

## A PRESENTATION ESSENTIAL

### THE ZEN

*"Ta Hui compares the Satori like a fire menacing us or a sword that threatens us. The entire universe is a living, urgent koan that we have to solve immediately, whose solution brings an answer to any question. On the other hand, each part contains the whole (the same thing occurs in the transfinite numbers studied by Cantor, each series has the same value of the total) and understanding it we can understand the universe. "*

*Jorge Luis Borges*

Buddha, Siddhartha Gotama Shakya, two thousand five hundred years ago, taught his disciples how to get rid of mind conditioning.

This final and perfect freedom was defined by him as "samyak sambodhi", the "perfect and complete Enlightenment."

Born a Prince, he chose an ascetic life and being a cultured and refined man, he felt the need to formulate a system to make understandable what he achieved so as not to multiply strange or distorted ideas in his audience.

In fact, the Buddha did not fully express all those issues that we should see personally, thanks to the powerful, yet simple and direct means of investigation that he proposed.

For those who are monotheistic, I can say that in Buddhism, Zen, and the like, the only thing that might look like "God" could be "Enlightenment", both as a potential reality, alive and boundless, and as a state of consciousness achieved in the experience of someone. Some schools of Buddhism, developing their own philosophies and practices have also designed, iconographically, this "principle of Enlightenment" calling it Kalachakra, Mahavairocana, Amida, Vajrasattva, etcetera. In Zen, more than in other Schools, the individual experience of the Absolute is underlined.

Long after the Nirvana of Buddha and after subsequent councils, the Mahayana doctrine grew in importance, the "Great Vehicle", based on the ideas of "emptiness" = sunya, "intuitive wisdom" = prajna, "skillful mean" = upaya, "enlightenment" = bodhi, and "compassion" = karuna. Basically the new Mahayana doctrine fits in a new era highlighting some points of Buddha's teaching and giving shape to more functional ascetic methods for monks and lay people. With this new enunciation, there is no possibility of confusion with the words of the Buddha understanding them in a nihilistic or in an exaggerated epic sense, and so Enlightenment will be much less perceived as

an event far away from life. The "Mahayana clarification" even changed the perception of the Buddha teachings of modern men unfolding a dual evidence:

1. Philosophy or doctrine cannot contain in the written word, the sense of reality that only the eye comprehends;
2. Enlightenment is returned to the naked reality, being both a metaphysical principle waiting to be universally implemented, and at the same time a fact challenged in ourselves, in this very moment.

From this principle, from the personal experience of exceptional men, takes force the idea of "sudden Enlightenment" so characteristic of Zen.

Zen was the way in which the immediacy of Mahayana Buddhism found expression in China, a civilization based on a ritual and a pervasive pragmatism, almost martial. The monolithic Chinese culture initially reacted to Buddhism with discomfort but was the womb that gave opportunity to the distillation of the Zen tradition.

The Monk Bodhidharma travelled in China showing a teaching of a penetrating and unsettling character, and also became famous because it is said that he taught techniques and physical exercise to help health maintenance to the monks of the famous Shaolin Monastery.

It seems that the Sanskrit word "Dhyana", meaning "meditation", was transliterated in China as "Channa", then as "Ch'an," and then was introduced to Japan where it became "Zen." In Korea it was called "Son", in Tibet "Hashan", and also this tradition became established in Vietnam, as "Thien", for centuries becoming the state religion, even reaching Mongolia and the southern border of eastern Russia.

In Japan, Zen penetrated the warriors, the artisans and the artists castes' in such a subtle way as to shape ideas like:

"Goroku" = "spontaneous expression"

"Wabi" = "perfect imperfection"

"Sabi" = "shining antiquity"

that are true monuments to world culture that strongly inspired even contemporary art.

The Zen monks observe the basic vows that were extracted from the Vinaya code by the Tientai Teacher Saicho that brought these to Japan. In these few votes, Saicho summarized the plethora of vows in a simple and final vote of total dedication to Enlightenment and to the benefit of all beings. In obedience to these votes, it is not prohibited by Zen monks at the end of an intensive training to marry while remaining ministers.

Saicho reasonably assumed the principle that it is better to trust the common sense of men of religion rather than engulf them in complicated injunctions, not always feasible and often overtaken or maybe exceeded by some individuals. Of the same opinion were

most schools of Buddhism in Japan .

The "sudden Enlightenment " strongly characterizes the asceticism of Zen and its costumes and words. There are two words, 1) "kensho" and 2) "Satori" that we can define, respectively,

- 1) as "awakening" or a "peak" of oceanic experience,
- 2) and the immutable reality of that experience as everyday life, being Enlightenment the innate reality.

But according to their customs, for some Teachers, the terms "Satori" and "kensho" may mean the same thing or have the opposite meaning ...

The "koan" is a particular method of Zen consisting in special questions from the Teacher that exercise the pupil in the intuitive understanding of the living reality. In Japanese "koan" would be a contraction of "kofu andoku" that is "public document". The meaning was the same in China, as we shall see explained by Teacher Chun Feng. A curious synonym of "koan" in Japanese is "katto" which implies something inextricable, similar to roots as weeds or vines.

The other key issue of asceticism is zen meditation that takes up much time in the life of the monks and is also essential for the lay practitioners. The most typical Zen meditation is considered the "zazen" which focuses on a boundless openness that leaves open the senses, making them bloom and remain silent, so that the reality in all its aspects will be revealed as it is. Because of this, life shows itself in its own blinding reality, without meditation of any kind and to this end is used to maintain a long-base position with legs crossed that allows a functional and harmonic flow of energy and a peaceful settlement of skeletal and muscular systems.

And yet the "Zen meditation" should be implemented at any time by returning to be ourselves with the life lived entirely.

The three main schools of Zen in Japan are Soto, Rinzai and Obaku. Zen in the whole of Asia is primarily that of the Rinzai school / Linchi ,often enriched with some practices of "Pure Land Buddhism" and yogic techniques.

Zen Buddhism is not enabled to justify any violence or war in any of its principles, but leaves to the practitioners, the freedom to choose their own way of life.

Zen is a discipline, as well as a religion, intended for dialogue precisely because of the lack of interest in doctrinal questions that have been expressed throughout all its history. The zen practitioners would have their own opinions regarding contingent questions.

Everything in Zen has to be seen in person, in the experience; a principle that called the greatest minds of our time to deal with this discipline. Exponents of art, science, religion, showed the assurances of their highest esteem in Zen.

Without any particular order: Levi Strauss, Toynbee, Keruac, Watts, Cage, Hasek, Jung, Eliade, Pessoa, Snyder, Kandinsky, Fromm, Duchamp, De Chirico, Heidegger, Jaspers, Nishida, Ginsberg, Dali, Redon, Demartino, Eco, Hesse, Kayserling, Jodorowsky, Maraini, Assaggioli, Lassalle, Cohen, Pound, Coltrane, Beijart, Lassalle, Benoit, Cage, Koomaraswamy, Beijart, and many others attended the monasteries, the doctrine, or the teachers of this tradition.

Enlightenment is a meta-value that belongs to all people, at all times and in all religions and especially to all the enlightened men, whether recognized or unrecognized as such. Only with this splendor, the interreligious dialogue between cultures is possible, thanks to the highest levels expressed by them.

In the reality of Zen, a "transfer of spiritual knowledge" is not conceived but is lived as a "communion of intensity and oceanic view" that can connect two brilliant human beings. From this, the idea of Zen Enlightenment takes shape, that of Teacher and Discipline, that of Meditation and the training process of the koan.

Zen is traditionally considered as:

- 1 kyoge betsuden ... a living communion without doctrines,
- 2 furyu Monji ... over the canonical scriptures,
- 3 jikishi ninshin ... that point directly to the heart,
- 4 Kensho jobutsu ... revealing, directly, the nature of my being enlightened (Buddha).

All of this has the three specific and indispensable purposes that give meaning to the practice of Zen:

- a) Joriki, or the development of concentration given by the continuative practice of Meditation, by the influence of the teachers and of the strength of character.
- b) Kensho-godo, or realization of the "awakening-kensho as the peak of the original experience".
- c) Mujodo no Taigen, or full realization of Satori as everyday life, "the original reality-Satori without return", the Enlightenment.