

ERICH FROMM

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ZEN BUDDHISM

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE ART OF LOVING



Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism

Erich Fromm



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FOREWORD

This book has its origin in a workshop with Daisetz T. Suzuki on Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, which was held under the auspices of the Department of Psychoanalysis of the Medical School, Autonomous National University of Mexico, during the first week of August, 1957, in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

The conference was attended by about fifty psychiatrists and psychologists from both Mexico and the United States (the majority of them psychoanalysts). Aside from my own paper published here, a number of other papers were given and discussed:

Dr. M. Green, "The Roots of Sullivan's Concept of Self."

Dr. J. Kirsch, "The Role of the Analyst in Jung's
Psychotherapy."

Dr. R. De Martino, "The Human Situation and Zen Buddhism."

Dr. I. Progoff, "The Psychological Dynamism of Zen." and
"The Concept of Neurosis and Cure in Jung."

Miss C. Selver, "Sensory Awareness and Body Functioning."

Dr. A. Stunkard, "Motivation for Treatment."

Dr. D. T. Suzuki: "Lectures on Zen Buddhism."

Dr. E. Tauber, "Sullivan's Concept of Cure."

Dr. P. Weisz, "The Contribution of Georg W. Groddeck."

Any psychologist, even twenty years ago, would have been greatly surprised—or shocked—to find his colleagues interested in a

“mystical” religious system such as Zen Buddhism. He would have been even more surprised to find that most of the people present were not just “interested” but deeply concerned, and that they discovered that the week spent with Dr. Suzuki and his ideas had a most stimulating and refreshing influence on them, to say the least.

The reason for this change lies in factors which are discussed in my paper. To sum them up briefly, they are to be found in the development of psychoanalytic theory, in the changes that have occurred in the intellectual and spiritual climate of the Western world, and in the work of Dr. Suzuki, who, by his books, his lectures, and his personality, has made the Western world acquainted with Zen Buddhism.

Every participant in the conference was expected to have some acquaintance with Dr. Suzuki’s writings, just as many a reader of this volume may have. My own paper has been completely revised for publication, both in length and in content. The main reason for this revision lies in the conference itself. While I was acquainted with the literature on Zen Buddhism, the stimulation of the conference and subsequent thinking led me to a considerable enlargement and revision of my ideas. This refers not only to my understanding of Zen, but also to certain psychoanalytic concepts, such as the problems of what constitutes the unconscious, of the transformation of the unconscious into consciousness, and of the goal of psychoanalytic therapy.

In relating Zen Buddhism to psychoanalysis, one discusses two systems, both dealing with a theory concerned with the nature of man and with a practice leading to his well-being. Each is a characteristic expression of Eastern and Western thought,

respectively. *Zen Buddhism* is a blending of Indian rationality and abstraction with Chinese concreteness and realism. *Psychoanalysis* is as exquisitely Western as Zen is Eastern; it is the child of Western humanism and rationalism, and of the nineteenth-century romantic search for the dark forces which elude rationalism. Much further back, Greek wisdom and Hebrew ethics are the spiritual godfathers of this scientific-therapeutic approach to man.

But in spite of the fact that both psychoanalysis and Zen deal with the nature of man and with a practice leading to his transformation, the differences seem to outweigh these similarities. Psychoanalysis is a scientific method, nonreligious to its core. Zen is a theory and technique to achieve “enlightenment,” an experience which in the West would be called religious or mystical. Psychoanalysis is a therapy for mental illness; Zen a way to spiritual salvation. Can the discussion of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism result in anything but the statement that there exists no relationship except that of radical and unbridgeable difference?

Yet there is an unmistakable and increasing interest in Zen Buddhism among psychoanalysts.¹ What are the sources of this interest? What is its meaning? To give an answer to these questions is what this book attempts to do. It does not try to give a systematic presentation of Zen Buddhist thought, a task which would transcend my knowledge and experience; nor does it try to give a full presentation of psychoanalysis, which would go beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, I shall—in the first part of this book—present in some detail those aspects of psychoanalysis which are of immediate relevance to the relation between psychoanalysis and

Zen Buddhism and which, at the same time, represent basic concepts of that continuation of Freudian analysis which I sometimes have called “humanistic psychoanalysis.” I hope in this way to show why the study of Zen Buddhism has been of vital significance to me and, as I believe—is significant for all students of psychoanalysis.

I. TODAY’S SPIRITUAL CRISIS AND THE ROLE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

As a first approach to our topic, we must consider the spiritual crisis which Western man is undergoing in this crucial historical epoch, and the function of psychoanalysis in this crisis.

While the majority of people living in the West do not consciously feel as if they were living through a crisis of Western culture (probably never have the majority of people in a radically critical situation been aware of the crisis), there is agreement, at least among a number of critical observers, as to the existence and the nature of this crisis. It is the crisis which has been described as “malaise,” “ennui,” “mal du siècle,” the deadening of life, the automatization of man, his alienation from himself, from his fellow man and from nature.² Man has followed rationalism to the point where rationalism has transformed itself into utter irrationality. Since Descartes, man has increasingly split thought from affect; thought alone is considered rational—affect, by its very nature, irrational; the person, I, has been split off into an intellect, which constitutes my self, and which is to control *me* as it is to control nature. Control by the intellect over nature, and the production of more and more things, became the paramount aims of life. In this process man has

transformed himself into a thing, life has become subordinated to property, “*to be*” is dominated by “*to have*.” Where the roots of Western culture, both Greek and Hebrew, considered the aim of life the *perfection of man*, modern man is concerned with the *perfection of things*, and the knowledge of how to make them. Western man is in a state of schizoid inability to experience affect, hence he is anxious, depressed, and desperate. He still pays lip service to the aims of happiness, individualism, initiative—but actually he has no aim. Ask him what he is living for, what is the aim of all his strivings—and he will be embarrassed. Some may say they live for the family, others, “to have fun,” still others, to make money, but in reality nobody knows what he is living for; he has no goal, except the wish to escape insecurity and aloneness.

It is true, church membership today is higher than ever before, books on religion become best sellers, and more people speak of God than ever before. Yet this kind of religious profession only covers up a profoundly materialistic and irreligious attitude, and is to be understood as an ideological reaction—caused by insecurity and conformism—to the trend of the nineteenth century, which Nietzsche characterized by his famous “God is dead.” As a truly religious attitude, it has no reality.

The abandonment of theistic ideas in the nineteenth century was—seen from one angle—no small achievement. Man took a big plunge to objectivity. The earth ceased to be the center of the universe; man lost his central role of the creature destined by God to dominate all other creatures. Studying man’s hidden motivations with a new objectivity, Freud recognized that the faith in an all-powerful, omniscient God, had its root in the helplessness of human existence

and in man's attempt to cope with his helplessness by means of belief in a helping father and mother represented by God in heaven. He saw that man only can save himself; the teaching of the great teachers, the loving help of parents, friends, and loved ones can help him—but can help him only to dare to accept the challenge of existence and to react to it with all his might and all his heart.

Man gave up the illusion of a fatherly God as a parental helper—but he gave up also the true aims of all great humanistic religions: overcoming the limitations of an egotistical self, achieving love, objectivity, and humility and respecting life so that the aim of life is living itself, and man becomes what he potentially is. These were the aims of the great Western religions, as they were the aims of the great Eastern religions. The East, however, was not burdened with the concept of a transcendent father-savior in which the monotheistic religions expressed their longings. Taoism and Buddhism had a rationality and realism superior to that of the Western religions. They could see man realistically and objectively, having nobody but the “awakened” ones to guide him, and being able to be guided because each man has within himself the capacity to awake and be enlightened. This is precisely the reason why Eastern religious thought, Taoism and Buddhism—and their blending in Zen Buddhism—assume such importance for the West today. Zen Buddhism helps man to find an answer to the question of his existence, an answer which is essentially the same as that given in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and yet which does not contradict the rationality, realism, and independence which are modern man's precious achievements. Paradoxically, Eastern religious thought turns out to be more

congenial to Western rational thought than does Western religious thought itself.

II. VALUES AND GOALS IN FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYTIC CONCEPTS

Psychoanalysis is a characteristic expression of Western man's spiritual crisis, and an attempt to find a solution. This is explicitly so in the more recent developments of psychoanalysis, in "humanist" or "existentialist" analysis. But before I discuss my own "humanist" concept, I want to show that, quite contrary to a widely held assumption Freud's own system transcended the concept of "illness" and "cure" and was concerned with the "salvation" of man, rather than only with a therapy for mentally sick patients. Superficially seen, Freud was the creator of a new therapy for mental illness, and this was the subject matter to which his main interest and all the efforts of his life were devoted. However, if we look more closely, we find that behind this concept of a medical therapy for the cure of neurosis was an entirely different interest, rarely expressed by Freud, and probably rarely conscious even to himself. This hidden or only implicit concept did not primarily deal with the cure of mental illness, but with something which transcended the concept of illness and cure. What was this something? What was the nature of the "psychoanalytic movement" he founded? What was Freud's vision for man's future? What was the dogma on which his movement was founded?

Freud answered this question perhaps most clearly in the sentence: "Where there was Id—there shall be Ego." His aim was

the domination of irrational and unconscious passions by reason; the liberation of man from the power of the unconscious, within the possibilities of man. Man had to become aware of the unconscious forces within him, in order to dominate and control them. Freud's aim was the optimum knowledge of truth, and that is the knowledge of reality; this knowledge to him was the only guiding light man had on this earth. These aims were the traditional aims of rationalism, of the Enlightenment philosophy, and of Puritan ethics. But while religion and philosophy had postulated these aims of self-control in, what might be called a *utopian* way, Freud was—or believed himself to be—the first one to put these aims on a *scientific* basis (by the exploration of the unconscious) and hence to show the way to their realization. While Freud represents the culmination of Western rationalism, it was his genius to overcome at the same time the false rationalistic and superficially optimistic aspects of rationalism, and to create a synthesis with romanticism, the very movement which during the nineteenth century opposed rationalism by its own interest in and reverence for the irrational, affective side of man.³

With regard to the treatment of the individual, Freud was also more concerned with a philosophical and ethical aim than he was generally believed to be. In the Introductory Lectures, he speaks of the attempts certain mystical practices make to produce a basic transformation within the personality. "We have to admit," he continues, "that the therapeutic efforts of psychoanalysis have chosen a similar point of approach. Its intention is to strengthen the Ego, to make it more independent from the Super-Ego, to enlarge its field of observation, so that it can appropriate for itself new parts of Id. Where there was Id there shall be Ego. It is a work of culture like

the reclamation of the Zuyder Zee.” In the same vein he speaks of psychoanalytic therapy as consisting in “*the liberation of the human being* from his neurotic symptoms, inhibitions and abnormalities of character.”* He sees also the role of the analyst in a light which transcends that of the doctor who “cures” the patient. “The analyst,” he says, “must be in a superior position in some sense, if he is to serve as a model for the patient in certain analytic situations, and in others to act as *his teacher*. (*Ibid.*, p. 351. Italics mine—E.F.) “Finally,” Freud writes, “we must not forget that the relationship between analyst and patient is based on a *love of truth*, that is, on acknowledgement of reality, that it precludes any kind of *sham*, and *deception*.”

There are other factors in Freud’s concept of psychoanalysis which transcend the conventional notion of illness and cure. Those familiar with Eastern thought, and especially with Zen Buddhism, will notice that the factors which I am going to mention are not without relation to concepts and thoughts of the Eastern mind. The principle to be mentioned here first is Freud’s concept that *knowledge leads to, transformation*, that theory and practice must not be separated, that in the very act of *knowing* oneself, one *transforms* oneself. It is hardly necessary to emphasize how different this idea is from the concepts of scientific psychology in Freud’s or in our time, where knowledge in itself remains theoretical knowledge, and has not a transforming function in the knower.

In still another aspect Freud’s method has a close connection with Eastern thought, and especially with Zen Buddhism. Freud did not share the high evaluation of our conscious thought system, so characteristic of modern Western man. On the contrary, he believed

that our conscious thought was only a small part of the whole of the psychic process going on in us and, in fact, an insignificant one in comparison with the tremendous power of those sources within ourselves which are dark and irrational and at the same time unconscious. Freud, in his wish to arrive at insight into the real nature of a person, wanted to break through the conscious thought system, by his method of *free association*. Free association was to by-pass logical, conscious, conventional thought. It was to lead into a new source of our personality, namely, the unconscious. Whatever criticism may be made of the contents of Freud's unconscious, the fact remains that by emphasizing free association as against logical thought, he transcended in an essential point the conventional rationalistic mode of thinking of the Western world, and moved in a direction which had been developed much farther and much more radically in the thought of the East.

There is one further point in which Freud differs radically from the contemporary Western attitude. I refer here to the fact that he was willing to analyze a person for one, two, three, four, five, or even more years. This procedure has, in fact, been the reason for a great deal of criticism against Freud. Needless to say, one should attempt to make analysis as efficient as possible, but the point I mean to stress here is that Freud had the courage to say that one could meaningfully spend years with one person, just to help this person to understand himself. From a standpoint of utility, from a standpoint of loss and profit, this does not make too much sense. One would rather say that the time spent in such a prolonged analysis is not worthwhile, if one considers the social effect of a change in one person. Freud's method makes sense only if one transcends the

modern concept of “value,” of the proper relationship between means and ends, of the balance sheet, as it were; if one takes the position that one human being is not commensurable with any *thing*, that his emancipation, his well-being, his enlightenment, or whatever term we might want to use, is a matter of “ultimate concern” in itself, then no amount of time and money can be related to this aim in quantitative terms. To have had the vision and the courage to devise a method which implied this extended concern with one person was a manifestation of an attitude which transcended Western conventional thought in an important aspect.

The foregoing remarks are not meant to imply that Freud, in his conscious intentions, was close to Eastern thought or specifically to the thought of Zen Buddhism. Many of the elements which I mentioned before were more implicit than explicit, and more unconscious than conscious, in Freud’s own mind. Freud was much too much of a son of Western civilization, and especially of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought, to be close to Eastern thought as expressed in Zen Buddhism, even if he had been familiar with it. Freud’s picture of man was in essential features the picture which the economists and philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had developed. They saw man as essentially competitive, isolated, and related to others only by the necessity of exchanging the satisfaction of economic and instinctual needs. For Freud, man is a machine, driven by the libido, and regulated by the principle of keeping libido excitation to a minimum. He saw man as fundamentally egotistical, and related to others only by the mutual necessity of satisfying instinctual desires. Pleasure, for Freud, was relief of tension, not the experience of joy. Man was seen split

between his intellect and his affects; man was not the whole man, but the intellect-self of the Enlightenment philosophers. Brotherly love was an unreasonable demand, contrary to reality; mystical experience a regression to infantile narcissism.

What I have tried to show is that in spite of these obvious contradictions to Zen Buddhism, there were nevertheless elements in Freud's system which transcended the conventional concepts of illness and cure, and the traditional rationalistic concepts of consciousness, elements which led to a further development of psychoanalysis which has a more direct and positive affinity with Zen Buddhist thought.

However, before we come to the discussion of the connection between this "humanistic" psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, I want to point to a change which is fundamental for the understanding of the further development of psychoanalysis: the change in the kinds of patients who come for analysis, and the problems they present.

At the beginning of this century the people who came to the psychiatrist were mainly people who suffered from *symptoms*. They had a paralyzed arm, or an obsessional symptom like a washing compulsion, or they suffered from obsessional thoughts which they could not get rid of. In other words, they were sick in the sense in which the word "sickness" is used in medicine; something prevented them from functioning socially as the so-called normal person functions. If this was what they suffered from, their concept of cure corresponded to the concept of sickness. They wanted to get rid of the symptoms, and their concept of "wellness" was—not to be sick. They wanted to be as well as the average person or, as we also

might put it, they wanted to be not more unhappy and disturbed than the average person in our society is.

These people still come to the psychoanalyst to seek help, and for them psychoanalysis is still a therapy which aims at the removal of their symptoms, and at enabling them to function socially. But while they once formed the majority of a psychoanalyst's clientele, they are the minority today—perhaps not because their absolute number is smaller today than then, but because their number is relatively smaller in comparison with the many new “patients” who function socially, who are not sick in the conventional sense, but who do suffer from the “maladie du siècle,” the malaise, the inner deadness I have been discussing above. These new “patients” come to the psychoanalyst without knowing what they really suffer from. They complain about being depressed, having insomnia, being unhappy in their marriages, not enjoying their work, and any number of similar troubles. They usually believe that this or that particular symptom is their problem and that if they could get rid of this particular trouble they would be well. However, these patients usually do not see that their problem is not that of depression, of insomnia, of their marriages, or of their jobs. These various complaints are only the conscious form in which our culture permits them to express something which lies much deeper, and which is common to the various people who consciously believe that they *suffer from* this or that particular symptom. The common suffering is the alienation from oneself, from one's fellow man, and from nature; the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand, and that one will die without having lived; that one lives in the midst of plenty and yet is joyless.

What is the help which psychoanalysis can offer those who suffer from the “maladie du siècle”? This help is—and must be—different from the “cure” which consists in removing symptoms, offered to those who cannot function socially. For those who suffer from alienation, cure does not consist in the *absence of illness*, but in the *presence of well-being*.

However, if we are to define well-being, we meet with considerable difficulties. If we stay within the Freudian system, well-being would have to be defined in terms of the libido theory, as the capacity for full genital functioning, or, from a different angle, as the awareness of the hidden Oedipal situation, definitions which, in my opinion, are only tangential to the real problem of human existence and the achievement of well-being by the total man. Any attempt to give a tentative answer to the problem of well-being must transcend the Freudian frame of reference and lead to a discussion, incomplete as it must be, of the basic concept of human existence, which underlies humanistic psychoanalysis. Only in this way can we lay the foundation for the comparison between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhist thought.

III. THE NATURE OF WELL-BEING— MAN’S PSYCHIC EVOLUTION

The first approach to a definition of well-being can be stated thus: *well-being is being in accord with the nature of man*. If we go beyond this formal statement the question arises: What is being, in accordance with the conditions of human existence? What are these conditions?

Human existence poses a question. Man is thrown into this world without his volition, and taken away from it again without his volition. In contrast to the animal, which in its instincts has a “built-in” mechanism of adaptation to its environment, living completely within nature, man lacks this instinctive mechanism. *He has to live* his life, he is *not lived by* it. He is *in* nature, yet he *transcends* nature; he has awareness of himself, and this awareness of himself as a separate entity makes him feel unbearably alone, lost, powerless. The very fact of being born poses a problem. At the moment of birth, life asks man a question, and this question he must answer. He must answer it at every moment; not his mind, not his body, but *he*, the person who thinks and dreams, who sleeps and eats and cries and laughs—*the whole man*—must answer it. What is this question which life poses? The question is: How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which the experience of separateness creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellow man, with nature? Man has to answer this question in some way; and even in insanity an answer is given by striking out reality outside of ourselves, living completely within the shell of ourselves, and thus overcoming the fright of separateness.

The *question* is always the same. However, there are *several answers*, or basically, there are only two answers. One is to overcome separateness, and to find unity by *regression* to the state of unity which existed before awareness ever arose, that is, before man was born. The other answer is to be *fully born*, to develop one’s awareness, one’s reason, one’s capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one’s own egocentric involvement, and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.

When we speak of birth we usually refer to the act of physiological birth which takes place for the human infant about nine months after conception. But in many ways the significance of this birth is overrated. In important aspects the life of the infant one week after birth is more like intra-uterine existence than like the existence of an adult man or woman. There is, however, a unique aspect of birth: the umbilical cord is severed, and the infant begins his first activity: breathing. Any severance of primary ties, from there on, is possible only to the extent to which this severance is accompanied by genuine activity.

Birth is not one act; it is a process. The aim of life is to be fully born, though its tragedy is that most of us die before we are thus born. To live is to be born every minute. Death occurs when birth stops. Physiologically, our cellular system is in a process of continual birth; psychologically, however, most of us cease to be born at a certain point. Some are completely stillborn; they go on living physiologically when mentally their longing is to return to the womb, to earth, darkness, death; they are insane, or nearly so. Many others proceed further on the path of life. Yet they can not cut the umbilical cord completely, as it were; they remain symbiotically attached to mother, father, family, race, state, status, money, gods, etc.; they never emerge fully as themselves and thus they never become fully born.⁸

The regressive attempt to answer the problem of existence can assume different forms; what is common to all of them is that they necessarily fail and lead to suffering. Once man is torn away from the prehuman, paradisiacal unity with nature, he can never go back to where he came from; two angels with fiery swords block his

return. Only in death or in insanity can the return be accomplished—not in life and sanity.

Man can strive to find this regressive unity at several levels, which are at the same time several levels of pathology and irrationality. He can be possessed by the passion to return to the womb, to mother earth, to death. If this aim is all-consuming and unchecked, the result is suicide or insanity. A less dangerous and pathological form of a regressive search for unity is the aim of remaining tied to mother's breast, or to mother's hand, or to father's command. The differences between these various aims mark the differences between various kinds of personalities. The one who remains on mother's breast is the eternally dependent suckling, who has a feeling of euphoria when he is loved, taken care of, protected, and admired, and is filled with unbearable anxiety when threatened with separation from the all-loving mother. The one who remains bound to father's command may develop a good deal of initiative and activity, yet always under the condition that an authority is present who gives orders, who praises and punishes. Another form of regressive orientation lies in destructiveness, in the aim of overcoming separateness by the passion to destroy everything and everybody. One can seek it by the wish to eat up and incorporate everything and everybody, that is, by experiencing the world and everything in it as food, or by outright destruction of everything except the one thing—himself. Still another form of trying to heal the suffering of separateness lies in building up one's own Ego, as a separate, fortified indestructible "thing." One then experiences oneself as one's own property, one's power, one's prestige, one's intellect.

The individual's emergence from regressive unity is accompanied by the gradual overcoming of narcissism. For the infant shortly after birth there is not even awareness of reality existing outside of himself in the sense of sense-perception; he and mother's nipple and mother's breast are still one; he finds himself in a state *before* any subject-object differentiation takes place. After a while, the capacity for subject-object differentiation develops in every child—but only in the obvious sense of awareness of the difference between me and not-me. But in an *affective* sense, it takes the development of full maturity to overcome the narcissistic attitude of omniscience and omnipotence, provided this stage is ever reached. We observe this narcissistic attitude clearly in the behavior of children and of neurotic persons, except that with the former it is usually conscious, with the latter unconscious. The child does not accept reality as it is, but as he wants it to be. He lives in his wishes, and his view of reality is what he wants it to be. If his wish is not fulfilled, he gets furious, and the function of his fury is to force the world (through the medium of father and mother) to correspond to his wish. In the normal development of the child, this attitude slowly changes to the mature one of being aware of reality and accepting it, its laws, hence necessity. In the neurotic person we find invariably that he has not arrived at this point, and has not given up the narcissistic interpretation of reality. He insists that reality must conform to his ideas, and when he recognizes that this is not so, he reacts either with the impulse to force reality to correspond to his wishes (that is, to do the impossible) or with a feeling of powerlessness because he can not perform the impossible. The notion of freedom which this person has is, whether he is aware of it

or not, a notion of narcissistic omnipotence, while the notion of freedom of the fully developed person is that of recognizing reality and its laws and acting within the laws of necessity, by relating oneself to the world productively by grasping the world with one's own powers of thought and affect.

These different goals and the ways to attain them are not primarily different systems of *thought*. They are different *ways of being*, different answers of the total man to the question which life asks him. They are the same answers which have been given in the various religious systems which make up the history of religion. From primitive cannibalism to Zen Buddhism, the human race has given only a few answers to the question of existence, and each man in his own life gives one of these answers, although usually he is not aware of the answer he gives. In our Western culture almost everybody *thinks* that he gives the answer of the Christian or Jewish religions, or the answer of an enlightened atheism, and yet if we could take a mental X-ray of everyone, we would find so many adherents of cannibalism, so many of totem worship, so many worshipers of idols of different kinds, and a few Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists. Religion is the formalized and elaborate answer to man's existence, and since it can be shared in consciousness and by ritual with others, even the lowest religion creates a feeling of reasonableness and of security by the very communion with others: When it is not shared, when the regressive wishes are in contrast to consciousness and the claims of the existing culture, then the secret, individual "religion" is a neurosis.

In order to understand the individual patient—or any human being—one must know what his answer to the question of existence

is, or, to put it differently, what his secret, individual religion is, to which all his *efforts* and passions are devoted. Most of what one considers to be “psychological problems” are only secondary consequences of his basic “answer,” and hence it is rather useless to try to “cure” them before this basic answer—that is, his secret, private religion—has been understood.

Returning now to the question of well-being, how are we going to define it in the light of what has been said thus far?

Well-being is the state of having arrived at the full development of reason: reason not in the sense of a merely intellectual judgment, but in that of grasping truth by “letting things be” (to use Heidegger’s term) as they are. Well-being is possible only to the degree to which one has overcome one’s narcissism; to the degree to which one is open, responsive, sensitive, awake, empty (in the Zen sense). Well-being means to be fully related to man and nature affectively, to overcome separateness and alienation, to arrive at the experience of oneness with all that exists—and yet to experience *myself* at the same time as the separate entity *I* am, as the individual. Well-being means to be fully born, to become what one potentially is; it means to have the full capacity for joy and for sadness or, to put it still differently, to awake from the half-slumber the average man lives in, and to be fully awake. If it is all that, it means also to be creative; that is, to react and to respond to myself, to others, to everything that exists—to react and to respond as the real, total man I am to the reality of everybody and everything as he or it is. In this act of true response lies the area of creativity, of seeing the world as it is *and* experiencing it as my world, the world created and transformed by my creative grasp of it, so that the world ceases to be a strange

world “over there” and becomes *my* world. Well-being means, finally, to drop one’s Ego, to give up greed, to cease chasing after the preservation and the aggrandizement of the Ego, to be and to experience one’s self in the act of being, not in having, preserving, coveting, using.

I have, in the foregoing remarks, tried to point to the parallel development in the individual and in the history of religion. In view of the fact that this paper deals with the relationship of psychoanalysis to Zen Buddhism I feel it is necessary to elaborate further on at least some psychological aspects of religious development.

I have said that man is asked a question by the very fact of his existence, and that this is a question raised by the contradiction within himself—that of being in nature and at the same time of transcending nature by the fact that he is life aware of itself. Any man who listens to this question posed to him, and who makes it a matter of “ultimate concern” to answer this question, and to answer it as a whole man and not only by thoughts, is a “religious” man; and all systems that try to give, teach and transmit such answers are “religions.” On the other hand, any man—and any culture—that tries to be deaf to the existential question is irreligious. There is no better example that can be cited for men who are deaf to the question posed by existence than we ourselves, living in the twentieth century. We try to evade the question by concern with property, prestige, power, production, fun, and ultimately, by trying to forget that we—that I—exist. No matter how often he *thinks* of God or goes to church, or how much he believes in religious ideas, if he, the whole man, is deaf to the question of existence, if he does not have an answer to it, he is marking time, and he lives and dies like one of the

million things he produces. He *thinks of* God, instead of experiencing *being* God.

But it is deceptive to think of religions as if they had, necessarily, something in common beyond the concern with giving *an* answer to the question of existence. As far as the *content of* religion is concerned, there is no unity whatsoever; on the contrary, there are two fundamentally opposite answers, which have been mentioned already above with regard to the individual: one answer is to go back to prehuman, preconscious existence, to do away with reason, to become an animal, and thus to become one with nature again. The forms in which this wish is expressed are manifold. At the one pole are phenomena such as we find in the Germanic secret societies of the “berserkers” (literally: “bear shirts”) who identified themselves with a bear, in which a young man during his initiation, had to transmute his humanity by a fit of aggressive and terror-striking fury, which assimilated him to the raging beast of prey”⁹ (That this tendency of returning to the prehuman unity with nature is by no means restricted to primitive societies becomes transparent if we make the connection between the “bear shirts” and Hitler’s “brown shirts.” While a large sector of the adherents of the National Socialist Party was composed simply of secular, opportunistic, ruthless, power-seeking politicians, Junkers, generals, businessmen, and bureaucrats, the core, represented by the triumvirate of Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels, was essentially not different from the primitive “bear shirts” driven by a “sacred” fury and the aim to destroy as the ultimate fulfillment *of* their religious vision. These “bear shirts” of the twentieth century who revived the “ritual murder” legend concerning the Jews actually, in doing so, projected one of

their own deepest desires: ritual murder. They committed ritual murder first of the Jews, then of foreign populations, then of the German people themselves and eventually they murdered their own wives and children and themselves in the final rite of complete destruction.) There are many other less archaic religious forms of striving for prehuman unity with nature. They are to be found in cults where the tribe is identified with a totem animal, in religious systems devoted to the worship of trees, lakes, caves, etc., in orgiastic cults which have as their aim the elimination of consciousness, reason, and conscience. In all these religions, the sacred is that which pertains to the vision of man's transmutation into a prehuman part of nature; the "holy man" (for instance, the shaman) is the one who has gone furthest in the achievement of his aim.

The other pole of religion is represented by all those religions which seek the answer to the question of human existence by emerging fully from prehuman existence, by developing the specifically human potentiality of reason and love, and thus by finding a new harmony between man and nature—and between man and man. Although such attempts may be *found in* individuals of relatively primitive societies, the great dividing line for the whole of humanity seems to lie in the period between roughly 2000 B.C. and the beginning of our era. Taoism and Buddhism in the Far East, Ikhnaton's religious revolutions in Egypt, the Zoroastrian religion in Persia, the Moses religion in Palestine, the Quetzalcoatl religion in Mexico,¹⁰ represent the full turn humanity has taken.

Unity is sought in all these religions—not the regressive unity found by going back to the pre-individual, preconscious harmony of paradise, but unity on a new level: that unity which can be arrived at

only after man has experienced his separateness, after he has gone through the stage of alienation from himself and from the world, and has been fully born. This new unity has as a premise the full development of man's reason, leading to a stage in which reason no longer separates man from his immediate, intuitive grasp of reality. There are many symbols for the new goal which lies ahead, and not in the past: Tao, Nirvana, Enlightenment, the Good, God. The differences between these symbols are caused by the social and cultural differences existing in the various countries in which they arose. In the Western tradition the symbol chosen for "the goal" was that of the authoritarian figure of the highest king, or the highest tribal chief. But as early as the time of the Old Testament, this figure changes from that of the arbitrary ruler to that of the ruler bound to man by the covenant and the promises contained therein. In prophetic literature the aim is seen as that of a new harmony between man and nature and in the messianic time; in Christianity, God manifests himself as man; in Maimonides' philosophy, as well as in mysticism, the anthropomorphic and authoritarian elements are almost completely eliminated, although in the popular forms of the Western religions they have remained without much change.

What is common to Jewish-Christian and Zen Buddhist thinking is the awareness that I must give up my "will" (in the sense of my desire to force, direct, strangle the world outside of me and within me) in order to be completely open, responsive, awake, alive. In Zen terminology this is often called "to make oneself empty"—which does not mean something negative, but means the openness to receive. In Christian terminology this is often called "to slay oneself and to accept the will of God." There seems to be little difference between

the Christian experience and the Buddhist experience which lies behind the two different formulations. However, as far as the popular interpretation and experience is concerned, this formulation means that instead of making decisions himself, man leaves the decisions to an omniscient, omnipotent father; who watches over him and knows what is good for him. It is clear that in this experience man does not become open and responsive, but obedient and submissive. To follow God's will in the sense of true surrender of egoism is best done if there is no concept of God. Paradoxically, I truly follow God's will if I forget about God. Zen's concept of emptiness implies the true meaning of giving up one's will, yet without the danger of regressing to the idolatrous concept of a helping father.

IV. THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS, REPRESSION AND DE-REPRESSION

In the foregoing chapter I have tried to outline the ideas of man and of human existence which underlie the goals of humanistic psychoanalysis. But psychoanalysis shares these general ideas with other humanistic philosophical or religious concepts. We must now proceed to describe the specific approach through which psychoanalysis tries to accomplish its goal.

The most characteristic element in the psychoanalytic approach is, without any doubt, its attempt to *make the unconscious conscious*—or, to put it in Freud's words, to transform Id into Ego. But while this formulation sounds simple and clear, it is by no means so.

Questions immediately arise: What is the unconscious? What is consciousness? What is repression? How does the unconscious become conscious? And if this happens, what effect does it have?

First of all we must consider that the terms *conscious* and *unconscious* are used with several different meanings. In one meaning, which might be called functional, “conscious” and “unconscious” refer to a subjective state within the individual. Saying that he is conscious of this or that psychic content means that he is *aware* of affects, of desires, of judgments, etc. Unconscious, used in the same sense, refers to a state of mind in which the person is not aware of his inner experiences; if he were totally unaware of *all* experiences, including sensory ones, he would be precisely like a person who *is* unconscious. Saying that the person is conscious of certain affects, etc., means *he is conscious* as far as these affects are concerned; saying that certain affects are unconscious means that he *is* unconscious as far as these contents are concerned. We must remember that “unconscious” does not refer to the absence of any impulse, feeling, desire, fear, etc., but only to the absence of *awareness* of these impulses.

Quite different from the use *of* conscious and unconscious in the functional sense just described is another use in which one refers to certain localities in the person and to certain contents connected with these localities. This is usually the case if the words “*the* conscious” and “*the* unconscious” are used. Here “the conscious” is one *part of the personality*, with specific contents, and “the unconscious” is another part of the personality, with other specific contents. In Freud’s view, the unconscious is essentially the seat of irrationality. In Jung’s thinking, the meaning seems to be almost reversed; the

unconscious is essentially the seat of the deepest sources of wisdom, while the conscious is the intellectual part of the personality. In this view of the conscious and the unconscious, the latter is perceived as being like the cellar of a house, in which everything is piled up that has no place in the superstructure; Freud's cellar contains mainly man's vices; Jung's contains mainly man's wisdom.

As H. S. Sullivan has emphasized, the use of "the unconscious" in the sense of locality is unfortunate, and a poor representation of the psychic facts involved. I might add that the preference for this kind of substantive rather than for functional concept corresponds to the general tendency in contemporary Western culture to perceive in terms of things we *have*, rather than to perceive in terms of *being*. We *have* a problem of anxiety, we *have* insomnia, we *have* a depression, we *have* a psychoanalyst, just as we have a car, a house, or a child. In the same vein we also *have* an "unconscious." It is not accidental that many people use the word "subconscious" instead of the word "unconscious." They do it obviously for the reason that "subconscious" lends itself better to the localized concept; I can say "I am unconscious of" this or that, but I cannot say "I am subconscious" of it.

There exists still another use of "conscious," which sometimes leads to confusion. Consciousness is identified with *reflecting intellect*, the unconscious with unreflected experience. There can, of course, be no objection to this use of conscious and unconscious, provided the meaning is clear and not confused with the other two meanings. Nevertheless, this use does not seem fortunate; intellectual reflection is, of course, always conscious, but not all that is conscious is intellectual reflection. If I look at a person, I am *aware*

of the person, I am aware of whatever happens in me in relation to the person, but only if I have separated myself from him in a subject-object distance is this consciousness identical with intellectual reflection. The same holds true if I am aware of my breathing, which is by no means the same as *thinking about* my breathing; in fact, once I begin to think *about* my breathing, I am not aware of my breathing any more. The same holds true for all my acts of relating myself to the world. More will be said about this later on.

Having decided to speak of unconscious and conscious as states of awareness and unawareness, respectively, rather than as “parts” of personality and specific contents, we must now consider the question of what prevents an experience from reaching our awareness—that is, from becoming conscious.

But before we begin to discuss this question, another one arises which should be answered first. If we speak in a psychoanalytic context of consciousness and unconsciousness, there is an implication that consciousness is of a higher value than unconsciousness. Why should we be striving to broaden the domain of consciousness, unless this were so? Yet it is quite obvious that consciousness as such has no particular value; in fact, most of what people have in their conscious minds is fiction and delusion; this is the case not so much because people would be *incapable* of seeing the truth as because of the function of society. Most of human history (with the exception of some primitive societies) is characterized by the fact that a small minority has ruled over and exploited the majority of its fellows. In order to do so, the minority has usually used force; but force is not enough. In the long run, the majority has had to accept its own exploitation voluntarily—and this is only possible if

its mind has been filled with all sorts of lies and fictions, justifying and explaining its acceptance of the minority's rule. However, it is not the only reason for the fact that most of what people have in their awareness about themselves, others, society, etc., is fiction. In its historical development each society becomes caught in its own need to survive in the particular form in which it has developed, and it usually accomplishes this survival by ignoring the wider human aims which are common to all men. This contradiction between the social and the universal aim leads also to the fabrication (on a social scale) of all sorts of fictions and illusions which have the function to deny and to rationalize the dichotomy between the goals of humanity and those of a given society.

We might say, then, that the content of consciousness is mostly fictional and delusional, and precisely does not represent reality. Consciousness as such, then, is nothing desirable. Only if the hidden reality (that which is unconscious) is revealed, and hence is no longer hidden (i.e., has become conscious)—has something valuable been achieved. We shall come back to this discussion at a later point. Right now I want only to emphasize that most of what is in our consciousness is “false consciousness” and that it is essentially society that fills us with these fictitious and unreal notions.

The effect of society is not only to funnel fictions into our consciousness, but also to prevent the awareness of reality. The further elaboration of this point leads us straight into the central problem of how repression or unconsciousness occurs.

The animal has a consciousness of the things around it which, to use R. M. Bucke's term, we may call “simple consciousness.” Man's brain structure, being larger and more complex than that of

the animal transcends this simple consciousness and is the basis of *self consciousness*, awareness of himself as the subject of his experience. But perhaps because of its enormous complexity¹¹ human awareness is organized in various possible ways, and for any experience to come into awareness, it must be comprehensible in the categories in which conscious thought is organized. Some of the categories, such as time and space, may be universal, and may constitute categories of perception common to all men. Others, such as causality, may be a valid category for many, but not for all, forms of human conscious perception. Other categories are even less general and differ from culture to culture. However this may be, experience can enter into awareness only under the condition that it can be perceived, related, and ordered in terms of a conceptual system¹² and of its categories. This system is in itself a result of social evolution. Every society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling, and perceiving, develops a system of categories which determines the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were, like a *socially conditioned filter*; experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter.

The question then, is to understand more concretely how this “social filter” operates, and how it happens that it permits certain experiences to be filtered through, while others are stopped from entering awareness.

First of all, we must consider that many experiences do not lend themselves easily to being perceived in awareness. Pain is perhaps the physical experience which best lends itself to being consciously perceived; sexual desire, hunger, etc., also are easily perceived; quite obviously, all sensations which are relevant to individual or

group survival have easy access to awareness. But when it comes to a more subtle or complex experience, like *seeing a rosebud in the early morning, a drop of dew on it, while the air is still chilly, the sun coming up, a bird singing*—this is an experience which in some cultures easily lends itself to awareness (for instance, in Japan), while in modern Western culture this same experience will usually not come into awareness because it is not sufficiently “important” or “eventful” to be noticed. Whether or not subtle affective experiences can arrive at awareness depends on the degree to which such experiences are cultivated in a given culture. There are many affective experiences for which a given language has no word, while another language may be rich in words which express these feelings. In English, for instance, we have one word, “love,” which covers experiences ranging from liking to erotic passion to brotherly and motherly love. In a language in which different affective experiences are not expressed by different words, it is almost impossible for one’s experiences to come to awareness, and vice versa. Generally speaking, it may be said that an experience rarely comes into awareness for which the language has no word.

But this is only one aspect of the filtering function of language. Different languages differ not only by the fact that they vary in the diversity of words they use to denote certain affective experiences, but by their syntax, their grammar, and the root-meaning of their words. The whole language contains an attitude of life, is a frozen expression of experiencing life in a certain way.[13](#)

Here are a few examples. There are languages in which the verb form “it rains,” for instance, is conjugated differently depending on whether I say that it rains because I have been out in the rain and

have got wet, or because I have seen it raining from the inside of a hut, or because somebody has told me that it rains. It is quite obvious that the emphasis of the language on these different *sources* of experiencing a fact (in this case, that it rains), has a deep influence on *the way* people experience facts. (In our modern culture, for instance, with its emphasis on the purely intellectual side of knowledge, it makes little difference how I know a fact, whether from direct or indirect experience, or from hearsay.) Or, in Hebrew the main principle of conjugation is to determine whether an activity is complete (perfect) or incomplete (imperfect), while the time in which it occurs—past, present, future—is expressed only in a secondary fashion. In Latin both principles (time and perfection) are used together, while in English we are predominantly oriented in the sense of time. Again, it goes without saying that this difference in conjugation expresses a difference in experiencing.[14](#)

Still another example is to be found in the different use of verbs and nouns in various languages, or even among different people speaking the same language. The noun refers to a “thing”; the verb refers to an activity. An increasing number of people prefer to think in terms of *having things*, instead of *being* or *acting*; hence they prefer nouns to verbs.

Language, by its words, its grammar, its syntax, by the whole spirit which is frozen in it, determines how we experience, and which experiences penetrate to our awareness.

The second aspect of the filter which makes awareness possible is the *logic* which directs the thinking of people in a given culture. Just as most people assume that their language is “natural” and that other languages only use different words for the same things, they

assume also that the rules which determine proper thinking, are natural and universal ones; that what is illogical in one cultural system is illogical in any other, because it conflicts with “natural” logic. A good example of this is the difference between Aristotelian and paradoxical logic.

Aristotelian logic is based on the law of identity which states that A is A , the law of contradiction (A is not non- A), and the law of the excluded middle (A cannot be A *and* non- A , neither A *nor* non- A): Aristotle stated it: “It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same thing and in the same respect. ... This, then, is the most certain of all principles.”¹⁵

In opposition to Aristotelian logic is what one might call paradoxical logic, which assumes that A and non- A do not exclude each other as predicates of X . Paradoxical logic was predominant in Chinese and Indian thinking, in Heraclitus’ philosophy, and then again under the name of dialectics in the thought of Hegel and Marx. The general principle of paradoxical logic has been clearly described in general terms by Lao-Tse: “Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical.”¹⁶ And by Chuang-tzu: “That which is one is one. That which is not-one, is also one.”

Inasmuch as a person lives in a culture in which the correctness of Aristotelian logic is not doubted, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for him to be aware of experiences which contradict Aristotelian logic, hence which from the standpoint of his culture are nonsensical. A good example is Freud’s concept of ambivalence, which says that one can experience love and hate for the same person at the same time. This experience, which from the standpoint of paradoxical logic is quite “logical,” does not make sense from the

standpoint of Aristotelian logic. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult for most people to be aware of feelings of ambivalence. If they are aware of love, they can not be aware of hate—since it would be utterly nonsensical to have two contradictory feelings at the same time towards the same person.[17](#)

The third aspect of the filter, aside from language and logic, is the *content* of experiences. Every society excludes certain thoughts and feelings from being thought, felt, and expressed. There are things which are not only “not done” but which are even “not thought.” In a tribe of warriors, for instance, whose members live by killing and robbing members of other tribes, there might be an individual who feels revulsion against killing and robbing. Yet it is most unlikely that he will be aware of this feeling, since it would be incompatible with the feeling of the whole tribe; to be aware of this incompatible feeling would mean the danger of feeling completely isolated and ostracized. Hence an individual with such a feeling of revulsion would probably develop a psychosomatic symptom of vomiting, instead of letting the feeling of revulsion penetrate to his awareness.

Exactly the contrary would be found in a member of a peaceful agricultural tribe, who has the impulse to go out and kill and rob members of other groups. He also would probably not permit himself to become aware of his impulses, but instead, would develop a symptom—maybe intense fright. Still another example: There must be many shopkeepers in our big cities who have a customer who badly needs, let us say, a suit of clothes, but who does not have sufficient money to buy even the cheapest one. Among those shopkeepers there must be a few who have the natural human

impulse to give the suit to the customer for the price that he can pay. But how many of these shopkeepers will permit themselves to be aware of such an impulse? I assume very few. The majority will repress it, and we might find among these men some aggressive behavior toward the customer which hides the unconscious impulse, or a dream the following night which expresses it.

In stating the thesis that contents which are incompatible with socially permissible ones are not permitted to enter the realm of awareness, we raise two further questions. Why are certain contents incompatible with a given society? Furthermore, why is the individual so afraid of being aware of such forbidden contents?

As to the first question, I must refer to the concept of the “social character.” Any society, in order to survive, must mold the character of its members in such a way that *they want to do what they have to do*; their social function must become internalized and transformed into something they feel driven to do, rather than something they are obliged to do. A society cannot permit deviation from this pattern, because if this “social character” loses its coherence and firmness, many individuals would cease to act as they are expected to do, and the survival of the society in its given form would be endangered. Societies, of course, differ in the rigidity with which they enforce their social character, and the observation of the taboos for protecting this character, but in all societies there are taboos, the violation of which results in ostracism.

The second question is why the individual is so afraid of the implied danger of ostracism that he does not permit himself to be aware of the “forbidden” impulses. To answer this question, I must also refer, to fuller statements made elsewhere.[18](#) To put it briefly,

unless he is to become insane, he has to relate himself in some way to others. To be completely unrelated brings him to the frontier of insanity. While in so far as he is an animal he is most afraid of dying, in so far as he is a man he is most afraid of being utterly alone. This fear, rather than, as Freud assumes, castration fear, is the effective agent which does not permit awareness of tabooed feelings and thoughts.

We come, then, to the conclusion that consciousness and unconsciousness are socially conditioned. *I am aware of* all my feelings and thoughts which are permitted to penetrate the threefold filter of (socially conditioned) language, logic, and taboos (social character). Experiences which cannot be filtered through remain outside of awareness; that is, they remain unconscious.[19](#)

Two qualifications have to be made in connection with the emphasis on the social nature of the unconscious. One, a rather obvious one, is that in addition to the social taboos there are individual elaborations of these taboos which differ from family to family; a child, afraid of being “abandoned” by his parents because he is aware of experiences which to them individually are taboo, will, in addition to the socially normal repression, also repress those feelings which are prevented from coming to awareness by the individual aspect of the filter. On the other hand, parents with great inner openness and with little “repressedness” will, by their own influence, tend to make the social filter (and Superego) less narrow and impenetrable.

The other qualification refers to a more complicated phenomenon. We repress not only the awareness of those strivings which are incompatible with the social pattern of thought; we tend

also to repress those strivings which are incompatible with the principle of structure and growth of the whole human being, incompatible with the “humanistic conscience,” that voice which speaks in the name of the full development of our person.

Destructive impulses, or the impulse to regress to the womb, or to death, the impulse to eat up those whom I want to be close to—all those and many other regressive impulses may or may not be compatible with the social character, but they are under no circumstances compatible with the inherent goals of the evolution of man’s nature. When an infant wants to be nursed it is normal, that is, it corresponds to the state of evolution in which the infant is at the time. If an adult has the same aims, he is ill; inasmuch as he is not only prompted by the past, but also by the goal which is inherent in his total structure, he senses the discrepancy between what he is and what he ought to be; “ought” being used here not in the moral sense of a command, but in the sense of the immanent evolutionary goals inherent in the chromosomes from which he develops, just as his future physical build, the color of his eyes, etc., are already “present” in the chromosomes.

If man loses his contact with the social group he lives in, he becomes afraid of utter isolation, and because of this fear he does not dare to think what “is not thought,” But man is also afraid of being completely isolated from humanity, which is inside of him and represented by his conscience. To be completely inhuman is frightening too, although as historical evidence seems to indicate, less frightening than to be socially ostracized, provided a whole society has adopted inhuman norms of behavior. The more a society approximates the human norm of living, the less is there a conflict

between isolation from society and from humanity. The greater the conflict between social aims and human aims, the more is the individual torn between the two dangerous poles of isolation. It hardly needs to be added that to the degree to which a person—by his own intellectual and spiritual development—feels his solidarity with humanity, the more can he tolerate social ostracism, and vice versa. The ability to act according to one's conscience depends on the degree to which one has transcended the limits of one's society and has become a citizen of the world, a "cosmopolitan."

The individual cannot permit himself to be aware of thoughts or feelings which are incompatible with the patterns of his culture, and hence he is forced to repress them. Formally speaking, then, what is unconscious and what is conscious depends (aside from the individual, family-conditioned elements and the influence of humanistic conscience) on the structure of society and on the patterns of feelings and thoughts it produces. As to the *contents of the unconscious*, no generalization is possible. But one statement can be made: it always represents the whole man, with all his potentialities for darkness and light; it always contains the basis for the different answers which man is capable of giving to the question which existence poses. In the extreme case of the most regressive cultures, bent on returning to the animal existence, this very wish is predominant and conscious, while all strivings to emerge from this level are repressed. In a culture which has moved from the regressive to the spiritual-progressive goal, the forces, representing the dark are unconscious. But man, in any culture, has all the potentialities; he is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the idolater, and he is the being with the capacity for reason, for love,

for justice. The content of the unconscious, then, is neither the good nor the evil, the rational nor the irrational; it is both; it is all that is human. The unconscious is the whole man—minus that part of man which corresponds to his society. Consciousness represents social man, the accidental limitations set by the historical situation into which an individual is thrown. Unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man, rooted in the Cosmos; it represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be “naturalized.”

Defining consciousness and unconsciousness as we have done, what does it mean if we speak of making the *unconscious conscious*, of *de-repression*?

In Freud’s concept, making the unconscious conscious had a limited function, first of all because the unconscious was supposed to consist mainly of the repressed, instinctual desires, as far as they are incompatible with civilized life. He dealt with single instinctual desires such as incestuous impulses, castration, fear; penis envy, etc., the awareness of which was assumed to have been repressed in the history of a particular individual. The awareness of the repressed impulse was supposed to be conducive to its domination by the victorious ego. When we free ourselves from the limited concept of Freud’s unconscious and follow the concept presented above, then Freud’s aim, the transformation of unconsciousness into consciousness (“Id into Ego”); gains a wider and more profound meaning. *Making the unconscious conscious transforms the mere*

idea of the universality of man into the living experience of this universality; it is the experiential realization of humanism.

Freud saw clearly how repression interferes with a person's sense of reality, and how the lifting of repression leads to a new appreciation of reality. Freud called the distorting effect of unconscious strivings "transference"; H. S. Sullivan later on called the same phenomenon "parataxic distortion." Freud discovered, first in the relationship of the patient to the analyst, that the patient did not see the analyst as *he is*, but as a projection of his (the patient's) own expectations, desires, and anxieties as they were originally formed in his experiences with the significant persons of his childhood. Only when the patient gets in touch with his unconscious can he overcome the distortions produced by himself and see the person of the analyst, as well as that of his father or his mother, as it is.

What Freud discovered here was the fact that we see reality in a distorted way: that we believe to see a person as he is, while actually we see our projection of an image of the person without being aware of it. Freud saw not only the distorting influence of transference, but also the many other distorting influences of repression. Inasmuch as a person is motivated by impulses unknown to him, and in contrast to his conscious thinking (representing the demands of social reality), he may project his own unconscious strivings onto another person, and hence not be aware of them within himself but—with indignation—in the other ("projection"). Or, he may invent rational reasons for impulses which in themselves have an entirely different source. This conscious reasoning, which is a pseudo-explanation for aims the true motives of which are unconscious, Freud called

rationalizations. Whether we deal with transference, projection, or with rationalizations, most of what the person is conscious of is a fiction—while that which he represses (i.e., which is unconscious) is real.

Taking into account what has been said above about the stultifying influence of society, and furthermore considering our wider concept of what constitutes unconsciousness, we arrive at a new concept of unconsciousness—consciousness. We may begin by saying that the average person, while he thinks he is awake, actually is half asleep. By “half asleep” I mean that his contact with reality is a very partial one; most of what he believes to be reality (outside or inside of himself) is a set of fictions which his mind constructs. He is aware of reality only to the degree to which his social functioning makes it necessary. He is aware of his fellowmen inasmuch as he needs to cooperate with them; he is aware of material and social reality inasmuch as he needs to be aware of it in order to manipulate it. *He is aware of reality to the extent to which the goal of survival makes such awareness necessary.* (In contradistinction in the state of sleep the awareness of outer reality is suspended, though easily recovered in case of necessity, and in the case of insanity, full awareness of outer reality is absent and not even recoverable in any kind of emergency.) The average person’s consciousness is mainly “false consciousness,” consisting of fictions and illusion, while precisely what he is not aware of is reality. We can thus differentiate between what a person is conscious of, and what he *becomes* conscious of. He is conscious, mostly, of fictions; he can *become* conscious of the realities which lie underneath these fictions.

There is another aspect of unconsciousness which follows from the premises discussed earlier. Inasmuch as consciousness represents only the small sector of socially patterned experience and unconsciousness represents the richness and depth of universal man the state of repressedness results in the fact that I, the accidental, social person, am separated from me the whole human person. I am a stranger to myself, and to the same degree everybody else is a stranger to me. I am cut off from the vast area of experience which is human, and remain a fragment of a man, a cripple who experiences only a small part of what is real in him and what is real in others.

Thus far we have spoken only of the distorting function of repressedness; another aspect remains to be mentioned which does not lead to distortion, but to making an experience unreal by *cerebration*. I refer by this to the fact that I believe I see—but I only see *words*; I believe I feel, but I only *think feelings*. The cerebrating person is the alienated person, the person in the cave who, as in Plato's allegory, sees only shadows and mistakes them for immediate reality.

This process of cerebration is related to the ambiguity of language. As soon as I have expressed something in a word, an alienation takes place, and the full experience has already been substituted for by the word. The full experience actually exists only up to the moment when it is expressed in language. This general process of cerebration is more widespread and intense in modern culture than it probably was at any time before in history. Just because of the increasing emphasis on intellectual knowledge which is a condition for scientific and technical achievements, and in

connection with it on literacy and education, words more and more take the place of experience. Yet the person concerned is unaware of this. He thinks he sees something; he thinks he feels something; yet there is no experience except memory and thought. When he thinks *he* grasps reality it is only his brain-self that grasps it, while he, the whole man, his eyes, his hands, his heart, his belly grasp nothing—in fact, *he* is not participating in the experience which he believes is *his*.

What happens then in the process in which the unconscious becomes conscious? In answering this question we had better reformulate it. There is no such thing as “the conscious” and no such thing as “the unconscious.” There are degrees of consciousness-awareness and unconsciousness-unawareness. Our question then should rather be: what happens when I become aware of what I have not been aware of before? In line with what has been said before, the general answer to this question is that every step in this process is in the direction of understanding the fictitious, unreal character of our “normal” consciousness. To become conscious of what is unconscious and thus to enlarge one’s consciousness means to get in touch with reality, and—in this sense—with truth (intellectually and affectively). To enlarge consciousness means to wake up, to lift a veil, to leave the cave, to bring light into the darkness.

Could this be the same experience Zen Buddhists call “enlightenment”?

While I shall return later to this question, I want at this point to discuss further a crucial point for psychoanalysis, namely, the *nature of insight and knowledge* which is to affect the transformation of

unconsciousness into consciousness.²⁰ Doubtlessly, in the first years of his psychoanalytic research Freud shared the conventional rationalistic belief that knowledge was intellectual, theoretical knowledge. He thought that it was enough to explain to the patient why certain developments had taken place, and to tell him what the analyst discovered in his unconscious. This intellectual knowledge, called “interpretation,” was supposed to effect a change in the patient. But soon Freud and other analysts had to discover the truth of Spinoza’s statement that *intellectual* knowledge is conducive to change only inasmuch as it is also *affective* knowledge. It became apparent that intellectual knowledge as such does not produce any change, except perhaps in the sense that by intellectual knowledge of his unconscious strivings a person may be better able to control them—which, however, is the aim of traditional ethics, rather than that of psychoanalysis. As long as the patient remains in the attitude of the detached scientific observer, taking himself as the object of his investigation, he is not in touch with his unconscious, except by *thinking* about it; he does not *experience* the wider, deeper reality within himself. Discovering one’s unconscious is, precisely, *not* an intellectual act, but an affective experience, which can hardly be put into words, if at all. This does not mean that thinking and speculation may not precede the act of discovery; but the act of discovery itself is always *a total* experience. It is total in the sense that the whole person experiences it; it is an experience which is characterized by its spontaneity and suddenness. One’s eyes are suddenly opened; oneself and the world appear in a different light, are seen from a different viewpoint. There is usually a good deal of anxiety aroused before the experience takes place, while afterwards a new feeling of

strength and certainty is present. The process of discovering the unconscious can be described as a series of ever-widening experiences, which are felt deeply and which transcend theoretical, intellectual knowledge.

The importance of this kind of *experiential knowledge* lies in the fact that it transcends the kind of knowledge and awareness in which the subject-intellect observes himself as an object, and thus that it transcends the Western, rationalistic concept of knowing. (Exceptions in the Western tradition, where experiential knowledge is dealt with, are to be found in Spinoza's highest form of knowing, intuition; in Fichte's intellectual intuition; or in Bergson's creative consciousness. All these categories of intuition transcend subject-object split knowledge. The importance of this kind of experience for the problem of Zen Buddhism will be clarified later, in the discussion of Zen.)

One more point in our brief sketch of the essential elements in psychoanalysis needs to be mentioned, *the role of the psychoanalyst*. Originally it was not different from that of any physician "treating" a patient. But after some years the situation changed radically. Freud recognized that the analyst himself needed to be analyzed, that is, to undergo the same process his patient was to submit to later. This need for the analyst's analysis was explained as resulting from the necessity to free the analyst from his own blind spots, neurotic tendencies, and so on. But this explanation seems insufficient, as far as Freud's own views are concerned, if we consider Freud's early statements, quoted above, when he spoke of the analyst needing to be a "model," a "teacher," being able to conduct a relationship between himself and the patient which is

based on “love of truth,” that precludes any kind of “sham or deception.” Freud seems to have sensed here that the analyst has a function transcending that of the physician in his relationship to his patient. But still, he did not change his fundamental concept, that of the analyst being the detached observer - and the patient being his *object* of observation. In the history of psychoanalysis, this concept of the detached observer was modified from two sides, first by Ferenczi, who in the last years of his life postulated that it was not enough for the analyst to observe and to interpret; that he had to be able to love the patient with the very love which the patient had needed as a child, yet had never experienced. Ferenczi did not have in mind that the analyst should feel erotic love toward his patient, but rather motherly or fatherly love or, putting it more generally, loving care.²¹ H. S. Sullivan approached the same point from a different aspect. He thought that the analyst must not have the attitude of a detached observer, but of a “participant observer,” thus trying to transcend the orthodox idea of the detachment of the analyst. In my own view, Sullivan may not have gone far enough, and one might prefer the definition of the analyst’s role as that of an “*observant participant*,” rather than that of a participant observer: But even the expression “participant” does not quite express what is meant here; to “participate” is still to be outside. The knowledge of another person requires being inside of him, to *be* him. The analyst understands the patient only inasmuch as he experiences in himself all that the patient experiences; otherwise he will have only intellectual knowledge *about* the patient, but will never really know what the patient experiences, nor will he be able to convey to him that *he* shares and understands his (the patient’s) experience. In this

productive relatedness between analyst and patient, in the act of being fully engaged with the patient, in being fully open and responsive to him, in being soaked with him, as it were, in this center-to-center relatedness, lies one of the essential conditions for psychoanalytic understanding and cure.²² The analyst must become the patient, yet he must be himself; he must forget that he is the doctor, yet he must remain aware of it. Only when he accepts this paradox, can he give “interpretations” which carry authority because they are rooted in his own experience. The analyst analyzes the patient, but the patient also analyzes the analyst, because the analyst, by sharing the unconscious of his patient, cannot help clarifying his own unconscious. Hence the analyst not only cures the patient, but is also cured by him. He not only understands the patient, but eventually the patient understands him. When this stage is reached, solidarity and communion are reached.

This relationship to the patient must be realistic and free from all sentimentality. Neither the analyst nor any man can “save” another human being. He can act as guide—or as a midwife; he can show the road, remove obstacles, and sometimes lend some direct help, but he can never do for the patient what only the patient can do for himself. He must make this perfectly clear to the patient, not only in words, but by his whole attitude. He must also stress the awareness of the realistic situation which is even more limited than a relationship between two persons necessarily needs to be; if he, the analyst, is to live his own life, and if he is to serve a number of patients simultaneously, there are limitations in time and space. But there is no limitation in the here and now of the encounter between patient and analyst. When this encounter takes place, during the

analytic session, when the two talk to each other, then there is nothing more important in the world than their talking to each other—for the patient as well as for the analyst. The analyst, in years of common work with the patient, transcends indeed the conventional role of the doctor; he becomes a teacher, a model, perhaps a master, provided that he himself never considers himself as analyzed until he has attained full self-awareness and freedom, until he has overcome his own alienation and separateness. The didactic analysis of the analyst is not the end, but the beginning of a continuous process of self analysis, that is, of ever-increasing awakeness.

V. PRINCIPLES OF ZEN BUDDHISM

In the foregoing pages I have given a brief sketch of Freudian psychoanalysis and its continuation in humanistic psychoanalysis. I have discussed man's existence and the question it poses; the nature of well-being defined as the overcoming of alienation and separateness; the specific method by which psychoanalysis tries to attain its goal, namely, the penetration of the unconscious. I have dealt with the question of what the nature of unconsciousness and of consciousness is; and what "knowing" and "awareness" mean in psychoanalysis; finally, I have discussed the role of the analyst in the process.

In order to prepare the ground for a discussion of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Zen, it seems as though I should have to give a systematic picture of Zen Buddhism. Fortunately, there is no need for such an attempt, since Dr. Suzuki's lectures in *Studies in Zen* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1986) (as well as his

other writings) have precisely the aim of transmitting an understanding of the nature of Zen as far as it can be given at all in words. However, I must speak of those principles of Zen which have an immediate bearing on psychoanalysis.

The essence of Zen is the acquisition of enlightenment (*satori*). One who has not had this experience can never fully understand Zen. Since I have not experienced *satori*, I can talk about Zen only in a tangential way, and not as it ought to be talked about—out of the fullness of experience. But this is not, as C. G. Jung has suggested, because *satori* “depicts an art and a way of enlightenment which is practically impossible for the European to appreciate.”²³ As far as this goes, Zen is not more difficult for the European than Heraclitus, Meister Eckhart, or Heidegger. The difficulty lies in the tremendous effort which is required to acquire *satori*; this effort is more than most people are willing to undertake, and that is why *satori* is rare even in Japan. Nevertheless, even though I cannot talk of Zen with any authority, the good fortune of having read Dr. Suzuki’s books, heard quite a few of his lectures, and read whatever else was available to me on Zen Buddhism, has given me at least an approximate idea of what constitutes Zen, an idea which I hope enables me to make a tentative comparison between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis.

What is the basic aim of Zen? To put it in Suzuki’s words: “Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one’s being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom. ... We can say that Zen liberates all the energies properly and naturally stored in each of us, which are in ordinary circumstances cramped and distorted so that they find no adequate channel for activity. ... It is the object of Zen, therefore, to save us from going crazy or being crippled. This is what

I mean by freedom, giving free play to all the creative and benevolent impulses inherently lying in our hearts. Generally, we are blind to this fact, that we are in possession of all the necessary faculties that will make us happy and loving towards one another.”[24](#) We find in this definition a number of essential aspects of Zen which I should like to emphasize: Zen is the art of *seeing into the nature of one’s being*; it is a ways *from bondage to freedom*; it *liberates our natural energies*; it *prevents us from going crazy or being crippled*; and it impels us to express our faculty for *happiness and love*.

The final aim of Zen is the experience of enlightenment, called *satori*. Dr. Suzuki has given, in these lectures, and in his other writings, as much of a description as can be given at all. In these remarks I would like to stress some aspects which are of special importance for the Western reader, and especially for the psychologist. *Satori is not* an abnormal state of mind; it is not a trance in which reality disappears. It is not a narcissistic state of mind, as it can be seen in some religious manifestations. “If anything, it is a perfectly normal state of mind. ...” As Jōshū declared, “Zen is your everyday thought, it all depends on the adjustment of the hinge, whether the door opens in or opens out.”[25](#) *Satori* has a peculiar effect on the person who experiences it. “All your mental activities will now be working in a different key, which will be more satisfying, more peaceful, more full of joy than anything you ever experienced before. The tone of life will be altered. There is something rejuvenating in the possession of Zen. The spring flower will look prettier, and the mountain stream runs cooler and more transparent.”[26](#)

It is quite clear that *satori* is the true fulfillment of the state of well-being which Dr. Suzuki described in the passage quoted above. If we would try to express enlightenment in psychological terms, I would say that it is a state in which the person is completely tuned to the reality outside and inside of him, a state in which he is fully aware of it and fully grasps it. *He* is aware of it—that is, not his brain, nor any other part of his organism, but *he*, the whole man. He is aware of *it*; not as of an object over there which he grasps with his thought, but *it*, the flower, the dog, the man, in its, or his, full reality. He who awakes is open and responsive to the world, and he can be open and responsive because he has given up holding on to himself as a thing, and thus has become empty and ready to receive. To be enlightened means “the full awakening of the total personality to reality.”

It is very important to understand that the state of enlightenment is not a state of dissociation or of a trance in which one *believes* oneself to be awakened, when one is actually deeply asleep. The Western psychologist, of course, will be prone to believe that *satori* is just a subjective state, an auto-induced sort of trance, and even a psychologist as sympathetic to Zen as Dr. Jung cannot avoid the same error. Jung writes: “The imagination itself is a psychic occurrence, and therefore, whether an enlightenment is called real or imaginary is quite immaterial. The man who has enlightenment, or alleges that he has it, thinks in any case that he is enlightened... Even if he were to lie, his lie would be a spiritual fact.”²⁷ This is, of course, part of Jung’s general relativistic position with regard to the “truth” of religious experience. Contrary to him, I believe that a lie is never “a spiritual fact,” nor any other fact, for that matter, except that

of being a lie. But whatever the merits of the case, Jung's position is certainly not shared by Zen Buddhists. On the contrary, it is of crucial importance for them to differentiate between genuine *satori* experience, in which the acquisition of a new viewpoint is real, and hence true, and a pseudo-experience which can be of a hysterical or psychotic nature, in which the Zen student is convinced of having obtained *satori*, while the Zen-master has to make it clear that he has not. It is precisely one of the functions of the Zen master to be on guard against his student's confusion of real and imaginary enlightenment.

The full awakening to reality means, again speaking in psychological terms, to have attained a fully "productive orientation." That means not to relate oneself to the world receptively; exploitatively, hoardingly, or in the marketing fashion, but creatively, actively (in Spinoza's sense). In the state of full productiveness there are no veils which separate me from the "not me." The object is not an object any more; it does not stand against me, but is with me. The rose I see is not an object for my thought, in the manner that when I say "I see a rose" I only state that the object, a rose, falls under the category "rose," but in the manner that "a rose is a rose is a rose." The state of productiveness is at the same time the state of highest objectivity; I see the object without distortions by my greed and fear. I see it as it or he is, not as I wish it or him to be or not to be. In this mode of perception there are no parataxic distortions. There is complete aliveness, and the synthesis is of subjectivity-objectivity. I experience intensely—yet the object is left to be what it is. I bring it to life—and it brings me to life. *Satori* appears mysterious only to the person who is not aware to what degree his perception of the world

is purely mental, or parataxical. If one is aware of this, one is also aware of a different awareness, that which one can also call a fully realistic one. One may have only experienced glimpses of it—yet one can imagine what it is. A little boy studying the piano does not play like a great master. Yet the master's playing is nothing mysterious; it is only the perfection of the rudimentary experience the boy has.

That the undistorted and non-cerebral perception of reality is an essential element of Zen experience is expressed quite clearly in two Zen stories. One is the story of a master's conversation with a monk:

“Do you ever make an effort to get disciplined in the truth?”

“Yes, I do.”

“How do you exercise yourself?”

“When I am hungry, I eat; when I am tired, I sleep.”

“This is what everybody does; can they be said to be exercising themselves in the same way as you do?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because when they eat, they do not eat, but are thinking of various other things, thereby allowing themselves to be disturbed; when they sleep they do not sleep, but dream of a thousand and one things. This is why they are not like myself.”[28](#)

The story hardly needs any explanation. The average person, driven by insecurity, greed, fear, is constantly enmeshed in a world of phantasies (not necessarily being aware of it) in which he clothes the world in qualities which he projects into it, but which are not there. This was true at the period when this conversation took place; how

much more is it true today, when almost everybody sees, hears, feels, and tastes with his thoughts, rather than with those powers within himself which can see, hear, feel, and taste.

The other, equally revealing, statement is that of a Zen master who said: "Before I was enlightened the rivers were rivers and the mountains were mountains. When I began to be enlightened the rivers were not rivers any more and the mountains were not mountains. Now, since I am enlightened, the rivers are rivers again and the mountains are mountains." Again we see the new approach to reality. The average person is like the man in Plato's cave, seeing only the shadows and mistaking them for the substance. Once he has recognized this error, he knows only that the shadows are *not* the substance. But when he becomes enlightened, he has left the cave and its darkness for the light: there he sees the substance and not the shadows. He is awake. As long as he is in the dark, he cannot understand the light (as the Bible says: "A light shines in the darkness and the darkness understandeth not"). Once he be out of the darkness, he understands the difference between how he saw the world as shadows and how he sees it now, as reality.

Zen is aimed at the knowledge of one's own nature. It searches to "know thyself." But this knowledge is not the "scientific" knowledge of the modern psychologist, the knowledge of the knower-intellect who knows himself as object; knowledge of self in Zen is knowledge which is not intellectual, which is non-alienated, it is full experience in which knower and known become one: As Suzuki has put it: "The basic idea of Zen is to come in touch with the inner workings of one's being, and to do this in the most direct way possible, without resorting to anything external or super-added."[29](#)

This insight into one's own nature is not an intellectual one, standing outside, but an experiential one, being inside, as it were. This difference between intellectual and experiential knowledge is of central importance for Zen and, at the same time, constitutes one of the basic difficulties the Western student has in trying to understand Zen. The West, for two thousand years (and with only few exceptions, such as the mystics) has believed that a final answer to the problem of existence can be given in *thought*; the "right answer" in religion and in philosophy is of paramount importance. By this insistence the way was prepared for the flourishing of the natural sciences. Here the right thought, while not giving a final answer to the problem of existence, is inherent in the method and necessary for the application of the thought to practice, that is, for technique. Zen, on the other hand, is based on the premise that the ultimate answer to life cannot be given in thought. "The intellectual groove of 'yes' and 'no' is quite accommodating when things run their regular course; but as soon as the ultimate question of life comes up, the intellect fails to answer satisfactorily."³⁰ For this very reason, the experience of *satori* can never be conveyed intellectually. It is "an experience which no amount of explanation and argument can make communicable to others, unless the latter themselves had it previously. If *satori* is amenable to analysis in the sense that by so doing it becomes perfectly clear to another who has never had it, that *satori will* not be *satori*. For a *satori* turned into a concept ceases to be itself; and there will no more be a Zen experience."³¹

It is not only that the final answer to life can not be given by any intellectual formulation; in order to arrive at enlightenment, one has to do away with the many constructs of the mind, which impede true

insight. “Zen wants one’s mind free and unobstructed; even the idea of oneness and allness is a stumbling block and a strangling snare which threatens the original freedom of the spirit.”³² As a further consequence, the concept of participation or empathy, so emphasized by Western psychologists, is unacceptable to Zen thought. “The idea of participation or empathy is an intellectual interpretation of primary experience, while as far as the experience itself is concerned, there is no room for any sort of dichotomy. The intellect, however, obtrudes itself and breaks up the experience in order to make it amenable to intellectual treatment, which means a discrimination or bifurcation. The original feeling of identity is then lost and intellect is allowed to have its characteristic way of breaking up reality into pieces. Participation or empathy is the result of intellectualization. The philosopher who has no original experience is apt to indulge in it.”³³

Not only intellect, but any authoritative concept or figure, restricts the spontaneity of experience; thus Zen “does not attach any intrinsic importance to the sacred sutras or to their exegesis by the wise and learned. Personal experience is strongly acting against authority and objective revelation...”³⁴ In Zen God is neither denied nor insisted upon. “Zen wants absolute freedom even from God.”³⁵ It wants the sane freedom, even, from Buddha; hence the Zen saying, “Cleanse your mouth when you utter the word Buddha.”

In accordance with Zen’s attitude towards intellectual insight, its aim of teaching is not as in the West an ever-increasing subtlety of logical thinking, but its method “consists in putting one in a dilemma, out of which one must contrive to escape not through logic indeed but through a mind of higher order.”³⁶ Accordingly the teacher is not

a teacher in the Western sense. He is a master, inasmuch as he has mastered his own mind, and hence is capable of conveying to the student the only thing that can be conveyed: his existence. "With all that the master can do, he is helpless to make the disciple take hold of the thing, unless the latter is fully prepared for it. ... The taking hold of the ultimate reality is to be done by oneself."[37](#)

The attitude of the Zen master to his student is bewildering to the modern Western reader who is caught in the alternative between an irrational authority which limits freedom and exploits its object, and a laissez-faire absence of any authority. Zen represents another form of authority, that of "rational authority." The master does not call the student; he wants nothing from him, not even that he becomes enlightened; the student comes of his own free will, and he goes of his own free will. But inasmuch as he wants to learn from the master, the fact has to be recognized that the master is a master, that is, that the master knows what the student wants to know, and does not yet know. For the master "there is nothing to explain by means of words; there is nothing to be given out as a holy doctrine. Thirty blows whether you affirm or negate. Do not remain silent, nor be discursive."[38](#) The Zen master is characterized at the same time by the complete lack of irrational authority and by the equally strong affirmation of that undemanding authority, the source of which is genuine experience.

Zen cannot possibly be understood unless one takes into consideration the idea that the accomplishment of true insight is indissolubly connected with a change in character. Here Zen is rooted in Buddhist thinking, for which characterological transformation is a condition for salvation. Greed for possession, as

for anything else, self-conceit and self-glorification are to be left behind. The attitude towards the past is one of gratitude, towards the present, of service, and towards the future, of responsibility. To live in Zen “means to treat yourself and the world in the most appreciative and reverential frame of mind,” an attitude which is the basis of “secret virtue, a very characteristic feature of Zen discipline. It means not to waste natural resources; it means to make full use, economic and moral, of everything that comes your way.”

As positive aim, the ethical goal of Zen is to achieve “complete security and fearlessness,” to move from bondage to freedom. “Zen is a matter of character and not of the intellect, which means that Zen grows out of the will as the first principle of life.[39](#)

VI. DE-REPRESSION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

What follows from our discussion of psychoanalysis[40](#) and Zen as to the relationship between the two?

The reader must have been struck by now by the fact that the assumption of incompatibility between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis results only from a superficial view of both. Quite to the contrary, the affinity between both seems to be much more striking. This chapter is devoted to a detailed elucidation of this affinity.

Let us begin with Dr. Suzuki’s statements, quoted earlier, about the aim of Zen. “Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one’s being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom. ... We can say that Zen liberates all the energies properly and naturally

stored in each of us, which are in ordinary circumstances cramped and distorted so that they find no adequate channel for activity. ... It is the object of Zen, therefore, to save us from going crazy or being crippled. This is what I mean by freedom, giving free play to all the creative and benevolent impulses inherently lying in our hearts. Generally, we are blind to this fact, that we are in possession of all the necessary faculties that will make us happy and loving towards one another.”

This description of Zen’s aim could be applied without change as a description of what psychoanalysis aspires to achieve; insight into one’s own nature, the achievement of freedom; happiness and love, liberation of energy, salvation from being insane or crippled.

This last statement, that we are confronted with the alternative between enlightenment and insanity, may sound startling, but in my opinion is born out by the observable facts. While psychiatry is concerned with the question of why *some* people become insane, the real question is why most people do not become insane. Considering man’s position in the world, his separateness, aloneness, powerlessness, and his awareness of this, one would expect this burden to be more than he can bear, so that he would, quite literally, “go to pieces” under the strain. Most people avoid this outcome by compensatory mechanisms like the overriding routine of life, conformity with the herd, the search for power, prestige, and money, dependence on idols—shared with others in religious cults—a self-sacrificing masochistic life, narcissistic inflation in short, by becoming crippled. All these compensatory mechanisms can maintain sanity, provided they work, up to a point. The only fundamental solution which truly overcomes potential insanity is the

full, productive response to the world which in its highest form is enlightenment.

Before we arrive at the central issue of the connection between psychoanalysis and Zen I want to consider some more peripheral affinities:

First to be mentioned is the ethical orientation common to Zen and to psychoanalysis. A condition for achieving the aim of Zen is the overcoming of greed, be it greed for possession or glory, or any other form of greed, (“coveting,” in the Old Testament sense). This is exactly what the aim of psychoanalysis is. In his theory of the libido evolution from the oral receptive, through the oral sadistic, the anal, to the genital level, Freud implicitly stated that the healthy character develops from the greedy, cruel, stingy, into an active, independent orientation. In my own terminology, which follows Freud’s clinical observations, I have made this value element more explicit by speaking about evolution from the receptive, through the exploitative, hoarding, marketing, to the productive orientation.⁴¹ Whatever terminology one uses, the essential point is that, in the psychoanalytic concept, greed is a pathological phenomenon; it exists where a person has not developed his active, productive capacities. Yet neither psychoanalysis nor Zen is *primarily* an ethical system. The aim of Zen transcends the goal of ethical behavior, and so does psychoanalysis. It might be said that both systems assume that the achievement of their aim brings with it an ethical transformation, the overcoming of greed and the capacity for love and compassion. They do not tend to make a man lead a virtuous life by the suppression of the “evil” desire, but they expect that the evil desire will melt away and disappear under the light and warmth

of enlarged consciousness. But whatever the causal connection between enlightenment and ethical transformation may be, it would be a fundamental error to believe that the goal of Zen can be separated from the aim of overcoming greed, self glorification, and folly, or that *satori* can be achieved without achieving humility, love, and compassion. It would be equally a mistake to assume that the aim of psychoanalysis is achieved unless a similar transformation in the person's character occurs. A person who has reached the productive level is not greedy, and at the same time he has overcome his grandiosity and the fictions of omniscience and omnipotence; he is humble and sees himself as he is. Both Zen and psychoanalysis aim at something transcending ethics, yet their aim cannot be accomplished unless an ethical transformation takes place.

Another element common to both systems is their insistence on independence from any kind of authority. This is Freud's main reason for criticizing religion. He saw as the essence of religion the illusion of substituting the dependence on God for the original dependence on a helping and punishing father. In the belief in God, man, according to Freud, continues his infantile dependence, rather than matures, which means to rely only on his own strength. What would Freud have said to a "religion" which says: "When you have mentioned Buddha's name, wash your mouth!" What would he have said to a religion in which there is no God, no irrational authority of any kind, whose main goal is exactly that of liberating man from all dependence, activating him, showing him that he, and nobody else, bears the responsibility for his fate?

Yet, it might be asked, does this anti-authoritarian attitude not contradict the significance of the person of the master in Zen, and of the analyst in psychoanalysis? Again, this question points to an element in which there is a profound connection between Zen and psychoanalysis. In both systems a guide is needed, one who has himself gone through the experience the patient (student) under his care is to achieve. Does this mean that the student becomes dependent on the master (or psychoanalyst) and that hence the master's words constitute truth for him? Undoubtedly, psychoanalysts deal with the *fact* of such dependence (transference) and recognize the powerful influence which it can have. But the aim of psychoanalysis is to understand and eventually to dissolve this tie, and instead to bring the patient to a point where he has acquired full freedom from the analyst, because he has experienced in himself that which was unconscious and has reintegrated it into his consciousness. The Zen master—and the same can be said of the psychoanalyst—knows more, and hence can have conviction in his judgment, but that does not at all mean that he imposes his judgment on the student. He has not called the student, and he does not prevent him from leaving him. If the student voluntarily comes to him and wants his guidance in walking the steep path to enlightenment, the master is willing to guide him, but only under one condition: that the student understands that, much as the master wants to help him, the student must look after himself. None of us can save anybody else's soul. One can only save oneself. All the master can do is play the role of a midwife, of a guide in the mountains. As one master said, "I really have nothing to impart to you and if I tried to do so, you might have occasion to make me an

object of ridicule. Besides, whatever I can tell you is my own, and can never be yours.”

A very striking and concrete illustration of the Zen master's attitude is to be found in Herrigel's book on the art of archery.⁴² The Zen master insists upon his rational authority, that is to say, that he knows better how to achieve the art of archery, and therefore must stress a certain way of learning it, but he does not want any irrational authority, any power over the student, the continued dependence of the student on the master. On the contrary, once the student has become a master himself, he goes his own way, and all that the master expects from him is a picture from time to time which will show him how the student is doing. It might be said that the Zen master loves his students. His love is one of realism and maturity, of making every effort to help the student in achieving his aim, and yet of knowing that nothing the master does can solve the problem *for* the student, can achieve the aim for him. This love of the Zen master is non-sentimental, realistic love, a love which accepts the reality of human fate in which none of us can save the other, and yet in which we must never cease to make every effort to give help so that another can save himself. Any love which does not know this limitation, and claims to be able to “save” another soul, is one which has not rid itself of grandiosity and ambition.

Further proof that what has been said about the Zen Master in principle holds true (or should hold true) for the psychoanalyst is hardly necessary. Freud thought that the patient's independence of the analyst could best be established by a mirror-like, impersonal attitude on the part of the analyst. But analysts like Ferenczi, Sullivan, myself, and others, who stress the need for relatedness

between analyst and patient as a condition for understanding, would entirely agree that this panc relatedness must be free from all sentimentality, unrealistic distortions, and, especially, from any—even the most subtle and indirect—interference of the analyst in the life of the patient, not even that of the demand that the patient gets well. If the patient wants to get well and to change, that is fine, and the analyst is willing to help him. If his resistance to change is too great, this is not the analyst's responsibility. All his responsibility lies in lending the best of his knowledge and effort, of giving himself to the patient in search of the aim the patient seeks him out for.

Related to the attitude of the analyst is another affinity between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis. The “teaching” method of Zen is to drive the student into a corner, as it were. The koan makes it impossible for the student to seek refuge in intellectual thought; the koan is like a barrier which makes further flight impossible. The analyst does—or should do—something similar: He must avoid the error of feeding the patient with interpretations and explanations which only prevent the patient from making the jump from thinking into experiencing. On the contrary, he must take away one rationalization after another, one crutch after another, until the patient cannot escape any longer, and instead breaks through the fictions which fill his mind and experiences reality—that is, becomes conscious of something he was not conscious of before. This process often produces a good deal of anxiety, and sometimes the anxiety would prevent the break-through, were it not for the reassuring presence of the analyst. But this reassurance is one of “being there”, not one of words which tend to inhibit the patient from experiencing what only he can experience.

Our discussion thus far has dealt with tangential points of similarity or affinity between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis. But no such comparison can be satisfactory unless it deals squarely with the main issue of Zen, which is enlightenment, and the main issue of psychoanalysis; which is the overcoming of repressedness, the transformation of the unconscious into consciousness.

Let us sum up what has been said about this problem as far as psychoanalysis is concerned. The aim of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious. However, to speak of “the” conscious and “the” unconscious means to take words for realities. We must stick to the fact that conscious and unconscious refer to functions, not to places or contents. Properly speaking, then, we can talk only of states of various degrees of repressedness, that is, a state in which only those experiences are permitted to come to awareness which can penetrate through the social filter of language, logic, and content. To the degree to which I can rid myself of this filter and can experience myself as the universal man, that is, to the degree to which repressedness diminishes. I am in touch with the deepest sources within myself, and that means with all of humanity. If all repressedness has been lifted, there is no more unconscious as against conscious; there is direct, immediate experience; inasmuch as I am not a stranger to myself, no one and nothing is a stranger to me. Furthermore, to the degree to which part of me is alienated from myself, and my “unconscious” is separated from my conscious (that is I, the whole man, am separated from the I, the social man), my grasp of the world is falsified in several ways. First, in the way of parataxic distortions (transference); I experience the other person not with my total self, but with my split, childish self, and thus another

person is experienced as a significant person of one's childhood, and not as the person he really is.

Secondly, man in the state of repressedness experiences the world with a false consciousness. He does not see what exists, but he puts his thought image into things, and sees them in the light of his thought images and fantasies, rather than in their reality. It is the thought image, the distorting veil, that creates his passions, his anxieties. Eventually, the repressed man, instead of experiencing things and persons, experiences by *cerebration*. He is under the illusion of being in touch with the *world*, while he is only in touch with words. Parataxic distortion, false consciousness, and cerebration are not strictly separate ways of unreality; they are, rather, different and yet overlapping aspects of the same phenomenon of unreality which exists as long as the universal man is separated from the social man. We only describe the same phenomenon in a different way by saying that the person who lives in the state of repressedness is the alienated person. He projects his own feelings and ideas on objects, and then does not experience himself as the subject of his feelings, but is ruled by the objects which are charged with his feelings.

The opposite of the alienated, distorted, parataxic, false, cerebrated experience, is the immediate, direct, total grasp of the world which we see in the infant and child before the power of education changes this form of experience. For the newborn infant there is as yet no separation between the me and the not-me. This separation gradually takes place, and the final achievement is expressed by the fact that the child can say "I." But still the child's grasp of the world remains relatively immediate and direct. When the child plays with a ball, it really sees the ball moving, it is fully *in* this

experience, and that is why it is an experience which can be repeated without end, and with a never ceasing joy. The adult also believes that he sees the ball rolling. That is of course true, inasmuch as he sees that the object-ball is rolling on the object-floor. But he does not really see the rolling. He *thinks* the rolling ball on the surface. When he says "the ball rolls," he actually confirms only (a) his knowledge that the round object over there is called a ball and (b) his knowledge that round objects roll on a smooth surface when given a push. His eyes operate with the end of proving his knowledge, and thus making him secure in the world.

The state of non-repressedness is a state in which one acquires again the immediate, undistorted grasp of reality, the simpleness and spontaneity of the child; yet, *after* having gone through the process of alienation, of development of one's intellect, non-repressedness is return to innocence on a higher level; this return to innocence is possible only after one has lost one's innocence.

This whole idea has found a clear expression in the Old Testament, in the story of the Fall, and in the prophetic concept of the Messiah. Man, in the biblical story, finds himself in a state of undifferentiated unity in the Garden of Eden. There is no consciousness, no differentiation, no choice, no freedom, no sin. He is part of nature, and he is not aware of any distance between himself and nature. This state of primordial, pre-individual unity is disrupted by the first act of choice, which is at the same time the first act of disobedience and of freedom. The act brings about the emergence of consciousness. Man is aware of himself as he, of his separateness from Eve the woman, and from nature, animals, and the earth. When he experiences this separateness he feels ashamed

—as we all still feel ashamed (though unconsciously) when we experience the-separateness from our fellowman. He leaves the Garden of Eden, and this is the beginning of human history. He can not return to the original state of harmony yet he can strive for a new state of harmony by developing his reason, his objectivity, his conscience, and his love fully, so that, as the prophets express it, the “earth is full of the knowledge of God as the ocean is *full of water*.” History, in the Messianic concept, is the place in which there will occur this development from pre-individual, pre-conscious harmony to a new harmony, a harmony based on the completion and perfection of the development of reason. This new state of harmony is called the Messianic time in which the conflict between man and nature, man and man, will have disappeared, in which the desert will become a fruitful valley, in which the lamb and the wolf will rest side by side, and in which swords will be transformed into ploughshares. The Messianic time is the time of the Garden of Eden, and yet it is its opposite: It is oneness, immediacy, entirety, but of the fully developed man who has become a child again, yet has outgrown being a child.

The same idea is expressed in the New Testament: “Truly, I say to you, whosoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”[43](#) The meaning is clear: we have to become children again, to experience the unalienated, creative grasp of the world; but in becoming children again we are at the same time not children, but fully developed adults. Then, indeed, we have the experience which the New Testament describes like this: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully even as I have been *fully* understood.”[44](#)

To “become conscious of the unconscious” means to overcome repressedness and alienation from myself, and hence from the stranger. It means to wake up, to shed illusions, fictions, and lies, to see reality as it is. The man who wakes up is the liberated man, the man whose freedom cannot be restricted either by others or by himself. The process of becoming aware of that which one was not aware of constitutes the inner revolution of man. It is the true awakening which is at the root of both creative intellectual thought and intuitive immediate grasp. To lie is possible only in a state of alienation, where reality is not experienced except as a thought. In the state of being open to reality which exists in being awakened, to lie is impossible because the lie would melt under the strength of experiencing *fully*. In the last analysis, to make the unconscious conscious means to live in truth. Reality has ceased to be alienated; I am open to it; I let it be; hence my responses to it are “true.”

This aim of the immediate, full grasp of the world is the aim of Zen. Since Dr. Suzuki has written about the unconscious in *Studies in Zen* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), I can refer to his discussion, and thus try to clarify further the connection between the psychoanalytic and the Zen concepts.

First of all, I should like to point again to the terminological difficulty which, I believe, unnecessarily complicates matters; the use of the conscious and *the* unconscious, instead of the functional term of greater or lesser awareness of experience in the total man. I believe that, if we free our discussion from these terminological obstacles, we can recognize more readily the connection between the true meaning of making the unconscious conscious and the idea of enlightenment.

“The Zen approach is to enter right into the object itself and see it, as it were, from the inside.”[45](#) This immediate grasp of reality “may also be called connative or creative.”[46](#) Suzuki then speaks of this source of creativity as of “Zen’s unconscious” and continues by saying that “the unconscious is something to feel, not in its ordinary sense, but in what I would call the most primary or fundamental sense.”[47](#) The formulation speaks here of the unconscious as of a realm within the personality and transcending it, and, as Suzuki goes on to say, “the feeling of the unconscious is... basic [and] primary.”[48](#) Translating this into functional terms I would not speak of feeling “the” unconscious, but rather of being aware of a deeper and not conventionalized area of experience, or to put it differently, lessening the degree of repressedness, and thus reducing the parataxic distortion, image projections, and cerebration of reality. When Suzuki speaks of the Zen-man as being “in direct communion with the great unconscious,”[49](#) I would prefer the formulation: being aware of his own reality, and of the reality of the world in its full depth and without veils. A little later Suzuki uses the same functional language when he states: “In fact, it [the unconscious] is, on the contrary, the most intimate thing to us and it is just because of this intimacy that it is difficult to take hold of, in the same way as the eye can not see itself. To *become*, therefore, *conscious of the unconscious requires a special training on the part of consciousness.*”[50](#) Here Suzuki chooses a formulation which would be exactly the one chosen from the psychoanalytic standpoint: the aim is to become conscious of the unconscious, and in order to achieve this aim a special training on the part of consciousness is necessary. Does this imply that Zen and

psychoanalysis have the same aim, and that they differ only in the training of the consciousness they have developed?

Before we return to this point, I should like to discuss a few other points which need to be clarified.

Dr. Suzuki, in his discussion, refers to the same problem which I mentioned in the discussion of the psychoanalytic concept above, that of knowledge vs. the state of innocence. What is called in biblical terms the loss of innocence, through the acquisition of knowledge, is called in Zen and in Buddhism generally “the ‘affective contamination (*klesha*)’ or ‘the interference of the conscious mind predominated by intellection (*vijñāna*).” The term intellection raises a very important problem: Is intellection the same as consciousness? In this case, making the unconscious conscious would imply the furthering of intellection and indeed lead to an aim exactly opposite to Zen’s. If this were so, then indeed the aim of psychoanalysis and of Zen would be diametrically opposed, the one striving for more intellection, the other striving for the overcoming of intellection.

It must be admitted that Freud, in the earlier years of his work, when he still believed that the proper information given the patient by the psychoanalyst was enough to cure him, had a concept of intellection as the goal of psychoanalysis; it must be admitted further that many analysts in practice have still not emerged from this concept of intellection, and that Freud never expressed himself with full clarity on the difference between intellection and the affective, total experience which occurs in genuine “working through.” Yet, it is precisely this experimental and non-intellectual insight which constitutes the aim of psychoanalysis. As I stated before, to be aware of my breathing does not mean *to think about* my breathing.

To be aware of the movement of my hand does not mean to think about it. On the contrary, once I *think* about my breathing or the movement of my hand, I am not any more aware of my breathing or of the movement of my hand. The same holds true of my awareness of a flower or a person, of my experience of joy, love, or peace. It is characteristic of all true insight in psychoanalysis that it cannot be formulated in thought, while it is characteristic of all bad analysis that “insight” is formulated in complicated theories which have nothing to do with immediate experience. The authentic psychoanalytic insight is sudden; it arrives without being forced or even being premeditated. It starts not in our brain but, to use a Japanese image, in our belly. It can not be adequately formulated in words and it eludes one if one tries to do so; yet it is real and conscious, and leaves the person who experiences it a changed person.

The immediate grasp of the world by the infant is one before consciousness, objectivity, and a sense of reality as separate from self are fully developed. In this state “the unconscious is an instinctive one, it does not go beyond that of animals and infants. It cannot be that of the mature man.”⁵¹ During the emergence from primitive unconsciousness to self-consciousness, the world is experienced as an alienated one on the basis of the split between subject and object, of separation between the universal man and the social man, between unconsciousness and consciousness. To the degree, however, to which consciousness is gained to open itself, to loosen the threefold filter, the discrepancy between consciousness and unconsciousness disappears. When it has fully disappeared there is direct, unreflected, conscious experience, precisely the kind of experience which exists without intellection and reflection. This

knowledge is what Spinoza called the highest form of knowledge, *intuition*; the knowledge which Suzuki describes as the approach which “is to enter right into the object itself and see it, as it were, from the inside”; it is the connative or creative way of seeing reality. In this experience of the immediate, reflected grasp, man becomes the “creative artist of life” which we all are and yet have forgotten that we are. “To such [creative artist of life] his every deed expresses originality, creativity, his living personality. There is no conventionality, no conformity, no inhibitory motivation. ... He has no self-encased in his fragmentary, limited, restrained ego-centric existence. He is gone out of this prison.”[52](#)

The “mature man,” if he has cleansed himself of “affective contamination” and the interference of intellection, can realize “a life of freedom and spontaneity where such disturbing feelings as fear, anxiety, or insecurity have no room to assail him.”[53](#) What Suzuki says here of the liberating function of this achievement is, indeed, what from the psychoanalytic standpoint would be said of the expected effect of full insight.

There remains a question of terminology which I want to mention only briefly since, like all terminological questions, it is not of great importance. I mentioned before that Suzuki speaks of the training of consciousness; but in other places he speaks of the “*trained unconscious* in which all the conscious experiences he has gone through since infancy are incorporated as constituting his whole being.”[54](#) One might find a contradiction in the use at one time of the “trained consciousness” and at another of the “trained unconsciousness.” But actually I do not believe that we deal here with a contradiction at all. In the process of making the unconscious

conscious, of arriving at the full and hence unreflected reality of experience, both the conscious and the unconscious must be trained. The conscious must be trained to loosen its reliance on the conventional filter, while the unconscious must be trained to emerge from its secret, separate existence, into the light. But in reality, speaking of the training of consciousness and unconsciousness means using metaphors. Neither the unconscious nor the conscious need to be trained (since there is neither a conscious nor an unconscious), but man must be trained to drop his repressedness and to experience reality fully, clearly, in all awareness, and yet without intellectual reflection, except where intellectual reflection is wanted or necessary, as in science and in practical occupations.

Suzuki suggests calling this unconscious the Cosmic Unconscious. There is, of course, no valid argument against this terminology, provided it is explained as clearly as in Suzuki's text. Nevertheless, I would prefer to use the term "Cosmic Consciousness," which Bucke used to denote a new, emerging form of consciousness.⁵⁵ I would prefer this term because if, and to the degree to which, the unconscious becomes conscious, it ceases to be unconscious (always keeping in mind that it does not become reflective intellection). The cosmic unconsciousness is the unconscious only as long as we are separated from it, that is, as long as we are unconscious of reality. To the degree to which we awaken and are in touch with reality, there is nothing we are unconscious of. It must be added that by using the term *Cosmic Consciousness*, rather than *conscious*, reference is made to the function of awareness rather than to a place within the personality.

Where does this whole discussion lead us with regard to the relationship between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis?

The aim of Zen is enlightenment: the immediate, unreflected grasp of reality, without affective contamination and intellectualization, the realization of the relation of myself to the Universe. This new experience is a repetition of the pre-intellectual, immediate grasp of the child, but on a new level, that of the full development of man's reason, objectivity, individuality. While the child's experience, that of immediacy and oneness, lies *before* the experience of alienation and the subject-object split, the enlightenment experience lies after it.

The aim of psychoanalysis, as formulated by Freud, is that of making the unconscious conscious, of replacing Id by Ego. To be sure, the content of the unconscious to be discovered was limited to a small sector of the personality, to those instinctual drives which were alive in early childhood, but which were subject to amnesia. To lift these out of the state of repression was the aim of the analytic technique. Furthermore, the sector to be uncovered, quite aside from Freud's theoretical premises, was determined by the therapeutic need to cure a particular symptom. There was little interest in recovering unconsciousness outside of the sector related to the symptom formation. Slowly the introduction of the concept of the death instinct and eros and the development of the Ego aspects in recent years have brought about a certain broadening of the Freudian concepts of the contents of the unconscious. The non-Freudian schools greatly widened the sector of the unconscious to be uncovered. Most radically Jung, but also Adler, Rank, and the other more recent so-called neo-Freudian authors have contributed

to this extension. But (with the exception of Jung), in spite of such a widening, the extent of the sector to be uncovered has remained determined by the therapeutic aim of curing this or that symptom; or this or that neurotic character trait. It has not encompassed the whole person.

However, if one follows the original aim of Freud, that of making the unconscious conscious, to its last consequences, one must free it from the limitations imposed on it by Freud's own instinctual orientation, and by the immediate task of curing symptoms. If one pursues the aim of the full recovery of the unconscious, then this task is not restricted to the instincts, nor to other limited sectors of experience, but to the total experience of the total man; then the aim becomes that of overcoming alienation, and of the subject-object split in perceiving the world; then the uncovering of the unconscious means the overcoming of affective contamination and cerebration; it means the de-repression, the abolition of the split within myself between the universal man and the social man; it means the disappearance of the polarity of conscious vs. unconscious; it means arriving at the state of the immediate grasp of reality, without distortion and without interference by intellectual reflection; it means overcoming of the craving to hold on to the ego, to worship it; it means giving up the illusion of an indestructible separate ego, which is to be enlarged, preserved and as the Egyptian pharaohs hoped to preserve themselves as mummies for eternity. To be conscious of the unconscious means to be open, responding, to *have* nothing and to *be*.

This aim of the full recovery of unconsciousness by consciousness is quite obviously much more radical than the general

psychoanalytic aim. The reasons for this are easy to see. To achieve this total aim requires an effort far beyond the effort most persons in the West are willing to make. But quite aside from this question of effort, even the visualization of this aim is possible only under certain conditions. First of all, this radical aim can be envisaged only from the point of view of a certain philosophical position. There is no need to describe this position in detail. Suffice it to say that it is one in which not the negative aim of the absence of sickness, but the positive one of the presence of well-being is aimed at, and that well-being is conceived in terms of full union, the immediate and uncontaminated grasp of the world. This aim could not be better described than has been done by Suzuki in terms of "the art of living." One must keep in mind that any such concept as the art of living grows from the soil of a spiritual humanistic orientation, as it underlies the teaching of Buddha, of the prophets, of Jesus, of Meister Eckhart, or of men such as Blake, Walt Whitman, or Bucke. Unless it is seen in this context, the concept of "the art of living" loses all that is specific, and deteriorates into a concept that goes today under the name of "happiness." It must also not be forgotten that this orientation includes an ethical aim. While Zen transcends ethics, it includes the basic ethical aims of Buddhism, which are essentially the same as those of all humanistic teaching. The achievement of the aim of Zen, as Suzuki has made very clear in his book, *Studies in Zen*, implies the overcoming of greed in all forms, whether it is the greed for possession, for fame, or for affection; it implies overcoming narcissistic self-glorification and the illusion of omnipotence. It implies, furthermore, the overcoming of the desire to submit to an authority who solves one's own problem of existence.

The person who only wants to use the discovery of the unconscious to be cured of sickness will, of course, not even attempt to achieve the radical aim which lies in the overcoming of repressedness.

But it would be a mistake to believe that the radical aim of the de-repression has no connection with a therapeutic aim. Just as one has recognized that the cure of a symptom and the prevention of future symptom formations is not possible without the analysis and change of the character, one must also recognize that the change of this or that neurotic character trait is not possible without pursuing the more radical aim of a complete transformation of the person. It may very well be that the relatively disappointing results of character analysis (which have never been expressed more honestly than by Freud in his "Analysis, Terminable or Interminable?") are due precisely to the fact that the aims for the cure of the neurotic character were not radical enough; that well-being, freedom from anxiety and insecurity, can be achieved only if the limited aim is transcended, that is, if one realizes that the limited, therapeutic aim cannot be achieved as long as it remains limited and does not become part of a wider, humanistic frame of reference. Perhaps the limited aim can be achieved with more limited and less time-consuming methods, while the time and energy consumed in the long analytic process are used fruitfully only for the radical aim of "transformation" rather than the narrow one of "reform." This proposition might be strengthened by referring to a statement made above. Man, as long as he has not reached the creative relatedness of which *satori* is the fullest achievement, at best compensates for inherent potential depression by routine, idolatry, destructiveness, greed for property or fame, etc. When any of these compensations

break down, his sanity is threatened. The cure of the potential insanity lies only in the change in attitude from split and alienation to creative, immediate grasp of and response to the world. If psychoanalysis can help in this way, it can help to achieve true mental health; if it cannot, it will only help to improve compensatory mechanisms. To put it still differently: somebody may be “cured” of a symptom, but he can not be “cured” of a character neurosis. Man is not a thing,⁵⁶ man is not a “case,” and the analyst does not cure anybody by treating him as an object. Rather, the analyst can only help a man to wake up, in a process in which the analyst is engaged with the “patient” in the process of their understanding each other, which means experiencing their oneness.

In stating all this, however, we must be prepared to be confronted with an objection. If, as I said above, the achievement of the full consciousness of the unconscious is as radical and difficult an aim as enlightenment, does it make any sense to discuss this radical aim as something which has any general application? Is it not purely speculative to raise seriously the question that only this radical aim can justify the hopes of psychoanalytic therapy?

If there were only the alternative between full enlightenment and nothing, then indeed this objection would be valid. But this is not so. In Zen there are many stages of enlightenment, of which *satori* is the ultimate and decisive step. But, as far as I understand, value is set on experiences which are steps in the direction of *satori*, although *satori* may never be reached. Dr. Suzuki once illustrated this point in the following way: If one candle is brought into an absolutely dark room, the darkness disappears, and there is light. But if ten or a hundred or a thousand candles are added, the room will become

brighter and brighter. Yet the decisive change was brought about by the first candle which penetrated the darkness.[57](#)

What happens in the analytic process? A person senses for the first time that he is vain, that he is frightened, that he hates; while consciously he had believed himself to be modest, brave, and loving. The new insight may hurt him, but it opens a door; it permits him to stop projecting on others what he represses in himself. He proceeds; he experiences the infant, the child, the adolescent, the criminal, the insane, the saint, the artist, the male, *and* the female within himself; he gets more deeply in touch with humanity, with the universal man; he represses less, is freer, has less need to project, to celebrate; then he may experience for the first time how he sees colors, how he sees a ball roll, how his ears are suddenly fully opened to music, when up to now he only listened *to* it; in sensing his oneness with others, he may have a first glimpse of the illusion that his separate individual ego is *something* to hold onto, to cultivate, to save; he will experience the futility of seeking the answer to life by *having* himself, rather than by being and becoming himself. All these are sudden, unexpected experiences with no intellectual content; yet afterwards the person feels freer, stronger, less anxious than he ever felt before.

So far we have spoken about aims, and I have proposed that if one carries Freud's principle of the transformation of unconsciousness into consciousness to its ultimate consequences, one approaches the concept of enlightenment. But as to *methods* of achieving this aim, psychoanalysis and Zen are, indeed, entirely different. The method of Zen is, one might say, that of a frontal attack on the alienated way of perception by means of the "sitting," the koan, and the authority of the master. Of course, all this is not a

“technique” which can be isolated from the premise of Buddhist thinking, of the behavior and ethical values which are embodied in the master and in the atmosphere of the monastery. It must also be remembered that it is not a “five hour a week” concern, and that by the very fact of coming for instruction in Zen the student has made a most important decision, a decision which is an important part of what goes on afterwards.

The psychoanalytic method is entirely different from the Zen method. It trains consciousness to get hold of the unconscious in a different way. It directs attention to that perception which is distorted; it leads to a recognition of the fiction within oneself; it widens the range of human experience by lifting repressedness. The analytic method is psychological-empirical. It examines the psychic development of a person from childhood on and tries to recover the earlier experiences in order to assist the person in experiencing what is now repressed. It proceeds by uncovering illusions within oneself about the world, step by step, so that parataxic distortions and alienated intellectualizations diminish. By becoming less of a stranger to himself, the person who goes through this process becomes less estranged to the world; because he has opened up communication with the universe within himself, he has opened up communication with the universe outside. False consciousness disappears, and with it the polarity conscious-unconscious. A new realism dawns in which “the mountains are mountains again.” The psychoanalytic method is of course only a method, a preparation; but so is the Zen method. By the very fact that it is a method it never guarantees the achievement of the goal. The factors which permit

this achievement are deeply rooted in the individual personality, and for all practical purposes we know little of them.

I have suggested that the method of uncovering the unconscious, if carried to its ultimate consequences, may be a step toward enlightenment, provided it is taken within the philosophical context which is most radically and realistically expressed in Zen. But only a great deal of further experience in applying this method will show how far it can lead. The view expressed here implies only a possibility and thus has the character of a hypothesis which is to be tested.

But what can be said with more certainty is that the knowledge of Zen, and a concern with it, can have a most fertile and clarifying influence on the theory and technique of psychoanalysis. Zen, different as it is in its method from psychoanalysis, can sharpen the focus, throw new light on the nature of insight, and heighten the sense of what it is to see, what it is to be creative, what it is to overcome the affective contaminations and false intellectualizations which are the necessary results of experience based on the subject-object split.

In its very radicalism with respect to intellectualization, authority, and the delusion of the ego, in its emphasis on the aim of well-being, Zen thought will deepen and widen the horizon of the psychoanalyst and help him to arrive at a more radical concept of the grasp of reality as the ultimate aim of full, conscious awareness.

If further speculation on the relation between Zen and psychoanalysis is permissible, one might think of the possibility that psychoanalysis may be significant to the student of Zen. I can visualize it as a help in avoiding the danger of a false enlightenment

(which is, of course, no enlightenment), one which is purely subjective, based on psychotic or hysterical phenomena, or on a self-induced state of trance. Analytic clarification might help the Zen student to avoid illusions, the absence of which is the very condition of enlightenment.

Whatever the use is that Zen may make of psychoanalysis, from the standpoint of a Western psychoanalyst I express my gratitude for this precious gift of the East, especially to Dr. Suzuki, who has succeeded in expressing it in such a way that none of its essence becomes lost in the attempt to translate Eastern into Western thinking, so that the Westerner, if he takes the trouble, can arrive at an understanding of Zen, as far as it can be arrived at before the goal is reached. How could such understanding be possible, were it not for the fact that "Buddha nature is in all of us," that man and existence, are universal categories, and that the immediate grasp of reality, waking up, and enlightenment, are universal experiences.

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Notes

1 Cf. Jung's introduction to D. T. Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism* (London, Rider, 1949); the French psychiatrist Benoit's work on Zen Buddhism, *The Supreme Doctrine* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1955). The late Karen Horney was intensely interested in Zen Buddhism during the last years of her life. The conference held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, is another symptom of the interest of psychoanalysts in Zen Buddhism. There is also considerable interest in Japan in the relation between psychotherapy and Zen Buddhism. Cf. Koji Sato's paper on "Psychotherapeutic Implications of Zen," in *Psychologia, An International Journal of Psychology in the Orient*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1958), and other papers in the same issue.

2 Cf. the writings of Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche and, at present, of existentialist philosophers and of Lewis Mumford, Paul Tillich, Erich Kahler, David Riesman, and others.

3 For details of the quasi-religious character of the psychoanalytic movement which Freud created, cf. my *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, World Perspective Series, ed. R. N. Anshen New York, Harper, 1959).

* "Analysis Terminable and Unterminalable," *Collected Papers*, Hogarth Press, V, p. 316. (Italics mine—E. F.)

8 The evolution of man from fixation on mother and father, to the point of full independence and, enlightenment has been beautifully described by Meister Eckhart in *The Book of Benedictus*: “In the first stage the inner or new man, St. Augustine says, follows in the footsteps of good, pious people. He is still an infant at his *mother’s* breast.

“In the second stage he no longer follows blindly the example even of good people. He goes in hot pursuit of sound instruction, godly counsel, holy wisdom. He turns his back on man and his face to God: leaving his mother’s lap he smiles to his heavenly *Father*.

“In the third stage he parts more and more from his mother, draws further and further away from her breast. He flees care and casts away fear. Though he might with impunity treat everyone with harshness and injustice he would find no satisfaction in it, for in his love to God he is so much engaged with him; so much occupied with him in doing good: God has established him so firmly in joy, in holiness and love that everything unlike and foreign to God seems to him unworthy and repugnant.

“In the fourth stage he more and more grows and is rooted in love, in God. He is ever ready to welcome any struggle, any trial, adversity or suffering, and that willingly, gladly, joyfully.

“In the fifth stage he is at peace, enjoying the fullness of supreme ineffable wisdom.

“In the sixth stage he is de-formed and transformed by God’s eternal nature. He has come to full perfection and, oblivious of impermanent things and temporal life, is drawn, transported, into the image of God and become a child of God. There is no further and no higher stage. It is eternal rest and bliss. The end of the inner and new man is

eternal life.” *Meister Eckhart*, translation by C. de B. Evans (London, John M. Watkins, 1952), II, pp. 80-81.

[9](#) Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth* (New York, Harper, 1958), p. 84.

[10](#) Cf. Laurette Séjournée’s *Burning Waters* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1957).

[11](#) I have been greatly stimulated in my thinking by personal communications from Dr. William Wolf on the neurological basis of consciousness.

[12](#) The same idea has been expressed by E. Schachtel (in an illuminating paper an “Memory and Childhood Amnesia,” in *Psychiatry*, Vol. X, no. 1, 1947) with regard to the amnesia of childhood memories. As the title indicates, he is concerned there with the more specific problem of childhood amnesia, and with the difference between the categories (“schematas”) employed by the child and those employed by the adult. He concludes that “the incompatibility of early childhood experience with the categories and organization of adult memory is to a large extent due to... the conventionalization of the adult memory.” In my opinion, what he says about childhood and adult memory holds true; but we find not only the differences between childhood and adult categories, but also those between various cultures, and furthermore, the problem is not only that of memory, but also that of consciousness in general.

[13](#) Cf. the pathfinding contribution of Benjamin Whorf in his *Collected Papers on Metalinguistics* (Washington, D.C., Foreign Service Institute, 1952).

[14](#) The significance of this difference becomes quite apparent in the English and German translations of the Old Testament; often when the Hebrew text uses the perfect tense for an emotional experience like loving, meaning, “I love fully,” the translator misunderstands and writes “I loved.”

[15](#) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Gamma, 1005b 20. Quoted from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, transl. by R. Hope (Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1952).

[16](#) Lao-Tse, “The T’ao Teh King;” “The Sacred Books of the East,” ed. by F. Max Mueller, Vol. XXXIX (Oxford University Press, London, 1927, p. 120).

[17](#) Cf. my more detailed discussion of this problem in *The Art of Loving*, World Perspectives Series (Harper & Bros., New York, 1956, p.72 ff.).

[18](#) Cf. my descriptions of this concept in *Escape from Freedom* (New York, Rinehart, 1941) and *The Sane Society* (New York, Reinhart, 1955).

[19](#) This analysis of consciousness leads to the same conclusion Karl Marx reached when he formulated the problem of consciousness: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness” (*Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie* (Berlin, Dietz, 1924), foreword, p. LV).

[20](#) We have no word to express this transformation. We could say “reversion of repressedness,” or, more concretely, “awakening”; I propose the term “de-repression.”

[21](#) Cf. S. Ferenczi, *Collected Papers*, ed. by Clara Thompson (Basic Books, Inc.), and the excellent study of Ferenczi’s ideas in Izette de Forest’s *The Leaven of Love* (New York, Harper, 1954).

[22](#) Cf. my paper on “The Limitations and Dangers of Psychology,” published in *Religion and Culture*, ed. by W. Leibrecht (New York, Harper, 1959).

[23](#) Foreword to D. T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London, Rider, 1949), pp. 9-10.

[24](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism* (New York, Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956), p. 3.

[25](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London, Rider, 1949), p. 97.

[26](#) (*Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.)

[27](#) Foreword to Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 15.

[28](#) Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 86.

[29](#) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[30](#) *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[31](#) *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[32](#) *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[33](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*, World Perspective Series, ed. R. N. Anshen (Harper, New York, 1957), p. 105.

[34](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 34.

[35](#) *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[36](#) *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[37](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 96.

[38](#) Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 49.

[39](#) *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[40](#) When I speak in this chapter of “psychoanalysis,” I refer to humanistic psychoanalysis as a development from Freudian analysis, yet including those aspects of Freudian analysis which are at the root of this development.

[41](#) *Man for Himself* (New York, Rinehart, 1947), Chapter III.

[42](#) Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1953).

[43](#) Luke 18:17

[44](#) I. Corinthians 13:11

[45](#) D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (London, Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), p. 11.

[46](#) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[47](#) *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[48](#) *Idem.*

[49](#) *Ibid.*, p. 16

[50](#) *Ibid.*, p. 18.—My italics—E.F.

[51](#) *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[52](#) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[53](#) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[54](#) (*Ibid.*, p. 19 – my italics—E.F.)

[55](#) Richard R. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness. A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Innes & Sons, 1901; New York, Dutton, 1923, 17th ed., 1954). It should be mentioned, though only in passing, that Bucke's book is perhaps the book most germane to the topic of this article. Bucke, a psychiatrist of great knowledge and experience, a socialist with a profound belief in the necessity and possibility of a socialist society which "will abolish individual ownership and rid the earth at once of two immense evils—riches and poverty," develops in this book a hypothesis of the evolution of human consciousness. According to his hypothesis, man has progressed from animal "simple consciousness" to human self-

consciousness, and is now on the threshold of developing Cosmic Consciousness, a revolutionary event which has already occurred in a number of extraordinary personalities in the last two thousand years. What Bucke describes as cosmic consciousness is, in my opinion, precisely the experience which is called *satori* in Zen Buddhism.

[56](#) Cf. my paper: "The Limitations and Dangers of Psychology," in: *Religion and Culture*, ed. by W. Leibrecht. (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 31 ff.

[57](#) In a personal communication, as I remember.

A Biography of Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm (1900–1980) was a German-American psychoanalyst, sociologist, and democratic socialist best known for his classic works *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and *The Art of Loving* (1956), and for his early association with the Frankfurt School of critical theory. He is commonly considered one of the most influential and popular psychoanalysts in America, and his works have sold multi-millions of copies throughout the world in many languages.

Fromm was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, the only child of Naphtali Fromm, a wine merchant, and Rosa Fromm (née Krause). His parents were devout Orthodox Jews, and Fromm spent much of his youth studying the Talmud. Though he renounced practicing his religion at the age of twenty-six, Fromm's view of the world remained profoundly shaped by Orthodox Judaism and its rejection of assimilation with the mainstream.

Fromm's interest in ethics and legal issues led him first to study law at Frankfurt University and, starting in 1919, sociology under Alfred Weber (brother to Max Weber) in Heidelberg. In his 1922 dissertation, Fromm examined the function of Jewish law in three diaspora communities. Introduced by his friend (and later wife) Frieda Reichmann, Fromm became interested in the ideas of Sigmund Freud and started to develop his own theories and methods to understand social phenomena in a psychoanalytic way.

After completing his psychoanalytic training in 1930, Fromm began his own clinical practice in Berlin. By then he was also working with the Institute for Social Research, affiliated with the University of Frankfurt, where a circle of critical theorists around Max Horkheimer became known as the Frankfurt School.

Following the Nazi takeover, Fromm settled in the United States in 1934. Many of his colleagues from the Institute for Social Research had gone into exile in New York City, joining Fromm. He then taught at several American schools and became a US citizen in 1940.

In 1941 *Escape from Freedom* was published and Fromm started lecturing at the New School for Social Research. He was cofounder of the William Alanson White Institute in New York, and in 1944 he married Henny Gurland, a fellow emigré.

In 1950 Fromm moved to Mexico City, where the climate would better suit his wife's health problems, and he became a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Despite the move, Henny died in 1952, and Fromm married Annis Freeman in 1953.

Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis, where he served as director until 1973. Following his retirement, Fromm made Muraltó, Switzerland, his permanent home until his death.

Fromm published books known for their socio-political and social psychoanalytic groundwork. His works include *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *Man for Himself* (1947), *The Sane Society* (1955), *The Art of Loving* (1956), *The Heart of Man* (1964) *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) and *To Have or To Be?* (1976).

By applying his social-psychoanalytic approach to cultural and social phenomena, Fromm analyzed authoritarianism in Hitler's Germany; in the United States he described the "marketing character," which motivates people to fulfill the requirements of the market and results in increased self-alienation.

In addition to his merits as a "psychoanalyst of society" and as a social scientist Fromm always stressed the productive powers of man: reason and love. This humanistic attitude pervades his understanding of religion, his vision of the art of living and his idea of a "sane" society.



With photography becoming popular at the turn of the twentieth century, young Fromm's picture was often taken.



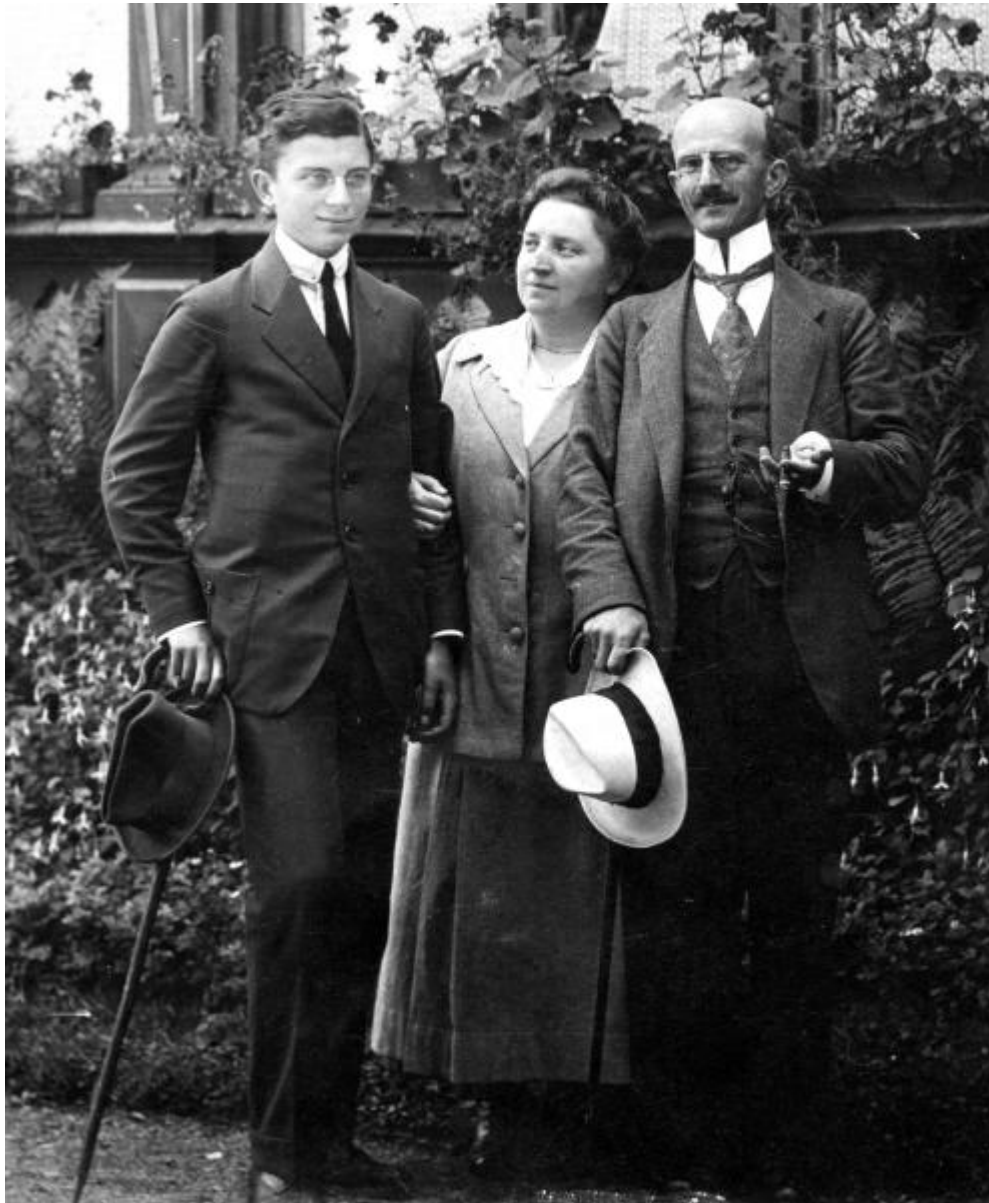
Fromm and his mother, Rosa Fromm, around 1906.



Fromm's childhood home at 27 Liebigstrasse in Frankfurt.



Thirteen-year-old Fromm and his father, Naphtali Fromm, celebrate Hanukkah.



**A complete Fromm family picture taken in Germany during Fromm's
Wöhlerschule student days.**



The Association of Zionist students in the summer of 1919. Fromm is in the first row, third from the left.



Fromm and his second wife, Henny Gurland-Fromm, in Bennington, Vermont, in 1946, where they lived part-time until Henny's declining health prompted them to move to Mexico.



Fromm made it a priority to meditate and to analyze his dreams every day. Here he is meditating in his home in Cuernavaca, ca. 1965.

My beautiful Love,
I love you so that it hurts, but the heart is
sweet and wonderful. I wish you feel it in
your sleep.

It is 10 now - I go to the office. Maybe
you call me up after 1 or 2 cups of tea (I had
9 first, then more tea.) I will see you at 4.
I'll be back at the latest at 2. I am all
yours

totally
E.

After his wife's passing in 1952, Fromm found love again with Annis Freeman. Here is a message Fromm wrote to Annis during their marriage.



A picture of Fromm and his third wife, Annis at the end of the 1950s in Cuernavaca. They were married for twenty-eight years, until Fromm's death in 1980.



Fromm and his students in Chiconuac, Mexico, where, in the sixties, they planned a socio-psychological field-research project.



Though Fromm suffered from several heart attacks during his later years, he was able to smile until the end of his life. The photo was taken two weeks before he died, in 1980.

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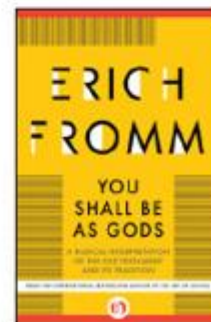
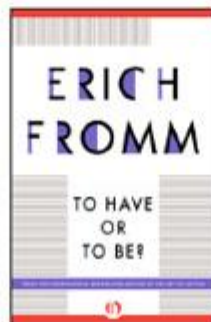
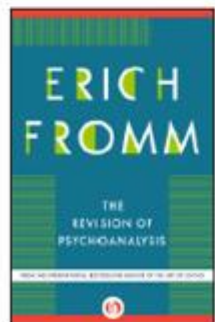
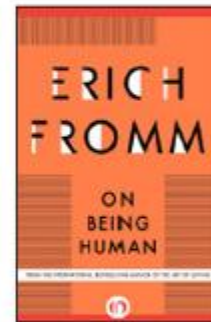
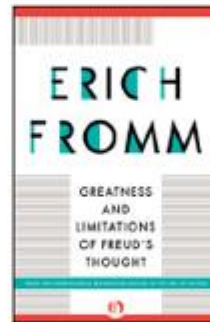
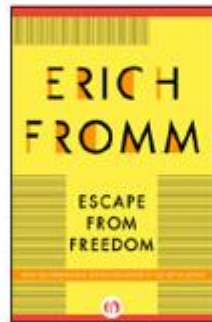
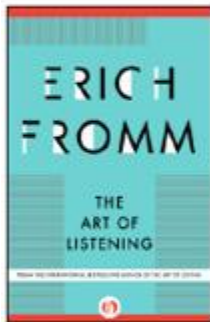
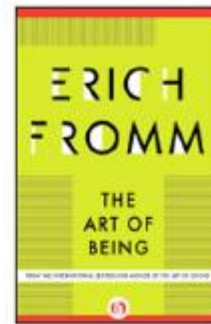
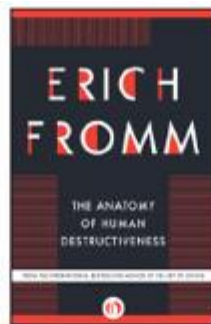
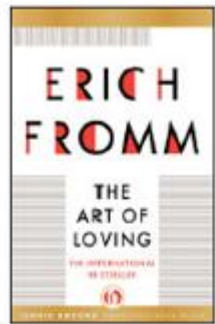
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