of inherent existence.” That is, Nāgārjuna is teaching that both nirvāṇa and saṃsāra are empty. In that sense, there is not the slightest difference between them. And nirvāṇa “is attainable here and now through the correct understanding of the here and now.”⁵⁷

Indeed, elsewhere in the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna clearly teaches that nirvāṇa is attained through a change of understanding or perspective—seeing things as they really are. He says, for instance, that nirvāṇa is “The pacification of all objectification / And the pacification of illusion.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Nāgārjuna specifies how one should practice in order to change one’s perspective and thus attain nirvāṇa. In the chapter on the twelvefold chain of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*; a basic Buddhist teaching about the arising of suffering), Nāgārjuna provides what Garfield calls “a straightforward exposition of how . . . to enter into and to exploit the cycle in the

⁵⁵ Garfield, 331.

⁵⁶ Garfield, 331.

⁵⁷ Williams, 69.

⁵⁸ Garfield, 76 (XXV:24). Williams (67) pointed me to this verse.

service of liberation.”⁵⁹ The first link in the chain of dependent origination is “ignorance”—that is, ignorance of the emptiness of all phenomena, our ignorant tendency to reify things (including emptiness). Ignorance gives rise to the second link, “action”—that is, our physical, verbal, and mental actions, the psychological dispositions to which they give rise, the further actions to which these dispositions give rise, and so on—and thus to the continuation of samsāra and suffering.⁶⁰ We need to end our ignorance in order to end the actions that keep us bound to the cycle of samsāra. As Nāgārjuna says, “With the cessation of ignorance / Action will not arise.”⁶¹ That is, when ignorance ceases, the ignorance-based action that perpetuates the cycle of samsāra also ceases.⁶²

But how does ignorance cease? Nāgārjuna continues: “The cessation of ignorance occurs through / Meditation and wisdom.”⁶³ We need wisdom—*prajñā*, the understanding of things as they really are, as empty—and, as Garfield puts it, this understanding “must be internalized through meditation, so that it becomes not merely a philosophical theory that we can reason our way into, but the basic way in which we take up with the world.”⁶⁴ The next and final verse of this penultimate chapter of the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* says:

Through the cessation of this and that
This and that will not manifest.
The entire mass of suffering
Indeed thereby completely ceases.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Garfield, 335.

⁶⁰ Garfield, 336.

⁶¹ Garfield, 78 (XXVI:11).

⁶² Nāgārjuna does not mean that we cease to act. We just act *differently*. As Garfield says in interpreting this section of the text, “By changing the way that we act physically, verbally, and mentally, we thereby change the way that we perceive, think, and act and thereby change what we see and the consequences of our actions” (340).

⁶³ Garfield, 78 (XXVI:11).

⁶⁴ Garfield, 340.

⁶⁵ Garfield, 78 (XXVI:12).

Garfield interprets this verse to mean that internalizing the understanding of emptiness through meditation—attaining *prajñā*—“leads to the cessation of that activity responsible for the perpetuation of the suffering of samsāra.”⁶⁶ Wisdom and meditation can lead to the cessation of ignorance and thus to the cessation of ignorance-based action and thus to liberation from the cycle of suffering. In these verses, Nāgārjuna does indeed seem to be teaching that Buddhist practice—specifically, meditation—is instrumental for attaining *prajñā* and thus liberation.

So Jay Garfield, Paul Williams, and Tsongkhapa agree that when Nāgārjuna says “there is not the slightest difference” between samsāra and nirvāna, what he means is that they are equally empty and that samsāra and nirvāna are the same reality understood or perceived in two different ways. If this interpretation is correct, then Nāgārjuna presents practice in essentially the same instrumental way as the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition and the Heart Sūtra. Despite Nāgārjuna’s complex and subtle analyses of the Buddhist teachings of emptiness, dependent origination, the Two Truths, and nirvāna, Nāgārjuna’s presentation of practice appears to many interpreters to be relatively simple and straightforward. According to these interpreters, Nāgārjuna teaches that practice is instrumental for attaining *prajñā* and, thus, buddhahood.

Again, Garfield, Williams, and Tsongkhapa argue that when Nāgārjuna says “there is not the slightest difference” between samsāra and nirvāna, he means that they are equally empty and are simply the same reality viewed in two different ways. I find this interpretation plausible, but the fact remains that what Nāgārjuna actually *said*—three times—was that “there is not the slightest difference.” He didn’t say that “there is not the slightest difference, *except* in one’s perspective.” This seems like it might be

⁶⁶ Garfield, 340.

significant for understanding Nāgārjuna's pedagogical strategy. I will revisit Nāgārjuna and this particular issue in the concluding section of this chapter.

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR UNCOVERING BUDDHA-NATURE

Buddhist practice is also described as a means to “uncover” one's buddha-nature and, thus, to become enlightened. In this description, one already has all the qualities of a buddha, but this buddha-nature has been covered over with defilements, and one needs to uncover one's buddha-nature. Practice, in this particular variation on instrumental rhetoric, is not a means to *attain* the qualities of a buddha but simply to *uncover* one's inherent buddha-nature. This description of practice is prominent in the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition and the Yogācārā school of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The *Tathāgata-garbha* Sūtras

The Sanskrit term *tathāgata-garbha*—rendered by the Chinese as “buddha-nature”⁶⁷—goes back to the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. A *Tathāgata* is a buddha (literally, a “thus-come one” or “thus-perfected one”). The Buddha referred to himself and other buddhas with the title *Tathāgata*. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the term *Tathāgata* is used synonymously with *Tathatā*, or “suchness,” referring to the absolute nature of all things. The *tathāgata-garbha* is the buddha-nature: a being's inherent buddhahood, or suchness, in a nonmanifest form. *Tathāgata-garbha* literally means “germ,” or “womb,” or “matrix,” “of the Tathāgata,” suggesting that a buddha

⁶⁷ Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 140.

germinates from the seed of *tathāgata-garbha*, or buddha-nature, or that a buddha develops within the environment of buddha-nature.⁶⁸

Probably the earliest sūtra to teach the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine is the *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra*,⁶⁹ which consists of a series of similes showing how the buddha-nature is concealed within sentient beings.⁷⁰ The *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra* survives only in Tibetan and Chinese translations and some Sanskrit fragments.⁷¹ In the Chinese version, the Buddha observes that “‘all the living beings, though they are among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, have the Buddha’s wisdom’” and that “‘in spite of their being covered with defilements, . . . they are possessed of the Matrix of the Tathāgata [*tathāgata-garbha*], endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence are not different from me.’”⁷² That is, all beings are buddhas—no different from the Buddha, possessing the wisdom of the Buddha, inherently pure—but this inherent buddhahood is covered or obscured by defilements. As Williams says, enlightenment thus “lies in removing the taints in order to allow this inherently pure nature to shine forth.”⁷³ Enlightenment lies in uncovering one’s buddha-nature.

Another important *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtra is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, also known as the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, which teaches that the *tathāgata-garbha* is present even in *icchantikas*, those who have cut all the wholesome roots in themselves⁷⁴ and who, according to some Mahāyāna texts, lacked the potential for enlightenment.⁷⁵ The

⁶⁸ *Shambhala*, 220–21.

⁶⁹ Williams, 97.

⁷⁰ Williams, 97; Keown, 296.

⁷¹ Keown, 296.

⁷² Williams 97, quoting from J. Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra)* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente).

⁷³ Williams, 98.

⁷⁴ *Shambhala*, 97.

⁷⁵ Williams, 98; Keown, 117.

Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra was “highly influential in the development of Chinese Buddhism,” providing “the scriptural basis for asserting that all living beings have Buddha-nature”⁷⁶—not just some living beings but every living being.

The authors of the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras were aware of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and Mādhyamika philosophy.⁷⁷ Contemporary scholars argue that the authors of the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras, “like many other Buddhists at that time, were concerned with the negative impression conveyed by the notion of ‘emptiness,’” which seemed to focus “on the *lack* of independent selfhood and did not do justice to the positive and *full* nature of enlightened experience.”⁷⁸ So the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras stressed the positive aspect of enlightenment: “the Awakening to one’s Buddha potential that exists within as a luminous treasure waiting to be discovered.”⁷⁹ Mitchell sums up: “This line of thinking about the generation of Buddhahood is seen by the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras to be a positive addition to the Mādhyamika notion of emptiness. That is, when one attains the purification of mental formations and gains wisdom realizing emptiness, one can see this inner Buddha potential shining in all beings, including oneself.”⁸⁰

In the *Tathāgata-garbha* sūtras, practice is presented not as a way to “attain” the qualities of a buddha but as a way to “uncover” one’s inherent buddha-nature. Donald Mitchell explains that defilements such as greed, hatred, and delusion “cover over the *Tathāgata-garbha* ‘like a rag covering a Buddha statue.’ Once one is free from these defilements, the inner essence of Buddhahood shines forth with its luminous nirvanic

⁷⁶ Keown, 197.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, 140.

⁷⁸ Mitchell, 140.

⁷⁹ Mitchell, 140.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, 139.

nature and pure qualities.”⁸¹ Thus, Mitchell says, “it is not possible for human thought or willfulness to attain Nirvāṇa or Buddhahood any more than a rag can produce the Buddha statue that is wrapped within.”⁸² The human will cannot attain or achieve or produce the qualities of a buddha; they are inherent. The *tathāgata-garbha* “alone is the source of the attainment of Nirvāṇa and Buddhahood.”⁸³ One’s buddha-nature simply needs to be uncovered. That is the only role for the human will: to clear away defilements so that one’s inherent buddha-nature can shine forth.

The Yogācarā School

The Indian Yogācarā school of Mahāyāna Buddhism—also known as Cittamātra (“Mind Only”) or Vijñānavāda (“Way of Consciousness”)—emerged in the fourth century C.E.⁸⁴ The followers of Yogācarā shared the concern of the authors of the *Tathāgata-garbha* literature about the negative connotation of “emptiness” in Mādhyamika philosophy. It is possible that the *Tathāgata-garbha* texts influenced Yogācarā, but the relationship between the *Tathāgata-garbha* texts and Yogācarā is a subject of scholarly debate.⁸⁵ In any case, the term *tathāgata-garbha* is an important one in Yogācarā texts.⁸⁶

The work of the great translator Paramārtha (499–569) (also known as Chen-ti) was the basis of the Chinese She-lun school of Yogācarā.⁸⁷ Paramārtha, an Indian

⁸¹ Mitchell, 139.

⁸² Mitchell, 139.

⁸³ Mitchell, 139.

⁸⁴ Keown, 341.

⁸⁵ Mitchell, 140; Williams, 96–97.

⁸⁶ Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 257.

⁸⁷ Keown, 211; Williams, 92; Mitchell, 188.

monastic scholar, arrived in China in 546.⁸⁸ His work “was foundational . . . to the development of all of Chinese Buddhism . . . because of his role in promoting the *Tathāgata-garbha* tradition.”⁸⁹ Through Paramārtha, the teaching of the *tathāgata-garbha*—and, thus, the description of practice as instrumental for uncovering buddha-nature—contributed directly to the Chinese Ch’an school (as well as the T’ien-t’ai school).⁹⁰

In the Yogācārā tradition, as in the *Tathāgata-garbha* tradition, there is an important end that needs to be attained: the uncovering of one’s buddha-nature. Practice is instrumental in attaining that end. Practice is not, however, a means to *attain* buddha-nature. All beings already have buddha-nature. Buddha-nature cannot be “attained.” One’s inherent buddha-nature, one’s inherent perfection, needs only to be uncovered so that it can shine forth.

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR REALIZING BUDDHA-NATURE

Practice can also be described as a means to *realize* one’s buddha-nature and, thus, to become enlightened. In this context, “to realize” is generally understood to mean “to become fully aware of” (rather than “to make real”). So in this particular variation on instrumental rhetoric, Buddhist practice is a means to become fully aware of one’s buddha-nature. This description of practice originated with the Chinese Buddhist text *The Awakening of Faith* and is found throughout the history of Ch’an and Zen.

⁸⁸ Mitchell, 188.

⁸⁹ Mitchell, 188.

⁹⁰ Mitchell, 188.

The Awakening of Faith

The *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (*Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun*; given the Sanskrit title *Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda Śāstra*)—or simply the *Awakening of Faith*—was “a seminal text in East Asian Buddhism” and specifically Ch’an Buddhism.⁹¹ Although attributed to the Indian Buddhist teacher Aśvaghoṣa, it was almost certainly composed in China⁹²—probably, according to Paul Williams, by Paramārtha, its purported translator.⁹³

The *Awakening of Faith* was the origin of the distinction in Chinese Buddhism between “original enlightenment” (*hongaku* in Japanese) and “temporal enlightenment.”⁹⁴

Original enlightenment (or originary enlightenment) is inherent. It is the state of “the true mind within.”⁹⁵ Original enlightenment “refers to the fact that Mind in itself, truly, is free from thoughts and all pervading.” This true mind is “analogous to empty space”; it is “like a mirror which in itself is empty of images.”⁹⁶ Ordinarily, though, people do not perceive the mind as being like empty space; they do not perceive this original enlightenment. From the ordinary point of view, “the fundamental delusion or ignorance is the result of (or identified with) mental agitation, like waves on a previously calm ocean.”⁹⁷

⁹¹ Williams, 109, 112; Keown, 168; Mitchell, 189.

⁹² Yoshito S. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 5, 7; Keown, 168; Williams, 109.

⁹³ Williams, 109.

⁹⁴ Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, Vol. II: *The Mass Movement* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1976), 156; Keown, 109; Williams, 110; John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 139.

⁹⁵ McRae, 139.

⁹⁶ Williams, 110.

⁹⁷ Williams, 110.

Temporal enlightenment—or the “realization” of enlightenment—is “the removal of illusions to reveal this inherent brilliance,”⁹⁸ that is, the inherent brilliance of original enlightenment. “Through cutting discursive activity the mind is ‘returned’ to the state it was always really in, that of pure, mirror-like, radiant stillness.”⁹⁹ That “returning” is temporal enlightenment. Temporal enlightenment is a state that is attained at a particular time, whereas original enlightenment is a state that has always been.

Paul Williams notes that since original enlightenment is the mind’s own natural state, “it is thereby quite possible for enlightenment”—that is, temporal enlightenment—“to occur not as the direct result of a long period of moral and spiritual cultivation but rather at any time, suddenly or apparently spontaneously.”¹⁰⁰

Williams says that in his opinion “it is impossible to underestimate . . . the importance of the Buddha-essence theory in general, and the *Awakening of Faith* in particular, for East Asian Buddhism.”¹⁰¹ He says that “the many references to Mind, One Mind, and True Self in East Asian Buddhism can to a substantial degree be traced directly or indirectly to this tradition.”¹⁰² With regard to Ch’an Buddhism, the fourth Chinese patriarch of Ch’an, Tao-hsin, “was the first to incorporate the concept of ‘Original Enlightenment’ from the *Awakening of Faith* into his meditation sessions,” and this new emphasis on original enlightenment was continued under Tao-hsin’s successor Hung-jen, the fifth Chinese patriarch of Ch’an.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ McRae, 139.

⁹⁹ Williams, 111.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, 111.

¹⁰¹ Williams, 112.

¹⁰² Williams, 112.

¹⁰³ Matsunaga, Vol. II, 196.

According to John McRae, in the Ch'an of the fourth through sixth Chinese patriarchs, "the general, almost universal, tendency" was "implicitly to favor originary enlightenment over the specific achievement of temporal enlightenment."¹⁰⁴ Thus, McRae argues, there is "a profound continuity" between the early Ch'an understanding of Buddha-nature and the Ts'ao-tung (Sōtō) approach to "silent illumination."¹⁰⁵

In the *Awakening of Faith*, as in the *Tathāgata-garbha* and Yogācārā traditions, practice is not described as instrumental for "attaining" the qualities of a buddha. Here again, buddha-nature is understood to be inherent. One already has the qualities of a buddha. In the *Tathāgata-garbha* and Yogācārā traditions, one needs to "uncover" one's buddha-nature, which has been covered over by defilements. The *Awakening of Faith* uses a slightly different form of rhetoric: one does not even need to clear away anything that was "covering" one's buddha-nature; one needs only to "realize" one's buddha-nature. The rhetoric of "realization" stresses that the only change necessary is a change of awareness, an epistemological change. Practice is a means of coming to this awareness, realizing what has always been: attaining "temporal enlightenment," which is the realization of one's "original enlightenment."

Hakuin

The variety of instrumental rhetoric first found in early Ch'an in the *Awakening of Faith*—distinguishing between "original" and "temporal" enlightenment—is also the primary variety of instrumental rhetoric found in the teaching of the much later Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768).

¹⁰⁴ McRae, 139.

¹⁰⁵ McRae, 139.

Norman Waddell calls Hakuin “the major figure of Japanese Rinzai Zen” and says that Hakuin “almost singlehandedly reformed and revitalized a Zen school that, except for a brief interval in the previous century, had been in a state of spiritual lethargy for nearly three hundred years.”¹⁰⁶ (Michel Mohr objects to this common characterization of Hakuin, arguing that “a wide conjunction of circumstances converged in the direction of reforms well before the rise of Hakuin to the status of a ‘reformer.’”¹⁰⁷ But in any case, Hakuin is a significant figure in Japanese Zen.) Hakuin is known for systematizing and revitalizing kōan practice and is known for his famous kōan, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”¹⁰⁸ Nearly all contemporary Rinzai teachers trace their lineage back to Hakuin.¹⁰⁹

I will examine Hakuin’s *Sokkō-roku Kaien-fusetsu*, “Talks Given Introductory to Zen Lectures on the Records of Sokkō.” Sokkō is a Japanese name for the Ch’an master Hsü-t’ang Chih-yü (1185–1269), also known in Chinese as Hsi-keng, a teacher whom Hakuin “held in special veneration as an exemplar of the authentic Zen traditions to which he aspired.”¹¹⁰ According to Waddell, the talks in Hakuin’s *Sokkō-roku*, given to students in 1740 at a large meeting at Shōin-ji, Hakuin’s home temple, “incorporated virtually all his basic views on Zen teaching and training.”¹¹¹ In the *Sokkō-roku*, Hakuin repeatedly and unambiguously presents practice as a means to realize buddha-nature. Or, to borrow the categories from *The Awakening of Faith*, Hakuin repeatedly and

¹⁰⁶ Norman Waddell, *The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Hakuin* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), xi.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Mohr, “Emerging from Nonduality: Koan Practice in the Rinzai Tradition since Hakuin,” in *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 244, 256.

¹⁰⁸ Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 134; *Shambhala Dictionary*, 80; Keown, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Waddell, xiii.

¹¹⁰ Waddell, xi.

¹¹¹ Waddell, xi–xii.

unambiguously presents practice as a means to attain “temporal enlightenment,” which is the realization of one’s “original enlightenment.”

Hakuin talks about “original enlightenment” as “self-nature” or “buddha-mind.” For instance, Hakuin defines the “great faith” required for Zen practice as “the belief that each and every person has an essential self-nature he can see into, and the belief in a principle by which this self-nature can be fully penetrated.”¹¹² “Great faith” is the faith that we can realize our original enlightenment—in Hakuin’s words, “the fundamental self-nature inherent in each and every person,”¹¹³ or “the buddha-mind that is originally furnished in your own home.”¹¹⁴

Although Hakuin clearly believes that we all are equipped with original enlightenment—self nature, or buddha-mind—he puts most of his stress on temporal enlightenment—*kenshō*, or a “breakthrough,” or the realization of original enlightenment—and on the single-minded effort required to attain temporal enlightenment.

For Hakuin, *kenshō*—temporal enlightenment—is absolutely vital. He says that the activities of a person who hasn’t experienced *kenshō* are “all unenlightened activity.”¹¹⁵ Such a person

tries constantly to remain detached in thought and deed, but all the while his thoughts and deeds remain attached. He endeavors to be doing nothing all day long, and all day long he is busily doing. But let this same person experience *kenshō*, and everything changes. Now, though he is constantly thinking and acting, it is all totally free and unattached. Although he is engaged in activity around the clock, that activity is, as such, nonactivity.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Waddell, 62.

¹¹³ Waddell, 54.

¹¹⁴ Waddell, 44.

¹¹⁵ Waddell, 27.

¹¹⁶ Waddell, 27.

Hakuin says that the twenty-eight Indian patriarchs of Zen and the first six Chinese patriarchs, “as well as venerable Zen teachers of the Five Houses and Seven Schools who descended from them,” have all “transmitted this Dharma of *kenshō* as they strove to lead people to awakening in Shakyamuni’s place.”¹¹⁷

Zen practice, Hakuin says, is “a formidable undertaking.”¹¹⁸ Hakuin says, for instance, that often someone will “spend three, five, perhaps seven years doing zazen, but because he does not apply himself with total devotion he fails to achieve true single-mindedness, and his practice does not bear fruit. . . . he never experiences the joy of nirvāṇa.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, in reply to the question of what one can do to become awakened, Hakuin says that you must investigate what it is that asks such a question and clarify it for yourself, keeping at it “with total, single-minded devotion” “whether you are standing or sitting, speaking or silent, when you are eating your rice or drinking your tea.” And “when all the effort you can muster has been exhausted and you have reached a total impasse, . . . it will suddenly come and you will break free.”¹²⁰ (Note an interesting nuance in this last example: that while great effort is required, the breakthrough is described not as a direct result of the effort per se; rather, it happens when all effort is exhausted and an impasse is reached. Usually, though, Hakuin presents the breakthrough as a direct result of effort.)

Hakuin particularly recommends kōan practice as a means to the realization of buddha-mind. Waddell notes that for Hakuin, the freedom of enlightenment “could not be

¹¹⁷ Waddell, 54.

¹¹⁸ Waddell, 72.

¹¹⁹ Waddell, 40.

¹²⁰ Waddell, 61–62.

attained by anything less than total dedication to a vigorous program of koan study.”¹²¹

Hakuin speaks of “the current crop of sightless, irresponsible bungler priests who regard the koan as nonessential,” and he says that “true followers of the Way . . . will pledge with firm determination to work their way through the final koans of the patriarch teachers.”¹²² Hakuin says that once you have bored through the “difficult-to-pass” (*nantō*) kōans, “you will understand exactly what the Buddha meant when he said that a buddha can see the buddha-nature with his own eyes as distinctly as you see a fruit lying in the palm of your hand.”¹²³

Hakuin ridicules those Zen teachers who emphasize original enlightenment to the point of advocating “doing nothing,” those teachers who say things like, “‘Self-nature is naturally pure, the mind-source is deep as an ocean. There is no samsaric existence to cast aside, there is no nirvāṇa to be sought. . . . How could anything be lacking?’” Hakuin comments:

Ah, how plausible it sounds! All too plausible. Unfortunately, the words they speak do not possess even a shred of strength in practical application. . . . How can any spiritual energy emerge from such an attitude? Can people of this kind be true descendants of the great Bodhidharma? They assure you that there is “nothing lacking.” But are they happy? Are their minds free of care?¹²⁴

As Waddell says, Hakuin believes that Zen teachers in the Sōtō and Ōbaku sects and even Hakuin’s own Rinzai sect “are all equally guilty of debilitating Zen by espousing passive and quietistic approaches to practice.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Waddell, xii.

¹²² Waddell, 66, 59.

¹²³ Waddell, 30.

¹²⁴ Waddell, 66.

¹²⁵ Waddell, xv.

Similarly, Hakuin ridicules those Zen teachers who teach emptying the mind of thoughts and aspirations, who say things like, ““All you have to do is concentrate on being thoughtless and doing nothing whatever. No practice. No realization. Doing nothing, the state of no-mind, is the direct path to sudden realization.”” Hakuin says, “People hear this teaching and try to follow it. Choking off their aspirations, sweeping their minds clean of delusive thoughts, they dedicate themselves to doing nothing but keeping their minds complete blanks, blissfully unaware that they are, in the process, doing and thinking a great deal.”¹²⁶

Hakuin’s presentation of Zen practice is clearly instrumental for attaining enlightenment. Practice, for Hakuin, is a means to attain temporal enlightenment—*kenshō*—which is the realization of one’s original enlightenment—one’s self-nature, or buddha-mind. Again, as in the *Awakening of Faith* and the instrumental rhetoric of “uncovering” buddha-nature, practice is not being described as instrumental for attaining the qualities of a buddha. Buddha-nature is presented as inherent. In Hakuin’s version of the instrumental pedagogical strategy, one needs only to “realize” the buddha-nature that is already there.

PRACTICE AS NONINSTRUMENTAL

Buddhist practice is not always described as instrumental, as a means to the end of enlightenment. In the history of Zen, practice has also been described as *noninstrumental*—specifically, as a manifestation of one’s inherent buddhahood. That is, beings are already buddhas, period. There is nothing that needs to be attained, not *prajñā*

¹²⁶ Waddell, 26–27.

and not even the “uncovering” or “realization” of one’s buddha-nature. According to this noninstrumental teaching, when one practices, one is expressing or manifesting one’s buddhahood, but one is a buddha in any case. The quintessential example of this pedagogical strategy is the teaching of Dōgen, but it did not originate with Dōgen.

Twelfth-Century Ts’ao-tung

I have generally associated Sōtō Zen with an essentially noninstrumental teaching about practice and Rinzai Zen with an essentially instrumental teaching about practice. So when I began my research for this project and read some of the teachings of the ninth-century Chinese founders of these lineages, I was surprised to discover that their teachings did not correspond particularly well with my impressions of their lineages. The teachings of Tung-shan (Tōzan), one of the founders of the Ts’ao-tung (Sōtō) school, are difficult to categorize as either instrumental or noninstrumental, given that he says very little at all about either practice or enlightenment¹²⁷; and as we will see in a later section, Lin-chi (Rinzai) has a complex and nuanced presentation of Zen practice that seems to incorporate both instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions.

It turns out that the Japanese Sōtō Zen master Dōgen (examined in the next section) fits my noninstrumental image of Tung-shan’s lineage much better than Tung-shan does, and the Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin (examined already) fits my instrumental image of Lin-chi’s lineage much better than Lin-chi does. Given this, I wondered if perhaps Dōgen and Hakuin were largely responsible for giving their schools the images I have of them.

¹²⁷ As William Powell observes, “enlightenment, which historically has been one of the central concerns of Buddhism, is . . . rarely mentioned in *The Record of Tung-shan*.” William F. Powell, *The Record of Tung-shan* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 18.

But in fact, this distinction is considered to have been defined by the differing teachings of several Sung-dynasty Ch'an monks. Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163) of the Lin-chi school taught kōan (*kung-an*) practice and striving after enlightenment, while Hung-chih Cheng-chüeh (1091–1157) and Chen-shieh Ch'ing-liao (1088–1151) of the Ts'ao-tung school taught “silent illumination” (*mo chao*) Ch'an.¹²⁸ This “silent illumination” practice of the twelfth-century Ts'ao-tung school was “a type of still meditation in which the Buddha-nature would naturally manifest.”¹²⁹

Hung-chih, who is the better known of the two Ts'ao-tung monks, wrote the *Inscription on Silent Meditation*, in which he “extols a silent awareness of the realm of Buddha-nature.”¹³⁰ According to John McRae, Hung-chih “seems to consider silent illumination as the inherently enlightened quality of mind and enlightenment as a natural and joyful state that is already fully present to the practitioner.”¹³¹

Dōgen is in the lineage of Ching-liao, and Dōgen praises Hung-chih's teaching on Zen practice. Dōgen says in his “Lancet of Seated Meditation” that among the various tracts on zazen written by the masters, only Hung-chih's is worthwhile, and Dōgen quotes Hung-chih at length.¹³² (Also fittingly, Hakuin calls Ta-hui—the advocate of kōan practice and striving after enlightenment—a “venerable master” and says that members of the Rinzai school “should feel honored to have a man of such profound attainment among the teachers of our school.”¹³³)

¹²⁸ McRae, 123-38; Keown, 288; Wright, 207; Morton Schlütter, “‘Before the Empty Eon’ versus ‘A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature’: Kung-an Use in the Ts'ao-tung Tradition and Ta-hui's Kung-an Introspection Ch'an,” in Heine and Wright, 169; Carl Bielefeldt, *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 99.

¹²⁹ Schlütter, 169.

¹³⁰ Schlütter, 169.

¹³¹ McRae, 137.

¹³² Bielefeldt, 198–199.

¹³³ Waddell, 70–71.

Dōgen

Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253), also known as Dōgen Zenji, was the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen in Japan and is considered one of the greatest figures of Japanese Buddhism.¹³⁴ As is widely recognized by scholars of Buddhism (though not necessarily by other scholars of religion¹³⁵), in Sōtō Zen, especially the writings of Dōgen, Zen practice—specifically, *zazen*, or seated meditation—is presented not as a means to the end of enlightenment but as a manifestation of one’s inherent buddhahood. In other words, in Dōgen’s written teachings on Zen, practice is presented as noninstrumental.

In *Dogen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation*, Carl Bielefeldt notes similarities between Dōgen’s and Shinran’s “soteriological strategies.”¹³⁶ Shinran (1173–1262), a contemporary of Dōgen, founded the Jōdo Shinshū, or “True Pure Land School,” of Japanese Buddhism. Bielefeldt argues that the practices of both Shinran and Dōgen (and Nichiren as well) are derived from “the principle of a higher perfection.” For Shinran, this principle is found in “the universal grace of the Buddha Amitabha.” For Dōgen, it is found in “the Buddhahood built into the very structures of consciousness.” In the writings of Shinran and Dōgen, the practices of Buddhism “did not, ultimately speaking, lead to anything: they were supposed rather to be the expression in the act of the practitioner of his acceptance of, and commitment to, the principle”¹³⁷—for Dōgen, the principle of

¹³⁴ Keown, 79; Prebish, *Historical Dictionary*, 116.

¹³⁵ For instance, in the section on Buddhism in Catherine Albanese’s textbook *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1999), although Albanese distinguishes between the strategies of Rinzai and Soto Zen, she makes the mistaken generalization that the “goal” of Zen is “to bring a person to enlightenment through the practice of meditation” (pp. 314–315).

¹³⁶ Bielefeldt, 165.

¹³⁷ Bielefeldt, 166.

inherent buddhahood. Zazen, in Dōgen’s written teachings, is not a means to an end; practice is noninstrumental.

The word “faith” is not often used in discussing Buddhism, except when discussing Pure Land Buddhism and Dōgen’s Zen. In *How to Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Zen Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, Francis Dojun Cook explicitly talks about Dōgen’s Zen as “the Zen of faith”¹³⁸—“faith in the other,”¹³⁹ the other being the Buddha, or “our inherent Buddha nature and its ability to actualize itself.”¹⁴⁰ In Dōgen’s Zen, Cook says, we need to “completely abandon our own efforts and trust completely in our own true nature which is the Buddha. This is where faith comes in.”¹⁴¹ Cook observes that Dōgen “often warns against any kind of seeking or wanting, even if the object of the desire is a ‘holy’ object.”¹⁴² In Dōgen’s teaching, practice is not instrumental.

According to Cook, Dōgen’s teaching of *honsho myoshu*—the idea that practice is a manifestation of inherent enlightenment—“means that practice should not be undertaken in the mistaken notion that it has a purely instrumental value, as a means to a separate and presumably greater end.”¹⁴³ As Cook says, to understand practice as a means to enlightenment is to “perpetuate and strengthen the very dualisms that lie at the root of the human problem”; it “encourages the very greed and attachment human beings seek to escape.” An instrumental teaching about practice and enlightenment “is a denial of what was for Dōgen the basis for his own achievement—the conviction that all beings, just as

¹³⁸ Francis Dojun Cook, *How To Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Zen Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), 25.

¹³⁹ Cook, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Cook, 30.

¹⁴¹ Cook, 28.

¹⁴² Cook, 27.

¹⁴³ Cook, 3.

they are, are Buddhas.”¹⁴⁴ Other Buddhist teachers, including Zen teachers, teach that all beings, just as they are, have *buddha-nature*—that is, all beings are *potential* buddhas—but this inherent buddha-nature needs to be “uncovered” or “realized” so that one can be a fully enlightened Buddha. Dōgen, in contrast, teaches that all beings are *buddhas*—not merely potential buddhas but actual buddhas. And Dōgen teaches *honsho myoshu*: practice as a manifestation of enlightenment.

Related to the teaching of *honsho myoshu* is Dōgen’s teaching of *shusho itto*, “the oneness of practice and enlightenment.” As Cook says, “when we truly practice Zen, we are being Buddhas with no question of a later payoff for our investment in practice.”¹⁴⁵ Practice is not a means to the end of enlightenment. Rather, practice and enlightenment are one.

(According to William Bodiford, Dōgen’s “faith in Zen practice as the expression of one’s inherent enlightenment is . . . indebted to Japanese Tendai doctrines of original enlightenment,” or *hongaku homon*.¹⁴⁶ Dōgen studied Tendai Buddhism at Tendai headquarters on Mt. Hiei from 1212 to 1217,¹⁴⁷ and then, disillusioned and in search of a new teacher, he entered Kenninji, which was officially a Tendai temple but where he became a disciple of Myōzen, a Zen teacher in the Lin-chi lineage.¹⁴⁸)

Dōgen’s *Fukan zazzen gi* (“Universal promotion of the principles of seated meditation”¹⁴⁹) is both a practical manual on meditation and also, as Carl Bielefeldt says, “a theological statement of the Zen approach to Buddhism.”¹⁵⁰ Dōgen begins the *Fukan*

¹⁴⁴ Cook, 3–4.

¹⁴⁵ Cook, 4.

¹⁴⁶ William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 14.

¹⁴⁷ Bodiford, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Bodiford, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Bielefeldt, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Bielefeldt, 109.

zazen gi by asking four rhetorical questions about the relationship between practice and enlightenment. Each question essentially asks, If we are inherently enlightened, why practice?:

Fundamentally speaking, the basis of the way is perfectly pervasive; how could it be contingent on practice and verification? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted; why should we expend sustained effort? Surely the whole being is far beyond defilement; who could believe in a method to polish it? Never is it apart; what is the use of a pilgrimage to practice it?¹⁵¹

This was a central question for Dōgen. As Cook says, the question “If one is in fact a Buddha right now, why practice at all?” was the question that “plagued the young Dōgen and eventually led him to China in search of the right answer.”¹⁵²

And yet, Dōgen clearly affirms the importance of practice.

Sometimes, Dōgen’s rhetoric is reminiscent of the distinction between “original enlightenment” and “temporal enlightenment,” first found in *The Awakening of Faith*. For instance, having begun the *Fukan zazen gi* with a series of rhetorical questions implying that there is no reason to practice, Dōgen immediately goes on to say, “And yet, if a hair’s breadth of distinction exists, the gap is like that between heaven and earth; once the slightest like or dislike arises, all is confused and the mind is lost.”¹⁵³ I am not entirely sure what that means, but it clearly implies that although we are inherently enlightened, that doesn’t necessarily mean all is well. Dōgen also says that you can reach a state where “your original face will appear,” and “if you want such a state, urgently

¹⁵¹ Bielefeldt, 175. Bielefeldt’s book includes translations of two versions of the *Fukan zazen gi*, the “vulgate” version and a version written earlier. I am using the “vulgate,” which Bielefeldt labels “FKZZG (2)” in his comparative translation.

¹⁵² Cook, 8.

¹⁵³ Bielefeldt, 175.

work at such a state.”¹⁵⁴ So he is distinguishing here between something inherent, one’s “original face,” and something that can in some way be attained, the revealing of that original face. So even Dōgen, the quintessential teacher of noninstrumental practice, occasionally seems to teach that practice is instrumental for attaining enlightenment.

More often, though, Dōgen simply asserts that practice is important, without trying to make any sense of that assertion in light of his insistence on our inherent buddhahood. Of course, Dōgen’s audience at the time of his writing was students of Zen who were presumably already deeply engaged in practice; thus, perhaps, he felt little need to say much about practice. For example, he simply invokes the examples of the Buddha and Bodhidharma, who engaged in intensive seated meditation. He says that “we can see the traces” of the Buddha’s “six years of sitting erect,” and “we still hear of the fame” of Bodhidharma’s “nine years facing the wall.” And Dōgen asks, “When even the ancient sages were like this, how could men today dispense with pursuing [the way]?”¹⁵⁵ Practice, for Dōgen, is simply the activity of buddhas. It is “the essential function of the way of the Buddha.”¹⁵⁶

The bulk of the *Fukan zazen gi* is devoted to instructions for the practice of seated meditation, or *zazen*, including clear and detailed instructions regarding the appropriate posture—for example, “Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel”¹⁵⁷—and the breathing—for example, “Breathe gently through the nose.”¹⁵⁸ The instructions regarding the mind are not so clear. For example, he says, “Sitting fixedly, think of not thinking. How do you think of not thinking? Nonthinking.

¹⁵⁴ Bielefeldt, 175–76.

¹⁵⁵ Bielefeldt, 176.

¹⁵⁶ Bielefeldt, 186.

¹⁵⁷ Bielefeldt, 180.

¹⁵⁸ Bielefeldt, 180.

This is the essential art of zazen.”¹⁵⁹ But in any case, Dōgen gives detailed instructions in the practice of zazen, but without making much effort to explain *why* the practice of zazen is so important.

For Dōgen, zazen is, as Carl Bielefeldt says, “the very essence of the Buddhist religion.”¹⁶⁰ In the “Lancet of Seated Meditation” (*Shobo genzo zazen shin*), Dōgen says, “What is inherited by successor after successor [in this transmission] is just this message of seated meditation; one who does not participate in the unique transmission of this message is not a Buddha or Patriarch.” And he closes the text with this: “Above all, descendants of the Buddhas and Patriarchs should study seated meditation as the one great concern. This is the orthodox seal of the single transmission.”¹⁶¹

In his writing, Dōgen teaches that all sentient beings, just as they are, are buddhas, and practice is important; but (for the most part) Dōgen seems to posit no causal connection between practice and buddhahood. In Dōgen’s writing, practice is not described as a means to “attain” buddhahood (buddhahood is inherent), and practice generally is not even described as a means to “uncover” or “realize” buddha-nature. Dōgen teaches that nothing needs to be attained, not even the uncovering or realization of buddha-nature, and that practice has no role whatsoever in the attainment of buddhahood, or even in the attainment of some sort of “uncovering” or “realizing” of buddha-nature. Dōgen does not generally distinguish between an enlightenment that is “original” (and thus unattainable) and an enlightenment that is “temporal” (and thus attainable). In Dōgen’s rhetoric, beings are buddhas, period. To be a buddha is to be enlightened.

¹⁵⁹ Bielefeldt, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Bielefeldt, 2.

¹⁶¹ Bielefeldt, 197, 205.

When, as in Dōgen’s writing, practice is not presented as a means to buddhahood, or even as a means to an enlightenment that is distinguishable from buddha-nature, it becomes more difficult to make a compelling case for practice. If practice is not a means to buddhahood or enlightenment, why practice? And yet, Dōgen does stress the importance of practice.

PRACTICE AS BOTH INSTRUMENTAL AND NONINSTRUMENTAL: TWO TRUTHS?

The previous sections of this chapter examined various instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of Buddhist practice. Some texts in the Asian development of Zen make use of two or more of these ways of describing Buddhist practice, sometimes even making use of both instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of practice. That is, some texts teach both that practice is a means to the end of enlightenment and also that practice is *not* a means to the end of enlightenment.

It is possible that some of these texts are simply mixing or juxtaposing instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of practice, despite the apparent contradiction of saying that practice both is and is not instrumental for attaining enlightenment. But I would propose that, in at least some cases, these texts may best be understood as explicitly or implicitly making use of the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of the Two Truths—the conventional truth and the ultimate truth—to present practice as instrumental when seen from the “conventional” perspective and noninstrumental when seen from the “ultimate” perspective.

In this section, I will revisit Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, which I examined earlier as an example of presenting practice as instrumental for attaining *prajñā*, and I will consider whether Nāgārjuna is in fact presenting practice as both instrumental and also noninstrumental. Then I will examine the complex presentations of practice in *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* and in the *Lin-chi lu*, the record of the teachings of Lin-chi (Rinzai).

Nāgārjuna Revisited

As discussed earlier, in the *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna presents practice as instrumental for attaining *prajñā* (the wisdom of emptiness) and thus nirvāna or buddhahood; and yet Nāgārjuna also says that “there is not the slightest difference” between nirvāna and samsāra.¹⁶² As I noted, various interpreters—Jay Garfield, Paul Williams, and Tsongkhapa—understand the phrase “there is not the slightest difference” to mean that samsāra and nirvāna are equally empty of inherent existence and that they are the same reality seen or understood in two different ways. However, what Nāgārjuna actually *said* was simply that “there is not the slightest difference.” He did *not* say that “there is not the slightest difference, *except* a difference of perspective.”

Now, what if we understand Nāgārjuna to actually mean simply that “there is not the slightest difference”—that is, that even if one seems to be living in samsāra, it is in fact also nirvāna, regardless of one's perspective? This sounds more like an assumption of the noninstrumental strategy: that one does not and cannot “attain” *anything* through practice. That is, one cannot “attain” nirvāna if one is already there.

¹⁶² Garfield, 75 (XXV:9).

And perhaps, using the teaching of the Two Truths, we can reconcile Nāgārjuna's saying that buddhahood is attainable (through the realization of emptiness) and also implying that nothing needs to be attained. The teaching of the Two Truths was actually developed by Nāgārjuna (in the form in which I am discussing it; it has roots in earlier Abhidharma teachings¹⁶³), and as noted by Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, the teaching of the Two Truths "is of vital importance in Madhyamika,"¹⁶⁴ so this may not be an unwarranted imposition on Nāgārjuna's thought.

The Two Truths, or two levels of truth, are the "ultimate" truth and the "conventional" truth.¹⁶⁵ These two truths are observations of reality from two different perspectives: the ultimate (or absolute) perspective and the conventional (or relative) perspective.¹⁶⁶ From the ultimate perspective, all phenomena, including the self, are seen as useful fictions, as reifications, as constructions that are empty of inherent, independent existence. That is, the ultimate perspective is the perspective of *prajñā*, or the wisdom of emptiness. From the conventional perspective—the ordinary, everyday perspective—one sees individual phenomena, including an individual self, that are independent of other phenomena. In ordinary, everyday life, whether one is enlightened or not, one operates from the conventional point of view, in which individual phenomena are useful constructions. (E.g., to chop a carrot, one needs to perceive oneself, the carrot, the knife, and the cutting board as separate from one another.) And yet from the ultimate point of

¹⁶³ Peter Harvey says, "The concept of two levels of truth already existed in *Abhidharma*. There, 'conventional truths' were those expressed using terms such as 'person' and 'thing'; 'ultimate truth' referred to more exact statements, expressed in terms of dharmas. For the Madhyamika writers, however, talk of dharmas is just another kind of provisional, conventional truth, which ultimate truth transcends." Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 98–99.

¹⁶⁴ Matsunaga, Vol. I, 70.

¹⁶⁵ I borrowed the phrase "two levels of truth" from H. H. the Dalai Lama and Alexander Berzin, *The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1997), 160.

¹⁶⁶ Matsunaga, Vol. I, 70.

view, nothing has inherent, independent existence. (Ultimately, one's self, the carrot, the knife, and the cutting board are *not* separate.) The ultimate and the conventional are the two levels of truth, or the Two Truths.¹⁶⁷

Employing the Two Truths, we could argue that Nāgārjuna is saying that from the *conventional* perspective, practice is instrumental for realizing emptiness and thus attaining buddhahood, while from the *ultimate* perspective, nirvāna is already here, so it cannot be “attained” through practice or in any other way.

If we understand Nāgārjuna's teaching in this way, then we do not need to read a central teaching of the Mādhyamika school—that samsāra and nirvāna are the same—as including an implied disclaimer: “they're the same *except* for a difference of perspective.” We can understand the teaching to mean straightforwardly that samsāra and nirvāna are in all respects the same. They are identical. When Nāgārjuna says that samsāra is nirvāna, he means precisely what he says. Nāgārjuna is describing the view from the ultimate perspective. From that perspective, there is no difference whatsoever between samsāra and nirvāna, and thus it makes no sense to talk about “attaining” nirvāna.

So I am arguing that one can understand Nāgārjuna to be offering the following two teachings, from the perspective of each of the Two Truths: The *conventional* truth is that samsāra and nirvāna differ, but only because reality is being viewed from two different perspectives (from the conventional perspective we see samsāra, and from the ultimate perspective we see nirvāna), and thus one can speak about practice as a means of

¹⁶⁷ I have borrowed much of this discussion of the Two Truths from my *Zen for Christians: A Beginner's Guide* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

attaining nirvāna; and the *ultimate* truth is that there is no difference whatsoever between samsāra and nirvāna, and thus it makes no sense to talk about “attaining” nirvāna.

Now, it might sound as if I am agreeing, in a complicated way, with the interpreters who understand Nāgārjuna’s equation of samsāra and nirvāna to mean that there is no difference *except* a difference of perspective, but I am proposing an alternate understanding, so let me restate my point. I am proposing that Nāgārjuna’s equation of samsāra and nirvāna means simply that there is no difference whatsoever between the two—and this teaching is an example of the *noninstrumental* strategy. *Elsewhere* in the text Nāgārjuna is saying that one can attain nirvāna through the realization of emptiness—and this teaching is an example of the *instrumental* strategy. Furthermore, I propose that it makes some degree of logical sense to include these two apparently contradictory ways of teaching in the same text if one understands the noninstrumental teachings as the view from the ultimate perspective and the instrumental teachings as the view from the conventional perspective. So I am arguing that Nāgārjuna does indeed teach that samsāra and nirvāna differ only because of one’s perspective—and on this point I agree with Jay Garfield, Paul Williams, and Tsongkhapa—but I am arguing that this is only one *part* of Nāgārjuna’s teaching: his teaching from the conventional perspective. Nāgārjuna *also* teaches that samsāra and nirvāna differ in no way whatsoever, and this is his teaching from the *ultimate* perspective. Nāgārjuna’s statement that “there is not the slightest difference” between samsāra and nirvāna is a teaching from the ultimate perspective and means simply that there is no difference. When Nāgārjuna equates samsāra and nirvāna, he is not being sloppy or using shorthand or leaving us to add a qualification: “nirvāna is samsāra *seen from a different perspective*.” Rather,

Nāgārjuna is actually clearly stating the teaching from the ultimate perspective: nirvāna and saṃsāra are the same, period. Here, Nāgārjuna teaches that there is no difference at all between saṃsāra and nirvāna. Both teachings are true. There are Two Truths: the conventional truth and the ultimate truth.

For my purposes here, the significant point is that we can understand Nāgārjuna to be teaching *both* that practice is *instrumental* for attaining nirvāna and *also* that nirvāna is not “attainable” and thus that practice *cannot be instrumental* for “attaining” nirvāna. And we can make some logical sense of his combining of these two apparently contradictory teachings by making use of the Two Truths.

Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga argue that the teaching of the Two Truths “is of vital importance” not only in the Mādhyamika school founded by Nāgārjuna but in “all future Mahāyāna schools of thought,”¹⁶⁸ which of course includes Ch’an and Zen.

In the next two sections, I will examine *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* and the record of Lin-chi (Rinzai) in light of this idea that when instrumental and noninstrumental teachings are found in the same text, perhaps the teacher is implicitly making use of the Two Truths: teaching from the conventional perspective, where practice can be viewed as instrumental for attaining enlightenment, and also from the ultimate perspective, where it doesn’t make sense to speak of “attaining” enlightenment through practice or by any other means. I share Paul Williams’s sense that much of the paradoxical-sounding rhetoric in Zen teaching comes from mixing together ultimate and conventional ways of describing reality.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Matsunaga, Vol. I, 70.

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 46.

The Platform Sūtra

*The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*¹⁷⁰ (*Liu-tsu t'an ching*) is ostensibly a record of the career and teachings of Hui-neng (638–713), the sixth Chinese patriarch of Ch'an/Zen. D. T. Suzuki observes that “the seeds of Zen were sown” by Bodhidharma, but “the real Chinese founder of Zen” was Hui-neng, “for it was through him and his direct followers that Zen could cast off the garment borrowed from India and began to put on one cut and sewn by the native hands.”¹⁷¹ John McRae calls the *Platform Sūtra* “a brilliant consummation” of early Ch'an and “a virtual repository of the entire tradition up to the second half of the eighth century.”¹⁷² McRae also observes that the *Platform Sūtra* is “a nuanced attempt to describe a notoriously refractory subject, that is, the basic attitude that should be adopted toward Buddhist spiritual cultivation.”¹⁷³

For the most part, the *Platform Sūtra* presents practice as a means to *realize* buddha-nature, but in a key passage, we find what may be a noninstrumental description of practice.

The *Platform Sūtra* often makes the distinction, first found in *The Awakening of Faith*, between “original enlightenment” and “temporal enlightenment.” In the *Platform Sūtra*, to be enlightened usually means to attain “enlightenment” or “awakening” (temporal enlightenment), which is the realization of one’s “original nature” or buddha-nature (original enlightenment).

¹⁷⁰ Regarding the title, Philip Yampolsky suggests that “platform” may refer to a platform from which sermons were delivered, and regarding “sūtra,” he says this is the first time that a record of the career and teachings of a particular master was called a sūtra, even though “strictly speaking, of course, it is not one.” Philip B. Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 125.

¹⁷¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

¹⁷² McRae, 60, 65.

¹⁷³ McRae, 66.

The *Platform Sūtra* teaches that all beings have “original enlightenment,” that is, inherent buddha-nature, or a pure original nature. As Philip Yampolsky notes, the teaching that buddha-nature is inherent in all beings is assumed throughout the text.¹⁷⁴ And according to John McRae, the teaching about buddha-nature in the *Platform Sūtra* is the same as in texts attributed to Bodhidharma and to the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen—the *Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* and the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind*, respectively—including the idea that inherent buddha-nature “is only made invisible to ordinary humans by their illusions.”¹⁷⁵

The *Platform Sūtra* teaches that one can attain “temporal enlightenment,” or the realization of one’s buddha-nature. Hui-neng talks repeatedly about “enlightenment” or “awakening” as something that one can “gain,”¹⁷⁶ and about the “Buddha Way” as something that one can “achieve” or “gain,”¹⁷⁷ and he talks about how to “become Buddha.”¹⁷⁸ For instance, he says that even “people of shallow capacity” who are “filled with passions and troubles,” if they “always raise correct views in regard to their own original natures,” “will at once gain awakening.”¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere, and similarly, he says to his students, “Good friends, see for yourselves the purity of your own natures, practice and accomplish yourselves,” and “by self-accomplishment you may achieve the Buddha Way for yourselves.”¹⁸⁰

The *Platform Sūtra* teaches that one can attain “temporal enlightenment”—one can awaken to, or realize, one’s buddha-nature—through practice. For instance, Hui-neng

¹⁷⁴ Yampolsky, 118.

¹⁷⁵ McRae, 65–66.

¹⁷⁶ Yampolsky: “enlightenment”: 159, 168, 181; “awakening”: 149, 150, 151, 152, 168.

¹⁷⁷ Yampolsky: “achieve”: 141, 144, 151; “gain”: 149.

¹⁷⁸ Yampolsky, 148, 181.

¹⁷⁹ Yampolsky, 150.

¹⁸⁰ Yampolsky, 141.

says, “If you aspire to attain the Way, / Practice correctly; this is the Way,”¹⁸¹ and he says that “if you praise the supreme Dharma and practice according to it, you will certainly become Buddha.”¹⁸²

But *how* does one practice to realize one’s buddha-nature? Hui-neng urges students to exert themselves—to “work hard to practice the Way,” to “strive earnestly,” to “practice the Dharma with great effort,” to “exert [their] utmost efforts”¹⁸³—but exert themselves at *what*? In two places, Hui-neng encourages students to practice “straightforward mind,” and although he says what this is *not* (the “deluded” person thinks it is “sitting without moving and casting aside delusion without letting things arise in the mind”), he doesn’t say what it *is*.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Hui-neng advises his disciples that after he dies they should carry on as before and “sit all together in meditation,” but the next sentence, which apparently describes what one is to do in meditation, is not particularly helpful: “If you are only peacefully calm and quiet, without motion without stillness, without birth, without destruction, without coming, without going, without judgments of right and wrong, without staying and without going—this then is the Great Way.”¹⁸⁵

The *Platform Sūtra*, like many other Ch’an texts, includes little to no discussion of specific practices, and John McRae offers an explanation for this. He says that in the scheme of Shen-hui (684-758)—whose campaign against the “Northern School” of Ch’an created a crisis in early Ch’an—“sudden enlightenment (especially the first moment of inspiration) was good and gradual enlightenment (or the progressive development toward

¹⁸¹ Yampolsky, 161.

¹⁸² Yampolsky, 148.

¹⁸³ Yampolsky, 155, 168, 175.

¹⁸⁴ Yampolsky, 157, 136.

¹⁸⁵ Yampolsky, 181.

complete understanding) was bad,” and although this scheme was not accepted, Shenhui’s “combative bombast did make everyone else shy away from formulations that might be attacked as either dualistic or gradualist.” So, according to McRae, subsequent Ch’an texts, including the *Platform Sūtra*, “observed an unspoken ‘rule of rhetorical purity,’ avoiding any direct discussion of specific meditation practices—since *any* method was by definition gradualistic in some fashion.”¹⁸⁶

(In Mahāyāna more generally, there had long been a deemphasis on talk about specific practices. A significant part of early Mahāyāna identity was its claimed contrast to the “Hīnayāna” emphasis on technique, which, in the Mahāyāna view, gave rise to a prideful virtuoso ethos. So talk of technique was downplayed in Mahāyāna rhetoric, even as the Mahāyāna continued to make use of the same techniques. It might be argued that the Mahāyāna criticism of an emphasis on technique continued in China, despite the virtual absence of Hīnayāna because Mahāyāna, including Ch’an, still felt a need to exorcise the ghost of Hīnayāna.)¹⁸⁷

Now, as I said, for the most part, the *Platform Sūtra* presents practice as a means to *realize* one’s inherent buddhahood (instrumental), as I’ve been showing, but in one of the best known stories from the *Platform Sūtra*—the story of the poetry contest, which McRae calls “the heart of the *Platform Sūtra*”¹⁸⁸—we find what may be a noninstrumental description of practice.

¹⁸⁶ McRae, 57, 65. On this avoidance of the discussion of meditation techniques, see also Carl Bielefeldt, *Dogen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), ch. 4, esp. 83 and 89 ff.

¹⁸⁷ Thanks to Eric Reinders for this.

¹⁸⁸ Although I always think of this episode as “the poetry contest,” I probably would not have called it that in academic writing, at least not without scare quotes, but I discovered that Damien Keown uses the same phrase in his *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 114, so I feel I have permission. McRae, 60.

In the *Platform Sūtra*, the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen, instructs his disciples each to compose a verse and says that if any of the verses demonstrates that the author is “awakened to the cardinal meaning,” Hung-jen will make that disciple the Sixth Patriarch.¹⁸⁹ Shen-hsiu, the head monk, composes this verse:

The body is the *bodhi* tree.
The mind is like a bright mirror’s stand.
At all times we must strive to polish it
and must not let dust collect.

Hui-neng, who (so the story goes) is an uneducated layman working in the threshing room of the monastery, composes his own verse in response to Shen-hsiu’s verse, and Hung-jen makes him the Sixth Patriarch. In other words, Shen-hsiu, who is the head monk, loses the poetry contest to the lowly Hui-neng.

The earliest extant manuscript of the *Platform Sūtra* contains two variants of Hui-neng’s “winning” verse:

Bodhi originally has no tree,
The mirror also has no stand.
The Buddha-nature is always clear and pure;
Where is there room for dust?

The mind is the *bodhi* tree,
The body is the bright mirror’s stand.
The bright mirror is originally clear and pure;
Where could there be any dust?

Later and better known versions of the *Platform Sūtra* include only one version, which more closely resembles the first version but includes the different and famous third line, “Fundamentally there is not a single thing”:

¹⁸⁹ This story is on pp. 128–33 of Yampolsky, but I am using McRae’s version of the verses (McRae, 61–62), which is Yampolsky’s translation with some modifications (McRae, 164, n. 26). McRae notes that many English translations of Shen-hsiu’s verse (including Yampolsky’s) say that the mind is like a “mirror” instead of a “mirror’s stand,” but McRae says that “mirror” is “simply erroneous” (McRae, 64). Also, while Yampolsky notes that the later version of Hui-neng’s verse substitutes a different third line, McRae’s version includes additional differences between the first and third versions of Hui-neng’s verse.

Bodhi originally has no tree,
 The bright mirror also has no stand.
 Fundamentally there is not a single thing.
 Where could dust arise?

I think one could write an entire book just on interpretations of this story, but here is my tentative attempt—informed by McRae’s analysis¹⁹⁰—to understand the story in relation to the issue of instrumental and noninstrumental presentations of Buddhist practice.

The losing verse by Shen-hsiu, the head monk, presents practice as instrumental for “uncovering” buddha-nature. Shen-hsiu’s verse teaches that one’s original nature (the mirror) is pure (bright and dust-free), but continuous practice (polishing at all times) is needed in order to keep one’s pure original nature from being obscured (by dust). And the story seems to indicate that this instrumental teaching about practice is fine in a qualified way. Although Hung-jen tells Shen-hui privately that his verse reveals that he still hasn’t reached ultimate enlightenment, Hung-jen instructs the monks to recite this verse and tells them that practicing according to it will be beneficial.

The winning verse by Hui-neng presents a clear challenge to the teaching in Shen-hsiu’s losing verse. But what precisely does Hui-neng find problematic in Shen-hsiu’s verse, and why exactly does Hung-jen consider Hui-neng’s verse to exhibit a fuller understanding?

Perhaps the main problem with Shen-hsiu’s losing verse is the “uncovering” metaphor, which implies that one’s pure original nature can somehow be obscured and that practice is instrumental for getting rid of something that is *not* one’s pure original nature. Hui-neng’s verse asks rhetorically (in the three versions of the verse,

¹⁹⁰ McRae, 60–67.

respectively), “Where is there room for dust?” or “Where could there be any dust?” or “Where could dust arise?” implying that one’s original nature cannot become “dusty” or perhaps even that there is no such thing as “dust.”

So Hui-neng’s winning verse rejects a presentation of practice as instrumental for uncovering one’s buddha-nature, and perhaps it thereby implicitly reaffirms the predominant presentation of practice in the *Platform Sūtra*: as instrumental for realizing one’s “original enlightenment,” that is, one’s pure original nature, or one’s inherent buddha-nature.

However, Hui-neng’s verse doesn’t explicitly affirm the necessity of anything like “realization” or anything like practice. So perhaps Hui-neng’s winning verse actually rejects *any* instrumental description of practice, not only a description of practice as instrumental for “uncovering” buddha-nature but also a description of practice as instrumental for “realizing” buddha-nature. That is, perhaps Hui-neng’s winning verse teaches—as Dōgen will later teach in his writings—that one’s mind is inherently pure, that one is inherently enlightened, and thus that from the ultimate perspective it makes no sense to talk about practice (or anything else) as instrumental for attaining enlightenment. So perhaps the story of the poetry contest is an example of the *noninstrumental* strategy. Or perhaps the *Platform Sūtra* is teaching that an instrumental understanding of practice is fine until one reaches an advanced stage of practice—as Hui-neng has done—at which point instrumental understandings of practice need to be abandoned.

Another example of the noninstrumental description of practice in the *Platform Sūtra* is when Hui-neng says that meditation and wisdom are “a unity, not two things,” and he tells his students to “be careful not to say that meditation gives rise to wisdom, or

that wisdom gives rise to meditation, or that meditation and wisdom are different from each other.”¹⁹¹ So here again, practice is apparently *not* instrumental for attaining buddhahood. This is reminiscent of, and perhaps the same as, Dōgen’s later teaching of the oneness of practice and enlightenment.

The *Platform Sūtra* appears to make use of both instrumental and noninstrumental strategies, and perhaps that’s all there is to it: the *Platform Sūtra* simply mixes together descriptions of practice that seem contradictory. But I think it’s possible to resolve the contradiction—or at least make some sense of the apparent contradiction—using the Two Truths.

Examining the story of the poetry contest, one could argue that Shen-hsiu’s losing verse expresses the *conventional* teaching that enlightenment needs to be attained through practice, while Hui-neng’s winning verse expresses the *ultimate* teaching that we are already buddhas, period, and nothing needs to be done.

A “Two Truths” interpretation could also help explain why Hung-jen passes the transmission to Hui-neng, author of the winning verse, but tells the monks to practice with Shen-hsiu’s losing verse. Hui-neng’s winning verse expresses the ultimate truth, the view of emptiness—that all things are empty of inherent existence and are distinct from one another only conventionally, that the things that supposedly obscure our original nature are not separate from our original nature. From this ultimate perspective, though, it is difficult to explain the importance of practice, whereas from the conventional perspective, cleanness and dustiness, the mirror and the dust, *are* different, and practice can be recommended as a means to “uncover” one’s original nature.

¹⁹¹ Yampolsky, 135.

If this interpretation is convincing, then the possibly contradictory teachings about practice in the *Platform Sūtra*—that practice is instrumental for attaining enlightenment and that there is nothing to attain—can be understood as two different views of reality, seen from two different perspectives, per the Two Truths.

Lin-chi (Rinzai)

Lin-chi I-hsüan (d. 866 or 867),¹⁹² known in Japanese as Rinzai Gigen, was the founder of the Lin-chi (Rinzai) school of Ch'an and was "one of the greatest and most influential of the T'ang period Ch'an masters."¹⁹³ Many lineages of early Ch'an died out, but Lin-chi's lineage "prospered and in time became the dominant school throughout China," and it "was one of two schools of Chinese Ch'an introduced to Japan in the thirteenth century," along with the Ts'ao-tung (Sōtō) school.¹⁹⁴ According to Burton Watson, "The Recorded Sayings of Ch'an Master Lin-chi"—the *Lin-chi ch'an-shih yü-lu*, often called simply the *Lin-chi lu*—has been dubbed "the 'king' of the *yü-lu*, or 'recorded sayings,' genre" and "represents the final major formulation of Ch'an thought in China."¹⁹⁵

I was surprised by the presentation of Ch'an in the *Lin-chi lu*. I think of the Lin-chi lineage as leaning strongly toward an instrumental teaching about practice and enlightenment, but Lin-chi's teaching is more complex and nuanced than that. (It turns out that the eighteenth-century Japanese Rinzai Zen teacher Hakuin fits my image of Lin-

¹⁹² Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), xix; and *Shambhala Dictionary*, 126. Prebish, *Historical Dictionary* (169) and Keown (155) simply say he died in 866.

¹⁹³ Watson, xi.

¹⁹⁴ Watson, xi–xii.

¹⁹⁵ Watson, xi.

chi's lineage much better than Lin-chi does.) Lin-chi sometimes uses clearly instrumental descriptions of practice, but at other times he seems to reject instrumental rhetoric. As Watson says, at times Lin-chi "does not hesitate to speak in terms of goals and endeavors, the very terminology he at other times deplores."¹⁹⁶

It seems to me that there are at least two possible ways of understanding this apparent mixture of pedagogical strategies. First, it is possible that Lin-chi is in fact consistently using the description of practice as instrumental for realizing buddha-nature, and his seemingly noninstrumental rhetoric actually refers to the "original enlightenment" (or inherent buddha-nature) that is realized in "temporal enlightenment." That is, perhaps, when Lin-chi speaks in terms of goals and endeavors, he is speaking of means to attain "temporal enlightenment," and when he deplores the language of goals and endeavors, he is speaking of the "original enlightenment" that cannot be "attained" because it is inherent. But it's difficult to be sure. Although the *Platform Sūtra* clearly distinguishes between temporal enlightenment ("enlightenment" or "awakening") and original enlightenment ("original nature"), the *Lin-chi lu* does not. Second, it is possible that Lin-chi does indeed use noninstrumental descriptions at times, in addition to instrumental descriptions.

Frequently, Lin-chi does clearly describe Buddhist practice as instrumental. There is something to attain—a new understanding, a different way of seeing things, a realization—and there's no time to waste. For instance, he says, "If you're a person who honestly wants to learn the Way, . . . set about as fast as you can looking for a true and

¹⁹⁶ Watson, xxviii.

proper understanding.”¹⁹⁷ Lin-chi even tells us about his own attainment: “I had to probe and polish and undergo experiences until one morning I could see clearly for myself.”¹⁹⁸

Enlightenment also appears to be something attained in the brief stories that largely make up the second half (Parts Three and Four) of the *Lin-chi lu*: stories of encounters between teacher and student or between two masters. In these encounters—both formal “interviews” and informal exchanges—a master tests the insight of a student or of another master or spurs a student to insight. So this insight is presented as something to be attained and refined. For example, a monk named Ting asked Lin-chi, “‘What is the basic meaning of Buddhism?’” and Lin-chi grabbed Ting, slapped him, and let him go. A monk standing nearby asked Ting, who was standing there in daze, why he didn’t go make a bow, and as Ting made a formal bow, “he suddenly had a great enlightenment.”¹⁹⁹ In these stories, an encounter with a teacher is instrumental for attaining enlightenment.

Enlightenment also appears to be something *attained* when Lin-chi says what needs to be done to attain it. According to Lin-chi, you just need to quit looking for something: “When your mind has learned to cease its momentary seeking, this is dubbed the state of the *bodhi* tree. But while your mind is incapable of ceasing, this is dubbed the tree of ignorance.”²⁰⁰ Similarly, he says that “the more you search the farther away you get, the harder you hunt the wider astray you go. This is what I call the secret of the matter.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Watson, 34–35.

¹⁹⁸ Watson, 52.

¹⁹⁹ Watson, 97.

²⁰⁰ Watson, 54.

²⁰¹ Watson, 36.

Sometimes, though, Lin-chi's teaching implies that there is nothing to attain and nothing to do, which in turn implies that practice is *noninstrumental*. Perhaps in these cases (or some of them), he is talking about our *original* enlightenment, or buddha-nature, and this is still an example of the "realizing" strategy, but perhaps in these cases (or some of them), Lin-chi has switched strategies and is presenting practice simply as a manifestation of buddhahood and not as a means to attain anything.

In at least one case when Lin-chi says to quit seeking, the rationale is not (as above) that seeking is a *problem* because it moves you away from enlightenment but that seeking is *pointless* because there is nothing to be attained: "you rush around frantically one place and another—what are you looking for, tramping till the soles of your feet are squashed flat? There is no Buddha to be sought, no Way to be carried out, no Dharma to be gained."²⁰² Elsewhere, and similarly, Lin-chi says, "I tell you, there's no Buddha, no Dharma, no practice, no enlightenment. Yet you go off like this on side roads, trying to find something. Blind fools! Will you put another head on top of the one you have? What is it you lack? Followers of the Way, you who are carrying out your activities before my eyes are no different from the Buddha and the patriarchs."²⁰³ Are these examples of the "realizing" strategy? That is, is Lin-chi emphasizing that one's original nature is pure—that one already has *original* enlightenment—although he would also say that one needs to attain *temporal* enlightenment, or realization? Or are these examples of the noninstrumental strategy, emphasizing that seeking is pointless because there is *nothing* one needs to "attain"? I don't know.

²⁰² Watson, 61–62.

²⁰³ Watson, 53.

Sometimes Lin-chi says or implies in the same breath that there is nothing to attain and something to attain. For example, he says of the person listening to his talk that “he has never lacked anything”—that there is nothing to attain—but then the next sentence is, “If you want to be no different from the patriarchs and buddhas, learn to see it this way and never give in to doubt or questioning,”²⁰⁴ implying that the listener currently is not a buddha but can attain buddhahood. Is Lin-chi saying both that no “realization” is necessary and also that one should practice in order to realize one’s buddhahood? Or is he saying that *original* enlightenment is inherent but *temporal* enlightenment—the realization of original enlightenment—can and should be attained? When he says that we have never lacked anything, does he mean that we lack nothing *at all* or that we lack nothing *except* the realization of our buddhahood? Similarly, he says that “if you can just stop this mind that goes rushing around moment by moment looking for something, then you’ll be no different from the patriarchs and buddhas”—you can *attain* something—and then the next sentence is, “Do you want to get to know the patriarchs and buddhas? They’re none other than you, the people standing in front of me listening to this lecture on the Dharma!”—there’s nothing to attain.”²⁰⁵ Is he using both instrumental and noninstrumental strategies, or is he simply distinguishing between temporal and original enlightenment?

Lin-chi talks repeatedly about the need for faith—often faith in oneself—but it is unclear whether faith is a prerequisite for attaining realization or whether faith perhaps consists in recognizing that nothing needs to be realized, or neither of those. For instance, Lin-chi says, “Don’t search for it and it’s right before your eyes, its miraculous sound

²⁰⁴ Watson, 45.

²⁰⁵ Watson, 23.

always in your ears. But if you don't have faith, you'll spend your hundred years in wasted labor."²⁰⁶ Faith is something else I had associated more with the Ts'ao-tung/Sōtō school than the Lin-chi/Rinzai school, but Dale Wright notes that "faith was an essential theme" for Lin-chi and also for Ta-hui (1089-1163), a master of the Lin-chi lineage who is known as an important champion of *kung-an* (koan) training.²⁰⁷

Lin-chi also says a number of times that there is nothing special to do, that you should just act ordinary, for example, that

the Dharma of the buddhas calls for no special undertakings. Just act ordinary, without trying to do anything particular. Move your bowels, piss, get dressed, eat your rice, and if you get tired, then lie down. Fools may laugh at me, but wise men will know what I mean.²⁰⁸

Not being one of the "wise men," I don't know whether this means that there's nothing special to do because there's nothing to realize, or whether it means (as discussed above) that to realize buddhahood you just need to quit seeking it, or neither of those things.

And what about meditation practice? This, too, is unclear. Lin-chi often talks about "practice"—usually in saying that there's no such thing as practice or enlightenment—but it is unclear whether "practice" means meditation or is a larger category that includes meditation. When Lin-chi occasionally talks about meditation specifically, it is to ridicule it, for example:

I tell you there is no Dharma to be found outside. But students don't understand me and immediately start looking inward for some explanation, sitting by the wall in meditation, pressing their tongues against the roof of their mouths, absolutely still, never moving, supposing this to be the Dharma of the buddhas taught by the patriarchs. What a mistake!²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Watson, 58. See also 11, 41, 23, 40, 58.

²⁰⁷ Dale S. Wright, "Koan History: Transformative Language in Chinese Buddhist Thought," in Heine and Wright, 209.

²⁰⁸ Watson, 31. See also 53–54.

²⁰⁹ Watson, 57.

But apparently it is not meditation per se that is a problem but meditation as certain people approach it or done in a certain way, for there are mentions in the text of both Lin-chi and his head monk “sitting in meditation.”²¹⁰ Perhaps illustrating McRae’s “rule of rhetorical purity,” Lin-chi does not discuss specific meditation practices.

If Lin-chi does indeed use noninstrumental rhetoric at times, perhaps his teaching can best be understood as using a Two Truths strategy: teaching sometimes, from the “conventional” perspective, that there are means to the end of enlightenment and teaching at other times, from the “ultimate” perspective, that enlightenment is inherent and thus cannot be “attained.”

CHALLENGES TO INSTRUMENTALITY

As we have seen, in the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that leads to and includes Japanese Zen, there are various pedagogical strategies for describing Buddhist practice in relation to enlightenment. Some texts use instrumental descriptions of practice, describing practice as means to the end of enlightenment; some texts use noninstrumental descriptions of practice, describing practice as simply a manifestation or expression of one’s inherent buddhahood and not as a means to attain enlightenment; and some texts mix together various descriptions of practice, even mixing instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions of practice. The texts that use both instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions, I proposed, might best be understood as implicitly making use of the teaching of the Two Truths: describing practice as instrumental when seen

²¹⁰ Watson, 110, 111.

from the conventional perspective and as noninstrumental when seen from the ultimate perspective.

All of these pedagogical strategies, even those I have called “instrumental,” present some degree of challenge to an instrumental orientation to life in general and Buddhist practice in particular. All of these descriptions of practice suggest, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, that one does not need to make any substantive change to reality or to oneself and that in some fundamental way everything is already fine.

Even in the “instrumental” pedagogical strategies, there is an assumption that Buddhist practice is not about acquiring certain qualities in order to become a buddha—except in a highly delimited sense. One does not need a spiritual overhaul in order to become a buddha; one only needs a certain new sort of vision or, or awakening to, how reality has always been. Although the instrumental pedagogical strategies describe practice as instrumental for attaining enlightenment, they all challenge an instrumental orientation that would seek to totally remake or reform or improve or develop the person in order to make the person into a buddha. What is needed is simply a “realization” (either of emptiness or of one’s buddha-nature) or an “uncovering” of one’s buddhahood.

In the noninstrumental description of practice, even this last bit of instrumentality is challenged. Practice is no longer described even as instrumental for awakening to the true nature of reality and thus becoming enlightened. Practice is described simply as a manifestation or expression of one’s inherent buddhahood. There is no means to attain enlightenment or buddhahood because beings are already inherently buddhas.

In the noninstrumental strategy, with practice completely disconnected causally from enlightenment, it becomes difficult to explain why one should engage in the practices of Zen. As Dōgen wondered, “If one is in fact a Buddha right now, why practice at all?”²¹¹

As we will see, when Zen moves to a new time and place—into the modern world and from Japan to the United States—new pedagogical strategies begins to emerge, presenting strong challenges to instrumentality, while also offering answers to the question, “Why practice?”

The next chapter examines the modernization and Westernization of Buddhism in Japan and the United States—involving a new emphasis on scientific modes of thought—and the migration of Buddhism, especially modernized Japanese Zen Buddhism, to the United States.

²¹¹ Cook, 8.

3

The Modernization and American Immigration of Buddhism

Buddhism first came to the United States in the mid–nineteenth century. Zen Buddhism made its formal debut in the United States in 1893, at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and was popularized in the mid-twentieth century, largely through the work of D. T. Suzuki.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in both Japan and the United States, Buddhism was being modernized and Westernized for its new temporal and geographical context. More specifically, Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism, was being represented or refigured as eminently rational and empirical, as compatible with scientific and technological modes of thought, as humanistic and socially responsible, and as a cosmopolitan and universal religion to stand beside other world religions.

This chapter examines the modernization and Westernization of Buddhism in Japan and the United States—especially the ways in which Buddhism was being refigured as compatible with scientific and technological modes of thought—and the

migration of Buddhism, especially modernized Japanese Zen Buddhism, to the United States.

THE MODERNIZATION OF BUDDHISM IN MEIJI JAPAN

The Zen Buddhism that first came to the United States was a product of the modernization and “Westernization” of Buddhism in Japan in the Meiji period (1868–1912).

During the preceding period of Japanese history, the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), the imperial family served primarily a ceremonial role, and real political power was in the hands of the shogun, or military commander, and the regional samurai lords. For most of the Tokugawa period, Japan was essentially closed to foreigners, but trade began with the United States in the 1850s. In 1868, a revolution known as the Meiji Restoration restored political power to the Japanese imperial family, and the teenaged emperor gave the name *Meiji*—meaning “illuminated rule,” or “enlightened rule”—to the new era.

In the Meiji period, Japanese Buddhism got “caught in the crossfire between Shintoists, enlightenment thinkers, nationalists, imperialists, economists, Confucians, and the newly emergent scientists and historians.”²¹² At first, many of the Meiji “restorationists”—as the revolutionaries were known—believed that the “illumination” of Japan would be possible “only with the concomitant darkening of certain elements of

²¹² James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan* (Princeton, 1990), x.

society,” such as Buddhism, and thus Buddhism “became the paradigm of the eminently persecutable, the perfect darkness in an age devoted to ‘illumination.’”²¹³

During the Meiji period, Buddhism in Japan was “the subject of a devastating critique and persecution known as *haibutsu kishaku* or ‘abolishing Buddhism and destroying [the teachings of] Śākyamuni.’”²¹⁴ According to James Edward Ketelaar, the three main strands of the critique of Buddhism were (1) the socioeconomic uselessness of Buddhist temples and priests, (2) Buddhism’s foreignness (which, it was supposed, was antithetical to Japanese national unity), and (3) Buddhism’s mythological, “unscientific” history.²¹⁵ As Robert Sharf says (relying heavily on Ketelaar’s work on Meiji Buddhism), “Government ideologues succeeded for a time in censuring Buddhism as a corrupt, decadent, antisocial, parasitic, and superstitious creed, inimical to Japan’s need for scientific and technological advancement,” and Buddhism was also “effectively rendered by its opponents as a foreign ‘other,’ diametrically opposed to the cultural sensibility innate spirituality of the Japanese.”²¹⁶ In Meiji-era Japan, Buddhism “underwent severe attacks and, in some locales, was threatened with complete and permanent eradication.” Many Buddhist temples were destroyed, and Buddhist priests were forcibly laicized (“returned to farming” or “returned to the secular” were the euphemisms used by the government).²¹⁷

However, Japanese Buddhists did not concede defeat. “A vanguard of modern Buddhist leaders”—university-educated intellectuals who sought to bring Japan into the

²¹³ Ketelaar, 5.

²¹⁴ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 109.

²¹⁵ Ketelaar, 132.

²¹⁶ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 109.

²¹⁷ Ketelaar, x, 49.

“modern world”—emerged to respond to the critiques of Buddhism. They readily acknowledged the “corruption, decay, and petty sectarian rivalries” that characterized the Buddhism of the late Tokugawa period, and some even argued that government suppression of Buddhism was “a purifying force”—that the persecution would “purge Buddhism of its degenerate accretions and effect a return to the original essence of the Buddha’s teachings.” The problem, these Buddhists insisted, lay not in Buddhism per se but in “the institutional and sectarian trappings to which Buddhism had fallen prey,” so the solution was to reform Buddhism from within.

These modern leaders of Japanese Buddhism responded to the critiques of Buddhism and produced what came to be known in Japan as the New Buddhism (*shin bukkō*)—a “‘modern,’ ‘cosmopolitan,’ ‘humanistic,’ and ‘socially responsible’” Buddhism that involved a resurgent concern for social action (including disaster-relief projects and long-term projects to aid the poor), support of the Japanese government (including cooperation in colonizing the northern territories and support of involvement with the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars), a revised historiography, and a reconstruction of Buddhist history as a bastion of Japanese national spirit. Ketelaar observes that, in Meiji Japan, Buddhism was “being examined and (re)defined . . . with the same comprehensive rigor that accompanied its introduction into the Chinese cultural milieu” nearly two thousand years earlier.²¹⁸

The new Japanese Buddhist leaders were sympathetic to European “Enlightenment” critiques of religion, and the New Buddhism, “under the guide of ‘true’ or ‘pure’ Buddhism, was conceived of as a ‘world religion’ ready to take its rightful place alongside other universal creeds.” This “true Buddhism” was not opposed to reason; and

²¹⁸ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 109–110; Ketelaar, 132–134, x.

in fact, once it was “purified” of its superstitious accretions, Buddhism “was found to be uncompromisingly empirical and rational, and in full accord with the findings of modern science.”²¹⁹

By the middle of the Meiji era, it had become clear that Buddhism could not be expunged from Japanese life and history, and Buddhism was gradually incorporated into the orthodox history of Japan. In responding to persecution and also to critiques from within, Buddhism managed to refigure itself as “martyred” rather than “heretical,” and as a bastion of true Japanese culture rather than an “ancient evil.” This refiguring was done so effectively that the persecution of Buddhism in the Meiji era “is all but forgotten in chronicles of Japanese history,” and the modern Buddhism produced by the Meiji-era Buddhists came to be central to Japan’s self-understanding.²²⁰

Japanese Buddhists in the Zen tradition “adopted and further refined” the new Buddhist polemic, presenting Zen Buddhism as “immune to ‘Enlightenment’ critiques of religion precisely because it is not a religion in the institutional sense at all” but is, rather, “an uncompromisingly empirical, rational, and scientific mode of inquiry into the nature of things.”²²¹

The Zen Buddhism that would be presented in 1893 at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago and later be popularized in the United States by D. T. Suzuki was a product of this Meiji-era modernization and Westernization.

The aspects of this modernized “Zen” that were especially attractive to Westerners were derived “in large part,” according to Robert Sharf, from Western

²¹⁹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 110.

²²⁰ Ketelaar, 83, x.

²²¹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 111.

sources.²²² Although Westerners' embracing of Zen was "a response to disillusionment with Western cultural, intellectual, and religious forms, the Zen they embraced was often interpreted in terms of these forms."²²³ (As Sharf says, "Like Narcissus, Western enthusiasts failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror being held out to them."²²⁴)

Sharf highlights the emphasis on religious experience and the devaluation of institutional religious forms as two aspects of "Zen" that appealed to Westerners and were, in fact, largely Western in origin. For instance, D. T. Suzuki's emphasis on religious experience, according to Sharf, seems to have been inspired in large part by the writings of his friend Nishida Kitarō, whose interest in religious experience can be traced to contemporary Western sources, especially the writings of William James (and, interestingly, it was Suzuki who had introduced Nishida to James's work).²²⁵

Similarly, David McMahan highlights iconoclasm and individualism as two aspects of "Zen" that appealed to Westerners and were, in fact, largely Western in origin. The Zen introduced to the West was "as iconoclastic as Sartre," McMahan says, and yet "it still offered a pure experience of unmediated truth obtainable through one's own effort and insight—a feature that appealed to the individualist tenor of Western, and especially American, society." This iconoclasm and individualism "appealed to the modern Enlightenment and Protestant mentality, even while those experimenting with Zen attempted to reject and surpass this mentality." McMahan observes that "Western interpretations of Zen have often remained within the framework of notions of freedom

²²² Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 140.

²²³ David L. McMahan, "Repackaging Zen for the West," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), 222.

²²⁴ Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 140.

²²⁵ Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 123.

and individualism so deeply rooted in modern Western philosophical and political discourse.”²²⁶

The Japanese Zen Buddhism that would come to the United States was already in the process of being modernized and Westernized in Japan. Most significantly for my purposes here, Japanese Zen was already being refigured as an eminently rational religion. Zen was being “purified” of superstitious “accretions.” Zen was being presented as an empirical investigation of the nature of reality, offering an experience of truth obtainable without mediation or revelation but through one’s own effort and insight.

Before Zen arrived in the United States, though, other forms of Buddhism were brought by Asian immigrants and were being explored by European-Americans.

BUDDHISM COMES TO AMERICA

Buddhism was not widely known in the West until the nineteenth century.²²⁷ In the mid–nineteenth century, Asian Buddhists began to immigrate to the United States, and European-Americans had their first encounters with Buddhism.

The First American Buddhists: Chinese and Japanese Immigrants

The first Buddhists in the United States were Asian immigrants, first from China and then from Japan, who settled on the West Coast. The Buddhism of these early immigrants owed more to the Pure Land tradition of Buddhism than to Ch’an or Zen Buddhism.

²²⁶ McMahan, 221.

²²⁷ Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992), xxxii.

In 1848, the United States annexed California, and gold was discovered in California's Sacramento Valley. The first wave of Asian immigration to the United States began with the Gold Rush of 1849 to 1852. Chinese "forty-niners," drawn by the Gold Rush and leaving behind war, natural disasters, poverty, and starvation in China, sought a better life in California, which they called *Gam Saan*, or Gold Mountain. By 1860, about ten percent of Californians were Chinese, and these immigrants had brought their religions to the United States with them.²²⁸

The first Buddhist institution in the United States was a Chinese temple built in San Francisco in 1853.²²⁹ By 1875, there were eight Chinese temples in San Francisco and many other small temples on the West Coast, and by the end of the nineteenth century "there may have been over four hundred Chinese temples in Western states," though these were "often small shacks or home temples."²³⁰ The religion practiced in these temples was "a mixture of Confucian ancestor veneration, popular Taoism, and Pure Land Buddhism."²³¹ According to Thomas Tweed, "there seem to have been tens of thousands of Chinese who were predominantly Buddhist by heritage and conviction at any point between the 1850s and 1910s."²³²

Chinese Buddhists, however, did not send priests or missionaries from China to nurture their Buddhist communities in the United States, and this "lack of institutional support" resulted in "a loosening of Buddhist ties among second- and third-generation

²²⁸ Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 62; Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1992), 70.

²²⁹ Tweed and Prothero, 75; Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 159; Keown, 10.

²³⁰ Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 107; Tweed and Prothero, 75; Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 159.

²³¹ Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," 107.

²³² Tweed, *American Encounter*, 35.

Chinese Americans.”²³³ So although Chinese Buddhists were the first Buddhists to arrive in the United States and the first to establish Buddhist temples in the United States, the early Chinese Buddhist institutions did not survive, and the oldest major institutional form of Buddhism in the United States today is Japanese: the Buddhist Churches of America.²³⁴

Japanese immigrants, most from Buddhist backgrounds, began to arrive on the West Coast in significant numbers in the 1890s. Unlike the Chinese Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists did offer institutional support to their nascent American religious communities. In 1898, the Hompa Hongwanji, one form of Jōdo Shinshū, the “True Pure Land” school of Japanese Buddhism, sent two priests to San Francisco to visit the immigrant Buddhist community. During their brief sojourn in the United States, these priests founded a Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA)—a new form of lay Buddhist organization inspired by the analogous Christian organizations in Japan—which would later become the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA). Also in 1898, a Japanese Buddhist temple was established in San Francisco. The following year, the Hompa Hongwanji sent the first two permanent Jōdo Shinshū missionary priests to North America, and they established the Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA). In the following decades, Young Men’s Buddhist Associations and temples were founded all along the West Coast. In 1944, during the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in internment camps during World

²³³ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 35.

²³⁴ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 52; Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 146, quoting Stuart Chandler, “Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice,” in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), 13–30.

War II—a period of increasing Americanization for the Jōdo Shinshū community—the organization changed its name to Buddhist Churches of America.²³⁵

When Asian immigrants, including Asian Buddhists, arrived in the United States in the nineteenth century, most Americans shared the sentiments of nativist groups such as the Asiatic Exclusion League and treated Asian immigrants and their religions with either hostility or apathy. In 1924, the Asian Exclusion Act essentially closed the United States to Asian immigration, and Asian immigration would not be reopened until the 1960s. Although the first American Buddhists were Chinese and Japanese, for decades these Buddhists were either excluded from mainstream American society or preoccupied within their own immigrant communities, and, thus, these early Chinese- and Japanese-American Buddhists made little impact on the broader American culture.²³⁶

European-Americans' First Encounters Buddhism

In the period from the mid–nineteenth century to the mid–twentieth century, amidst nativist scorn for Asian immigrants and their religions, some European-Americans began to sympathize with, and even convert to, Asian religions, including Buddhism,²³⁷ primarily in its Theravāda forms. Many of Buddhism's early European-American sympathizers and converts reimagined Buddhism in “modern” terms.

Transcendentalism was the first American movement to “press past missionary critiques of ‘heathen’ religions toward a sympathetic engagement with Asian thought,”

²³⁵ Tweed and Prothero, 62–63, 78; Seager, “American Buddhism in the Making,” 107; Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 53–54, 57–58; Tweed, *American Encounter*, 36.

²³⁶ Tweed and Prothero, 63, 159; Tweed, *American Encounter*, 39; Richard Hughes Seager, “Buddhist Worlds in the U.S.A.: A Survey of the Territory,” in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1998), 252–253.

²³⁷ Tweed and Prothero, 64, 62.

including Buddhism.²³⁸ Thomas Tweed chose 1844 as the starting point for his study of Buddhism in the United States in the Victorian era because it was in 1844 that the Transcendentalist periodical *The Dial* published “The Preaching of the Buddha”—a translation, with commentary, by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (who edited *The Dial* starting in 1841) of a passage from a French translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*—and it was also in 1844 that Edward Elbridge Salisbury read his “Memoir on the History of Buddhism” at the first annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, which Salisbury and others had organized. During the period 1844-57, according to Tweed, “Buddhism began to emerge from obscurity” in the United States.²³⁹

Nineteenth-century Western Buddhologists understood the Theravāda Buddhism of South Asia to be the original and purest form of Buddhism. Western scholars as well as the general public had little interest in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which they perceived as having “broken away” from the pure, original Buddhism, with a plethora of supernatural beings added to its cosmology. Japanese Buddhism, in particular, was perceived to be adulterated by its syncretism with the indigenous Shintō tradition.²⁴⁰ So at this point, Zen Buddhism had received little attention from Westerners.

It was at the end of the nineteenth century that a few Westerners began to actually become adherents of Buddhism, as opposed to simply studying and sympathizing with Buddhism.²⁴¹ The first Americans formally to convert to Buddhism were Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, co-founders of the Theosophical Society, who “took

²³⁸ Tweed and Prothero, 62.

²³⁹ Tweed, *American Encounter*, xxxi, 62, xxxii.

²⁴⁰ Ketelaar, 159–166.

²⁴¹ Tweed, *American Encounter*, xxxii.

refuge” (became Buddhists) in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1880.²⁴² In 1883, Phillips Brooks, an influential Episcopal priest and bishop, remarked wryly that ““a large part of Boston prefers to consider itself Buddhist rather than Christian.””²⁴³

As mentioned in chapter 1, Thomas Tweed offers a helpful typology of three main types of European-American Buddhist sympathizers and adherents in late-Victorian America (“ideal types” à la Max Weber): the romantic, esoteric, and rationalist types.

The *romantic* type was attracted to the culture of Buddhism—“its art, architecture, music, drama, customs, language, and literature as well as its religion”—and emphasized aesthetic approaches to religious truth and meaning.²⁴⁴

The *esoteric* (or occult) type, which “tended to be shaped by Neoplatonism, Theosophy, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Swedenborgianism,” emphasized “hidden sources of religious truth and meaning” and believed in a spiritual or nonmaterial realm inhabited by nonhuman or superhuman realities that can be contacted through specific practices or unusual states of consciousness. Henry Steel Olcott, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, is an example of the esoteric type.²⁴⁵

The *rationalist* type—most important for my purposes here—was “influenced most emphatically by Enlightenment rationalism, Auguste Comte’s positivism, and Herbert Spencer’s evolutionism.” The rationalist type emphasized rational means of attaining religious truth and meaning and was characterized by “a sometimes uncritical affirmation of ‘science.’” This type “emphasized the authority of the individual in

²⁴² Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 35; Tweed and Prothero, 64.

²⁴³ Tweed and Prothero, 64; and Tweed, 27, quoting from Alexander V. G. Allen, *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1901), 2.

²⁴⁴ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 69.

²⁴⁵ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 50–51, 55.

religious matters rather than that of creeds, texts, officials, or institutions” and was characterized by “an always fierce advocacy of religious and political tolerance.”²⁴⁶

Tweed suggests that the European-American Buddhist adherents and sympathizers of this era were *not* mainly “New England romantics filled with an aesthetic and mystical spirit,” as he thinks many have assumed. Rather, most were either “esoteric inheritors of an occult tradition who inclined toward Spiritualism and Theosophy” or “rationalist inheritors of the ‘Skeptical Enlightenment.’”²⁴⁷

Tweed argues that Buddhism was becoming increasingly attractive to many spiritually disillusioned Americans just as Christianity was becoming increasingly problematic. According to Tweed, two major sources of Buddhism’s appeal to Victorian Americans were, first, the perception that Buddhism was more tolerant toward religious and cultural outsiders than were Christianity and Victorian culture and, second and more importantly, the perception that Buddhism was more compatible with science than were the other available religious options.

These qualities—tolerance and compatibility with science—though most obviously associated with the “rationalist” type, appealed also to the “romantic” and “esoteric” types.²⁴⁸ For instance, Henry Steel Olcott, an exemplar of the esoteric type, published *The Buddhist Catechism* (1881), in which the fifth and final chapter is entitled “Buddhism and Science.” This chapter explains that Buddhism is a “scientific religion” as opposed to a “revealed religion.” Olcott cites the *Kālāma-sutta*, in which the Buddha “tells us not to believe in alleged revelation without testing it by one’s reason and experience.” Olcott says that Buddhism is “eminently practical” and is not opposed to

²⁴⁶ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 60–61.

²⁴⁷ Tweed, *American Encounter*, xxxiii.

²⁴⁸ Tweed, 103, 110.

education and the study of science. He describes Buddhism as “a pure moral philosophy, a system of ethics and transcendental metaphysics.”²⁴⁹

Olcott accepts the accounts in Buddhist scriptures of seemingly miraculous or supernatural occurrences, but he understands these actually to be natural phenomena amenable to scientific investigation and proof. For example, Olcott explains that the bright light said to have emanated from the Buddha and other buddhas and arhats is what Europeans would call an aura, and it is not a miracle but a natural phenomenon. He names a scientist who “has proved the existence of this aura” in published research and another scientist who has “photographed this light.” Olcott also refers to a story in the Buddhist scriptures that he understands to be an example of “the modern theory of hypnotic suggestion,” which he refers to as a “branch of science” that is “familiar to all students of mesmerism and hypnotism.” Olcott says that human beings have the power to perform so-called miracles, but these are natural, not supernatural, phenomena. Moreover, the Buddha “expressly discouraged” displays of such phenomena “as tending to create confusion in the mind of those who were not acquainted with the principles involved.”²⁵⁰ Olcott was interested in the nonmaterial realm and unusual phenomena, but he understood these phenomena to be scientifically explicable, and he understood Buddhism to be an eminently scientific and practical religion, as did those of Tweed’s “rationalist” type.

Although the Buddhist apologists and sympathizers of the time seemed to feel that they had unusual values, their commitments to tolerance and science, Tweed observes, actually “were shared by a much wider range of their contemporaries that they realized or

²⁴⁹ Henry S. Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism* [1881] (Talent, Oregon: Eastern School Press), 109–111.

²⁵⁰ Olcott, 112–118, 124.

acknowledged.” In the twentieth century, Tweed observes, American Buddhist apologists and adherents would continue to note Buddhism’s tolerance and compatibility with science, though these qualities were no longer quite so crucial to Buddhism’s appeal as they were in the nineteenth century.²⁵¹

In his article “Repackaging Zen for the West,” David McMahan argues, like Tweed, that some of Buddhism’s early Western sympathizers reimagined Buddhism in modern, rationalist, scientific terms. When Westerners first encountered Buddhism, McMahan says, they “read many ideas into ancient Buddhist scriptures and philosophical texts that appeared to resonate with the modern, scientific attitude.” In the texts of Buddhism, they saw “an experimental attitude, a de-emphasis on faith and belief, and a sophisticated philosophy—exquisitely rational, yet soaring beyond ordinary reason.” And yet Buddhism as it was actually practiced in many Asian countries seemed to these same Westerners to be “permeated by things quite counter to the modern, rationalistic attitude—practices and beliefs that appeared superstitious, magical, and ritualistic”—and thus some of Buddhism’s early Western admirers “tried to extract the empirically minded philosophical and practical ingredients of Buddhism from what they considered its idolatrous and superstitious elements.” McMahan says that “this ‘demythologized’ Buddhism—more accurately, ‘remythologized’ in terms of the dominant European attitudes and beliefs”—is still the Buddhism that most Westerners are familiar with.²⁵²

Many of the American Buddhist sympathizers of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries were particularly interested in what they saw as the rational aspects of Buddhism. The rationalists tended to spurn forms of Buddhism such as Mahāyāna

²⁵¹ Tweed, *American Encounter*, xxxii, 98–110, 113, 160.

²⁵² McMahan, 219.

Buddhism and especially Japanese Buddhism that seemed to them to involve too much of the supernatural or superstitious. Supposed miracles in Buddhism were either discarded or reinterpreted as scientifically explicable. These early European-American Buddhist sympathizers saw, in Buddhism—though perhaps buried in superstitious accretions—a religion that deemphasized revelation and faith and emphasized empirical inquiry and rationality.

As we have seen, it wasn't only Westerners who were reimagining Buddhism in modern, Western terms. Asians were doing so as well, largely in response to Western influences. As Peter Gregory observes, many of the forms of Buddhism popular among “convert” Buddhists in the United States “are themselves products of various reform and modernization movements in Asia that, in turn, are responses to the impact of Western colonialism and imperialism.” So these forms of Buddhism—including Japanese Zen Buddhism—arrived in the United States having already been adapted in ways that were suited to a modern, Western audience.²⁵³

MODERNIZED JAPANESE ZEN COMES TO AMERICA

Zen Buddhism made its American debut in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, with the appearance of Japanese Rinzai Zen teacher Sōen Shaku. The Zen presented by Sōen—and popularized in the 1950s by Sōen's student D. T. Suzuki—was a product of the modernizing and Westernizing of Buddhism that had already begun in Meiji-era Japan.

²⁵³ Peter N. Gregory, “Describing the Elephant: Buddhism in America,” in *Religion and American Culture* 11:2 (Summer 2001), 252.

The World's Parliament of Religions

Although, as already discussed, there was a smattering of interest in Buddhism among European-Americans beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the year 1893 is often used to mark the beginning of a notable enthusiasm for Buddhism among European-Americans. It was the year of the first formal conversion to Buddhism in the United States—that is, the first conversion on American soil—by C. T. Strauss. (Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott had converted more than a decade earlier, in Ceylon.) But more importantly, 1893 was the year of “the public successes of the Asian Buddhist missionaries” at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the largest interreligious forum of the nineteenth century and the formal debut of Asian religious missions to the West.²⁵⁴

The World’s Parliament of Religion was held in conjunction with the World’s Columbian Exposition, which celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the New World. The delegates to the Parliament included five Japanese Buddhists: one priest each from the Zen, Shin, Shingon, and Tendai sects and a Buddhist layman. These five Japanese “champions of Buddhism” had no official funding or authorization from the Japanese government or the one pan-Buddhist organization, the Buddhist Transsectarian Cooperative Society (*Bukkyō kakushū kyōkai*), and depended on their own temples for support. They understood that they were participating in a program controlled by Christians to glorify Christianity, and yet they were confident of their own ultimate victory in this battle of religions. Japanese Buddhism was seeking to enhance its

²⁵⁴ Seager, “Buddhist Worlds in the U.S.A.,” 252–253; Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 169.

position as “a harbinger of civilization and enlightenment,” and the Japanese Buddhist delegates to the Parliament were confident that Buddhism was the religion most compatible with the concerns of modern people throughout the world.²⁵⁵

According to James Ketelaar, the two main goals of the Japanese Buddhist delegates were, first, to be “the first Mahayana Buddhist missionaries to the West, similar to those Indian emissaries to China centuries before, charged with carrying the wisdom of the Orient to an Occidental world drunk with its own material success,” and second, to return home to Japan and use their “privileged position of exteriority” as cosmopolitan figures who had journeyed to the West to continue to revivify the Buddhism that had been besieged in Japan. That is, in the continuing reformulation of Buddhism as modern, the Japanese Buddhist delegates hoped to return from their travels to show Japan that Buddhism, due to its inherently cosmopolitan nature and universal efficacy, “was not merely the ‘Light of Asia’ but also the ‘Light of the World.’”²⁵⁶

The Japanese Zen Buddhist delegate to the World’s Parliament of Religions was Shaku Sōen (1856–1919),²⁵⁷ a teacher of Rinzai Zen. When Sōen was invited to speak at the Parliament, most of his Japanese associates discouraged him from participating, since the United States “was, after all, uncivilized and unspeakably barbaric.” But Sōen “was adventurous and asked one of his lay students who spoke English, D. T. Suzuki, to draft his letter of acceptance” to the Parliament.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Ketelaar, 259, n. 4 (Ketelaar doesn’t specify the sect of the layman); 159–160; 138–139.

²⁵⁶ Ketelaar, xii.

²⁵⁷ Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 533; James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who?: A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 62; Fields, 179.

²⁵⁸ Ford, 62.

In his modernist approach to Buddhism, Sōen was, in the words of Robert Sharf, “typical of the new breed of cosmopolitan and intellectual religious leaders emerging in the Meiji period” in Japan. Sōen was a well educated intellectual who had traveled extensively through the United States, Europe, and Asia, and he was “an avowed religious reformer who devoted much of his mature career to training Buddhist laymen rather than Zen priests.”²⁵⁹

Sōen’s modernist outlook reflected in part the influence of his teacher, Kōsen Sōon (also known as Imagita Kōsen), abbot of Engakuji, a prominent Rinzai monastery in Kamakura.²⁶⁰ Kōsen was a “highly respected if somewhat unorthodox” Japanese Rinzai Zen teacher and “a widely educated man of letters interested in Chinese and Western philosophy,” who was “very much a part of the early Meiji Buddhist reform movement” and, as such, was “an enthusiastic advocate of ‘nonsectarian,’ ‘universal,’ and ‘socially engaged’ Buddhism.”²⁶¹ Sōen spent several years in Ceylon studying Theravāda monasticism²⁶²—the first Japanese priest to do such a thing²⁶³ and, as Andrew Rawlinson notes, “probably the first Mahayana Buddhist to do so for a thousand years or so.”²⁶⁴ Sōen was named a Dharma successor to Kōsen, and when Kōsen died in 1892, Sōen took his place as master of Engakuji.²⁶⁵

Sōen claimed that the Buddha’s teachings were “in exact agreement with the doctrines of modern science.”²⁶⁶ As David McMahan says, Sōen “attempted to align Buddhism with the scientific spirit of the times, giving it an intellectual credibility and

²⁵⁹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 113, 112.

²⁶⁰ Ford, 62.

²⁶¹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 112.

²⁶² Fields, 110–113.

²⁶³ Ford, 62; Rawlinson, 90.

²⁶⁴ Rawlinson, 533.

²⁶⁵ Fields, 137, 113.

²⁶⁶ Tweed and Prothero, 139.

prestige that were eroding in Christianity among the intellectual elite. Appealing to the ethos of modernity, he displayed an empirical bent and an agnostic indifference about miracles.”²⁶⁷

Sōen also portrayed Buddhism as “a ‘universal religion’ in harmony with other world faiths.”²⁶⁸ (Along with Anagarika Dharmapala, a Theravāda Buddhist delegate from Ceylon, Sōen was a member of the Maha Bodhi Society, a modern reform group working to unite Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhists and to check the advances of Christianity in Asia.²⁶⁹) In his article “Repackaging Zen for the West,” David McMahan says that Sōen presented teachings of Buddhism in terms of “natural law” and “moral law”—“concepts that many late-nineteenth-century American and European intellectuals found irresistible”—and Sōen claimed that “this moral law leads to enlightenment, in which all great men—including Jesus, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln—participate to some extent, albeit not to the extent of the Buddha.”²⁷⁰

Among the stars of the World’s Parliament of Religions was Dharmapala, the Theravāda Buddhist delegate from Ceylon.²⁷¹ The Japanese Buddhist delegates, however, didn’t come across very well. Their English was poor (except the layman’s), and their papers were “largely philosophical.”²⁷² But while they were in Chicago, they “held meetings in public halls, coffee houses, and churches” and distributed tens of thousands of pamphlets on Mahāyāna Buddhism, and “these missionary efforts, the first ever by modern Buddhists, were . . . positively received.”²⁷³ The Japanese delegates returned

²⁶⁷ McMahan, 220.

²⁶⁸ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 113.

²⁶⁹ Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 109.

²⁷⁰ McMahan, 220.

²⁷¹ Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 110.

²⁷² Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 109; Ketelaar, 156, 169.

²⁷³ Ketelaar, 163.

home as heroes. Press releases in Japan following the Parliament expressed optimism about the “promulgation of Mahayana Buddhism among Westerners saturated with material comforts, but lacking in the life of the spirit.” Buddhism returned from the Parliament “claiming a more cosmopolitan status than when it left and, to that precise extent, claiming a status closer to that of a true universal religion.”²⁷⁴

Although Sōen, like the other Japanese Buddhists, was a “little-noticed” delegate to the World’s Parliament of Religions,²⁷⁵ some of the main themes in his presentation of Buddhism—“an embrace of science combined with the promise of something beyond it, and a universal reality in which different religions and individuals participate, but which Buddhism embodies most perfectly”—“characterized the tone set for the interpretation of Zen and Buddhism in the West, a tone still present in many writings.”²⁷⁶

While in Chicago, Sōen made the acquaintance of Paul Carus, the editor of Open Court Publishing, who had attended the Parliament.²⁷⁷ Carus was “a compelling figure who, through his writings and publishing ventures, was important in developing a Buddhist presence among North Americans of European descent.”²⁷⁸ Before returning to Japan after the Parliament, Sōen spent another week in Illinois, at the home of Paul Carus.²⁷⁹

In 1905, Sōen returned to the United States at the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Russell of San Francisco—perhaps the first Zen Buddhists in the United States—and stayed for about nine months. According to Rick Fields, Sōen was the only

²⁷⁴ Ketelaar, 161, 152, 174.

²⁷⁵ Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 150.

²⁷⁶ McMahan, 220.

²⁷⁷ Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 6; Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 158.

²⁷⁸ Ford, 62.

²⁷⁹ Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 6; Seager, *World’s Parliament*, 158.

Zen master in Japan at the time who had any interest in teaching foreigners. In 1905-06, Sōen delivered lectures around the United States, mostly in California and the northeast. He subsequently published a book based on these lectures, *Sermons of a Buddhist*—retitled *Zen for Americans* in later editions—which was the first book on Zen in English.²⁸⁰

But Sōen's influence in the United States was felt most through his student, D. T. Suzuki. It was the work of D. T. Suzuki, along with Sōen's student Nyogen Senzaki and Sōen's colleague Shigetsu Sasaki (later known as Sokei-an), in the early decades of the twentieth century that “effectively laid the foundations for American Zen Buddhism.”²⁸¹

D. T. Suzuki and the Popularization of Zen in the United States

It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that Zen Buddhism began to be popularized in the United States—largely through the work of D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), a scholar of Zen and the author of numerous books on Zen. In *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, a history of Buddhism in the United States, Rick Fields refers to D. T. Suzuki as “the first patriarch of American Zen”; and Robert Sharf says that Suzuki was “no doubt the single most important figure in the spread of Zen in the West.”²⁸²

Suzuki was not a priest or Zen master, but rather a scholar of Zen and a lay student of Zen. Suzuki studied Buddhist texts in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese and was knowledgeable in Western thought in German, French, and English. Most of his Zen

²⁸⁰ Seager, *World's Parliament*, 158–159; Fields, 168–169; Ford, 62; Rawlinson, 533; Soyen Shaku, *Zen for Americans* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993); McMahan, 220; Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 112.

²⁸¹ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 37.

²⁸² Fields is quoted in James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 58; Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 116.

training took place in the 1890s while he was a student at Tokyo Imperial University, on weekends and during school vacations, when he would commute to the Rinzai Zen temple Engaku-ji in Kamakura, to practice first under Imagita Kōsen, the chief abbot of Engaku-ji, and then, when Kōsen died in 1892, under Shaku Sōen, who was Kōsen's successor. Suzuki prepared the English translation of Sōen's address to the World's Parliament of Religions (with the help of writer Natsume Sōseki), translated Sōen's lectures on his American lecture tour in 1905-06, and translated and edited Sōen's *Sermons of a Buddhist*.²⁸³

Sōen arranged for Suzuki to study in Illinois with Paul Carus, the editor of Open Court Publishing, whom Sōen had met when in Chicago for the World's Parliament of Religions. D. T. Suzuki came to the United States in 1897 and worked for eleven years with Carus as a translator of Buddhist material.²⁸⁴ In Tweed's typology of late-Victorian American Buddhist sympathizers, Paul Carus exemplifies the "rationalist" type.²⁸⁵ Carus was an important interpreter and popularizer of Buddhism in the United States, who "defended Buddhist ideas, composed Buddhist hymns, and encouraged Buddhist missionaries," although, "like many other rationalists, he stopped short of offering exclusive devotion to this, or any other, religion."²⁸⁶ In various works, Carus argues that Buddhism is compatible with what he calls "the religion of science." In Tweed's words, Carus found that Buddhism "harmonizes with the findings of science, the conclusions of

²⁸³ Christmas Humphreys, "Editor's Foreword," in D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, 7; Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 112, 116; Keown, 285; D. T. Suzuki, "Translator's Preface" to Soyen Shaku, *Zen for Americans*, iii.

²⁸⁴ Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 113; Seager, 40.

²⁸⁵ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 64-67.

²⁸⁶ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 66.

reason, the demands of morality, and the requirements of interreligious cooperation.”²⁸⁷

Carus was awarded an honorary membership in the Rationalist Press Association of London, and in accepting, he said, “‘I am in perfect agreement with the idea of rationalism, that is to say, of applying reasoning and scientific thought to the problem of religion, and all my work is evidence of the sense in which I would carry this principle into effect.’”²⁸⁸ In Carus’s *Gospel of Buddha* (1894), he “offered a Buddhism freed from superstitious and dogmatic accretions,” and he “tried to arrange the diverse passages into ‘harmonious and systematic form’ in order to construct ‘an ideal position upon which all true Buddhists may stand as upon common ground.’”²⁸⁹

After Suzuki’s eleven years of working with Paul Carus, Suzuki returned to Japan. He taught Buddhist philosophy at Otani University in Kyoto, began to publish extensively in English and Japanese, and along with his wife, Beatrice Lane, founded the English-language journal *The Eastern Buddhist*.²⁹⁰

Suzuki returned to the United States in the 1950s and lectured widely, including teaching Buddhism for six years at Columbia University, “where his lectures caught the attention of many literary and academic figures as well as younger New York poets and bohemians at the core of the Beat movement.”²⁹¹ Suzuki “influenced musician John Cage, novelist Jack Kerouac, poet Allen Ginsberg, Catholic monk Thomas Merton, psychologist Eric Fromm, and fellow Zen popularizer Alan Watts.”²⁹² Suzuki “became a

²⁸⁷ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 66, quoting Paul Carus to Charles E. Hooper, 21 Aug. 1899, Open Court Papers; and citing Paul Carus, “Religion and Science,” *Open Court* 1 (1877–78), 405–407, and Paul Carus, *The Religion of Science* (Chicago: Open Court, 1893).

²⁸⁸ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 66.

²⁸⁹ Tweed, *American Encounter*, 66, quoting from Paul Carus, ed., *Gospel of Buddha* [1894] (Tucson, Ariz.: Omen, 1972).

²⁹⁰ Tweed and Prothero, 191; Keown, 285.

²⁹¹ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 40.

²⁹² Tweed and Prothero, 191.

media presence” in the United States and England, and was profiled in the *New Yorker* and *Vogue*.²⁹³

Suzuki’s writing introduced Zen thought to many Western intellectuals, and “by the 1950s, most educated Westerners had at least heard of Zen Buddhism, even though it continued to be seen as something hopelessly strange and exotic.”²⁹⁴ (According to Sokei-an’s wife, Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Zen had become, “‘the magic password at smart cocktail parties and bohemian get-togethers alike’ in 1950s Manhattan.”²⁹⁵) By the middle of the twentieth century, D. T. Suzuki was, as Richard Hughes Seager says, “the outstanding figure in American Buddhism,”²⁹⁶ and it was largely because of Suzuki’s efforts that “Zen emerged after World War II as the Asian religion of choice among non-Asian Americans.”²⁹⁷

David McMahan calls Suzuki “perhaps the most important figure in the ‘repackaging’ of Zen for the West.”²⁹⁸ Like the Buddhism of Shaku Sōen and the other Japanese delegates to the World’s Parliament of Religions, the Zen of D. T. Suzuki was a product of the Japanese and American modernization of Buddhism. As Robert Sharf says, Suzuki’s Zen “was influenced as much by the Western currents of thought to which he was exposed as a philosophy student in Tokyo and as assistant to Carus, as it was by his necessarily limited involvement in Zen training.”²⁹⁹ D. T. Suzuki’s Zen—the Zen that Americans were first widely exposed to—was a modernized Zen that deemphasized superstition, the supernatural, faith, and dogma and emphasized empiricism and

²⁹³ Keown, 285.

²⁹⁴ Coleman, 7-8.

²⁹⁵ Fields, 205.

²⁹⁶ Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 40.

²⁹⁷ Tweed and Prothero, 161.

²⁹⁸ McMahan, 221.

²⁹⁹ Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” 121.

rationality, a Zen that was eminently compatible with scientific and technological modes of thought.

4

Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen*

The Three Pillars of Zen, published in 1965, was the first book on Zen by a Western Zen teacher.³⁰⁰ Most of the teaching in *The Three Pillars of Zen* exemplifies the pedagogical strategy of describing practice as instrumental for realizing one's buddha-nature—the strategy found in the Chinese Buddhist text the *Awakening of Faith* and the teaching of Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin. *The Three Pillars of Zen* does also include occasional instances of the noninstrumental pedagogical strategy, generally in the discussions of one particular type of Zen meditation practice: *shikan-taza*, or “just sitting.” In the teaching of inherent buddha-nature, *The Three Pillars of Zen* challenges an instrumentally-oriented Zen practice that would seek to change the fundamental nature of the self in order to attain enlightenment. However, the beginning Zen student reading *The Three Pillars of Zen* is mainly encouraged in an instrumental orientation to Zen practice: practicing as a means to attain enlightenment.

³⁰⁰ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1992), 241.

THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THE PRACTICE OF ZEN

Although Zen was popularized in the United States in the 1950s, largely through the work of D. T. Suzuki, it wasn't until the 1960s that the actual *practice* of Zen began to be popularized. In his history of American Buddhism, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, Rick Fields says that 1960 was “the point when American Zen turned from the intellectual to the practical.”³⁰¹ Similarly, James William Coleman notes that the 1960s and 1970s saw what is often referred to as a “Zen boom,” when “significant numbers of Westerners began actual Buddhist practice.”³⁰² Coleman observes that by the time the Zen boom was waning, “residential Zen centers had sprung up in most major urban areas of North America, and Zen had firmly established itself as a religious presence in the West.”³⁰³ Coleman also notes that in the 1960s, books on Zen “began to devote far more attention to actual Buddhist practice.”³⁰⁴

The Three Pillars of Zen, edited by Philip Kapleau and published in 1965, was the first real “how to” book in American Zen Buddhism³⁰⁵ and also the first book on Zen by a Western Zen teacher.³⁰⁶ (Westerners like Alan Watts had published books on Zen, but Kapleau was the first Western Zen teacher to do so.) In *Buddhism in America*, Richard Hughes Seager says that *Three Pillars* was “leagues ahead” of D. T. Suzuki and Alan

³⁰¹ Fields, 243

³⁰² James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 7–8.

³⁰³ Coleman, 7–8.

³⁰⁴ Coleman, 188.

³⁰⁵ Coleman, 188.

³⁰⁶ Fields, 241.

Watts “in how it addressed the actual practice of Buddhism.”³⁰⁷ Similarly, Zen teacher James Ishmael Ford says that *Three Pillars* was “the first book in English to describe authentic Zen training, and it justly became an international bestseller.”³⁰⁸ As Kapleau says in the book, Westerners who wanted to practice Zen but who didn’t have access to a qualified Zen teacher had “always faced an imposing handicap: the dearth of written information on what zazen is and how to begin and carry it on.” He observes that not only in European languages but also in the ancient Chinese and Japanese literature, there is little in the way of detailed practical instruction in zazen. There is also little on “the theory of zazen” or on “the relation of the practice of zazen to enlightenment.”³⁰⁹ *The Three Pillars of Zen* filled that gap, and since its publication most of the Zen bestsellers in the United States have been books offering advice on how to practice Zen.³¹⁰

Much of the material in *The Three Pillars of Zen* comes from Philip Kapleau’s teacher, Hakuun Yasutani (1885–1973). Yasutani founded the first lay lineage of Zen,³¹¹ and according to Richard Hughes Seager, “many of the innovative qualities of American Zen have been attributed to Hakuun Yasutani.”³¹² Yasutani’s teaching incorporates aspects of both Soto and Rinzai Zen.³¹³ Yasutani began temple life at age five under a Rinzai priest but at sixteen was ordained as a Soto novice. He had a ten-year career as a teacher and then a principal. He married and had five children. When he was forty he sat his first sesshin with Sogaku Harada, from whom he later received Dharma transmission.

³⁰⁷ Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 93.

³⁰⁸ James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who?: A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 155.

³⁰⁹ Philip Kapleau, ed., *The Three Pillars of Zen* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 3.

³¹⁰ Coleman, 188.

³¹¹ Ford, 150.

³¹² Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 92.

³¹³ In the chapters of the dissertation that focus on American Zen texts, in keeping with the usage in these texts, I have chosen not to use diacritical marks on names and terms such as *Soto*, *Dogen*, and *nirvana*.

Harada was a prominent teacher of Soto Zen who had also completed formal koan study with a Rinzai teacher, from whom he received permission to teach.³¹⁴ One of the most important lineages in Western Zen is the Harada-Yasutani lineage, named after Yasutani and his teacher. At the age of eighty, Yasutani “undertook an extended stay” in the United States to teach.³¹⁵ Many prominent Zen teachers in the United States, in addition to Kapleau, trace their lineages from Yasutani, including Robert Aitken, Taizan Maezumi, Bernie Tetsugen Glassman, Fr. Robert Kennedy, S.J., John Daido Looi, and Charlotte Joko Beck.

Philip Kapleau (1912-2004)³¹⁶ was the first Westerner to study formally with Yasutani.³¹⁷ Kapleau had completed about half of the Harada-Yasutani curriculum of koan study when he broke with Yasutani. Kapleau never received formal Dharma transmission, but he is “widely acknowledged as a genuine Zen master.”³¹⁸ He founded the Rochester Zen Center in upstate New York, and he edited *The Three Pillars of Zen*.

In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Kapleau collected and introduced a variety of material on Zen: introductory lectures on Zen training by Yasutani; a talk on a koan by Yasutani; transcripts of some of Yasutani’s one-on-one meetings with ten Western Zen students; a talk and letters to students from the fourteenth-century Japanese Rinzai Zen master Bassui; stories of the *kensho* (enlightenment) experiences of eight Zen practitioners, both Japanese and North American (including Kapleau); letters from a student to Sogaku Harada (Yasutani’s teacher) and Harada’s comments; Dogen’s essay “Being-Time”; the Ten Oxherding Pictures (a classic depiction of the stages of Zen

³¹⁴ Ford, 148–149.

³¹⁵ Kapleau, 27.

³¹⁶ Ford, 154, 156.

³¹⁷ Ford, 154.

³¹⁸ Ford, 152–153.

training) with commentary; illustrations of meditation postures with questions and answers; and a glossary of Buddhist vocabulary.

Harada, Yasutani, and Kapleau were all cognizant of their “modern” teaching context and the need to adapt to it. At the beginning of his introductory lectures on Zen training, Yasutani says, “While it is undeniably true that one must undergo Zen training himself in order to understand the truth of Zen, Harada-roshi felt that the modern mind is so much more aware that for beginners lectures of this type could be meaningful as a preliminary to practice.”³¹⁹ It is not entirely clear what is being implied here about the “modern mind,” but apparently, Harada believed that a series of explanatory lectures could also be helpful to modern beginners in Zen—in addition, of course, to actually engaging in Zen practice. Yasutani goes on to say that Harada “combined the best” of the Soto and Rinzai sects of Zen, and “nowhere in Japan will you find Zen teaching set forth so thoroughly and succinctly, so well suited to the temper of the modern mind, as at his monastery.”³²⁰ Kapleau, in his introduction to Yasutani’s lectures on Zen training, says that Yasutani was of the opinion that “since modern man . . . lacks the faith and burning zeal of his predecessors in Zen, he needs a map which his mind can trust, charting his entire spiritual journey, before he can move ahead with confidence.” And Kapleau explains that it was for this reason that Harada devised a series of introductory lectures on Zen training some forty years earlier, and those lectures form the basis of Yasutani’s introductory lectures that are collected in *The Three Pillars of Zen*.³²¹

³¹⁹ Kapleau, 29.

³²⁰ Kapleau, 29.

³²¹ Kapleau, 4.

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR ATTAINING *PRAJÑĀ*

Sometimes, *The Three Pillars of Zen* presents practice as instrumental for attaining *prajñā*—that is, the wisdom of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*—though the term *prajñā* is rarely used.

According to Kapleau, Zen practice is instrumental for learning the true nature of the self and all reality. First of all, through Zen practice, we come to know what goes on in our own minds. Zazen, Kapleau says, is “the solitary search into the vast, hidden world of one’s own mind, . . . the lonely trek through winding canyons of shame and fear, across deserts of ecstatic visions and tormenting phantasms, around volcanoes of oozing ego, and through jungles of folly and delusion.”³²² More importantly, though, Kapleau says that through Zen practice one can realize one’s true “Self-nature.”³²³ Zen practice is instrumental for attaining *prajñā*, the wisdom of the way things really are. Zen practitioners can “break through their protective shell of self-delusion and come to true Self-understanding.”³²⁴ What is this “Self-nature”? Who are we really?

Expressed negatively, *prajñā* is the wisdom that we are not truly separate from other people or from anything at all, that there is no real boundary between self and other. We see through the illusion of separation; we un-know, or de-know, something we thought we knew. As Kapleau says, “the relative world of distinction and opposites . . . is illusory, the product of . . . mistaken views,” and in the experience of satori, “the throttling notion of self-and-other” is “uprooted.”³²⁵

³²² Kapleau, 214.

³²³ Kapleau, 199, 202.

³²⁴ Kapleau, 206.

³²⁵ Kapleau, 48, 200.

Expressed positively, *prajñā* is the wisdom of the oneness, or wholeness, or unity, of all reality. Kapleau speaks of “the vision of Oneness attained in enlightenment,” “the lightning and thunder discovery that the universe and oneself are not remote and apart but an intimate, palpitating Whole.”³²⁶

For Kapleau, there are degrees of *prajñā*. Kapleau says that unless it is “fortified” by continued practice, “the vision of Oneness attained in enlightenment, especially if it is faint to begin with, in time becomes clouded and eventually fades into a pleasant memory instead of remaining an omnipresent reality shaping our daily life.”³²⁷

Yasutani also uses the language of oneness, or unity, or “equality” when describing the wisdom attained through Zen practice. He refers, for instance, to “the world of Oneness,” “the underlying unity of the cosmos,” “the absolute equality of things,” and “the Oneness of all existence.”³²⁸

The teaching that practice is instrumental for attaining *prajñā* is not the only teaching about practice in *The Three Pillars of Zen*.

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR REALIZING BUDDHA-NATURE

Much of the teaching about practice in *The Three Pillars of Zen* exemplifies the description of practice as instrumental for realizing one’s inherent buddha-nature. That is, according to *The Three Pillars of Zen*, all beings have buddha-nature, but we need to realize this buddha-nature—that is, we need to become enlightened—and the way to do that is through Zen practice. Zen practice is instrumental for attaining enlightenment.

³²⁶ Kapleau, 23, 214.

³²⁷ Kapleau, 23.

³²⁸ Kapleau, 51, 51, 62, 161.

The distinction between “original enlightenment” and “temporal enlightenment” can be helpful here—that is, the idea that all beings are endowed with *original* enlightenment, but we need to attain *temporal* enlightenment, which is simply the realization of our original enlightenment. (As discussed in chapter 2, this distinction is first found in the Chinese Buddhist text *The Awakening of Faith*.) In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, original enlightenment is usually called Buddha-nature, being a Buddha, or innate perfection; and temporal enlightenment is variously called realization, kensho, satori, awakening, or simply enlightenment.

Yasutani’s Lecture on the “Theory and Practice of Zazen”

Hakuun Yasutani, following the example of his own teacher, would give a series of lectures on Zen training to new Zen students, and no student would be allowed to meet with Yasutani one-on-one for dokusan until they had heard the whole series of lectures. The first chapter of *The Three Pillars of Zen* is Yasutani’s introductory lectures on Zen training, with an extended introduction by Philip Kapleau. Yasutani’s lectures, Kapleau says, are not only a “compendium of instructions on the formal aspects of zazen,” but also an “authoritative exposition” of various topics related to Zen practice, including “the all-important relation of zazen to enlightenment (*satori*).”³²⁹

In the first of his lectures on Zen training, “Theory and Practice of Zazen,” Yasutani clearly presents practice as instrumental for realizing buddha-nature.

In telling the story of the Buddha’s own enlightenment, Yasutani says that we are all buddhas, but we fail to perceive this, and the way to attain enlightenment—to awaken to our buddha-nature—is through Zen practice. Yasutani cites the Avatamsaka (or

³²⁹ Kapleau, 4.

Kegon) sutra as saying that “at the moment of his enlightenment” the Buddha spontaneously exclaimed, “Wonder of wonders! Intrinsically all living beings are Buddha, endowed with wisdom and virtue, but because men’s minds have become inverted through delusive thinking they fail to perceive this.” That is, at the moment of his own temporal enlightenment, the Buddha realized that all beings are originally enlightened, but because they are deluded they fail to perceive their original enlightenment; they are not temporally enlightened. According to Yasutani’s reading of the Avatamsaka sutra, the Buddha went on to exclaim again about the marvel of our original enlightenment, our original perfection: “Yes, how truly marvelous that all human beings, whether clever or stupid, male or female, ugly or beautiful, are whole and complete just as they are. That is to say, the nature of every being is inherently without a flaw, perfect, no different from that of Amida or any other Buddha.” And again, the Buddha notes that we are, alas, deluded and fail to perceive this: “Yet man, restless and anxious, lives a half-crazed existence because his mind, heavily encrusted with delusion, is turned topsy-turvy.” We need to realize our original enlightenment; we need to attain temporal enlightenment: “We need . . . to return to our original perfection, to see through the false image of ourselves as incomplete and sinful, and to wake up to our inherent purity and wholeness.”³³⁰

And “the most effective means” for awakening to one’s original enlightenment, Yasutani says, is through zazen. Yasutani observes that the Buddha himself and many of the Buddha’s disciples attained full awakening through zazen, and countless Indian, China, and Japan devotees have also, through zazen, “resolved for themselves the most

³³⁰ Kapleau, 31.

fundamental question of all: What is the meaning of life and death?” And even today, he says, many people “have emancipated themselves through zazen.”³³¹

Yasutani then tells us a second time that we are all buddhas (we are originally enlightened), but we fail to perceive this (we are not temporally enlightened), and the way to attain temporal enlightenment is through Zen practice. Yasutani says that ordinary beings and buddhas are substantially the same: “Between a supremely perfected Buddha and us, who are ordinary, there is no difference as to substance.” But we don’t perceive our original enlightenment, and “we live bound and fettered through ignorance of our true nature.” The difference between a buddha and an ordinary being, Yasutani says, is that a buddha perceives the truth (original enlightenment) clearly, and the ordinary being does not.³³²

In Zen teaching, the moon is often used as an image of enlightenment, and Yasutani says that the mind of a buddha “is like water that is calm, deep, and crystal clear, and upon which the ‘moon of truth’ reflects fully and perfectly.” The buddha clearly perceives the truth. “The mind of the ordinary man, on the other hand, is like murky water, constantly being churned by the gales of delusive thought and no longer able to reflect the moon of truth.” Yasutani is quick to note that “the moon nonetheless shines down upon the waves”—the truth is still there, one’s original enlightenment is still there—but the churning, muddy waters keep the ordinary being from perceiving that truth. And, thus, “we lead lives that are frustrating and meaningless.”³³³

So how do we perceive the truth? “How can we fully illumine our life and personality with the moon of truth?” Yasutani answers, “We need first to purify this

³³¹ Kapleau, 31–32.

³³² Kapleau, 32.

³³³ Kapleau, 32.

water, to calm the surging waves by halting the winds of discursive thought.” The winds must be stilled. “Once they abate, the waves subside, the muddiness clears, and we perceive directly that the moon of truth has never ceased shining.” We need to attain temporal enlightenment, the direct realization of our original enlightenment. “The moment of such realization is *kensho*, i.e., enlightenment, the apprehension of the true substance of our Self-nature.” That realization of our true nature frees us from our suffering: “Now for the first time we can live with inner peace and dignity, free from perplexity and disquiet, and in harmony with our environment.”³³⁴

After this explanation of the “theory” of zazen, Yasutani expresses his hope that he has successfully conveyed “the importance of zazen,” and he then goes on to give detailed instructions in the practice of zazen.³³⁵

Yasutani’s Lecture on “The Parable of Enyadatta”

The eighth of Yasutani’s introductory lectures on Zen training, “The Parable of Enyadatta,” also exemplifies the presentation of practice as instrumental for realizing buddha-nature.

The story of Enyadatta, Yasutani notes in his talk, comes from the Surangama sutra. (Kapleau adds, in a footnote, that “in the journey from India to Japan, Vajradatta, the half-demented villager mentioned in the sutra, was mysteriously transformed into the beautiful maiden Enyadatta.”) The tale of Enyadatta, Yasutani says, is “an exceptionally

³³⁴ Kapleau, 32–33.

³³⁵ Kapleau, 33.

fine parable that will, if you reflect carefully upon it, clarify many abstruse points of Buddhism.”³³⁶

This is the story (condensed and paraphrased from Yasutani’s retelling): One day, the beautiful maiden Enyadatta looked in the mirror and didn’t see her head reflected there. In shock, she began running around frantically, searching for her head and demanding to know who had taken it. Everyone told her not to be silly, that her head was right where it had always been, but she refused to believe them, and she continued her frantic search. After a while, her friends, thinking she’d gone mad, dragged Enyadatta home and tied her to a pillar to keep her from hurting herself. They tried to persuade her that her head had never been missing, and gradually she came to believe that it might be true and that perhaps she was deluded in thinking that she had lost her head. Then suddenly, one of her friends gave her a hard whack on the head. “Ouch!” she yelled, in pain and shock. “*There’s* your head!” her friend exclaimed, and Enyadatta realized that she had indeed been deluded in thinking that her head had ever been missing. Enyadatta was so elated that she ran around exclaiming joyfully that she had her head. As her joy subsided, she recovered from this half-mad state.³³⁷

Yasutani explains the significance of this story. The head, he says, “corresponds to the Buddha-nature, to our innate perfection.” Most people “are like Enyadatta when she was unconscious of her head as such.” That is, it never occurs to most people that they have Buddha-nature, and they are unaware of the possibility of enlightenment. Then they hear the teaching that all beings have Buddha-nature, that “their Essential-nature is no different from the Buddha’s,” and moreover that “the substance of the universe is

³³⁶ Kapleau, 57.

³³⁷ Kapleau, 58–59.

coextensive with their own Buddha-nature.” And yet, “because their minds are clouded with delusion,” they don’t see their Buddha-nature; “they see themselves confronted by a world of individual entities.” Just as Enyadatta was never without her head, we are never without our essential Buddha-nature. But just as Enyadatta thought her head was missing and started searching for it, we think our Buddha-nature is missing and start searching for it. Just as Enyadatta’s friends told her that her head had never been missing, the teachings of Zen tell us that our Buddha-nature, our innate perfection, our connection with all of reality, has never been missing. But Enyadatta couldn’t believe it, and we can’t believe it.³³⁸

Yasutani compares Enyadatta’s friends’ tying her to a pillar to undertaking zazen. With the body immobilized in zazen, the mind, though still distracted by the “missing” Buddha-nature, achieves a measure of tranquility, and the body is prevented from scattering its energy.³³⁹

Yasutani compares Enyadatta’s listening to her friends’ reassurances with the Zen practitioner’s listening to the Zen master’s talks (*teisho*). At first, these talks are puzzling, but then you start to wonder if what is being said is really true, and eventually you begin to believe that it must be true.³⁴⁰

Enyadatta’s being whacked on the head by her friend is like the Zen practitioner’s being whacked with the *kyosaku* (the “awakening stick”). Yasutani explains that the *kyosaku* can spur you on in your practice, and also, “when you have reached a decisive stage” in your practice, being jolted either physically or verbally “by a perceptive teacher at the right time” can “precipitate your mind into awareness of its true nature—in other

³³⁸ Kapleau, 59.

³³⁹ Kapleau, 58.

³⁴⁰ Kapleau, 58.

words, enlightenment”—just as being whacked on the head precipitated Enyadatta’s awareness that her head was right where it belonged.³⁴¹

Enyadatta’s joy at finding her head is “the rapture of kensho.” “The ecstasy is genuine enough,” Yasutani says, but this is a “half-mad” state: being ecstatic to find the head—or the Buddha-nature—that has always been there. Your state of mind “cannot be called natural until you have fully disabused yourself of the notion, ‘I have become enlightened.’” And yet, it is important to go through this whole peculiar process, to come to this discovery of your Buddha-nature: “Until you reach this point,” Yasutani says, “it is impossible to live in harmony with your environment or to continue on a course of true spiritual practice.” “When your delirium of delight recedes, taking with it all thoughts of realization, you settle into a truly natural life and there is nothing queer about it.” “When the ecstasy recedes, we realize that we have acquired nothing extraordinary, and certainly nothing peculiar. Only now everything is utterly natural.”³⁴²

In Yasutani’s lecture on the story of Enyadatta, enlightenment is “finding” our Buddha-nature, or innate perfection, which has never actually been missing, just as Enyadatta’s enlightenment was “finding” her head, which had never actually been missing. According to Yasutani’s teaching in this talk, Zen practice is instrumental for realizing one’s buddha-nature—that is, a means to attain temporal enlightenment, which is the realization of one’s original enlightenment.

³⁴¹ Kapleau, 58.

³⁴² Kapleau, 59–60.

Yasutani's Commentary on Mu

The second chapter of *The Three Pillars of Zen* contains Yasutani's talk (*teisho*) on the koan Mu—which is often assigned to Zen students as their first koan—and Kapleau's introduction to this talk. Here, too, Yasutani presents practice as instrumental for realizing buddha-nature.

Yasutani explains that realization is seeing the world in a radically new way (attaining temporal enlightenment) but also seeing the world just as it has always been: “as Buddha-nature” (realizing your original enlightenment). When you come to realization, he says, “everything will appear so changed that you will think heaven and earth have been overturned.” That is, temporal enlightenment is an enormous change in one's perception. But, he says, “of course there is no literal toppling over.” That is, the world hasn't actually changed. With realization “you see the world as Buddha-nature”—you realize original enlightenment, which was always here. Seeing everything anew, Yasutani cautions, “does not mean that all becomes as radiant as a halo. Rather, each thing *just as it is* takes on an entirely new significance and worth. Miraculously, everything is radically transformed through remaining as it is.”³⁴³ Realization, or temporal enlightenment, is a radical change, but what one has realized is what has always been: original enlightenment. Through this realization, Yasutani says, “one acquires self-confidence and an imposing bearing”; one is “able to face death and rebirth without anxiety”; whatever one's circumstances, one is “able to live with the spontaneity and joy of children at play” and to “descend to the deepest hell or rise to the highest heaven with

³⁴³ Kapleau, 85.

freedom and rapture.”³⁴⁴ How is this realization achieved? “Through zazen,” Yasutani says.

Again, Yasutani presents zazen as instrumental for realizing one’s buddha-nature—that is, as a means of attaining temporal enlightenment, which is the realization of original enlightenment.

Kapleau’s Story of Dogen’s Enlightenment

Like Yasutani’s sections of *Three Pillars of Zen*, Philip Kapleau’s sections primarily present Zen practice as instrumental for realizing buddha-nature.

For instance, in Kapleau’s introduction to Yasutani’s introductory lectures on Zen training, he says that koans “point to the Buddha-mind with which we are endowed, but they do not teach how to *realize* the reality of this Mind” (italics his), which is through “the pure and faithful practice of zazen.”³⁴⁵ Zen practice is a means of realizing the reality of the Buddha-mind with which we are already endowed.

Even in referring to Dogen and to Dogen’s own struggle to understand the relation of practice and enlightenment, Kapleau generally talks about practice as a means to realize buddha-nature. By the time Dogen was fifteen, Kapleau says, Dogen’s “spiritual strivings” revolved around “one burning question”: “‘If, as the sutras say, our Essential-nature is Bodhi (perfection), why did all Buddhas have to strive for enlightenment and perfection?’” This was Dogen’s core question: if we are inherently perfect, why must we strive for perfection—as clearly we must, since even the buddhas did? If we are inherently awakened (our essential nature is Bodhi), why must we strive

³⁴⁴ Kapleau, 85–86.

³⁴⁵ Kapleau, 26.

for awakening (enlightenment)? Dogen practiced under two Japanese Rinzai masters but “still felt spiritually unfulfilled” and made the hazardous journey to China to visit many monasteries “in search of complete peace of mind.” At T’ien-t’ung Monastery, Dogen practiced under Ju-ching, the new master there. As Kapleau tells the story, one morning as master Ju-ching was making his rounds of the meditation hall just before the formal zazen period, Ju-ching saw a monk dozing, reprimanded him, and said to all of the monks, ““You must exert yourselves with all your might, even at the risk of your lives. To realize perfect enlightenment you must let fall . . . body and mind.”” Kapleau explains that to “let fall” body and mind means to “become empty of” body and mind. As Dogen heard the last phrase, “You must let fall body and mind,” Dogen’s “Mind’s eye suddenly expanded in a flood of light and understanding.” He “achieved full awakening.”³⁴⁶

Now, Dogen’s burning question was (as Kapleau renders it), ““If, as the sutras say, our Essential-nature is Bodhi (perfection), why did all Buddhas have to strive for enlightenment and perfection?””³⁴⁷ How would Kapleau answer that question? Judging from Kapleau’s telling of Dogen’s “enlightenment” story, spiritual fulfillment or peace of mind are not necessarily the fruits of our inherent enlightenment and perfection. We need to strive for enlightenment and perfection—apparently some *other* sort of enlightenment and perfection, which are *not* inherent. Though Kapleau doesn’t make this distinction clearly and explicitly, he seems to be distinguishing here between the “original enlightenment” (“Bodhi,” “perfection”) with which we are all endowed and the “temporal enlightenment” (“enlightenment”) that we must strive for. That is, he appears to be presenting practice as instrumental for realizing our buddha-nature.

³⁴⁶ Kapleau, 5–7.

³⁴⁷ Kapleau, 5.

**PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR REALIZING BUDDHA-NATURE
AND AS A MANIFESTATION OF BUDDHAHOOD?**

Occasionally in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, both Yasutani and Kapleau present practice not only as a means to realize buddha-nature (as instrumental) but also as a manifestation of buddhahood (as noninstrumental), but in a qualified sort of way. This generally happens in the context of talking about the practice of shikan-taza, or “just sitting,” a practice that is associated particularly with Dogen’s Soto Zen.³⁴⁸

Kapleau on Shikan-taza

In Kapleau’s introduction to Yasutani’s lectures on Zen training, just after his discussion of Dogen’s “enlightenment” experience (examined above), Kapleau discusses shikan-taza. The practice of shikan-taza, as Kapleau presents it, is a manifestation of buddhahood (noninstrumental), but it is also—and Kapleau devotes much more attention to this point—a means to realize buddha-nature (instrumental).

Kapleau says that Dogen, at the time of his enlightenment, was engaged in the practice of shikan-taza. The foundation of shikan-taza, Kapleau says, is faith—specifically, “an unshakeable faith that sitting as the Buddha sat, with the mind void of all conceptions, of all beliefs and points of view, is the actualization or unfoldment of the inherently enlightened Bodhi-mind with which all are endowed.” That is, one practices shikan-taza in the faith that this practice actualizes, or *manifests*, one’s buddhahood.

³⁴⁸ These days, “shikan-taza” is usually spelled without the hyphen, but in this section, for the sake of consistency, I’m using Kapleau’s hyphenated rendering.

Kapleau adds that one also sits in the faith that this practice “will one day culminate in the sudden and direct perception of the true nature of this Mind—in other words, enlightenment.” That is, one sits in the faith that this practice is also a means to *realize* one’s buddha-nature, or to attain enlightenment. Sitting in this twofold faith—the faith that practice is a manifestation of buddhahood and also a means to realize buddha-nature—one need not and should not strive to attain realization or anything else: “to strive self-consciously for satori or any other gain from zazen is as unnecessary as it is undesirable.” But again, even as one is practicing without self-conscious striving for any end, one is sitting in the faith that this practice is a means to the end of enlightenment.³⁴⁹

Kapleau is insistent that satori, or enlightenment, should not be excluded from an understanding of shikan-taza. To exclude the idea of enlightenment from the understanding of shikan-taza “would necessarily involve stigmatizing as meaningless and even masochistic the Buddha’s strenuous efforts toward enlightenment, and impugning the patriarchs’ and Dogen’s own painful struggles to that end.” That is, the Buddha and the great Zen masters, including Dogen, strove for satori, or enlightenment, and we should not exclude the attainment of enlightenment from our understanding of practice. “This relation of satori to shikan-taza,” Kapleau says, “is of the utmost importance.” But “unfortunately it has often been misunderstood,” especially, he says, by those who do not have access to Dogen’s complete writings. Thus, Kapleau says, Western Zen students will often meet with a Soto Zen teacher who makes use of koan practice and protest that koan practice aims at enlightenment, but since we are all *intrinsically* enlightened, there is no point in *seeking* enlightenment. So these students ask to practice shikan-taza, in the belief that it “does not involve the experience of enlightenment.” This sort of attitude,

³⁴⁹ Kapleau, 7.

Kapleau says, “reveals a fundamental misconception” about the nature of shikan-taza and also about the difficulty of shikan-taza. The practice of shikan-taza, Kapleau says, “cannot be successfully undertaken by a rank novice, who has yet to learn how to sit with stability and equanimity, . . . or who lacks strong faith in his own Bodhi-mind coupled with a dedicated resolve to experience its reality in his daily life.” Believing that shikan-taza does not involve the experience of enlightenment is, for Kapleau, a grave misunderstanding.³⁵⁰

Kapleau appeals to Dogen’s own practice to support the contention that Zen practice is a means to the end of awakening. Kapleau reminds us that Dogen himself practiced koan Zen and compiled his own koan collection, and although Dogen later “wrote at length about shikan-taza and recommended it for his inner band of disciples,” Kapleau says we should not forget that “these disciples were dedicated truth-seekers for whom koans were an unnecessary encouragement to sustained practice.” So apparently, in Kapleau’s view, koan practice is better encouragement to sustained practice than is shikan-taza, but if one already has a strong inner motivation, the encouragement of koan practice is not necessary, and one can sustain the practice of shikan-taza.³⁵¹

Kapleau also appeals to Dogen’s writing to support the contention that Zen practice is a means to the end of awakening. Kapleau asks rhetorically, “What then is zazen and how is it related to satori?” According to Kapleau, “Dogen taught that zazen is the ‘gateway to total liberation,’” and Keizan, another patriarch of Japanese Soto Zen, “declared that only through Zen sitting is the ‘mind of man illumined.’” Kapleau cites Dogen’s invocation, in the *Fukan zazen gi*, of the examples of the Buddha and

³⁵⁰ Kapleau, 7–8.

³⁵¹ Kapleau, 8–9.

Bodhidharma. Kapleau says, “Elsewhere Dogen wrote that ‘even the Buddha, who was a born sage, sat in zazen for six years until his supreme enlightenment, and so towering a figure as Bodhidharma sat for nine years facing the wall.’ And so have Dogen and all the other patriarchs sat.” Kapleau concludes that “through the practice of zazen . . . there are established the optimum preconditions for looking into the heart-mind and discovering there the true nature of existence.” Zazen is an optimal means of realizing one’s buddha-nature.³⁵²

Although Kapleau affirms that the practice of shikan-taza is a *manifestation* of one’s buddhahood (that it is noninstrumental), he uses much more space to make clear that even the practice of shikan-taza should be understood as a means to *realize* one’s buddha-nature (as instrumental).

Yasutani’s Lecture on “The Five Varieties of Zen”

In Yasutani’s fourth lecture on Zen training, “The Five Varieties of Zen,” Yasutani differentiates five types of Zen, based on their differing objectives. In this lecture, Yasutani presents practice both as a means to *realize* buddha-nature (instrumental) and also as a *manifestation* of buddhahood (noninstrumental).

The first three of Yasutani’s five types of Zen are clearly instrumental. The first type, “ordinary Zen,” is Zen practiced “purely in the belief that it can improve both physical and mental health.” Yasutani believes that Zen practice can indeed improve physical and mental health, and he thinks that is “can almost certainly have no ill effects,” so he thinks anyone can undertake this “ordinary Zen” as means to improved health. The second type of Zen includes forms of Zen that Yasutani considers non-

³⁵² Kapleau, 9.

Buddhist—for instance, “Hindu yoga, the quietest sitting of Confucianism, contemplation in Christianity,” and Zen practiced “to cultivate various supranormal powers or skills, or to master certain arts beyond the reach of ordinary man,” such as “walking barefooted on sharp sword blades or starting at sparrows so that they become paralyzed.” Again, this is Zen practiced instrumentally, as a means to certain ends. The third type of Zen, “Small Vehicle” Zen, focuses on one’s own peace of mind, aiming to move the practitioner from a state of delusion to a state of enlightenment. Yasutani is willing to call this sort of Zen “Buddhist,” but he says that it is “not in accord with the Buddha’s highest teaching.” This “Small Vehicle” Zen is for those Zen practitioners who “are unable to grasp the innermost meaning of the Buddha’s enlightenment, i.e., that existence is an inseparable whole, each one of us embracing the cosmos in its totality.” In these first three types of Zen, Zen practice is understood as instrumental: as a means for attaining physical or mental health, non-Buddhist religious ends or supranormal powers, or “enlightenment” for one’s “self” understood as separate from all else.³⁵³

Now we come to the forms of Zen that Yasutani considers “truly Buddhist.” The fourth type of Zen is “Great Vehicle” Zen, which is for those who can comprehend the Buddha’s enlightenment and who aim “to break through their own illusory view of the universe and experience absolute, undifferentiated Reality”—that is, for those who aim to attain true enlightenment as the Buddha understood it. Yasutani stresses that Buddhism is “essentially a religion of enlightenment,” and the Buddha, after his own enlightenment, spent the rest of his life teaching people how they might come to realize their “Self-nature.” So far, this fourth type of Zen seems to be an example of practicing to *realize*

³⁵³ Kapleau, 45–47.

buddha-nature: one practices in order to attain enlightenment (temporal enlightenment), that is, to experience “Reality,” to realize one’s “Self-nature” (original enlightenment).³⁵⁴

But then the discussion gets a little more complicated, and Yasutani makes use of the model of practice as a *manifestation* of buddhahood. Still discussing the fourth type of Zen, Yasutani says that the objective in practicing this “Great Vehicle” Zen is to awaken to your “True-nature,” but upon enlightenment, you realize that not only is zazen a means to enlightenment (i.e., not only is practice instrumental for *realizing* buddha-nature) but zazen is also “the actualization of your True-nature” (i.e., practice is also a *manifestation* of one’s buddhahood). He says that it is easy, in this type of Zen, to regard zazen as merely a means to the end of enlightenment, but a wise teacher will point out from the beginning that zazen is in fact “the actualization of the innate Buddha-nature.” To support this idea, Yasutani points out that if zazen were merely a means to enlightenment, then zazen would be unnecessary after enlightenment, but as Dogen himself pointed out, the more deeply you experience enlightenment, the more you perceive the necessity of practice.³⁵⁵

So, in the fourth type of Zen, one practices with the objective of attaining enlightenment (*realizing* buddha-nature), but after one is enlightened, one sees that practice is also the actualization (*manifestation*) of one’s buddhahood.

The fifth and final type of Zen, “the highest vehicle”—which, Yasutani says, was “practiced by all the Buddhas of the past”—is “the expression of the Absolute life.” This type of Zen “involves no struggle for satori or any other object.” Yasutani equates this type of Zen with the practice of shikan-taza, or “just sitting.” “In this highest practice,” he

³⁵⁴ Kapleau, 48.

³⁵⁵ Kapleau, 48.

says, “means and end coalesce.” So this sounds like an example of practicing as a *manifestation* of one’s buddhahood—not to realize buddha-nature or to achieve any other aim—and this is apparently the best type of Zen (the “highest,” the fifth of five types).³⁵⁶

Then, to complicate things slightly, Yasutani says that the fourth and fifth types of Zen are actually complementary. The Rinzai school, he says, would place the fourth type uppermost, and the Soto school would place the fifth type uppermost. (So by putting the fifth type uppermost—practice as a *manifestation* of buddhahood—Yasutani is identifying himself more strongly with the Soto school.)

Then, as in Kapleau’s discussion of shikan-taza, the understanding of practice as instrumental for *realizing* buddha-nature makes a reprise. Yasutani says that in the fifth type of Zen, “you sit in the firm conviction that zazen is the actualization of your undefiled True-nature” (so far, this sounds like practice as a *manifestation* of buddhahood), and (the italics are his) “*at the same time you sit in complete faith that the day will come when, exclaiming, ‘Oh, this is it!’ you will unmistakably realize this True-nature.*” So in the back of your mind, you still hold on to the hope and expectation of *realizing* buddha-nature, although, as Yasutani says, “you need not self-consciously strive for enlightenment.” In case there was any doubt, Yasutani then makes it clear that he does indeed have a dispute with those who would view practice *only* as the manifestation of buddhahood: “Today many in the Soto sect hold that since we are all innately Buddhas, satori is unnecessary.” This, he says, is an “egregious error,” which reduces *shikantaza*, the highest form of sitting, to “ordinary Zen,” the first of the five types.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Kapleau, 49.

³⁵⁷ Kapleau, 49.

Zen practice, as Yasutani presents it in this lecture, in its “truly Buddhist” forms—his fourth and fifth forms—is a *manifestation* of our buddhahood (noninstrumental), but we don’t see that until we’re enlightened, and as we engage in practice, we practice in order to *realize* our buddha-nature (we engage in practice as instrumental).

Yasutani’s Lecture on “Cause and Effect Are One”

Yasutani’s ninth lecture on Zen training, “Cause and Effect Are One,” also presents practice both as a means to *realize* enlightenment and also as the *manifestation* of enlightenment. This talk focuses on the notion of *inga ichinyo*—which Yasutani renders as “cause-and-effect are one”—from the *Chant in Praise of Zazen* by the great Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin.

Yasutani talks about the “clearly differentiated stages” of practice that “can be considered a ladder of cause and effect” up which one proceeds. But “while there are many stages corresponding to the length of practice, at every one of these different stages, he says, the mind substance is the same as that of the Buddha. Therefore we say cause and effect are one.” That is, all are inherently buddhas (we are all endowed with original enlightenment), and proceeding to further stages of practice (the “cause”) does not make one any more of a buddha (the “effect”). Until enlightenment, however, one is unlikely to have “a deep inner understanding” of “cause-and-effect are one.” That is, one needs to attain temporal enlightenment in order fully understand that practice is not a cause of original enlightenment.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Kapleau, 60–61.

Referring to the story of Enyadatta, Yasutani says that Enyadatta had her head at every stage, but she realized this only after she “found” her head. Likewise, he says, “after enlightenment we realize that from the very first we were never without Buddha-nature.” That is, after temporal enlightenment, we realize that we were never without original enlightenment. “And just as it was necessary for Enyadatta to go through all these phases in order to grasp the fact that she had always had a head, so we must pass through successive stages of zazen in order to apprehend directly our True-nature.” The successive steps of zazen are causally related, but when it comes to our inherent buddha-nature, “cause-and-effect are one.”³⁵⁹

Then Yasutani adds the rhetoric of practice as a *manifestation* of buddhahood. He quotes Dogen as saying in the *Shobogenzo*, ““The zazen of even beginners manifests the whole of their Essential-nature.”” Yasutani explains that Dogen “is saying here that correct zazen is the actualization of the Bodhi-mind, the mind with which we are all endowed.” This is the “highest” of Yasutani’s five types of Zen, a Zen in which “the Way of the Buddha suffuses your entire being and enters into the whole of your life.” So practice is the *manifestation* of buddhahood. But then, as in the previous lecture I examined, Yasutani says that only when we are enlightened do we *realize* that practice is the manifestation of buddhahood: “as our practice progresses we gradually acquire understanding and insight, and finally, with enlightenment, wake up to the fact that zazen is the actualization of our inherently pure Buddha-nature, whether we are enlightened or not.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Kapleau, 61.

³⁶⁰ Kapleau, 61.

So again, as in the lecture on the “Five Varieties of Zen,” Yasutani presents Zen practice as a *manifestation* of our buddhahood (noninstrumental), but we don’t see that until we’re enlightened, and our aim in practice is to *realize* our buddha-nature (we engage in practice as instrumental).

TWO TRUTHS ABOUT PRACTICE

There is one instance in *The Three Pillars of Zen* in which Philip Kapleau seems to be using a “Two Truths” strategy for integrating instrumental and noninstrumental teachings about Zen practice. In Kapleau’s introduction to Yasutani’s lectures on Zen training, Kapleau says:

Zazen that leads to Self-realization . . . demands energy, determination and courage. Yasutani-roshi calls it “a battle between the opposing forces of delusion and bodhi.”

In other words, the Zen practice that is instrumental for attaining enlightenment is a battle between delusion and enlightenment. Interestingly, in the 1980 edition of *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Kapleau adds a footnote: “This statement is made from the standpoint of practice or training. From the standpoint of the fundamental Buddha-mind there is no delusion and no bodhi.”³⁶¹ It sounds very much like he is saying that from the conventional viewpoint (“the standpoint of practice or training”), Zen practice is a battle to attain enlightenment, but from the ultimate viewpoint (“the standpoint of the fundamental Buddha-mind”), it doesn’t even make sense to talk about “enlightenment” as opposed to “delusion.”

³⁶¹ Kapleau, 13.

HOW TO PRACTICE TO ATTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT

In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Hakuun Yasutani and Philip Kapleau present Zen practice primarily as instrumental: as a means to attain enlightenment either by realizing one's buddha-nature or by attaining *prajñā* (the wisdom of emptiness). Both Yasutani and Kapleau also note that Zen practice is *noninstrumental*—simply a manifestation of our buddhahood—but we don't realize this until we realize our buddha-nature. Even in talking about the Buddha, Yasutani says that the Buddha “devoted himself exclusively to zazen” and eventually “attained perfect enlightenment.”³⁶² *The Three Pillars of Zen* is fundamentally a book about how to attain enlightenment through Zen practice.

So then, how does one practice to attain enlightenment?

Posture

The Three Pillars of Zen includes detailed instructions on the posture for zazen.

In his first lecture on Zen training, Yasutani describes in detail the posture that should be used for zazen. He says that it is best to sit in the full-lotus posture—that is, with the right foot on top of the left thigh and the left foot on top of the right thigh. The main point of arranging the legs in this particular way, he says, “is that by establishing a side, solid base with the crossed legs and both knees touching the mat, you achieve repose and absolute stability. When the body is immobile, thoughts are not stirred into activity by physical movements and the mind is more easily quieted.” If sitting in a full-lotus is difficult because of the pain it causes, you may instead sit in a half-lotus position, with the left foot on top of the right thigh and the right foot tucked underneath. If you

³⁶² Kapleau, 31.

find even the half-lotus “acutely uncomfortable,” one can kneel in the “traditional Japanese” posture of “sitting on the heels and calves.” And if even that is too painful, you can sit in a chair.³⁶³

Next, Yasutani describes the *mudra*, or hand position, that is used for zazen. You rest your right hand in your lap, palm upward, and place the left hand on top of it, palm upward. Then “lightly touch the tips of the thumbs to each other so that a flattened circle is formed by the palms and thumbs.”³⁶⁴

Regarding the placement of the legs and hands, with the left on top of the right, he explains that “the right side of the body is the active side, and the left the passive,” and so, in zazen, “we repress the active side by placing the left foot and left hand over the right members, as an aid in achieving the highest degree of tranquility.”³⁶⁵

The eyes are open, with the gaze lowered. About the eyes, Yasutani explains that “if you close your eyes you will fall into a dull and dreamy state,” and “experience has shown that the mind is quietest, with the least fatigue or strain, when the eyes in this lowered position.”³⁶⁶

The spinal column should be “erect.” Yasutani stresses the point: “This admonition is important.” He explains that when the body is slumped, “undue pressure” is put on the internal organs, “interfering with their free functioning,” and also the vertebrae may cause strains by “impinging on the nerves.” He says that “since the body and mind are one, any impairment of the physiological functions inevitably involves the

³⁶³ Kapleau, 33–34.

³⁶⁴ Kapleau, 34.

³⁶⁵ Kapleau, 34.

³⁶⁶ Kapleau, 34.

mind and thus diminishes clarity and one-pointedness, which are essential for effective concentration.”³⁶⁷

The head should be “erect,” lest you get “a crick in the neck.” The mouth is closed. And you should breathe through the nose, breathing naturally, “without trying to manipulate your breath.”³⁶⁸

The Three Pillars of Zen also includes an appendix including illustrations and explanations of various sitting postures and a section of questions and answers about the posture and the breathing. In this appendix, Kapleau adds one more option to Yasutani’s list of positions for the legs: the so-called Burmese position, in which the legs are not actually crossed but lie on the mat parallel to one another. Kapleau notes for many Westerners, “not nurtured on cross-legged sitting,” this position may be less uncomfortable than the full-lotus or half-lotus; however, “it does not provide the strong support for the trunk that the lotus posture does,” and thus the spine “cannot be kept absolutely erect for long without strain.” Kapleau also modifies Yasutani’s instructions for the traditional Japanese kneeling posture, noting that it “can be made comfortable for Westerners” by either inserting a cushion between the buttocks and heels or using a low bench designed to support a kneeling posture. “For a novice,” Kapleau says, “an absolutely straight back is easiest in this position.” Regarding sitting in chair, Kapleau notes that sitting in a chair “in the usual way, that is, with the back bent, is not satisfactory for zazen.” But using a cushion to raise the buttocks (which allows the thighs to slant downward from hip to knee) will help to keep the spine erect.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Kapleau, 34–35.

³⁶⁸ Kapleau, 34–35.

³⁶⁹ Kapleau, 327–328.

Note that Yasutani often gives the reasons for the various posture instructions—since inquiring modern minds may want to know—and the reasons he gives are practical ones. Following these directions will help your Zen practice to be instrumental for attaining a quiet, tranquil, clear, concentrated mind. Similarly, following Kapleau's instructions will help you to sit with as little discomfort as possible.

Thinking Is Not the Way

Both Kapleau and Yasutani teach that one cannot think one's way to enlightenment. Thinking is not instrumental for attaining enlightenment.

Kapleau says, for instance, that “the essential truth of the universe” lies “beyond the realm of the discriminating intellect,” and he speaks of Zen's “clear awareness of the dangers of intellectualism” and “its empirical appeal to personal experience and not philosophic speculation as the means of verifying ultimate truth.”³⁷⁰ In discussing koan practice, Kapleau says that “every koan is a unique expression of the living, indivisible Buddha-nature, which cannot be grasped by the bifurcating intellect. . . . To people who cherish the letter above the spirit, koans appear bewildering, for in their phrasing koans deliberately throw sand into the eyes of the intellect to force us to open our Mind's eye and see the world and everything in it undistorted by our concepts and judgments.”

Similarly, Yasutani says in his talk on the koan Mu that “Buddha-nature cannot be grasped by the intellect” and that “it is useless to approach Zen from the standpoint of supposition or logic. You can never come to enlightenment through inference, cognition, or conceptualization. Cease clinging to all thought-forms!”³⁷¹ Not only can you not think

³⁷⁰ Kapleau, 19, 214–215.

³⁷¹ Kapleau, 81–82.

your way to enlightenment, but thinking is actually a hindrance to attaining enlightenment. He says that “you must melt down your illusions with the red-hot iron ball of Mu stuck in your throat.” What does he mean by “illusions”? “Illusions” include “opinions you hold,” “worldly knowledge,” “philosophical and moral concepts, no matter how lofty,” “religious beliefs and dogmas,” as well as “innocent and commonplace thoughts.” “In short, all conceivable ideas are embraced in the term ‘illusions’ and as such are a hindrance to the realization of your Essential-nature. So dissolve them with the fireball of Mu!”³⁷²

In his first lecture on Zen training, Yasutani makes use of some common images in Zen: thoughts as waves in the water of the mind, and the moon as the truth. “The mind of a Buddha” he says, “is like water that is calm, deep, and crystal clear, and upon which the ‘moon of truth’ reflects fully and perfectly. The mind of the ordinary man, on the other hand, is like murky water, constantly being churned by the gales of delusive thought and no longer able to reflect the moon of truth.” He notes that “the moon nonetheless shines steadily upon the waves”—the truth shines on the mind of the ordinary person as well as on the mind of a Buddha—however, in ordinary people, “as the waters are roiled we are unable to see its reflection,” and thus, not clearly seeing the moon of truth, “we lead lives that are frustrating and meaningless.” So what are we to do? “How can we fully illumine our life and personality with the moon of truth?” We need to calm the water “by halting the waves of discursive thought. In other words, we must empty our minds of what the Kegon (Avatamsaka) sutra calls ‘the conceptual thought of man.’” Yasutani observes that “most people place a high value on abstract thought,” and he allows that, “to be sure, abstract thinking is useful when wisely employed—which is to say, when its

³⁷² Kapleau, 84.

nature and limitations are properly understood.” However, “Buddhism has clearly demonstrated that discriminative thinking lies at the root of delusion,” and “as long as human beings remain slaves to their intellect, fettered and controlled by it, they can well be called sick.”³⁷³

Yasutani then makes a distinction (to be developed and clarified below) between thoughts that are not a hindrance to enlightenment and thoughts that are. “It is important,” he says, “to distinguish the role of transitory thoughts from that of fixed concepts. Random ideas are relatively innocuous, but ideologies, beliefs, opinions, and points of view, not to mention the factual knowledge accumulated since birth (to which we attach ourselves), are the shadows which obscure the light of truth.” What he calls transitory thoughts or random ideas are not a problem, but fixed concepts, ideologies, beliefs, opinions, points of view, and factual knowledge are a problem.³⁷⁴

Emptying the Mind, or Stilling the Mind?

Interestingly, Kapleau and Yasutani have somewhat different teachings about what to do with thoughts in Zen practice. Kapleau suggests that one must “empty” one’s mind of all thoughts in zazen, while Yasutani suggests that only some types of thoughts are a problem, and one need only “still” one’s mind.

Kapleau often says that emptying the mind of all thoughts is essential to enlightenment. Through zazen, he says “the mind is freed from bondage to *all* thought-forms, visions, objects, and imaginings, however sacred or elevating, and brought to state of absolute emptiness” (*italics his*), and it is only from this state of emptiness that the

³⁷³ Kapleau, 32–33.

³⁷⁴ Kapleau, 32–33.

mind “may one day perceive its own true nature, or the nature of the universe.”³⁷⁵

Similarly, Kapleau says that through zazen one can “still the mind and bring it to one-pointedness so that it may be employed as an instrument of Self-discovery.”³⁷⁶ Zen practitioners can attain enlightenment if they “expunge every thought from their minds.”³⁷⁷

Sometimes Kapleau speaks as if only certain kinds of thoughts are a problem—“discriminating thoughts,” “extraneous thoughts,” “discursive thought,” “the uncontrolled proliferation of idle thoughts,” “random ideas”³⁷⁸—perhaps implying that other kinds of thoughts are not a problem. But when he is talking about freeing the mind of these specific kinds of thoughts, the context is usually a discussion of an end more mundane than enlightenment. For instance, he says that “one who sits devotedly in zazen every day, his mind free of discriminating thoughts, finds it easier to relate himself wholeheartedly to his daily tasks” and that “with the mind’s eye centered in the hara the proliferation of random ideas is diminished and the attainment of one-pointedness accelerated,” which “leads to a greater degree of mental and emotional stability,” to a “broadness of outlook and magnanimity of spirit.”³⁷⁹ But this way of being is, according to Kapleau, “only indirectly related to satori and synonymous with it.”³⁸⁰ It would appear that, in Kapleau’s view, getting rid of the most troublesome sorts of thoughts can improve one’s life, but complete emptying of the mind is necessary for enlightenment.

³⁷⁵ Kapleau, 13.

³⁷⁶ Kapleau, 23.

³⁷⁷ Kapleau, 204.

³⁷⁸ Kapleau, 11, 14, 15.

³⁷⁹ Kapleau, 11, 15–16.

³⁸⁰ Kapleau, 16.

While Kapleau stresses emptying the mind of all thoughts, Yasutani advocates “stilling” the mind and simply not “pursuing” thoughts. For instance, in the first of Yasutani’s introductory lectures on Zen training, “Theory and Practice of Zazen,” Yasutani uses the image of the water of the mind reflecting the moon of truth:

So long as the winds of thought continue to disturb the water of our Self-nature, we cannot distinguish truth from untruth. It is imperative, therefore, that these winds be stilled. Once they abate, the waves subside, the muddiness clears, and we perceive directly that the moon of truth has never ceased shining.³⁸¹

Yasutani goes on to give detailed practical instructions in zazen, beginning with where to sit and the posture for zazen and then describing the practice of “counting the breath.” In this practice, while breathing naturally, you count the inhalation “one,” the exhalation “two,” the inhalation “three,” and so on. If you lose track of the counting, you start again at one, and if you get to ten, you start again at one. In this exercise of counting the breath, Yasutani says, the “discriminative mind” is “put at rest,” “the waves of thought are stilled,” and “a gradual one-pointedness of mind is achieved.” But Yasutani is careful to note that not all thoughts are a problem. The “fleeting thoughts which naturally fluctuate in the mind,” he says, “are not in themselves an impediment” in Zen practice. But “this unfortunately is commonly not recognized.” Yasutani finds that Zen is often misunderstood to be “a stopping of consciousness,” even by many Japanese practitioners who have been practicing Zen for five years or more. And as we have seen, it appears that Philip Kapleau shares this “misunderstanding.” Yasutani allows that there is indeed a type of practice that aims at stopping all thoughts, but he says that “it is not the traditional zazen of Zen Buddhism.” Yasutani elaborates on this point by observing that no matter how hard you concentrate on counting the breath, since the eyes are kept open in zazen,

³⁸¹ Kapleau, 33.

you will perceive whatever is in your line of sight, and since your ears are not plugged, you will hear the sounds around you. Likewise, since your brain is awake, “various thoughtforms will dart about in your mind.” Such fleeting thoughts need not “hamper or diminish the effectiveness of zazen.” They will only be a problem, Yasutani says, if you consider them “good” and cling to them or consider them “bad” and try to stop or eliminate them. He says that you should not “pursue” any perceptions or sensations or regard them as “an obstruction to zazen.” He adds, “I emphasize this,” and he reiterates that your concentration on counting the breath will be impeded only if your mind “dwells on” or “adheres to” perceptions or ideas. And to make sure we’ve gotten the point, he says: “To recapitulate: let random thoughts arise and vanish as they will, do not dally with them and do not try to expel them, but merely concentrate all your energy on counting the inhalations and exhalations of your breath.”³⁸²

Kapleau and Yasutani do not seem to agree about how to practice with random thoughts. They do agree, however, that zazen is about concentrating the mind.

Concentration, or One-Pointedness

Both Kapleau and Yasutani stress the importance of concentration, or “one-pointedness” of mind, in the practice of Zen.

Kapleau says repeatedly that concentration, or one-pointedness, is necessary for enlightenment. “Dynamic one-pointedness of mind,” he says, is “indispensable for kensho”—that is, for “seeing into one’s own nature”—and zazen “is the easiest way to still the mind and bring it to one-pointedness so that it may be employed as an instrument

³⁸² Kapleau, 35–36.

of Self-discovery.”³⁸³ He says that “the purpose of sesshin”—the silent, intensive meditation retreat—“is to enable one to collect and unify his normally scattered mind so that he can focus it like a powerful telescope inward in order to discover his true Self-nature.”³⁸⁴ On the opening page of the first part of the book, Kapleau talks about “concentration of the mind” as one of the “elementary matters” of zazen (along with sitting postures, the regulation of the breath, and illusory visions and sensations), and he summarizes the path of Zen as using zazen to develop one’s “powers of concentration, achieve unification and tranquility of the mind, and eventually, if [one’s] aspiration was pure and strong enough, come to Self-Realization.”³⁸⁵

Yasutani also repeatedly highlights the importance of concentration, or one-pointedness. In his instructions for counting the breath, for instance, he says that in this practice “a gradual one-pointedness of mind is achieved.” In discussing the proper posture for zazen, Yasutani talks about the importance of keeping the spine erect, noting that “since body and mind are one, any impairment of the physiological functions inevitably involves the mind and thus diminishes its clarity and one-pointedness,” which are “essential for effective concentration.” In moving from his discussion of the disposition of the body to his discussion of the disposition of the mind, he says, “You are now ready to concentrate your mind.” And in summing up the practice of counting the breath, he says that you should “concentrate all your energy on counting the inhalations and exhalations of your breath.” Concentration, or one-pointedness, is key.³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Kapleau, 207, 369, 22.

³⁸⁴ Kapleau, 202.

³⁸⁵ Kapleau, 3.

³⁸⁶ Kapleau, 35–36.

Similarly, in his talk on the koan Mu, Yasutani says, “Concentrate on and penetrate fully into Mu.” One must “achieve absolute unity” with Mu, by “holding to Mu tenaciously day and night.” One must “stop speculating and concentrate wholly on Mu—just Mu!” There is no other way for those who work on the koan Mu, he says, but “to concentrate on Mu until they ‘turn blue in the face.’” In the “early stages of practice,” he says, you will repeatedly try and fail to “to pour yourself wholeheartedly into Mu,” and “you will have to concentrate harder—just ‘Mu! Mu! Mu!’” and “again, it will elude you.” At last, when you “absorb yourself in Mu, the external and internal merge into a single unity,” and “Self-realization will abruptly take place. Instantaneously!” “You must concentrate on Mu unflinchingly, determined not to give up until you attain kensho.”³⁸⁷

Strenuous Effort

For Kapleau, Zen practice depends on one’s own strenuous and disciplined efforts. “Zazen that leads to Self-realization,” he says, “is neither idle reverie nor vacant inattention but an intense inner struggle to gain control over the mind and then to use it, like a silent missile, to penetrate the barrier of the five senses and the discursive intellect.” This sort of practice, he says, “demands energy, determination, and courage.”³⁸⁸ Similarly, he says that realization “demands dedication and sustained exertion, which is to say the pure and faithful practice of zazen.”³⁸⁹

Kapleau invokes the examples of the Buddha to support his point. He refers to “the Buddha’s strenuous efforts toward enlightenment.”³⁹⁰ The required state of mind for

³⁸⁷ Kapleau, 83–86.

³⁸⁸ Kapleau, 13.

³⁸⁹ Kapleau, 26.

³⁹⁰ Kapleau, 7.

practice, Kapleau says, “has been vividly described in these words, said to have been uttered by the Buddha as he sat beneath the Bo tree making his supreme effort, and often quoted in the *zendo* during *sesshin*: ‘Though only my skin, sinews, and bones remain and my blood and flesh dry up and wither away, yet never from this seat will I stir until I have attained full enlightenment.’”³⁹¹

Kapleau also invokes the example of Dogen to support his point. He refers to “Dogen’s own painful struggles” toward enlightenment.³⁹² In Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, Kapleau says, “Dogen takes to task those who would identify themselves with the highest ideals of the Buddha yet shirk the effort required to put them into practice.”³⁹³

STRESSING THE INSTRUMENTAL

The Three Pillars of Zen teaches that the way to practice zazen is to sit in a specific sort of stable and erect posture and to quiet or empty the mind to bring it to one-pointed concentration, bringing strenuous effort to one’s practice. This is the means of attaining enlightenment, usually described in *Three Pillars* as realizing one’s inherent buddha-nature, but sometimes described as attaining the wisdom of emptiness. Occasionally and with important qualifications, *Three Pillars* also describes Zen practice as noninstrumental, but essentially, this is a book about how to practice Zen in order to attain enlightenment. In *The Three Pillars of Zen*—the first book on Zen by a Western Zen teacher—practice is mostly described as instrumental for realizing one’s inherent buddha-nature, a pedagogical strategy that goes back to the Chinese text *The Awakening*

³⁹¹ Kapleau, 13.

³⁹² Kapleau, 7.

³⁹³ Kapleau, 26.

of Faith and was the primary pedagogical strategy of the eighteenth-century Rinzai Zen master Hakuin.

Implicit even in this “instrumental” teaching is a challenge to an instrumental orientation to life in general and Buddhist practice in particular. According to this pedagogical strategy, buddha-nature is intrinsic and thus cannot be “attained” by any means. One already has the qualities of a buddha. One does not need to make any substantive changes to oneself; one only need to realize the true nature that one has always had.

The emphasis, though in *Three Pillars*, is not on the buddha-nature that is inherent in all beings but on the realization that needs to be attained by means of practice. In *The Three Pillars of Zen*, instrumentality predominates.

The next two chapters examine two other classic texts of American Zen—Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* and Charlotte Joko Beck’s *Everyday Zen*—texts in which new pedagogical strategies begin to emerge.

5

Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

I first read Shunryu Suzuki's classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* more than twenty years ago, for a college class on Buddhism, and I have reread parts of it many times since then. Before I started examining the book closely for this project, I had thought that Suzuki shared Dogen's pedagogical strategy for talking about Zen practice: describing practice as noninstrumental—as a manifestation of one's inherent buddhahood—and not as a means to any end. Suzuki was, after all, a teacher in the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, and Suzuki frequently cites Dogen in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

What I found, though, was that Suzuki's way of presenting Zen practice, though it draws on Dogen's, is not simply noninstrumental, and it is different from the presentation of Zen practice in any of the other texts I examined, Asian or American. Suzuki uses a variety of pedagogical strategies for talking about practice, but one that he repeatedly returns to integrates instrumentality and noninstrumentality. According to Suzuki, Zen

practice is indeed *instrumental*—it is a means to “resume” one’s original enlightenment—but one must practice with a *noninstrumental* attitude.

SHUNRYU SUZUKI AND *ZEN MIND, BEGINNER’S MIND*

In the 1960s, the Soto form of Zen “began spreading out from the ethnic enclaves of Japanese Americans into the general population,”³⁹⁴ largely through the work of Shunryu Suzuki and of Taizan Maezumi, Charlotte Joko Beck’s teacher.

Shunryu Suzuki (1904–1971) was the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center, which opened in 1961,³⁹⁵ and in 1967 he and his students established the first Zen monastery in the Western Hemisphere, Zen Mountain Center at Tassajara Springs in Northern California, in a wilderness area ten miles inland from Big Sur.³⁹⁶ Suzuki came to the United States in 1959 to minister to a small Japanese-American Zen community in San Francisco, but he is “best known for his role in instructing American converts.”³⁹⁷

Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*—a collection of his talks, transcribed and edited by one of his students—was first published in 1970, a year before his death, and is now a classic of American Zen. *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* has sold “over a million copies in a dozen languages,”³⁹⁸ and James Williams Coleman reported in 2001 that *Zen*

³⁹⁴ James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 67.

³⁹⁵ Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 14.

³⁹⁶ David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1999), xi, xii, 281.

³⁹⁷ Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 261.

³⁹⁸ Chadwick, xii. In Coleman’s *The New Buddhism*—published two years after Chadwick’s book—Coleman said that *Publishers Weekly* estimated that there were “almost a million copies” of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* in print (189). Perhaps this number—a *lower* estimate two years *later*—was an estimate

Mind, Beginner's Mind, then in its thirty-seventh edition, was “still selling 30,000 copies a year.”³⁹⁹ Coleman says that it is “the most popular of all Buddhist books in the West” and that “there is probably no other figure who has had as great an influence on the growth of American Buddhism” as Shunryu Suzuki; and Richard Hughes Seager calls *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* one of America’s “Buddhist classics.”⁴⁰⁰

Huston Smith, in his preface to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, begins by comparing Shunryu Suzuki with D. T. Suzuki. Smith says that D. T. Suzuki “brought Zen to the West single-handed,” and then, “fifty years later, Shunryu Suzuki did something almost as important.” In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Smith says, Shunryu Suzuki “sounded exactly the follow-up note Americans interested in Zen need to hear.” D. T. Suzuki’s Zen is “dramatic,” but Shunryu Suzuki’s Zen is “ordinary.” D. T. Suzuki focuses on *satori*—and, Smith notes, “it was in large part the fascination of this extraordinary state that made his writings so compelling”—but in Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, “the words *satori* and *kensho*, its near-equivalent, never appear.”⁴⁰¹

DESCRIPTIONS OF PRACTICE IN *ZEN MIND, BEGINNER'S MIND*

In the Zen teaching collected in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki makes use of a variety of ways of describing Zen practice. As one might expect, given his Japanese Soto Zen pedigree, Suzuki uses Dogen’s noninstrumental description of Zen

of copies in *English*? (Two other collections of Suzuki’s talks were published posthumously: *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness* in 1999, and *Not Always So* in 2002.)

³⁹⁹ Coleman, 189.

⁴⁰⁰ Coleman, 189, 69–70; Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 91.

⁴⁰¹ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), 9.

practice, but he also uses various instrumental descriptions of Zen practice (as do his students, in the book's introduction). Most interesting and unusual, though, is Suzuki's integration of instrumental and noninstrumental descriptions.

Practice as Noninstrumental

Sometimes, Suzuki presents Zen practice as noninstrumental—as simply a manifestation of one's buddhahood, in the tradition of Dogen, to whom Suzuki frequently refers.⁴⁰²

For instance, in the talk “Traditional Zen Spirit,” Suzuki tries to correct what he sees as a misunderstanding of practice, a misunderstanding that he believes is shared by pre-Zen Buddhists and many contemporary Zen practitioners. Suzuki says that before Bodhidharma brought his particular strand of Buddhism to China, “people thought that after a long preparation, sudden enlightenment would come,” so Buddhist practice was understood as “a kind of training to gain enlightenment.” Buddhism had come to China before Bodhidharma arrived, but Bodhidharma—a semi-historical, semi-legendary Indian Buddhist monk—is credited with introducing Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism to China. And according to Suzuki, before Bodhidharma, Buddhist practice in China was understood as “a kind of training to gain enlightenment”—that is, as instrumental, as a means to attain enlightenment. This misunderstanding wasn't only found in pre-Ch'an China. “Actually,” Suzuki continues, “many people today are practicing zazen with this idea. But this is not the traditional understanding of Zen.” So what is the traditional understanding?

According to Suzuki, “the understanding passed down from Buddha to our time is that

⁴⁰² Suzuki refers to Dogen on pp. 22, 39, 73–74, 91–93, 104–106, 118, 122, 125–126, 129, 133, 137. Dogen is also mentioned in Baker's introduction, on pp. 13–14. (The book has no index, so I compiled this list myself.)

when you start zazen, there is enlightenment even without any preparation. Whether you practice zazen or not, you have Buddha nature. Because you have it, there is enlightenment in your practice.” Enlightenment is in your Zen practice, even if you are just beginning.⁴⁰³

For many readers, this noninstrumental description is Suzuki’s most striking teaching about Zen practice. For instance, in *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, Rick Fields begins his chapter on American Buddhism in the 1960s with this: “‘Where there is practice there is enlightenment.’ This above all was the message Shunryu Suzuki-roshi brought to America.”⁴⁰⁴ And Fields goes on to say that the sitting meditation taught by Suzuki “was in itself the expression of Buddha nature” and that in Zen practice as taught by Suzuki, “there was nothing to be achieved.”⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, James William Coleman, says of Shunryu Suzuki that “There was no particular goal to his *zazen* (sitting meditation); no special state of mind to attain.” Once a practitioner had settled into a good meditation posture, “there was nothing else to achieve.”⁴⁰⁶

However, in closely examining *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, I found that much of the teaching about Zen practice does indicate that practice is instrumental, that there is an end to be achieved.

Practice as Instrumental

When Suzuki presents Zen practice as instrumental, he uses a variety of language to express the end that is attained through practice.

⁴⁰³ Suzuki, 99.

⁴⁰⁴ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 225.

⁴⁰⁵ Fields, 229.

⁴⁰⁶ Coleman, 71.

Occasionally, Suzuki presents practice as instrumental for *uncovering* one's Buddha-nature. He says, for instance, "Our egoistic ideas are delusion, covering our Buddha nature."⁴⁰⁷ Our buddha-nature is inherent; we just need to clear away the delusions that obscure it.

Sometimes, Suzuki presents practice as instrumental for *realizing* one's buddha-nature. For instance, in the closing paragraph of the talk called "Posture," Suzuki distinguishes between buddha-nature, which is inherent, and enlightenment, which is not. He says that the Buddha "found that everything that exists has Buddha nature," and "that was his enlightenment."⁴⁰⁸ That is, all sentient beings have Buddha nature—"original enlightenment"—and the realization of this "original enlightenment" is "temporal enlightenment."

For the most part, though, Suzuki uses rhetoric that I have not encountered elsewhere. He speaks of the "Buddha-nature," or "original mind," or "pure mind"—this much is familiar—but he generally does not speak of either "uncovering" or "realizing" that buddha-nature. Instead, he speaks of *resuming*, or *keeping*, or *not losing*, one's buddha-nature, or original mind. He says, for instance, that if you practice regularly and with the appropriate attitude, "then eventually you will resume your own true nature."⁴⁰⁹ Suzuki attributes this way of describing practice to Dogen: "Dogen-zenji, the founder of our school, always emphasized how important it is to resume our boundless original mind."⁴¹⁰ In another talk, in giving specific instructions for how to practice Zen, Suzuki

⁴⁰⁷ Suzuki, 100.

⁴⁰⁸ Suzuki, 28.

⁴⁰⁹ Suzuki, 49.

⁴¹⁰ Suzuki, 22.

says, “You should resume your own Buddha nature.”⁴¹¹ And in another talk, he says, “When we resume our original nature and incessantly make our effort from this base, we will appreciate the result of our effort moment after moment, day after day, year after year.”⁴¹² Later in the same talk, he uses the language of “keeping” our original nature: “By practice we just keep our original nature as it is.”⁴¹³ So the effort we make in Zen practice is the effort to “resume” and “keep” our original nature. Similarly, he says that the “‘original mind’ includes everything within itself” and “is always rich and sufficient within itself,” and “you should not lose your self-sufficient state of mind.” One should not “lose” one’s original, self-sufficient mind. Suzuki hastens to add that a self-sufficient mind does not mean a self-satisfied mind but an open mind: “This does not mean a closed mind, but actually an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything.”⁴¹⁴ This is the mind that we are apparently prone to losing, but we should try not to lose it, and if we do lose it, we should resume it and keep it.

A Noninstrumental Attitude in an Instrumental Practice

In *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki combines instrumental and noninstrumental rhetoric in an interesting way. He does sometimes present Zen practice as noninstrumental, but more often he presents Zen practice as instrumental but stresses that one should practice with a noninstrumental *attitude*. That is, one should practice without trying to attain some end, although practice is in fact a means to an end.

⁴¹¹ Suzuki, 27.

⁴¹² Suzuki, 123.

⁴¹³ Suzuki, 124.

⁴¹⁴ Suzuki, 21.

In the talk “Traditional Zen Spirit,” the traditional Zen spirit that Suzuki extols is the noninstrumental spirit: practicing without trying to attain anything. Despite the noninstrumental *attitude* Suzuki recommends in practice, he does also describe Zen practice as instrumental: as a means to attain an end. Indeed, he repeatedly uses the language of “attaining enlightenment” and “attaining stages” of practice. He says that one should not *try* to attain anything in practice, but he admits that one *does* in fact attain something through practice.

Suzuki downplays ideas of “attainment” in Zen practice and emphasizes the spirit with which we practice: “The points we emphasize are not the stage we attain, but the strong confidence we have in our original nature and the sincerity of our practice. We should practice Zen with the same sincerity as Buddha.”⁴¹⁵ He admits that there are indeed attainments through Zen practice, but your attitude in practice should not be an instrumental attitude of attaining something for yourself: “You may attain some particular stage, of course, but the spirit of your practice should not be based on an egoistic idea.”⁴¹⁶

“If you are trying to attain enlightenment,” Suzuki says, “you are wasting your time on your black cushion.” Suzuki refers to Bodhidharma, the supposed founder of Ch’an, to support this point: “According to Bodhidharma’s understanding, practice based on any gaining idea is just a repetition of your karma.” Alas, Zen teachers have not always kept this point in mind: “Forgetting this point, many later Zen masters have emphasized some stage to be attained by practice.”⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Suzuki, 99–100.

⁴¹⁶ Suzuki, 100.

⁴¹⁷ Suzuki, 100.

Suzuki seems to admit that there are indeed stages that can be attained in Zen practice, but he thinks practicing with the right attitude—a noninstrumental attitude—is what needs to be emphasized: “More important than any stage which you will attain is your sincerity, your right effort.” And what is right effort? It is effort “based on a true understanding of our traditional practice.” When this is not understood, then “the posture and the way of breathing are just a means to attain enlightenment. If this is your attitude, it would be much better to take some drugs instead of sitting in the cross-legged position!”⁴¹⁸

Again, Suzuki implies that enlightenment can be attained—Zen practice is instrumental—but we need to practice with a noninstrumental attitude: “If our practice is only a means to attain enlightenment, there is actually no way to attain it! We lost the meaning of the way to the goal.” To attain enlightenment, according to Suzuki, one cannot engage in practice as if it is merely a means to attain enlightenment. Meaning needs to be found in the practice in the present, not just in a goal in the future.⁴¹⁹

Suzuki then suggests that to find meaning in the practice—practicing noninstrumentally—*is* enlightenment: “When we believe in our way firmly, we have already attained enlightenment. When you believe in your way, enlightenment is there. But when you cannot believe in the meaning of the practice which you are doing in this moment, you cannot do anything. You are just wandering around the goal with your monkey mind.” Suzuki is careful to say that he is not dismissing the idea of a goal; it’s just not what should be stressed: “We do not slight the idea of attaining enlightenment,

⁴¹⁸ Suzuki, 100.

⁴¹⁹ Suzuki, 100.

but the most important thing is this moment, not some day in the future. We have to make our effort in this moment. This is the most important thing for our practice.”⁴²⁰

Again, he invokes Bodhidharma, who “discovered that it was a mistake to create some lofty or deep idea and then try to attain it by the practice of zazen.” Perhaps practicing to attain some lofty goal “looks like a very good, a very lofty and holy activity, but actually there is no difference between it and our monkey mind.” Practicing with a gaining idea—instrumentally—is not the way. “When we have the traditional spirit to follow the truth as it goes, and practice our way without any egoistic idea, then we will attain enlightenment in its true sense.”⁴²¹

The talk “Experience, Not Philosophy”⁴²² also teaches the importance of a noninstrumental attitude in practice. Suzuki says that if the source of our effort in practice is not “clear and pure,” then “our effort will not be pure, and its result will not satisfy us.” But what does it mean for the source of our effort to be clear and pure? It means not to be attached to the results of our effort. Suzuki says, “Those who are attached only to the result of their effort will not have any chance to appreciate it, because the result will never come. But if moment by moment your effort arises from its pure origin, all you do will be good, and you will be satisfied with whatever you do.” So, according to Suzuki, this is Zen practice: “just to sit, without any idea of gain, and with the purest intention, to remain as quiet as our original nature.”

A story in Huston Smith’s preface to *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* also suggests that Suzuki does understand Zen practice to be instrumental—for attaining *satori*, or enlightenment—but that he wants to downplay that instrumentality in his teaching.

⁴²⁰ Suzuki, 100–101.

⁴²¹ Suzuki, 101, 102.

⁴²² Suzuki, 123–124.

Huston Smith says that he had the opportunity to ask Suzuki, four months before Suzuki's death, why *satori* doesn't figure in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Suzuki's wife leaned toward Smith and "whispered impishly, 'It's because he hasn't had it'; whereupon the Roshi batted his fan at her in mock consternation and with finger to his lips hissed, 'Shhhh! Don't tell him!'" After they stopped laughing, Suzuki said, "'It's not that *satori* is unimportant, but it's not the part of Zen that needs to be stressed.'" ⁴²³

Suzuki's Students' Instrumental Descriptions of Practice

I found it interesting to discover that two of Suzuki's students describe practice in ways different from that of their teacher. The introduction to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* was written by Suzuki's student and successor Richard Baker, who includes a long quotation from another of Suzuki's students, Trudy Dixon, who edited the manuscript of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Baker and Dixon understand practice somewhat differently than Suzuki does.

In the introduction, Richard Baker presents practice in essentially the same way that *The Three Pillars of Zen* presents practice. That is, practice is a means of *realizing* one's true nature, or Buddha mind; and practice also *manifests* one's true nature, but we don't see that until realization, and Baker does not stress this point. Baker says that for any reader of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, whether the reader is a disciple of Suzuki or not, the book will be "an encouragement to realize his [the reader's] own nature, his own Zen mind." The practice of Zen, Baker says, is "beginner's mind": the kind of mind that "can see things as they are," the kind of mind that "can realize the original nature of everything." What a Zen teacher fundamentally offers to the Zen student, according to

⁴²³ Suzuki, 9.

Baker, is an example of someone who has attained that realization of our true nature. The Zen teacher is “living proof that all this talk and the seemingly impossible goals can be realized in this lifetime.” You go deeper into your Zen practice until “you finally see” that your own mind is “Buddha’s mind.” Your own mind has always been Buddha’s mind, but through Zen practice, you can realize that; you can see it for yourself. Then Baker immediately adds the same twist that we find occasionally in *The Three Pillars of Zen*. He says that when you see that your own mind is Buddha’s mind, you also “find that zazen meditation is the most perfect expression of your actual nature.” Baker presents zazen not only as a means of realizing your true nature but also as a manifestation of your true nature, though it is only upon realization of your true nature that you *discover* that practice also manifests your true nature—but this final point gets only a single sentence.⁴²⁴

Baker’s introduction closes with an extended quotation from a tribute to Shunryu Suzuki by Trudy Dixon. She presents Zen practice as a means of “freeing” one’s true nature, or Buddha mind. She talks about the Zen teacher as an example of someone whose true nature has been freed. A roshi, she says, is someone who “has actualized that perfect freedom which is the potentiality for all human beings.” All people have the potential to live freely, and a Zen master is someone who actually lives freely. The Zen master is someone whose “whole being testifies to what it means to live in the reality of the present.” Just meeting someone like this, Dixon says, can change a person’s way of life. Through the teacher we can get a glimpse of our true nature. In the teacher’s presence, “we see our original face,” and this original face might seem extraordinary, but “the extraordinariness we see is only our own true nature.” She continues: “When we

⁴²⁴ Suzuki, 13–14, 17.

learn to let our own nature free, the boundaries between master and student disappear in a deep flow of being and joy in the unfolding of Buddha mind.”⁴²⁵

In the introduction to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Richard Baker and Trudy Dixon both present Zen practice as instrumental. Baker primarily presents practice as a means of realizing one's true nature, and Dixon presents practice as a way of freeing one's true nature.

SUZUKI'S COMPLEX PRESENTATION OF PRACTICE

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind includes a complicated mixture of understandings of Zen practice. As discussed, Suzuki primarily presents Zen practice as instrumental for resuming one's buddha-nature if one practices with a noninstrumental attitude. But sometimes, Suzuki presents practice noninstrumentally—as a manifestation of one's buddhahood—and occasionally he presents practice as instrumental for realizing one's buddha-nature. I will examine two of the talks from *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* in detail to illustrate Suzuki's complicated mixture of presentations of Zen practice.

“Posture”

The talk on posture in zazen is a good example of Suzuki's complicated mixture of instrumental and noninstrumental ways of presenting Zen practice, including his unique understanding of practice as instrumental if one practices with a noninstrumental attitude.

⁴²⁵ Suzuki, 18.

Suzuki begins the talk with detailed instructions on the physical posture for zazen. He then gives his noninstrumental understanding of the posture. This posture “is not just form,” he says, but “a perfect expression of your Buddha nature.” The details of the posture “are not a means of obtaining the right state of mind. To take this posture itself is the purpose of our practice. When you have this posture, you have the right state of mind, so there is no need to try to attain some special state.” This passage exemplifies Suzuki’s presentation of practice as noninstrumental: as a manifestation, or expression, of one’s true nature and not as a means to attain anything.⁴²⁶

Then Suzuki shifts into a slightly different form of rhetoric:

When you try to attain something, your mind starts to wander about somewhere else. When you do not try to attain anything, you have your own body and mind right here. A Zen master would say, ‘Kill the Buddha!’ Kill the Buddha if the Buddha exists somewhere else. Kill the Buddha, because you should resume your own Buddha nature.⁴²⁷

There is a suggestion here of instrumentality, of a goal to be reached, a state to be attained that is different from one’s ordinary state: to “have your own body and mind right here,” to “resume your own Buddha nature.” But in order to do that, one needs to adopt a noninstrumental attitude. The aim is to “have your own body and mind right here,” and that happens “when you do not try to attain anything,” when you drop your instrumental attitude toward practice. “When you try to attain something,” Suzuki says—when you try to use practice as an instrument to attain some end—then “your mind starts to wander about somewhere else.” You no longer have your own body and mind right here. In this passage, Suzuki interprets the classic Zen saying “Kill the Buddha!” to mean “Kill the Buddha if the Buddha exists somewhere else. Kill the Buddha, because you

⁴²⁶ Suzuki, 26.

⁴²⁷ Suzuki, 26–27,

should resume your own Buddha nature.” That is, one should “kill” any “Buddha” who is somewhere other than right here: kill any notion that one needs to go elsewhere to find Buddhahood; kill any notion that one is not already a Buddha oneself. So we should practice with a noninstrumental attitude—not trying to attain anything—in order for practice to be instrumental for resuming our Buddha nature.⁴²⁸

Similarly, Suzuki says later in the talk that what is most important about the posture is “to own your own physical body,” and again he warns us about wandering about somewhere else: “If you slump,” he says, “you will lose your self. Your mind will be wandering about somewhere else; you will not be in your body. This is not the way.” The way is to be right here: “We must exist right here, right now! This is the key point. You must have your own body and mind.” Again, it seems that there is something we need to strive for, or aim at, in our Zen practice: to not wander off and, thus, to have our own body and mind, to exist right here, right now.⁴²⁹

As mentioned earlier, in the closing paragraph of this talk, Suzuki distinguishes between Buddha nature, which is inherent, and enlightenment, which is not. He says that the Buddha “found that everything that exists has Buddha nature,” and “that was his enlightenment.”⁴³⁰ This sounds like the understanding of practice as a means to *realize* one’s true nature. That is, all sentient beings have Buddha nature—“original enlightenment”—and they can realize that “original enlightenment,” can attain “temporal enlightenment.”

Suzuki then returns to a noninstrumental understanding, much like Dogen’s “oneness of practice and enlightenment.” “Enlightenment,” Suzuki says, “is not some

⁴²⁸ Suzuki, 26–27,

⁴²⁹ Suzuki, 27.

⁴³⁰ Suzuki, 28.

good feeling or some particular state of mind. The state of mind that exists when you sit in the right posture is, itself, enlightenment.” One does not sit in the zazen posture as a means to attain an “enlightened” mind; rather, when one sits in the zazen posture, one’s mind *is* enlightened. Doing zazen manifests, or expresses, enlightenment.⁴³¹

But Suzuki follows this with renewed encouragement to adopt a noninstrumental *attitude*—“to be satisfied with the state of mind you have in zazen”—in order attain the state of being right here, right now. He says, “If you cannot be satisfied with the state of mind you have in zazen, it means your mind is still wandering about. Our body and mind should not be wobbling or wandering about.”⁴³²

And then one last time, to wrap up the talk, Suzuki presents an apparently noninstrumental understanding of Zen practice: “In this posture there is no need to talk about the right state of mind. You already have it. This is the conclusion of Buddhism.”⁴³³

“Nothing Special”

The talk “Nothing Special” is another good example of Suzuki’s complicated mixture of instrumental and noninstrumental ways of presenting Zen practice, including his unique understanding of practice as instrumental if one practices with a noninstrumental attitude.

Suzuki begins this talk with some Dogen-like noninstrumental rhetoric, presenting practice simply as the expression of our true nature and not as a means to any end:

⁴³¹ Suzuki, 28.

⁴³² Suzuki, 28.

⁴³³ Suzuki, 28.

I do not feel like speaking after zazen. I feel the practice of zazen is enough. But if I must say something I think I would like to talk about how wonderful it is to practice zazen. Our purpose is just to keep this practice forever. This practice started from beginningless time, and it will continue into an endless future. Strictly speaking, for a human being there is no other practice than this practice. There is no other way of life than this way of life. Zen practice is the direct expression of our true nature.”⁴³⁴

Suzuki then shifts to an instrumental form of rhetoric, speaking of practice as a means to realize one’s true nature: “Of course, whatever we do is the expression of our true nature, but without this practice it is difficult to realize.”⁴³⁵

He then moves into his distinctive rhetoric of practice as instrumental if practiced noninstrumentally. He says that it is in the nature of being alive that we are active and always doing something. What is important is our attitude as we do things:

As long as you think, “I am doing this,” or “I have to do this,” or “I must attain something special,” you are actually not doing anything. When you give up, when you no longer want something, or when you do not try to do anything special, then you do something. When there is no gaining idea in what you do, then you do something.

When your attitude is instrumental, “you are actually not doing anything,” but when you drop the instrumental attitude, “then you do something.” One should not engage in Zen practice as instrumental: “In zazen, what you are doing is not for the sake of anything.”⁴³⁶

Suzuki then shifts back to an apparently noninstrumental understanding of practice: “You may feel as if you are doing something special, but actually it is only the expression of your true nature; it is the activity which appeases your inmost desire.” Zen practice is simply an expression of one’s true nature. Perhaps practice is also instrumental here, though, since it “appeases your inmost desire.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ Suzuki, 46–47.

⁴³⁵ Suzuki, 47.

⁴³⁶ Suzuki, 47.

⁴³⁷ Suzuki, 47.

He then resumes his discussion of the importance of practicing with a noninstrumental attitude: “As long as you think you are practicing zazen for the sake of something, that is not true practice.”⁴³⁸

I found the next section of the talk hard to categorize, though it reminds me of the idea in *The Three Pillars of Zen* that practice is instrumental but one will eventually discover that practice is also noninstrumental: simply a manifestation of one’s true nature. Suzuki says that if you continue to practice daily, “you will obtain a wonderful power. Before you attain it, it is something wonderful, but after you obtain it, it is nothing special. It is just you yourself, nothing special.” Practice is instrumental for obtaining something wonderful, but after you attain it, you realize that the wonderful thing you’ve “obtained” is just “you yourself.” Suzuki recognizes that this might be hard to follow. “It is a kind of mystery” he says, “that for people who have no experience of enlightenment, enlightenment is something wonderful. But if they attain it, it is nothing. But yet it is not nothing. Do you understand?” Still trying to make this point, he says, “For a mother with children, having children is nothing special.” What seems to be implied here is that for someone without children, having children seems like something wonderful and special. But for someone who has children, it’s just ordinary life. “That is zazen,” he says. Summing up this point, he says: “So, if you continue this practice, more and more you will acquire something—nothing special, but nevertheless something. You may say ‘universal nature’ or ‘Buddha nature’ or ‘enlightenment.’ You may call it by many names, but for the person who has it, it is nothing, and it is something.”⁴³⁹ Suzuki seems to be saying here that practice can be understood as instrumental: one acquires something

⁴³⁸ Suzuki, 47.

⁴³⁹ Suzuki, 47–48.

through practice. And at the same time, practice is noninstrumental: one acquires nothing through practice. But one only really sees that nothing had been acquired when one has “acquired” it.

Suzuki then affirms Dogen’s statement that everything is Buddha nature: “In the *Pari-nirvana Sutra*, Buddha says, ‘Everything has Buddha nature,’ but Dogen reads it in this way: ‘Everything *is* Buddha nature.’” Suzuki explains the difference:

If you say, ‘Everything has Buddha nature,’ it means Buddha nature is in each existence, so Buddha nature and each existence are different. But when you say, ‘Everything *is* Buddha nature,’ it means everything is Buddha nature itself. When there is no Buddha nature, there is nothing at all. Something apart from Buddha nature is just a delusion. It may exist in your mind, but such things actually do not exist.⁴⁴⁰

It’s hard to tell whether this could be understood as an affirmation of a noninstrumental understanding of practice—that there’s nothing to be attained—or whether it could be understood as an affirmation of the understanding of practice as instrumental for realizing one’s inherent buddha-nature.

What Suzuki says next, though, suggests that he is affirming a Dogen-esque noninstrumental understanding:

So to be a human being is to be a Buddha. Buddha nature is just another name for human nature, our true human nature. Thus even though you do not do anything, you are actually doing something. You are expressing yourself. You are expressing your true nature. Your eyes will express; your voice will express; your demeanor will express.

He seems to be saying that one expresses one’s buddhahood no matter what one does.

“The most important thing is to express your true nature in the simplest, most adequate way and to appreciate it in the smallest existence.”⁴⁴¹ Perhaps this “simplest, most

⁴⁴⁰ Suzuki, 48.

⁴⁴¹ Suzuki, 48.

adequate way” to express one’s true nature is zazen? We always express our buddhahood, but Zen practice is a particularly good expression of our buddhahood?

But then Suzuki throws in an apparently instrumental twist: “While you are continuing this practice, week after week, year after year, your experience will become deeper and deeper, and your experience will cover everything you do in your everyday life.” As you continue to express your buddhahood in your practice, something happens—it seeps out into your everyday life—and presumably this is a good thing.⁴⁴²

Suzuki closes this talk with an exhortation to engage in this instrumental practice with a noninstrumental attitude. Dropping the instrumental attitude is key: “The most important thing is to forget all gaining ideas, all dualistic ideas. In other words, just practice zazen in a certain posture. Do not think about anything. Just remain on your cushion without expecting anything.” If one practices with this noninstrumental attitude, then practice will be a means to the end of resuming your true nature: “Then eventually you will resume your own true nature. That is to say, your own true nature resumes itself.”⁴⁴³

HOW TO PRACTICE TO RESUME ONE’S BUDDHA-NATURE

Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind stresses the importance of practice. Suzuki says that “to practice zazen with a group is the most important thing for Buddhism—and for us—because this practice is the original way of life.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Suzuki, 48–49.

⁴⁴³ Suzuki, 48–49.

⁴⁴⁴ Suzuki, 123.

Suzuki makes it clear that Zen is not fundamentally about philosophy or intellectually satisfying teachings but about practice and experience. For instance, in the talk “Experience, Not Philosophy,” Suzuki begins by observing that although many Americans are interested in Buddhism, “few of them are interested in its pure form.” Most are, instead, “interested in studying the teaching or philosophy of Buddhism.” In comparison with “other religions,” they “appreciate how satisfying Buddhism is intellectually,” but according to Suzuki, “whether Buddhism is philosophically deep or good or perfect is not the point.” What is the point? “To keep our practice in its pure form is our purpose.” Suzuki says, “Wherever I go people ask me, ‘What is Buddhism?’ with their notebooks ready to write down my answer. You can imagine how I feel! But here we just practice zazen. . . . For us there is no need to understand what Zen is.” The point of Buddhism is not philosophy or intellectual understanding but practice.⁴⁴⁵ Similarly, in the talk “Traditional Zen Spirit,” Suzuki says, “Not by reading or contemplation of philosophy, but only through practice, actual practice, can we understand what Buddhism is.”⁴⁴⁶

So how should one practice?

Noninstrumental Attitude

A key aspect of Suzuki’s instructions for how to practice has already been discussed in depth: one should practice with a noninstrumental attitude. Suzuki says, for instance, “When you practice zazen you should not try to attain anything.” And he says

⁴⁴⁵ Suzuki, 123.

⁴⁴⁶ Suzuki, 102.

that “as long as you think you are practicing zazen for the sake of something, that is not true practice.”⁴⁴⁷

What else is involved in Zen practice, for Suzuki? “The most important things in our practice,” Suzuki says, “are our physical posture and our way of breathing.”⁴⁴⁸ And *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* has been arranged with the talk called “Posture” first and the talk called “Breathing” second.

Posture

Suzuki begins the talk on posture⁴⁴⁹ in zazen by discussing the full-lotus position, which he says symbolizes the Buddhist teaching of nonduality: the teaching that things are not separate from one another (not “dual”) but neither are they “one.” When we cross our legs in a full lotus, with each foot on the opposite thigh, “even though we have a right leg and a left leg, they have become one,” he says. Thus, the full lotus position “expresses the oneness of nonduality: not two, and not one.” Suzuki says that this is “the most important teaching.” He then applies the teaching of nonduality to the body and mind:

Our body and mind and not two and not one. If you think your body and mind are two, that is wrong; if you think that they are one, that is also wrong. Our body and mind are both two *and* one.

He goes on to apply the teaching of nonduality to death, saying that “we die, and we do not die.” Taking the full lotus posture “symbolizes this truth,” Suzuki says—the truth of nonduality. Unlike Kapleau and Yasutani in *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Suzuki does not discuss the practical utility of the full-lotus position. He also does not describe any of the

⁴⁴⁷ Suzuki, 122, 47.

⁴⁴⁸ Suzuki, 99.

⁴⁴⁹ Suzuki, 25–28.

leg positions that are easier for most people, such as the half-lotus, Burmese, or kneeling positions. He stresses the symbolism of the full-lotus position.

In describing the positioning of the torso and head, Suzuki does mention the practical utility of some aspects of the posture. For instance, he says that “to gain strength in your posture,” you should “press your diaphragm down toward your *hara*, or lower abdomen. This will help you maintain your physical and mental balance.”

The hands should form the “cosmic mudra,” with the left hand on top of the right, middle joints of the middle fingers together, and thumbs touching lightly. The arms should be held “freely and easily.”

Suzuki stresses that “the most important thing in taking the zazen posture is to keep your spine straight.” He says, “You should not be tilted sideways, backwards, or forwards. You should be sitting straight up as if you were supporting the sky with your head.” Why is this so important? It is “not just form,” Suzuki says. “It expresses the key point of Buddhism. It is a perfect expression of your Buddha nature.” He does not make it entirely clear *why* an upright posture is a perfect expression of one’s buddha-nature, but it is interesting to note that he is describing this aspect of the zazen posture not as instrumental for attaining enlightenment but as a manifestation of one’s true nature. Indeed, he goes on to say, “These forms are not a means of obtaining the right state of mind. . . . When you have this posture, you have the right state of mind, so there is no need to try to attain some special state.” And he elaborates on the noninstrumental attitude one needs for Zen practice: “When you try to attain something, your mind starts to wander about somewhere else. When you do not try to attain anything, you have your

own body and mind right here.” What you should do in practice is “resume your own Buddha nature.”

Suzuki gives detailed instructions in the posture for zazen, but for Suzuki, one’s fundamental attitude in taking this posture should not be that the posture is instrumental for attaining some end; one’s attitude should be that one is simply manifesting one’s original mind. Practicing in this way, you can “have your own body and mind right here”; you can “resume your own Buddha nature.”

Attending to the Breathing

The editors have entitled the next talk “Breathing” although only about a third of the talk is actually about the breathing in zazen.⁴⁵⁰

In terms of practical instructions, the main point Suzuki makes about the breathing is that, in Zen practice, one attends to the breathing: “When we practice zazen our mind always follows our breathing.”

As in his discussion of the full-lotus position, Suzuki connects the breathing with the Buddhist teaching of nonduality:

When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. We say ‘inner world’ or ‘outer world,’ but actually there is just one whole world. In this limitless world, our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out like someone passing through a swinging door.

He then appeals to the Buddhist teaching of “no-self,” or selflessness:

If you think ‘I breathe,’ the ‘I’ is extra. There is no you to say ‘I.’ What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no ‘I,’ no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door.”

⁴⁵⁰ Suzuki, 29–31.

Again he says that, in Zen practice, we attend to the breathing: “So when we practice zazen, all that exists is the movement of the breathing, but we are aware of this movement. You should not be absent-minded.” Suzuki wants to make it clear that attending to one’s breathing is not a sort of self-absorbed navel-gazing. Being aware of the movement of the breathing, he says, “does not mean to be aware of your small self, but rather of your universal nature, or Buddha nature.” Usually, he says, our awareness is “one-sided”; our understanding is “dualistic”: “you and I, this and that, good and bad.” But then Suzuki seems to realize that is he is implying that this dualism is bad, that’s just another example of dualism, so he says, “But actually these discriminations”—the dualistic discriminations between you and I, this and that, good and bad—“are themselves the awareness of the universal existence.” What you are actually doing when you practice zazen, Suzuki says, “is just sitting and being aware of the universal activity.”

In concluding the talk, Suzuki reiterates the instruction to attend to the breathing: “So when you practice zazen, your mind should be concentrated on your breathing”—the kind activity that is “the fundamental activity of the universal being.” Without this sort of practice, he says, “it is impossible to attain absolute freedom.”

Awareness of Thoughts

In zazen, as Suzuki teaches it, one should attend to one’s breathing, and one should also be aware of one’s thoughts.

In the talk called “Control,” Suzuki explains that the best way to control a cow or sheep is to give it a large, spacious meadow. Likewise, if you want to control other people, the best policy is to “let them do what they want, and watch them.” The worst

policy is to ignore them, Suzuki says, and the second worst policy is to try to control them. Again, he says the best policy is “to watch them, just to watch them, without trying to control them.” And the same goes for your mind. “If you want to obtain perfect calmness in your zazen, you should not be bothered by the various images you find in your mind. Let them come, and let them go. Then they will be under control.” You will be giving them a large, spacious meadow. Suzuki admits that although this “sounds easy,” it is actually “not so easy.” To give your thoughts space and watch them “requires some special effort. How to make this kind of effort is the secret of practice.” The “true purpose” of Zen practice, Suzuki says, “is to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes.” To do this is “to put everything under control in the widest sense.”⁴⁵¹

Similarly, in the talk “Mind Waves,” Suzuki says, “When you are practicing zazen, do not try to stop your thinking.” So what *should* you do with your thinking? He says, “Let it stop by itself. If something comes into your mind, let it come in, and let it go out. It will not stay long. When you try to stop your thinking, it means you are bothered by it. Do not be bothered by anything.” Suzuki describes thinking as “only the waves of your mind,” and he says that “if you are not bothered by the waves, gradually they will become calmer and calmer.” They will not go away, but that’s fine. Suzuki doesn’t want to give the impression that waves are bad. “Actually,” he says, “water always has waves. Waves are the practice of water. To speak of waves apart from water or water apart from waves is a delusion. Water and waves are one.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Suzuki, 32–33.

⁴⁵² Suzuki, 34–35.

In the talk “Mind Weeds,” Suzuki compares our thoughts to weeds: “We say, ‘Pulling out the weeds we give nourishment to the plant.’ We pull the weeds and bury them near the plant to give it nourishment.” Again, he wants to stress that thoughts are not bad: “you should not be bothered by your mind.” Thoughts are actually useful: “You should rather be grateful for the weeds, because eventually they will enrich your practice. If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment, your practice will make remarkable progress.” Suzuki acknowledges that treating our thoughts as mental nourishment is easier said than done: “Of course it is not so difficult to give some philosophical or psychological interpretation of our practice, but that is not enough. We must have the actual experience of how our weeds change into nourishment.”⁴⁵³

Effort

Although practice should be done with a noninstrumental attitude, it does take effort.

In the talk “Mind Weeds,” Suzuki says: “Strictly speaking, any effort we make is not good for our practice because it creates waves in our mind. It is impossible, however, to obtain absolute calmness of our mind without any effort.” We need to “make an effort up to the last moment, when all effort disappears.” Somehow, we need to try to combine effort with a noninstrumental attitude: “We must make some effort, but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make.” He says that our effort “will be refined more and more

⁴⁵³ Suzuki, 36–37.

while you are sitting.” It “will become purer and purer,” though it’s not entirely clear what he means by this.⁴⁵⁴

Basically, for Suzuki, the effort involved in Zen practice is the effort of maintaining the posture and attending to the breathing. Suzuki says, “We should just try to keep our mind on our breathing. That is our actual practice.” The way to practice Zen, according to Suzuki, “is just to be concentrated on your breathing with the right posture and with great, pure effort.”⁴⁵⁵

In the talk “No Dualism,” Suzuki suggests that effort is particularly important for beginners in Zen practice. He says, “For the beginner, practice without effort is not true practice.” He thinks effort is particularly important for young people, even an instrumental sort of effort, an effort to attain something through practice: “Especially for young people, it is necessary to try very hard to achieve something. You must stretch out your arms and legs as wide as they will go.” Eventually, though, you “come to the point where you see it is necessary to forget all about yourself,” by which he seems to mean that you should forget all about trying to achieve something for yourself. He says that “if you make your best effort just to continue your practice with your whole mind and body, without gaining ideas”—with a noninstrumental attitude—“then whatever you do will be true practice.” Your effort should be simply to keep practicing, just to do what you’re doing: “Just to continue should be your purpose. When you do something, just to do it should be your purpose.”

⁴⁵⁴ Suzuki, 37.

⁴⁵⁵ Suzuki, 37.

SUZUKI'S CHALLENGE TO INSTRUMENTALITY

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind teaches that the way to practice zazen is to sit in a specific sort of upright posture, simply attending to the breathing and being aware of one's thoughts. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* uses a variety of ways of describing Zen practice, but one that appears frequently and that I have not found elsewhere is the description of practice as instrumental for "resuming" one's buddha-nature, if one practices with a noninstrumental attitude. With this pedagogical strategy, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* is challenging an instrumental attitude more strongly than, say, *The Three Pillars of Zen* but without going quite so far as Dogen and saying that practice is not instrumental at all.

6

Charlotte Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen*

In *Everyday Zen*, Charlotte Joko Beck—founder of the Zen Center of San Diego and the “Ordinary Mind” school of Zen—primarily talks about Zen practice in a way that is unique to her. Like Shunryu Suzuki’s pedagogical strategy in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Joko’s pedagogical strategy in *Everyday Zen* integrates instrumentality and noninstrumentality. Although their strategies are similar in terms of structure, they differ in content. While Suzuki describes practice as instrumental if practiced with a noninstrumental attitude, Joko describes practice as instrumental for helping one to approach life in a noninstrumental way. In *Everyday Zen*, practice is described as a means to realize the perfection of things as they are. The goal of Zen practice is to not be so caught up in always trying to attain a goal. Zen practice is a means to the end of not being stuck in a means-to-end orientation toward life. For Joko, enlightenment is realizing the perfection of things as they are—dropping the obsessively instrumental attitude toward life—and practice is a means to become more noninstrumental.

CHARLOTTE JOKO BECK AND *EVERYDAY ZEN*

Charlotte Joko Beck (b. 1917),⁴⁵⁶ the author of *Everyday Zen*, founded the Zen Center of San Diego and was for many years its resident Zen teacher. She was also the founder of the Ordinary Mind Zen School, which now has Zen centers in New York City; Oakland, California; Champaign, Illinois; Portland, Oregon; and Brisbane, Australia.⁴⁵⁷ “Joko” is her “dharma name,” or Buddhist name, by which she is known in the Zen community.

Joko practiced with Zen teachers Soen Nakagawa (with whom she passed the Mu koan, traditionally the first koan given to Zen students) and Hakuun Yasutani, but her primary teacher was Taizan Maezumi (1931–1995), founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles.⁴⁵⁸ Maezumi received Dharma transmission from three teachers in three lines: from his father, Baian Hakujun Kuroda, a Soto Zen priest; from Koryu Osaka, a lay Rinzai Zen master; and from Hakuun Yasutani (discussed in the previous chapter), whose lineage combines elements of both Soto and Rinzai Zen.⁴⁵⁹ Like Shunryu Suzuki, Maezumi came to the United States to serve a Japanese-American Buddhist community but ended up attracting large numbers of non-Japanese students.⁴⁶⁰ Maezumi came to California in 1956 to be a Soto Zen missionary and spent most of the next decade as a

⁴⁵⁶ T. Matthew Ciolek, ed., “Harada-Yasutani School of Zen Buddhism,” <http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVLPages/ZenPages/HaradaYasutani.html>.

⁴⁵⁷ Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 102; and Ciolek.

⁴⁵⁸ James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who?: A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 174, 163, 165.

⁴⁵⁹ Ford, 163–164; James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 67.

⁴⁶⁰ Coleman, 67.

priest at the Zenshuji Soto Mission in Los Angeles.⁴⁶¹ In 1967, he established the Zen Center of Los Angeles.⁴⁶² He also founded the White Plum Sangha, “an organization of his Dharma heirs that continues as one of the most important of contemporary Western Zen lineages.”⁴⁶³ Many of Maezumi’s twelve Dharma successors,⁴⁶⁴ and now *their* successors, have been prominent in American Zen, including Bernie Tetsugen Glassman, known for his work in social justice, and John Daido Looi, the founder and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in upstate New York. Joko received Dharma transmission from Maezumi in 1978, becoming his third Dharma successor, but she formally broke with him in 1983 in the wake of his “improprieties” at the Zen Center of Los Angeles.⁴⁶⁵

According to Richard Hughes Seager, Joko “emerged as an important teacher in the 1980s,” and James William Coleman counts Joko among “the most influential women teachers in the West.”⁴⁶⁶ Joko is known especially for the practical, “everyday” style of her Zen. In an article on “women’s dharma” in the West, Judith Simmer-Brown counts Joko among those teachers who “have emphasized the practical quality of meditation practice, bringing Buddhism out of an abstract, conceptual realm into daily living.”⁴⁶⁷ Simmer-Brown observes that “Joko is astonishingly blunt and direct. She has no patience with sentiment of the trappings of religion—‘nothing special’ is her watchword.” In addition, Simmer-Brown observes that Joko “emphasizes real daily practice that includes

⁴⁶¹ Ford, 164.

⁴⁶² Ford, 164.

⁴⁶³ Ford, 162–163.

⁴⁶⁴ Ford, 164.

⁴⁶⁵ Lenore Friedman, *Meetings with Remarkable Women: Buddhist Teachers in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), 118; and Ford, 174.

⁴⁶⁶ Seager, 102; Coleman, 150.

⁴⁶⁷ Judith Simmer-Brown, “The Roar of the Lioness: Women’s Dharma in the West,” in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 318.

every aspect of life: emotions, physical sensations, relationships.”⁴⁶⁸ Another scholar of Buddhism observes that Joko’s Zen center, “while remaining in Taizan Maezumi Rōshi’s dual Sōtō-Rinzai lineage, emphasizes the everyday intimacy of Zen practice,” as Joko has also done “with great fluidity in her writings.”⁴⁶⁹ Similarly, Coleman refers to Joko as a “prominent example” of Western teachers of Buddhism who “have moved away from the Asian style of religious Buddhism to take a more secular approach.”⁴⁷⁰ Joko has students who are ordained, but she “no longer uses her titles and never wears her priest’s robes,” and “liturgical forms in the centers associated with her are minimal.”⁴⁷¹

Everyday Zen, published in 1989, is a collection of Joko’s talks. James Ishmael Ford calls *Everyday Zen* one of the “true Western spiritual classics” of Zen practice.⁴⁷²

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR ATTAINING *PRAJÑĀ*

Everyday Zen, like *The Three Pillars of Zen*, occasionally describes practice as instrumental for attaining *prajñā*—that is, the wisdom of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*—though Joko usually speaks of this as “realizing our true nature.” Joko says, for instance, that “to realize one’s true nature as no-self—a Buddha—is the fruit of zazen and the path of practice.” She says that through practice we can “realize who we really are”; we can “realize our true nature.”⁴⁷³ What is this “true nature”? Who are we really?

⁴⁶⁸ Simmer-Brown, 318.

⁴⁶⁹ Franz Aubrey Metcalf, “The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology,” in Prebish and Baumann, 355.

⁴⁷⁰ Coleman, 126.

⁴⁷¹ Ford, 174.

⁴⁷² Ford, xiii.

⁴⁷³ Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 43, 6, 174.

Expressed negatively, in realizing our true nature, we realize that we are not truly separate from other people or from anything at all, that there is no real boundary between self and other. We see through the illusion of separation; we un-know, or de-know, something we thought we knew. Joko talks about the error of “our exclusive identification with our own mind and body, the ‘I,’” and says that “to realize our natural state of enlightenment we must see this error and shatter it.” She says, “We need to see through the mirage that there is an ‘I’ separate from ‘that.’”⁴⁷⁴

Expressed positively, in realizing our true nature we come to realize the oneness, or wholeness, or unity, of all reality. Joko says that if we practice intelligently, “the boundaries gradually dissolve, and we realize the unity that is always right there.” “In the enlightened state,” she says, “there is no ‘I’; there is simply life itself, a pulsation of timeless energy whose very nature includes—or is—everything.” Through practice, “eventually we see that we are the limitless, boundless ground of the universe.”⁴⁷⁵

So far, this sounds like a standard instrumental description of Zen practice—that practice is a means of attaining *prajñā*—but Joko’s primary way of describing Zen practice is more complicated and nuanced than this.

PRACTICE AS INSTRUMENTAL FOR REALIZING THE PERFECTION OF THINGS AS THEY ARE

In *Everyday Zen*, Joko mainly talks about practice as a means to attain “the enlightened state”—the phrase she usually uses instead of saying “enlightenment”—

⁴⁷⁴ Beck, 174, 5.

⁴⁷⁵ Beck, 16, 174, 6.

which is the realization of the perfection of things as they are. Practice, for Joko, is instrumental for realizing the perfection of things as they are.

“It’s OK”

The talk “It’s OK” provides a particularly detailed explication of Joko’s understanding of the enlightened state and of practice as a means to attain this enlightened state, this realization of the perfection of things as they are.

Joko begins this talk by noting that we tend to have odd ideas about enlightenment. “Enlightenment,” Joko says, “is the core of all religion. But we have quite often a strange picture of what it is.” We think that the enlightened state is a state in which we are “quite perfect, quite nice and quiet, calm and accepting,” but “that’s not it.” For Joko, the enlightened state is the realization of the perfection of things as they are, growing in our “understanding and appreciation of the perfection of each moment,” or, as she more often says in this talk, being OK with things as they are. The enlightened state, she says, is “the state of a person who, to a great degree, can embrace any or all conditions, good or bad.” Joko observes that there may already be some areas of our lives in which we can embrace any and all conditions, “but mostly,” she says, “we wish to be something other than we are.” The enlightened state is to be able to be OK with anything—as long as we correctly understand what it means to be OK with things. “If they’re OK, what does it mean?” she asks. “What *is* the enlightened state?” She clarifies: “When there is no longer any separation between myself and the circumstances of my life, whatever they may be, that is it.”⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁶ Beck, 114–116, 118.

Joko is careful to head off some possible misunderstandings of what it means to be OK with things as they are. It doesn't mean fatalism or passivity. Being OK with things "doesn't mean blind acceptance. It doesn't mean if you're ill, not to do all you can to get well." But there are times when "things are inevitable, when "there's very little we can do. Then is it OK?"⁴⁷⁷

Being OK with something also does not mean being happy with it, having no negative feelings about it, being indifferent to reality: "For something to be OK, it doesn't mean that I don't scream or cry or protest or hate it. Singing and dancing are the voice of the dharma, and screaming and moaning are also the voice of the dharma. For these things to be OK for me doesn't mean that I'm happy about them." Being OK with everything "doesn't mean that you are never upset." "When something's OK with us," Joko explains, "we accept everything we are with it; we accept our protest, our struggle, our confusion, the fact that we're not getting anywhere according to our view of things. And we are willing for all those things to continue: the struggle, the pain, the confusion. . . an understanding slowly increases: 'Yes, I'm going through this and I don't like it—wish I could run out—and somehow, it's OK.' That increases."⁴⁷⁸

For Joko, being OK with something means, more precisely, being OK with however I *feel* about it, being OK with whatever *attitude* I have toward something. She gives the example of our attitude toward our own death. "The key," she says, "is not to learn to die bravely, but to learn not to *need* to die bravely." We don't necessarily learn to be OK with *death*; we learn to be OK with *however we feel* about death. She observes that the enlightened attitude of being OK with things as they are is "an interesting attitude

⁴⁷⁷ Beck, 116.

⁴⁷⁸ Beck, 115, 117.

indeed: not to learn to put up with any circumstance, but to learn not to *need* a particular attitude toward a circumstance.” Joko uses the fictional character of Zorba the Greek as an example of someone who is OK with whatever happens. She says that, “strangely enough, those who practice like this are the people who hugely enjoy life, like Zorba the Greek. Expecting nothing from life, they can enjoy it. When events happen that most people would call disastrous, they may struggle and fight and fuss, but they still enjoy—it’s OK.”⁴⁷⁹ According to Joko, struggling with life can be a part of being OK with life and even enjoying life.

Joko realizes that the attitude of being OK with things just as they are may sound strange: “You may protest that a person for whom any condition is OK is not human.” And she admits that there’s something to this: “In a way you’re right; such a person is not human. Or we may say they are truly human. We can say it either way.” She allows that “a person who has no aversion to any circumstance is not a human being as we usually know human beings,” but this way of being is “the enlightened state: the state of a person who, to a great degree, can embrace any or all conditions, good or bad.”⁴⁸⁰

If the enlightened state is being OK with things exactly as they are, how do we get to that state? How do we learn to be OK with things as they are? How do we learn to embrace all of life? Through practice. For Joko, Zen practice is a way to realize the perfection, or OKness, of things just as they are, whether we like them or not. “As we sit in zazen,” she says, “we’re digging our way into this koan, this paradox which supports

⁴⁷⁹ Beck, 116, 117.

⁴⁸⁰ Beck, 116.

our life. More and more we know that whatever happens, and however much we hate it, however much we have to struggle with it—in some way it’s OK.”⁴⁸¹

Through practice, Joko says—and here she is talking specifically about the intensive practice of an extended Zen meditation retreat, or *sesshin*—we increase our appreciation of things as they are: increasingly “we appreciate the struggles, the weariness and pain, even as we dislike them.” We experience the joy of things just as they are. Although a sesshin is difficult, Joko says, it has “wonderful moments,” when “our joy and appreciation may startle us.” Through intensive practice like this, “a residue builds which is *understanding*” (italics hers). Joko says that she is “not as interested in the enlightenment experiences” as she is in “the practice which builds this understanding,” because as this understanding increases, “our life changes radically,” though perhaps not in the way we expect it to. “We grow in understanding and appreciation of the perfection of each moment: our aching knees and back, the itch on our nose, our sweat. We grow in being able to say, ‘Yes, it’s OK.’” And this is the miracle of practice: “this miracle of appreciation.”⁴⁸²

Joko observes that after a sesshin, almost everyone is happier. She allows that perhaps they are happier in part simply because the sesshin is over, but she thinks there’s more to it than that. Through the intensive meditation practice of sesshin, we develop “the ability (which we learn slowly and unwillingly) to be the experience of our life as it is”; we develop our appreciation of things as they are. After a sesshin, she says, “just a walk down the street is great. It wasn’t great before sesshin; but it’s great after sesshin.” This appreciation of things as they are may fade quickly—“three days later we’re already

⁴⁸¹ Beck, 117.

⁴⁸² Beck, 117–118.

searching for the next solution”—and yet we have learned a bit more about “the error of this kind of search.” “The more we have experienced life in all its guises as being OK”—the experience cultivated in Zen practice—“the less we are motivated to turn away from it in an illusory search for perfection.” The more we practice, the easier it is to realize the perfection of things just as they are.⁴⁸³

Joko compares this attitude of being OK with things as they are to the attitude expressed by the phrase “Thy will be done” in the Lord’s Prayer, and she talks about “the basis of life” in a way that one could interpret as similar to talking about God. Joko says that “there is a basis in which all of life rests, so that no matter what you can answer, ‘It’s OK.’” In Zen practice we are “learning to know this basis, this fact that can enable us to say in time: ‘It’s OK.’ Or, as in the Lord’s prayer: Thy will be done.” For Joko, practice is about being able to say, in all circumstances, “It’s OK,” or alternatively “Thy will be done”—not *my* will, but *Thy* will.⁴⁸⁴

For Joko, learning to see the perfection, or OKness, of everything is also learning to live in a more peaceful and compassionate way. Joko says that if you met someone who experienced everything as being “perfect as it is,” “you would probably notice immense peace in being with that person.” A person like this—someone “who has little self-concern, who is willing to be as he or she is and everything else to be as it is”—is a person who “is truly loving.” A person like this, Joko says, would “be very supportive if that were appropriate, or quite nonsupportive if that were appropriate. And this person

⁴⁸³ Beck, 118.

⁴⁸⁴ Beck, 117.

would know the distinction, would know what to do, because this person would be you.” That is, this person would not experience themselves as separate from you.⁴⁸⁵

Practice, for Joko, is a means to attain the enlightened state—to realize the perfection of things as they are—and live in a more peaceful, compassionate way.

“Enlightenment”

In the talk “Enlightenment,” Joko discusses the enlightened state mostly in negative terms, as *dropping* the *unenlightened* orientation to life. But again, the enlightened state is—positively speaking—the realization of the perfection of things as they are, and practice is a means to attain the enlightened state.

Our ordinary, unenlightened orientation to life, Joko says, is an “I”-centered avoidance of pain and pursuit of pleasure, hoping that we can achieve happiness or satisfaction by fixing things to match our desires. Joko observes that the “ordinary experience of life is centered around myself.” She acknowledges that this self-centered orientation is natural enough: “After all, *I* am experiencing these ongoing impressions—I can’t have *your* experience of your life, I always have my own.” It is inevitable, Joko says, “that I come to believe that there is an ‘I’ central to my life, since the experience of my life seems to be centered around ‘I.’ ‘I’ see, ‘I’ hear, ‘I’ feel, ‘I’ think, ‘I’ have this opinion. We rarely question this ‘I.’”⁴⁸⁶

Then what is the enlightened orientation to life? The enlightened orientation is *dropping* the *unenlightened* orientation, the “I”-centered avoidance of pain and pursuit of pleasure. Joko says that “in the enlightened state there is no ‘I’; there is simply life itself,

⁴⁸⁵ Beck, 116–117.

⁴⁸⁶ Beck, 173–174

a pulsation of timeless energy whose very nature includes—or is—everything.” In the enlightened state, there is simply life itself. Joko says that what keeps us from realizing our true nature is “our exclusive identification with our own mind and body, the ‘I.’ To realize our natural state of enlightenment we must see this error and shatter it. The path of practice is deliberately to go against the ordinary self-absorbed way of life.” So, negatively speaking, enlightenment is a state where there is no “I,” a non-self-absorbed state. And positively speaking, the enlightened state is realizing the perfection of things just as they are, simply “being life itself.”⁴⁸⁷

Zen practice, for Joko, is a way to be freed to live in this non-“I”-centered way. Zen practice, she says, is meant to “free us to live a soaring life which, in its freedom, its nonattachment, is the enlightened state—just being life itself.” The path of Zen practice is “deliberately to go against the ordinary self-absorbed way of life,” to let go of “I”-centered attachments.⁴⁸⁸

And Zen practice enables us to live in a more sane and compassionate way, to live “a life of settledness, of equanimity, of genuine thought and emotion,” a life that is “always beneficial to oneself and others,” which is “worth the endless devotion and practice it entails.”⁴⁸⁹

Again in this talk, Joko describes practice as a means to attain the enlightened state—to realize the perfection of things as they are—and live a more worthwhile life.

Instrumental or Noninstrumental?

Now, is Joko’s understanding of Zen practice instrumental or noninstrumental?

⁴⁸⁷ Beck, 174, 175.

⁴⁸⁸ Beck, 174–175.

⁴⁸⁹ Beck, 175.

On the one hand, for Joko, practice seems to be instrumental. Practice is a means to attain something—"the enlightened state" and, thus, a more peaceful and compassionate life. Practice can change one's life. Practice can move one from an unenlightened state to an enlightened state. Practice can help one to realize the perfection of things as they are. Practice can help one to drop the "I"-centered pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain and to simply be life itself. Practice can increase one's peace and compassion. One can apparently attain something, make a significant change in one's life, by engaging in Zen practice. This sounds like an instrumental understanding of practice: that practice is a means to attain the enlightened state and a more peaceful and compassionate life.

On the other hand, the whole point of Zen practice, for Joko, is to see the perfection of things exactly as they are, the OKness of life as it is, to see that one doesn't need to attain anything or change anything in order to have a perfect life. This "enlightened state" that we want to "attain" is precisely the realization that we don't need to attain anything, that everything is already OK. The enlightenment that "I" think I want is precisely the dropping of the "I"-centered pursuit of what I want. Everything is perfect exactly as it is. No change is needed. The world doesn't need to change. One's attitude toward the world doesn't even need to change. It's all perfect. It's all OK. To be enlightened, for Joko, is to have dropped the fundamentally instrumental orientation to life. The enlightened state is a *noninstrumental* orientation to life.

If practice is instrumental for Joko, it seems to be an odd sort of instrumentality. Practice is a means to move from an instrumental to a noninstrumental orientation to life, to go from a state where we think something needs to change to a state where we see that

it's all OK already. We ordinarily think we need to change something—we think we need to do things as a means to an end—but the “enlightened state” is the realization that nothing needs changing, that our satisfaction in life is not dependent on attaining some end. Might we say, then, that for Joko Zen practice is instrumental for becoming *noninstrumental*? That is, might we say that, for Joko, Zen practice is a means to the end of not being attached to attaining any end? Does this even make sense?

Joko seems to recognize that her way of talking about practice and enlightenment can be confusing. Although I have examined two talks in which Joko describes enlightenment, she generally tends to avoid describing enlightenment, because she worries that people will get confused and see enlightenment as an end to attain. For instance, Joko begins the talk “Enlightenment,” discussed in the previous section, like this: “Someone said to me a few days ago, ‘You know, you never talk about enlightenment. Could you say something about it?’” Joko goes on to say that “the problem with talking about ‘enlightenment’ is that our talk tends to create a picture of what it is—yet enlightenment is not a picture, but the shattering of all our pictures. And a shattered life isn’t what we are hoping for!”⁴⁹⁰ If enlightenment is an “end,” Joko doesn’t want us to think about it the way we usually think about ends. Again, could we say that Joko understands Zen practice as instrumental for becoming *noninstrumental*, as a means to the end of not being attached to attaining any end? And does that even make sense?

Next, I will examine another talk, “Beginning Zen Practice,” and consider whether Joko understands Zen practice as instrumental for becoming more *noninstrumental*.

⁴⁹⁰ Beck, 173.

“Beginning Zen Practice”

In the first talk in *Everyday Zen*, called “Beginning Zen Practice,” as in the talk “Enlightenment,” Joko focuses on the *unenlightened* orientation to life, and she talks about the enlightened state mostly in negative terms, as *dropping* the unenlightened orientation to life.

Ordinarily, Joko says, we do not realize the perfection of things as they are; things as they are do not seem OK to us. Joko says that “to some degree we all find life difficult, perplexing, and oppressive,” and “even when it goes well, as it may for a time, we worry that it probably won’t keep on that way.” Joko says that “nobody believes his or her life is perfect,” and she says, “If I were to tell you that your life is already perfect, whole, and complete just as it is, you would think I was crazy.” She observes that “underneath our nice, friendly facades there is great unease,” and scratching below the surface of anyone, one finds “fear, pain, and anxiety running amok.”⁴⁹¹ The unenlightened state is a state of experiencing things as *not* OK.

More specifically, according to Joko, the ordinary, unenlightened orientation to life is to try incessantly to avoid pain and pursue pleasure, in a quest for a life that will seem OK. This ordinary orientation to life is centered around “me”:

There is ‘me’ and there is this ‘thing’ out there that is either hurting or pleasing me. We tend to run our whole life trying to avoid all that hurts or displeases us, noticing the objects, people, or situations that we think will give us pain or pleasure, avoiding one and pursuing the other. . . . We remain separate from our life, looking at it, analyzing it, judging it, seeking to answer the questions, ‘What am I going to get out of it? Is it going to give me pleasure or comfort or should I run away from it?’ We do this from morning until night.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Beck, 3–4.

⁴⁹² Beck, 4.

The ordinary, “I”-centered orientation to life is full of what Joko calls “if onlies.” We think, “‘If only I had this, or that, then my life would work.’” My life is not OK now, but *if only* some of the particulars would change, *then* my life would be OK. If only I had more pleasure and less pain, more of what I like and less of what I don’t like, then my life would work for me. For example, Joko says many people “feel that if only they had a bigger car, a nicer house, better vacations, a more understanding boss, or a more interesting partner, then their life would work.”⁴⁹³ We feel that our lives aren’t working, and we try to change things to make them work. The ordinary, unenlightened orientation to life, according to Joko, is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain and to believe that “if only” something were different “my” life would work and “I” could be happy. In other words, the ordinary orientation to life is an instrumental orientation: incessantly seeking means to the end of increasing pleasure and decreasing pain for “me.”

In contrast, the enlightened orientation to life, as Joko explains it (negatively) in this talk, is dropping this incessant, instrumental, “I”-centered pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. She says, “all your life you have been going forward after something, pursuing some goal. Enlightenment is dropping all that.” We have spent our whole lives seeking ends, and enlightenment is dropping that search. Enlightenment, she says, “is not something you achieve. It is the absence of something.”⁴⁹⁴ Here we see Joko trying to articulate what the enlightened state is without stoking our ordinary, instrumental way of approaching life. The enlightened state is precisely the dropping of that instrumental orientation to life: dropping the belief that I must attain an end, that my life is not OK now and if only I could attain some particular end *then* my life would be OK.

⁴⁹³ Beck, 3.

⁴⁹⁴ Beck, 5.

Joko observes that we tend to bring our usual instrumental orientation to life into our Zen practice. As we begin a practice like Zen, Joko says, “unfortunately we tend to bring into this new search the same orientation as before”—the “I”-centered pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. We turn “enlightenment” into a new “if only.” We believe that *if only* we were “enlightened,” our lives would work. We bring into Zen practice “our usual notions that we are going to get somewhere—become enlightened—and get all the cookies that have eluded us in the past.” (Joko often uses “cookies” to represent things we find appealing and want to get.)⁴⁹⁵ We think our lives are not OK now, and if only we could attain “enlightenment,” then our lives would be OK. Enlightenment becomes an end to attain even though enlightenment is precisely the dropping of the desperate search to attain ends.

To confuse matters further, there are many appealing fruits of the enlightened orientation to life. Zen practice, Joko says, enables us to “live in a sane way,” to have “a more sane and satisfying life.” Zen practice, she says, “is about our daily life,” about “working better in the office, raising our kids better, and having better relationships.” With practice, our life “settles down, becomes more balanced.”⁴⁹⁶ Zen practice is apparently a means to the end of a more sane, satisfying, balanced life.

And yet, the enlightened state is not another “end” we can try to attain but, rather, the dropping of that whole instrumental, means-to-an-end orientation to life. But Zen practice seems to be a means to get to that “end” of not being attached to attaining ends.

⁴⁹⁵ Beck, 4.

⁴⁹⁶ Beck, 5.

“The Reward of Practice”

I will examine one more talk from *Everyday Zen* to illustrate Joko’s understanding of practice. “The Reward of Practice” is another talk that illustrates Joko’s understanding of practice as a means to realize the perfection of things as they are—as instrumental for becoming noninstrumental.

“Our usual mode of living,” Joko says in this talk, is “I”-centered and oriented toward “seeking happiness, battling to fulfill desires, struggling to avoid mental and physical pain.” Our usual mode of living is instrumental. Thus, she says, the ordinary, unenlightened life is full of difficulty. “Being self-centered—and therefore opposing ourselves to external things—we are anxious and worried about ourselves. We bristle quickly when the external environment opposes us; we are easily upset. And being self-centered, we are often confused.” According to Joko, “this is how most of us experience our lives.”⁴⁹⁷

But there is another way to experience our lives: the enlightened way. Again in this talk, Joko describes the enlightened state, negatively speaking, as dropping “I”-centeredness—living a life of “no-self”—and, thus, experiencing life in a way that is not permeated by difficulty. Here, Joko uses the classic Buddhist term “no-self,” but she doesn’t want us to get confused by this term, so she notes that “no-self doesn’t mean disappearing off the planet or not existing.” The life of no-self, Joko says, “is neither being self-centered nor other-centered, but just centered. A life of no-self is centered on no particular thing, but on all things—that is, it is nonattached—so the characteristics of a self cannot appear.” When the characteristics of a self do not appear—when we are not

⁴⁹⁷ Beck, 44, 42.

“I”-centered—“we are not anxious, we are not worried, we do not bristle easily, we are not easily upset, and, most of all, our lives do not have a basic tenor of confusion.”⁴⁹⁸

Positively speaking, the enlightened state—living a life of no-self—“is joy.” And “not only that,” but “no-self, because it opposes nothing, is beneficial to everything.” A life of joy, we discover, is found “not in seeking happiness, but in experiencing and simply *being* the circumstances of our life as they are; not in fulfilling personal wants, but in fulfilling the needs of life; not in avoiding pain, but in being pain when it is necessary to do so.” A life of joy is found in being our life as it is.⁴⁹⁹ The enlightened state, the life of joy, is a life of noninstrumentality.

And we discover the joy of the enlightened state through practice. According to Joko, “Zen practice (and perhaps a few other disciplines or therapies) can help us move from an unhappy self to no-self, which is joy.”

Joko does allow that there is, for most Zen practitioners, an initial phase of Zen practice that moves us from relative unhappiness to relative happiness. “For the vast majority of us,” she says, Zen practice must proceed “in an orderly fashion, in a relentless dissolution of self,” and the first phase of practice is the movement from unhappiness to what she calls “relative happiness.” She explains that this must be the first step because “there is absolutely no way in which an unhappy person—a person disturbed by herself or himself, by others, by situations—can be the life of no-self.” She notes that, “for some people, intelligent therapy can be useful at this point” in their Zen practice, “but people

⁴⁹⁸ Beck, 43.

⁴⁹⁹ Beck, 43, 44–45.

differ, and we can't generalize." In any case, she says that "we cannot (nor should we try to) skip over this first movement from relative unhappiness to relative happiness."⁵⁰⁰

What does she mean by "relative" happiness? She says, "No matter how much we may feel that our life is 'happy,' still, if our life is based on a self, we cannot have a final resolution." We will not be fully satisfied. Why not? "Because such a life is based on a false premise, the premise that we *are* a self. Without exception we all believe this—every one of us. And any practice that stops with the attempted adjustment of the self is ultimately unsatisfying." In the beginning, we may use Zen practice to move from unhappiness to a relative sort of happiness, but eventually, we need to give up the use of Zen practice as a means to make the "self" happier. This quest is finally misguided and futile, based as it is on the mistaken attachment to "self."⁵⁰¹

Ultimately, Zen practice is about realizing "no-self." Joko says, "To realize one's true nature as no-self—a Buddha—is the fruit of zazen and the path of practice." She uses the instrumental language of the "fruit" of Zen practice to talk about the end is attained through Zen practice: the realization of no-self. The practice of Zen is "the practice of nonattachment, the growth of no-self": the movement toward not being attached to achieving ends that gratify my "self." "Our usual mode of living," Joko says, is "one of seeking happiness, battling to fulfill desires, struggling to avoid mental and physical pain," and this mode of living "is always undermined by determined practice." Joko generally seems to do her best to avoid the paradoxical, nonrational language so typical of Zen, but when it comes to the relationship between practice and enlightenment—practice as instrumental for being noninstrumental—she can't seem to help herself:

⁵⁰⁰ Beck, 42, 43.

⁵⁰¹ Beck, 43.

“Finally we realize that there is no path, no way, no solution; because from the beginning our nature *is* the path, right here and right now. Because there is no path our practice is to follow this no-path endlessly—and for no reward. Because no-self is everything it needs no reward: from the no-beginning it is itself complete fulfillment.”⁵⁰²

And yet, there do seem to be rewards to living in a noninstrumental way. For practitioners who are “patient and determined,” Joko says, “joy increases; peace increases; the ability to live a beneficial and compassionate life increases. And the life which can be hurt by the whims of outside circumstances subtly alters. . . . we have a sense of growing sanity and understanding, of basic satisfaction.”⁵⁰³

TWO TRUTHS ABOUT PRACTICE?

There is one talk in *Everyday Zen* in which Joko may be suggesting a “Two Truths” strategy for integrating instrumental and noninstrumental teachings about Zen practice.

Joko tells the story of the poetry contest from the *Platform Sutra* and says that while Hui-neng’s winning verse “is the true understanding, the paradox for us is that we have to practice with the verse that was *not* accepted: we do have to polish the mirror.” Joko says she has heard people say, “‘Well, there’s nothing that need be done. No practice (polishing) is necessary. If you see clearly enough, such practice is nonsense.’” In response to this, Joko says, “Ah . . . but we *don’t* see clearly enough and, when we fail to see clearly, we create merry mayhem for ourselves and others. We do have to practice,

⁵⁰² Beck, 43–45.

⁵⁰³ Beck, 44.

we do have to polish the mirror, until we know in our guts the truth of our life. Then we can see that from the very beginning, nothing was needed.”⁵⁰⁴

Perhaps Joko is saying here that from the ultimate viewpoint, no practice is necessary, but from the conventional viewpoint—*our* viewpoint—practice is indeed a necessary means to the end of enlightenment. (And in fact, I suspect that it was this passage in *Everyday Zen* that planted the notion of a Two Truths strategy in my head.)

Alternatively, perhaps this teaching is more akin to one description of practice found in *The Three Pillars of Zen*: that practice is a manifestation of one’s inherent buddhahood (noninstrumental), but we don’t see that until we’re enlightened, and we engage in practice instrumentally.

HOW TO PRACTICE TO REALIZE THE PERFECTION OF THINGS AS THEY ARE

As we have seen, Joko’s teaching can be understood to be presenting Zen practice as instrumental, though as a means to an odd sort of end: approaching one’s life noninstrumentally, letting go of the attachment to attaining ends.

The central topic of *Everyday Zen* is practice. Like Kapleau and Yasutani in *The Three Pillars of Zen* and Suzuki in *Zen, Mind Beginner’s Mind*, Joko makes the point that an intellectual understanding of Zen teachings won’t do us much good. We need to practice. She says, “To talk about it is of little use. The practice has to be done by each individual. There is no substitute. We can read about it until we are a thousand years old

⁵⁰⁴ Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen: Love and Work* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 20.

and it won't do a thing for us. We all have to practice, and we have to practice with all our might for the rest of our lives.”⁵⁰⁵

The talks collected in *Everyday Zen* were given at the Zen Center of San Diego during sesshins (intensive meditation retreats) or the regular Saturday-morning program, which includes zazen and a talk,⁵⁰⁶ so it is not surprising that practice is a central topic of talks given in that context. What is somewhat surprising is that every one of the forty-two talks in the book discusses practice, and in fact, every talk *concludes* with the subject of practice. As I was paging through *Everyday Zen*, circling some of the many instances of the word “practice,” and also “sitting” and “zazen,” I discovered that practice is mentioned within the last three paragraphs of every talk in the book and in the last *paragraph* of three-quarters of the talks. Moreover, practice is explicitly mentioned in the last *sentence* of nearly a third of the talks. Some examples of Joko's closing lines:

“No matter what your life is, I encourage you to make it your practice.”

“So whether we have been sitting five years or twenty years or are just beginning, it is important to sit with great, meticulous care.”

“Let's practice well.”

“Do I understand the necessity for practice, and do I know what practice is?”

“Please sit well.”

“What is necessary? A lifetime of practice?”⁵⁰⁷

Joko's talks are talks about practice, and *Everyday Zen* is a book about practice.

Everyday Zen is not, however, a complete “how to” guide to Zen practice in the same way as *The Three Pillars of Zen*. *Everyday Zen* does not include detailed

⁵⁰⁵ Beck, 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Beck, vii.

⁵⁰⁷ Beck, 8, 31, 35, 80, 127, 203.

instructions on posture for meditation. At the Saturday-morning program at the Zen Center of San Diego, one can receive beginning meditation instruction, which includes detailed instructions on the posture, but this is not part of *Everyday Zen*. The talks in this book focus on mental aspects of Zen practice.

Bad Thoughts and Good Thoughts

Joko rarely speaks of completely emptying the mind of thoughts; she usually speaks of certain kinds of thinking that are a problem. “There are two kinds of thoughts,” Joko says. One kind of thinking is not a problem: “There is nothing wrong with thinking in the sense of what I call ‘technical thinking.’ We have to think in order to walk from here to the corner or to bake a cake or to solve a physics problem. That use of the mind is fine.” But there is another kind of thinking that is a problem. Joko says that “opinions, judgments, memories, dreaming about the future—ninety percent of the thoughts spinning around in our heads have no essential reality. And we go from birth to death, unless we wake up wasting most of our life with them.”⁵⁰⁸ This second kind of thinking—the thinking that is *not* “technical thinking”—is not merely a waste of time. According to Joko, a life based on “false” thinking is a selfish and harmful life. In our Zen practice, Joko says, “we see that we are violent, prejudiced, and selfish. We are all those things because a conditioned life based on false thinking leads to these states.”⁵⁰⁹ We humans misuse our ability to think. A large brain has been given to us, Joko says, “so we can function,” but we “misuse” this gift of a large brain “to do mischief that has nothing to do with the welfare of life.” It would be fine if we were simply thinking “in

⁵⁰⁸ Beck, 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Beck, 7.

terms of work that needs to be done for life,” but we get in trouble when we think “in terms of how we can serve our separate self.”⁵¹⁰ Joko says that in our Zen practice we discover that the main thing we need to work with is “our busy, chaotic mind.” All of us are “caught up in frantic thinking,” and the task of practice is “to begin to bring that thinking into clarity and balance.”⁵¹¹

Not Cutting Off Thoughts But Observing Thoughts

Although Joko considers much of our thinking to be a problem, she observes that “a lot of people misunderstand practice as the cutting-off of illusory thoughts.” She quotes the eighteenth-century Zen master Menzan:

He says, “When, through practice, you know the reality of zazen thoroughly, the frozen blockage of emotion-thought will naturally melt away.” He says, however: “If you think you have cut off illusory thought, *instead of clarifying how emotion-thought melts*, the emotion-thought will come up again, as though you have cut the stem of a blade of grass or the trunk of a tree and left the root alive.”

So for Joko, cutting off “emotion-thought”—“the emotional, self-centered thoughts that we fuss with all the time”—is not an effective long-term strategy. She says, “Of course thoughts are illusory but . . . if you cut them off instead of ‘clarifying how emotion-thought melts,’ you’ll learn little,” and even if you have “little enlightenment experiences,” as Joko says many people do, “the sour fruits of emotion-thought will be what they eat in daily life.” What we need to do is to “observe the thought content until it is neutral enough that we can enter the direct and nonverbal experience of the disappointment and suffering. When we experience the suffering directly, the melting of

⁵¹⁰ Beck, 164.

⁵¹¹ Beck, 6.

false emotion can begin, and true compassion can emerge.” Joko says that much of the practice at her Zen center “is about clarifying how emotion-thought melts.”⁵¹²

Open Attention to the Present Moment

For Joko, Zen practice is about paying attention—about clear perception of reality as it is right here and now. Joko tells a story of a skilled piano teacher she worked with, who taught her how to pay attention. With that teacher, although she had already been playing the piano for many years, she “learned to listen for the first time.” She “learned to pay attention.” That was the great lesson he gave his students: he taught them to pay attention, to really hear, to really listen, and “when you can hear it, you can play it.” What is necessary for Zen practice, she says, is “that kind of attention.”⁵¹³

For Joko, Zen practice is not just about paying attention when we’re sitting on a meditation cushion but about paying attention in whatever we’re doing. Joko says, “All practice aims to increase our ability to be attentive, not just in zazen but in every moment in our life.”⁵¹⁴

Joko almost never uses the word “concentration,” and she doesn’t often talk about that focused sort of attention. She emphasizes a wider sort of attention: observing everything that’s happening here and now. She distinguishes these two different ways to practice:

One is with sheer concentration (very common in Zen centers) . . . In this approach what we are really doing is pushing the false thought and emotion into hiding. . . . Another way, which is our practice here, is slowly to open ourselves to the wonder of what life is by meticulous attention to the anatomy of the present moment. . . . In this approach, everything in our

⁵¹² Beck, 71.

⁵¹³ Beck, 10.

⁵¹⁴ Beck, 32.

life—the good and bad events, our excitement, our depression, our disappointment, our irritability—becomes grist for the mill.⁵¹⁵

Similarly, Joko says elsewhere that “we have to pay attention to this very moment, the totality of what is happening right now” and that we need to “be with what’s right-here-now, no matter what it is: good, bad, nice, not nice, headache, being ill, being happy.”⁵¹⁶ Joko stresses opening our attention to everything in the present moment rather than focusing our attention to one point.

The Difficulty of Practice

Zen practice, according to Joko, is hard work. Zazen, she says, is “the most demanding of all activities.”⁵¹⁷ It is “very hard work.”⁵¹⁸ She urges us not to “underestimate the constant work we have to do on all the illusions that constantly interrupt our journey.”⁵¹⁹ She says that Zen students “have to work unbelievably hard,” but she wants to make sure we understand what she means: “when I say hard, I don’t mean straining and effort; it isn’t that. What is hard is this choice that we repeatedly have to make.”⁵²⁰

A repeated refrain in *Everyday Zen* is that Zen practice is “not easy,”⁵²¹ despite how it may sometimes sound. “To talk about this sounds really easy,” she says, “But to do it is horrendously difficult.”⁵²² She talks about practice as a “battle” that can be frightening. She says, for instance, that the process of practice, “though easy to talk

⁵¹⁵ Beck, 124.

⁵¹⁶ Beck, 10, 11.

⁵¹⁷ Beck, 25.

⁵¹⁸ Beck, 57.

⁵¹⁹ Beck, 38.

⁵²⁰ Beck, 13.

⁵²¹ E.g., Beck, 5, 14, 55, 60.

⁵²² Beck, 28.

about, “is sometimes frightening, dismal, discouraging; all that we have thought was
 ourself for many years is under attack.”⁵²³ It can even be “gruesome”: “The gruesome
 part of sitting (and it is gruesome, believe me) is to begin to see what is really going on in
 our mind.”⁵²⁴ Joko says repeatedly in *Everyday Zen* that it takes “courage” or “guts” to do
 Zen practice.⁵²⁵ In the talk “Practicing This Very Moment,” for instance, she says that the
 job of Zen practice “is not easy. It takes courage. Only people who have a tremendous
 amount of guts can do this practice for more than a short time.”⁵²⁶ Similarly, in the talk
 “Opening Pandora’s Box”—about how Zen practice opens the Pandora’s box of our self-
 centeredness to our awareness—she says that it takes courage to do this difficult practice
 and that we should only do it if we absolutely have to:

Practice is not easy. . . . Don’t practice unless you feel there’s nothing else
 you can do. Instead, step up your surfing or your physics or your music. If
 that satisfies you, do it. Don’t practice unless you feel you must. It takes
 enormous courage to have a real practice. You have to face everything
 about yourself hidden in that box, including some unpleasant things you
 don’t even want to know about.⁵²⁷

“So,” she says, “the illusion we have, that practice should always be peaceful and loving,
 just isn’t so.”⁵²⁸ Practice is not easy. “Am I making practice sound difficult? But practice
is difficult.”⁵²⁹

Patience

As Joko understands it, Zen practice also takes patience. In *Everyday Zen*, she
 repeatedly urges patience. “Just be patient,” she says.⁵³⁰ And: “Be very patient.”⁵³¹ And

⁵²³ Beck, 43, 44.

⁵²⁴ Beck, 7.

⁵²⁵ E.g., Beck, 5, 12, 14, 55.

⁵²⁶ Beck, 12.

⁵²⁷ Beck, 55.

⁵²⁸ Beck, 54.

⁵²⁹ Beck, 117.

again: “What I’m asking is that you be patient.”⁵³² “We need to work patiently with our lives,” she says, “with our desires for sensation, for security, for power . . . With patient practice our lives can constantly grow in power and also in integration.”⁵³³ We need patience, in part, because Zen practice is so difficult. “We need to have patience,” she says, “to face this challenging task: meticulously to observe all aspects of our life so that we can see their nature.”⁵³⁴ Similarly, she says that we need “patience, persistence, and courage” to continue practicing through “severe difficulties.”⁵³⁵ Engaging in Zen practice is not easy, she says, but if we can practice “with patience and perseverance, with the guidance of a good teacher, then gradually our life settles down, becomes more balanced.”⁵³⁶ And “for those of us who are patient and determined in our practice, joy increases; peace increases; the ability to live a beneficial and compassionate life increases.”⁵³⁷

JOKO’S CHALLENGE TO INSTRUMENTALITY

Everyday Zen teaches that the way to practice zazen is to open one’s attention to the present moment, observing everything but especially one’s thoughts—a practice that is difficult and requires patience. This practice is generally described as a means of attaining enlightenment, or the realization of the perfection of things as they are.

⁵³⁰ Beck, 67.

⁵³¹ Beck, 14.

⁵³² Beck, 37.

⁵³³ Beck, 38.

⁵³⁴ Beck, 127.

⁵³⁵ Beck, 44.

⁵³⁶ Beck, 5.

⁵³⁷ Beck, 44.

Joko teaches that Zen practice is instrumental, in an unusual sense. It is a means to an important end: approaching life noninstrumentally. That is, we might say that, for Joko, Zen practice is instrumental for becoming noninstrumental. With this pedagogical strategy, Everyday Zen is challenging an instrumental attitude more strongly than, say, *The Three Pillars of Zen* but without going quite so far as Dogen and saying that practice is not instrumental at all.

7

Conclusion

In the stream of Mahāyāna Buddhism that I have examined—the stream that leads to and includes Chinese Ch’an, Japanese Zen, and American Zen—most teachers have tried, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, to teach that in some fundamental way everything is already fine: that one does not need to make any substantive change to the nature of reality or of oneself in order to be liberated. These teachings challenge an instrumental orientation to Buddhist practice, and two of the three American Zen texts that I examined challenge instrumentality in new and interesting ways.

CHALLENGES TO INSTRUMENTALITY IN THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT OF ZEN

Even in what I have called “instrumental” pedagogical strategies, there is an assumption that Buddhist practice is not about acquiring brand new qualities or ridding oneself of certain qualities in order to become a buddha—except in a highly delimited

sense. One does not need a spiritual (or moral or intellectual or physical) overhaul in order to become a buddha; one only needs a certain new sort of vision or awareness of, an awakening to, how reality actually is.

In the first variety of instrumental rhetoric I discussed—practicing to attain *prajñā*—practice is described as a means to the end of realizing the true nature of reality: *śūnyatā*, or emptiness. One doesn't practice to make phenomena empty or to make one's "self" empty; everything has always been empty, according to this type of rhetoric. One only needs to realize, or awaken to, this emptiness.

Central to the second and third varieties of instrumental rhetoric I discussed is the basic Mahāyāna teaching of buddha-nature: that all beings inherently have the nature of buddhas, or enlightened beings, that there is no substantial difference between an unenlightened being and an enlightened one. In the second variety of instrumental rhetoric—practicing to "uncover" buddha-nature—practice is not a means to "attain" buddha-nature. All beings are intrinsically endowed with buddha-nature, so buddha-nature does not need to be, and cannot be, "attained." In this way of talking about practice, one's inherent buddha-nature, one's inherent perfection, needs only to be uncovered so that it can shine forth. In the third variety of instrumental rhetoric—practicing to "realize" buddha-nature—buddha-nature is again understood to be inherent or intrinsic. One already has the qualities of a buddha. In this way of talking about Buddhist practice, one does not even need to clear away anything that was "covering" one's buddha-nature; one needs only to "realize" one's buddha-nature.

Thus, although the pedagogical strategies that I have called "instrumental" describe practice as a means to an end—the end of awakening or enlightenment—they all

challenge an instrumental orientation that would seek to totally remake or reform or improve or develop the person in order to make the person into a buddha. What is required is simply a “realization” (either of emptiness or of one’s inherent buddha-nature) or an “uncovering” of one’s buddha-nature. According to these ways of teaching about Buddhist practice, the true nature of reality has never been amiss; it just needs to be seen.

In noninstrumental teachings about Buddhist practice, used by many Buddhist teachers and exemplified by Dōgen, even this last bit of instrumentality is challenged. Practice is no longer described even as instrumental for awakening to the true nature of reality and thus becoming enlightened. In the noninstrumental strategy, practice is described simply as a manifestation or expression of one’s inherent buddhahood. Beings are already buddhas, period. Practice is not a means to attain enlightenment or any end whatsoever.

Dōgen’s style of rhetoric about Buddhist practice is the strongest challenge to an instrumental orientation. What goes along with this, though, is that when practice is described as noninstrumental and is thus completely disconnected causally from enlightenment, it becomes difficult to explain (to anyone with a fundamentally instrumental mindset) why one should engage in Buddhist practice. Dōgen is apt to simply assert the importance of practice or to invoke the examples of great figures of Buddhism, such as the Buddha and Bodhidharma, who practiced intensively over long periods of time. This pedagogical strategy is perhaps not the most helpful for students of Buddhism who are thoroughly enmeshed in an instrumental style of reasoning. Asking, “Why practice?” they get the reply, “Just do it. (Even the Buddha did.)”

Many of the Buddhist teaching texts I examined incorporate both instrumental and noninstrumental rhetoric about practice. I argued (against some other interpreters) that Nāgārjuna uses some noninstrumental rhetoric in addition to his more obvious instrumental rhetoric. The *Platform Sūtra* also incorporates both instrumental and noninstrumental ways of talking about Buddhist practice, and the record of Lin-chi (Rinzai) may do so as well. There is a certain tension here, in teaching both that practice is a means to an end and also that it is *not* a means to an end, and I argued that one way to make some sense of this apparent tension is to make use of the Buddhist teaching of the Two Truths, understanding the instrumental description of practice as the “relative” view and the noninstrumental description of practice as the “ultimate” view.

CHALLENGES TO INSTRUMENTALITY IN MODERN AMERICAN ZEN

In moving into the modern American context, I chose three classic texts of American Zen to examine, to see how they describe Zen practice in relation to enlightenment and, more specifically, how they challenge an instrumental orientation to Buddhist practice.

Philip Kapleau’s *The Three Pillars of Zen* primarily makes use of the strategy of describing practice instrumentally, as a means to “realize” one’s inherent buddha-nature (the strategy also used predominantly by the Japanese Rinzai Zen master Hakuin). *The Three Pillars of Zen* does also incorporate a bit of noninstrumental rhetoric but only in a qualified sort of way and mainly in the context of discussing one particular practice:

shikan-taza. Of the three American Zen texts I examine in detail, this one offers the least challenge to instrumentality.

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind and *Everyday Zen* incorporate some interesting new strategies for describing Zen practice and for challenging an instrumental orientation—strategies that incorporate both instrumental and noninstrumental elements.

Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* uses a variety of ways of describing practice, but one that appears frequently and that I have not found elsewhere is the description of practice as instrumental for “resuming” one's buddha-nature, if one practices with a noninstrumental attitude. With this pedagogical strategy, Suzuki is putting much more stress on the noninstrumental than, say, Kapleau, but without going quite so far as Dōgen and saying that practice is not a means to any end at all. Suzuki does sometimes describe practice itself as noninstrumental—as simply a manifestation of one's inherent buddhahood—but more often, he is recommending a noninstrumental *approach* to Zen practice.

Charlotte Joko Beck's *Everyday Zen* mainly describes Zen practice as a means to attain the “enlightened state,” by which she means the realization of the perfection of things as they are. To put it another way, for Joko, practice is instrumental for approaching one's whole life more noninstrumentally. As with Suzuki's description of practice, this description puts much more stress on the noninstrumental than does, say, the description of practice in *Three Pillars*—viz, in Joko's teaching, a noninstrumental orientation to life is what Zen practice is all about—but without going quite so far as Dōgen and saying that practice is not a means to any end at all. Joko does not describe

Zen practice as itself noninstrumental, but in Joko's teaching, the goal of Zen practice is to live more noninstrumentally.

In their ways of talking about Zen practice, Ch'an and Zen teachers have generally tried, in one way or another, to a greater or lesser degree, to teach that in some fundamental way everything is already fine, that there is no "end" that we need to attain in order to be liberated, that one does not need a spiritual overhaul in order to become a buddha. Even, for instance, the "instrumental" teachings that practice is a means to "uncover" or "realize" one's buddha-nature are grounded in the teaching that one already has buddha-nature. One does not need to, and in fact cannot, "attain" buddha-nature. Dōgen goes even further and says that Zen practice is not a means to any end at all, but this teaching leaves nothing whatsoever for the instrumentally-oriented mind to grab onto, nothing for the practitioner to attain or accomplish or achieve.

Suzuki's and Joko's texts are noteworthy for how they challenge instrumentality and teach noninstrumentality in new ways and more strongly than do most of their predecessors other than Dōgen, while also incorporating an instrumental element that Dōgen eschews almost entirely.

The pedagogical strategies of Suzuki and Joko are well suited to their modern American audience and can be seen as examples of the process of the "modernizing" of Zen, which began in Japan, largely under the influence of Western modes of thought, and has continued in the West. Specifically, Zen has been represented and refigured as eminently rational, empirical, and practical and thus as fully compatible with scientific and technological modes of thought. Technologically-minded modern Westerners are perhaps especially in need of Zen's challenge to an instrumental orientation to life; and at

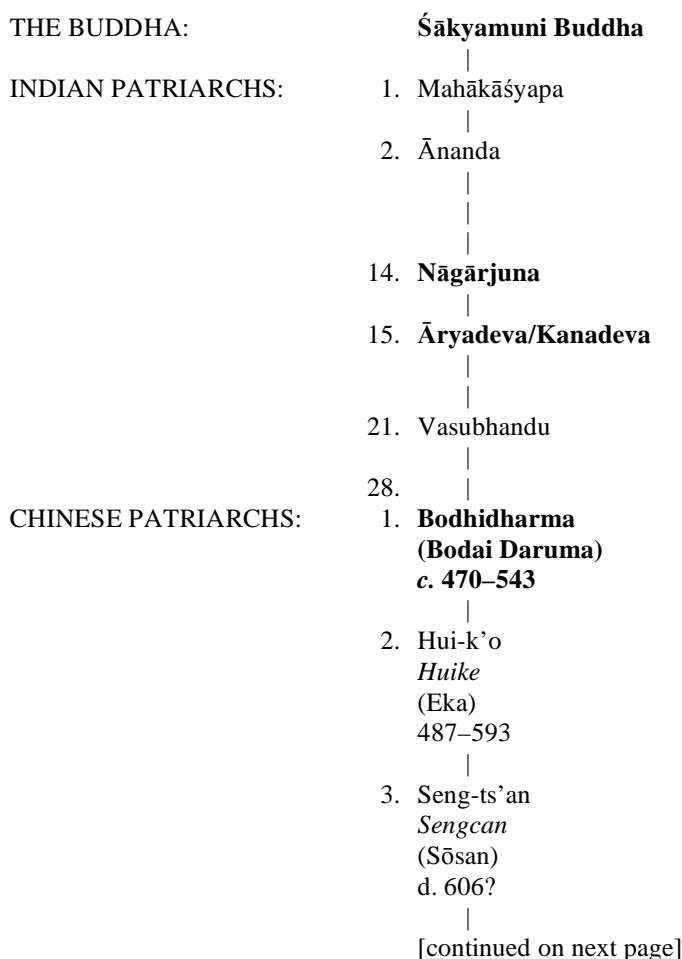
the same time, an almost entirely noninstrumental teaching like Dōgen's might be nearly impossible for them to grasp, perhaps especially as newcomers to Zen. *Zen Mind*, *Beginner's Mind* and *Everyday Zen* exhibit new strategies for challenging instrumentality and doing so more strongly than many of the other pedagogical strategies I've examined, while retaining an element of instrumentality that a technologically-oriented American can understand.

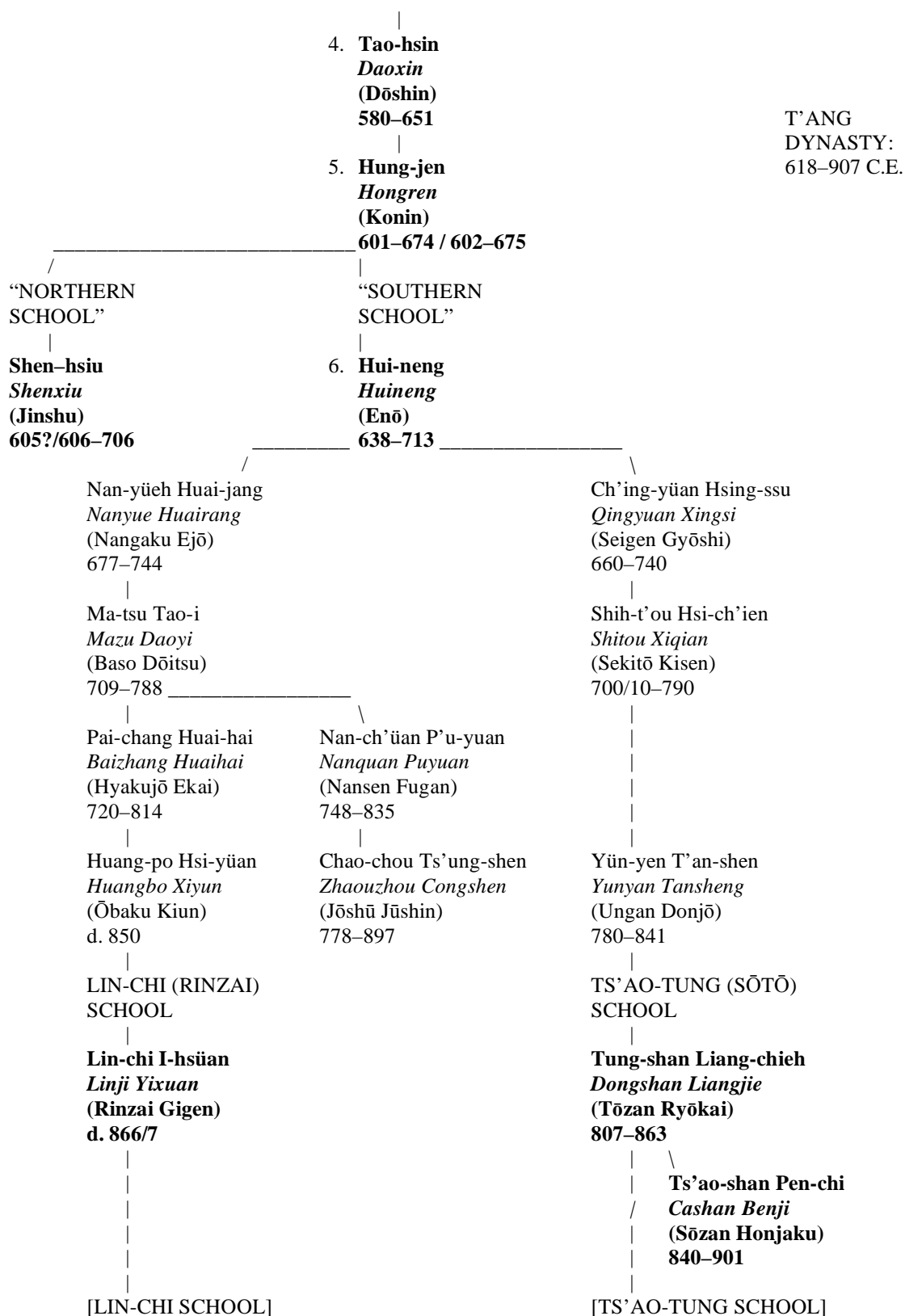
Buddhist teachers in many times and places have made use of *upaya*, or "skillful means," in their teaching—offering instruction in whatever way is most appropriate for a particular audience at a particular time. *Zen Mind*, *Beginner's Mind* and *Everyday Zen* employ unique forms of *upaya* regarding the issue of "practice and enlightenment."

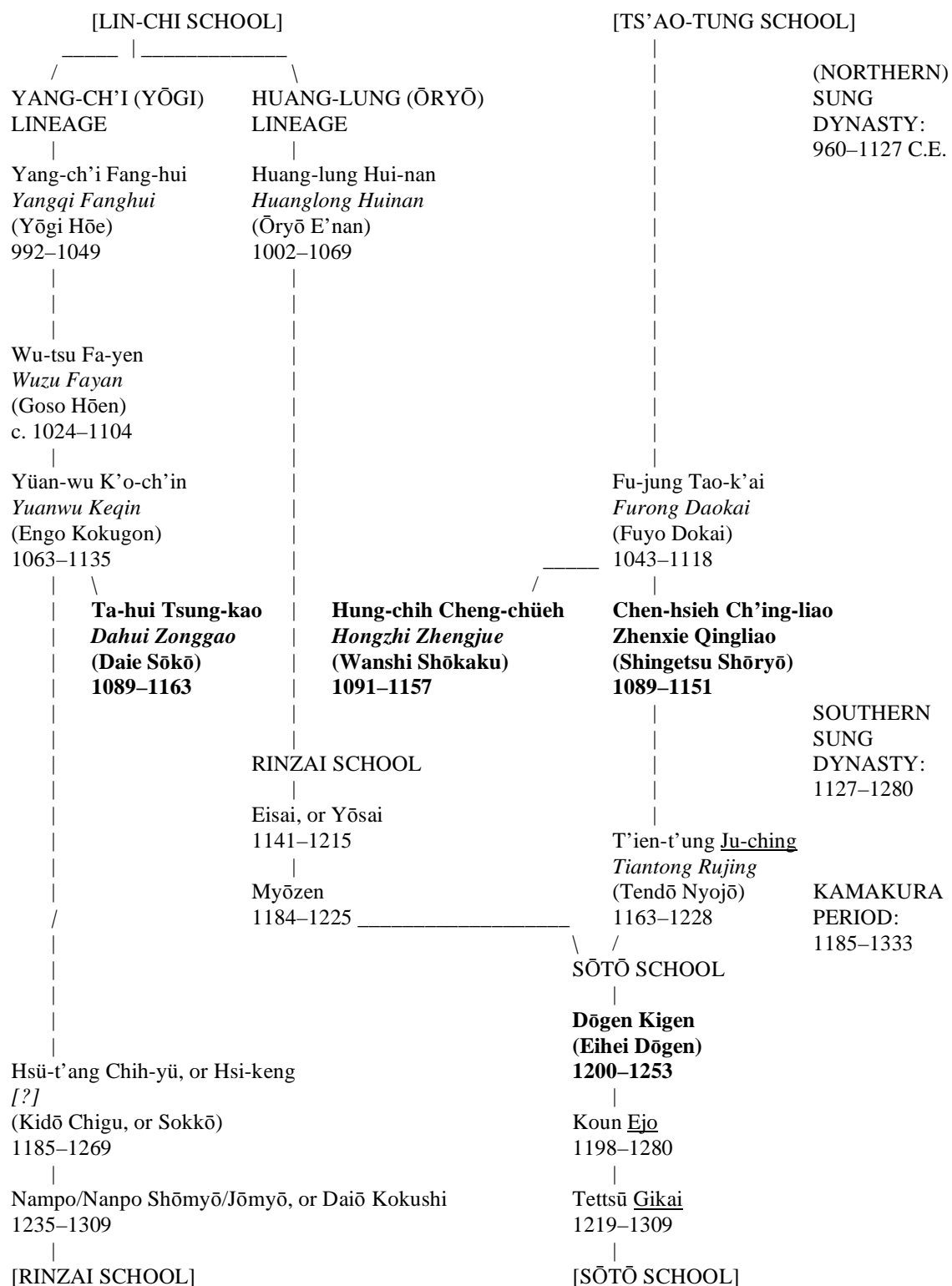
Appendix: Ch'an/Zen Lineage Chart

This chart includes most of the Ch'an and Zen masters mentioned in the dissertation (in boldface).

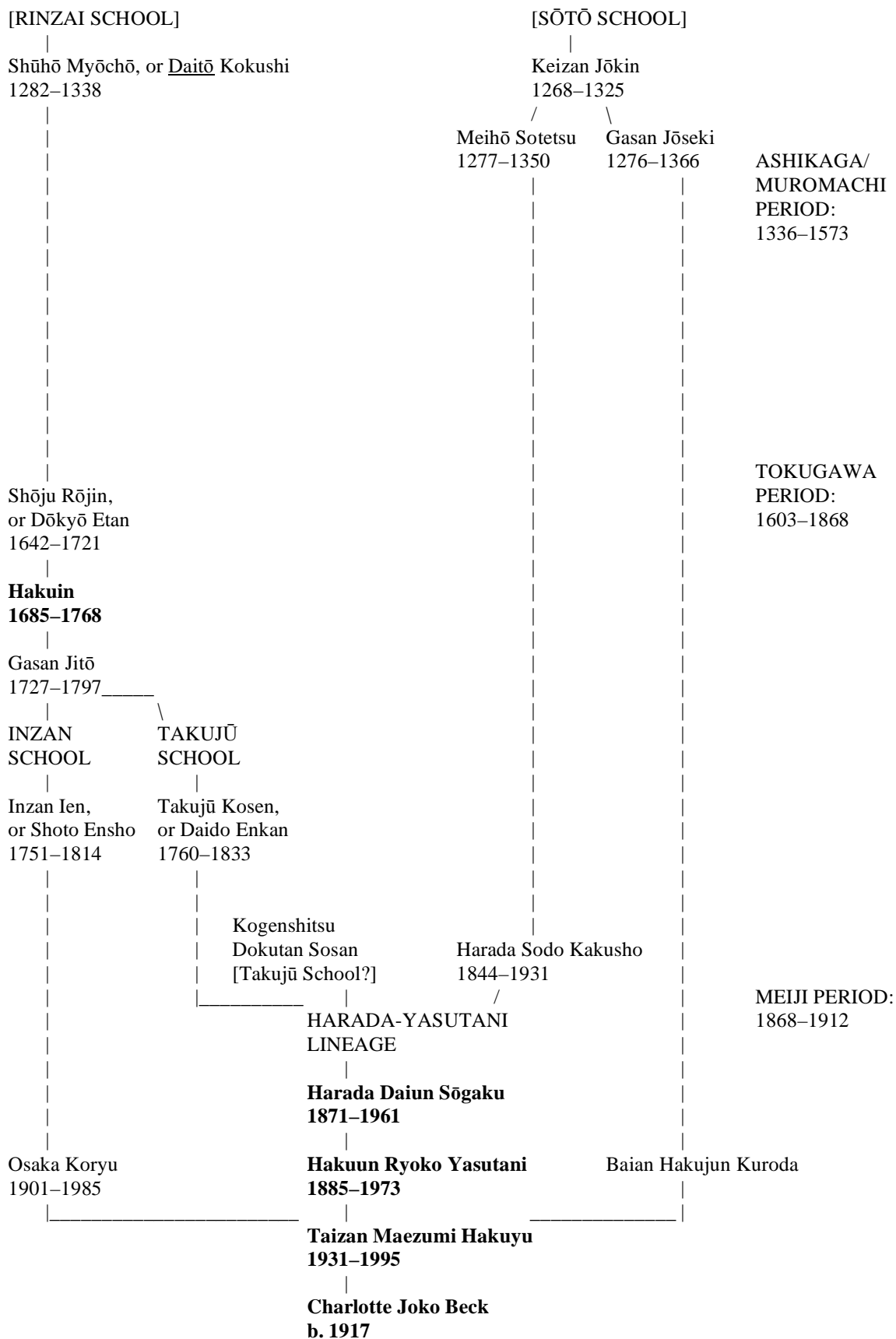
For Ch'an masters, the Wade-Giles romanization of the name is given first,
followed by the Pinyin romanization in italics
 (and the romanized Japanese version of the name in parentheses).







[continued on next page]



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