

SATORI

Source: D.T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*

Adapted by Paul Quek

People often imagine that the discipline of **Zen** is to produce a state of self-suggestion through meditation. This entirely misses the mark

Satori does not consist in producing a certain premeditated condition by intensely thinking of it. It is acquiring a new point of view for looking at things.

Ever since the unfoldment of consciousness we have been led to respond to the inner and outer conditions in a certain conceptual and analytical manner. The discipline of **Zen** consists in upsetting this groundwork once for all and reconstructing the old frame on an entirely new basis.

It is evident, therefore, that meditating on metaphysical and symbolic statements, which are products of the relative consciousness, play no part in **Zen**.

Without the attainment of **Satori** no one can enter into the truth of **Zen**.

Satori is the sudden flashing into consciousness of a new truth hitherto undreamed of. It is a sort of mental catastrophe taking place all at once, after much piling up of matters intellectual and demonstrative. The piling has reached a limit of stability and the whole edifice has come tumbling to the ground, when, behold, a new heaven is open to full survey.

When the freezing point is reached, water suddenly turns into ice; the liquid has suddenly turned into a solid body and no more flows freely.

Satori comes upon a man unawares, when he feels that he has exhausted his whole being.

Religiously, it is a new birth; intellectually, it is the acquiring of a new viewpoint. The world now appears as if dressed in a new garment, which seems to cover up all the unsightliness of **dualism**, which is called **delusion** in Buddhist phraseology.

Satori is the *raison d'être* of **Zen** without which **Zen** is no **Zen**. Therefore every contrivance, disciplinary and doctrinal, is directed towards **Satori** .

Zen masters could not remain patient for **Satori** to come by itself; that is, to come sporadically or at its own pleasure. In their earnestness to aid their disciples in the search after the truth of **Zen** their manifestly enigmatical presentations were designed to create in their disciples a state of mind which would more systematically open the way to enlightenment.

All the intellectual demonstrations and exhortatory persuasions so far carried out by most religious and philosophical leaders had failed to produce the desired effect, and their disciples thereby had been farther and farther led astray. Especially was this the case when Buddhism was first introduced into China, with all its Indian heritage of highly metaphysical abstractions and most complicated systems of Yoga discipline, which left the more practical Chinese at the loss as to how to grasp the central point of the doctrine of Sakyamuni.

Bodhidharma, the **Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng**, **Baso**, and other Chinese masters noticed the fact, and the proclamation and development of **Zen** was the natural outcome. By them **Satori** was placed above sutra-learning [Buddhist-scripture learning] and scholarly discussions of the shastras [commentaries] and was identified with **Zen** itself. **Zen**, therefore, without **Satori** is like pepper without its pungency.

But there is also such a thing as too much attachment to the experience of **Satori**, which is to be detested.

This emphasizing of **Satori** in **Zen** makes the fact quite significant that **Zen** is not a system of **Dhyana** as practiced in India and by other Buddhist schools in China.

By **Dhyana** is generally understood a kind of meditation or contemplation directed toward some fixed thought; in **Hinayana Buddhism** it was a thought of transiency, while in the **Mahayana [Buddhism]** it was more often the doctrine of emptiness.

When the mind has been so trained as to be able to realize a state of perfect void in which there is not a trace of consciousness left, even the sense of being unconscious having departed; in other words, when all forms of mental activity are swept away clean from the field of consciousness, leaving the mind like the sky devoid of every speck of cloud, a mere broad expanse of blue, **Dhyana** is said to have reached its perfection. This may be called **ecstasy** or **trance**, or the **First Jhana**, but it is not **Zen**.

In **Zen** there must be not just **Kensho**, but **Satori** . There must be a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulations of intellection and lays down the foundation for new life; there must be the awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hitherto undreamed-of angle of observation. In **Dhyana** there are none of these things, for it is merely a **quieting** exercise of mind. As such **Dhyana** doubtless has its own merit, but **Zen** must be not identified with it.

Satori is not seeing God as he is, as might be contended by some Christian mystics.

Zen has from the beginning made clear and insisted upon the main thesis, which is to see into the work of creation; the creator may be found busy moulding his universe, or he may be absent from his workshop, but **Zen** goes on with its own work. It is not dependent upon the support of a creator; when it grasps the reason for living a life, it is satisfied.

Hoyen (died 1104) of **Go-so-san** used to produce his own hand and ask his disciples why it was called a hand. When we know the reason, there is **Satori** and we have **Zen**. Whereas with the God of mysticism there is the grasping of a definite object; when you have God, what is no-God is excluded. This is self-limiting.

Zen wants absolute freedom, even from God. "No abiding place" means that very thing; "Cleanse your mouth when you utter the word **Buddha**" amounts to the same thing.

It is not that **Zen** wants to be morbidly unholy and godless, but that it recognizes the incompleteness of mere name.

Therefore, when **Yakusan** (aka **Yaoshan Weiyen**, **Yueh-shan Wei-jen**, 751-834) was asked to give a lecture, he did not say a word, but instead come down from the pulpit and went off to his own room. **Hyakujo** merely walked forward a few steps, stood still, and then opened his arms, which was his exposition of the great principle.

Satori is not a morbid state of mind, a fit subject for the study of abnormal psychology. If anything, it is a perfectly normal state of mind.

When I speak of mental upheaval, one may be led to consider **Zen** as something to be shunned by ordinary people. This is a most mistaken view of **Zen**, but one unfortunately often held by prejudiced critics.

As Joshu declared, "**Zen** is your everyday thought"; it all depends on the adjustment of the hinge whether the door opens in or opens out.

Even in the twinkling of an eye the whole affair is changed and you have **Zen**, and you are as perfect and as normal as ever. More than that, you have acquired in the meantime something altogether new. All your mental activities will now be working to a different key, which will be more satisfying, more peaceful, and fuller 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 flowers look prettier, and the mountain stream runs cooler and more transparent.

The subjective revolution that brings about this state of things cannot be called abnormal. When life becomes more enjoyable and its expense broadens to include the universe itself, there must be something in **Satori** that is quite precious and well worth one's striving after.