Chapter 6.

SAMĀDHI AND ZEN BUDDHISM

When Lord Krishna explained samādhi as the essence of Yoga in the Bhagavadgītā, he was speaking like a Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is ever free from the bonds of all actions. Yet he goes on doing his duty for the salvation of others. We may compare a Bodhisattva to Lord Shiva who drank the deadliest poison for the good of the gods. It is the way of action of one who is always in a state of samādhi, the way of action "Now"! This seems to be the principal gospel also of Zen Buddhism.

The modern interest in Zen Buddhism is largely a product of the works of D.T. Suzuki. He started writing from 1927, and wrote three volumes of essays in Zen Buddhism, two works on the famous Lankāvatāra Sūtra, and the treatise "Living Zen".

Zen draws its central principles from Mahayana Buddhism. Buddha's teachings were centered round the theme that existence is sorrowful, and that the main cause of human suffering is 'trīṣṇā', i.e., desire going out of hand. Buddha's spiritual programme for the removal of pain and suffering is more or less similar to that of
Patanjali. But his path is called the 'middle path' as it advocated moderation between the two extremes of sensuousness and complete asceticism. As shown by Zimmer, a characteristic feature of Buddha's middle path was the practical aspect of life, which is lived actually in the midst of heotius activities. This is also true of Zen, which shares the view that 'the world is continually being produced from man's own unconscious nature'.

Yāna means a boat. Buddha's doctrine is looked upon as a boat which helps to cross the river of life from the shore of avidyā and karma to the other shore of vidyā and moksha. After reaching the other shore, the yāna is to be thrown away. The Hīnayāna is the way of individual release, whereas the Mahāyāna, with its pantheon of Buddha and Bodhisattva, believes in the essential Buddha nature of all things.

Nagarjuna (possibly 200 A.D.) is said to be the father of the principle of 'shunyātā' or the 'void' theory. Radhakrishnan has argued that, according to Nagarjuna, Buddha taught two kinds of truth, namely, the relative truth, and the transcendental truth, which is the doctrine of the void.

The doctrine of the void, as pointed out by Zimmer, is a pedagogical concept to bring the mind above the sense of duality. A question arises here, namely, how does pure thought know the real nature of the world as 'void'?

As an answer to this problem the Yogachara school came forward with its doctrine of no-support, or nirālambanavāda. It is also called the doctrine of ideation or vijñānavāda, since it regards all existence as mental projections. This idealistic tendency may be traced to the Hīnayāna dogmas and the Pali cannon of Anguttara nikaya, which, according to Woodward and Hare, argues that 'consciousness is luminous but it is defiled by adventitious elements'.

According to the Yogachara view, vijñāna, which is the result of creation from within, parikalpa, or imagination, is the root cause of what is called 'santāna', or series of mental states assuming individual forms. Such a creative thought can only arise from a repository, which is called 'ālaya vijñāna'.

---


++ Woodward, F.L. and E.M. Hare., The book of the gradual sayings, 1932, verse 1-10.
forms the potential basis of all thoughts. But it is itself beyond all conceptions. Alaya-vijñāna may be called the Buddhist version of the Hindu concept of Brahman which is to be realized through pure mental Yoga or absolute consciousness. When it is realized, an individual ceases to have any ego-consciousness. This is very much like a man of sāmādhi or a jeevanmukta.

According to Suzuki+ this may be called the Yoga of the Bodhisattvas who possess four basic qualities, as follows:

1. The realization that everything is but a manifestation of our spirit.
2. Freedom from the false idea that there are the phenomena of growth, duration, or succession of things.
3. The understanding that the sole characteristic of external objects is non-existence,
4. The understanding that the holy knowledge is ultimately to be realized within ourselves.

The holy knowledge gained through this Yoga of the Bodhisattvas causes the samsāra to dissolve, and then there remains only the ever-abiding sole reality of the śūnya or void.

Bodhisattva or Avalokiteshwara stands for a personified ideal of Mahayana Buddhism. He is supposed to abide on the brink of eternity and time, and is believed to possess infinite grace, or power to save people from misery. As shown by Cowell et al+, in their explanation of the Prajnyā-paramita hridaya sutra, it is realized by the Bodhisattva that all elements are void, that emptiness and form are not different. He also sees that the twelve-fold chain starting from avidyā and ultimately resulting in old age and death, has completely snapped.

The doctrine of paticcārasamutpāda, (which states that 'this being there, that originates') which is one of the basic suppositions of Zen Buddhism, gives rise to the principle of the twelve-fold chain that results into misery in one's life. These twelve links forming the chain are:

1) avidyā or ignorance of the true nature of the self.
2) sanskāra or inborn tendencies for behaving and acting.
3) vijñāna or consciousness.

4) nāma-roopa or the world of objects.
5) Shadāyatan or the five sense organs and mind.
6) sparsha or contact of the senses and the objects.
7) vedanā or sensations and experiencing of the world.
8) trishnā or desires and cravings.
9) sanjnyā or notions and attachment.
10) bhava, i.e. becoming.
11) jāti or birth.
12) jarā-marana, meaning old-age and death.

All these links can be snapped one by one. When the cause is removed, the effect automatically goes. Thus the first step in the reverse direction of breaking the chain is cancellation of avidyā.

It is hard to differentiate between the Bodhisattva state of Buddhism and the viveka-khyāti of Yoga, or the sthitaprajnya state mentioned in the Gita. The inner state of all the three is nothing but samādhi of no return. Since the self is the same everywhere, there can be no difference from person to person so far as self-knowledge, which forms the core of samādhi is concerned.

The Chinese background of Zen:

Taoism, which developed in China, is another important ingredient of Zen. It had
a primitive magical form. It is Lao Tze and Chuang Tse. Tao indicates the universal moral order or a mysterious universal force and unconscious wisdom that works best when least interfered with. One important basic principle of Tao is the impossibility of comprehending the infinite by means of the finite intelligence. In this way the Chinese Zen shows the influence of Chuang Tse's reaction to Buddhist philosophy.

A.W. Watts + has shown how Zen has inherited much of its basic approach from Taoism. It has also borrowed its mythology and superstitions from Taoism. It is difficult to translate the word Tao. It is generally taken to mean the supreme Law, God, Reality, Nature, and so on.

It is believed that Zen originated at the moment when Buddha attained enlightenment. The original insight of Lord Buddha was handed down to the masses by a line of 28 patriarchs. It was brought to China by Bodhidharma in the sixth century A.D. It was said to be a direct transmission of the insight of Lord Buddha without any intermediary of scriptures or doctrinal teachings. The Mahayana sect of Buddhism spread in China,

+Watts, A.W., The spirit of Zen, London: Luzac, 1955, chpt. IV.
Mongolia, and Japan, while the Hinayana went southwards to Ceylon, Burma, and Siam.

Buddha accepted the doctrine of karma and rebirth, but he was silent on the nature of the self. Like Buddha's own example Zen also set aside all intellectual pursuits and declared that Nirvāṇa is achieved in the midst of samsāra, and that a wise man can realize it in the ordinary things of life.

After Bodhidharma there were six patriarchs of Buddhism in China, and by the time of the last one, namely, Hui-Neng, Zen had developed into its full form. He wrote a book, the Wei-Lang, which is truly the gospel of Zen. Strangely enough, it is the only sutra given by any Chinese master.

As shown by Wong, Wei-Lang (also called Hui-Neng) asserted that since the Buddha nature is present in all of us, we should not look for it outside us. The sutra advocates non-interference with the Buddha nature. Bodhi, it says, is inside one's own mind. It never comes from without. So it is futile to search for it 'without'.

The Japanese offshoot of Zen:

Myoan Ei-sai was the person who is regarded as the founder of Zen in Japan. He established it in the year 1191 A.D. As described by Steinilber, there were, at that time, at least a dozen sects of Buddhism in Japan. Zen became the most influential of them all. The Mahayana Buddhism had reached Japan as early as the sixth century A.D., from Korea, and had assimilated the national Shinto religion, which had a belief in animistic polytheism.

Jodo (Amida, or Amitabha) was the second major sect prevalent in Japan. The names of the monks Genku and Shinran were associated with it. It was made famous because of its adoption by the warrior class Samurai. The reason for its adoption by the warrior class is explained by Yukawa Hideki++ by saying that Zen believed in self power, and so it appealed to the Japanese warriors.

The Soto Zen founded by Dogen and the Shin school deeply influenced the thinking and life pattern of the common people in Japan.

Zen makes use of two main doctrines of

of the Mahayana as its base. The first is the principle of 'sudden enlightenment', and the second is that of 'shunya' or void. The word 'shunya' stands for an experience of illumination. Suzuki argues that in that state all opposites are dissolved, and it serves as the basic ground for all enlightened behaviour. It is very much similar to the state of samādhi. Suzuki has offered a comparison of the idea of 'void' with the Japanese ideas of 'sabi' (insufficiency) and 'wabi' (loneliness) connected with Japanese art.

The concept of Aleya-vijnāna is also retained in Zen, and was used by the Samurai caste of Japan. The principle of inactivity of Tao is replaced in Zen by a spontaneous process conducive to sudden illumination. This form of Zen is thus a combination of Chinese pragmatism and Japanese sensibility. It has given Zen a scientific psychology.

As pointed out by Charles A. Moore,

"The prominence of Zen Buddhism in Japan is not primarily because of its apparent anti-intellectualism, but because of its positive attitude toward living naturally, rather than intellectualize life, since such intellectualizing falsifies and distorts life".

Shosha1 has said that the word Zen has come from "dhyāna", the Chinese version of which was Chan. It is also called the school of the Buddha mind. If a Zen master is asked to define Zen, he may frown, and like Lao Tze he would say, "He who speaks, does not know; because, he who knows, never speaks."

The central experience of Zen means a heightened awareness of the glory, colour, and power of the present moment, the beauty of the smallest objects, and the significance of the most ordinary actions. As remarked by Marlow ++, "a truly enlightened man is he who suddenly becomes aware of the immense fullness of things that continually pass him by". A Zen master may assert that there is no past, that 'everything is now'.

It would be easy for any one who knows the state of samādhi that the state of a Zen master as described above is hardly different from samādhi.

The emphasis in Zen, unlike the original Mahayana school, on not relying on the scriptures,

---


for salvation, is a fact which puts Zen on a level different from that of the Mahayana. Suzuki has brought out the fact that the spontaneous movement of Zen with life without arresting its eternal natural flow is sometimes termed 'straightforwardness' or 'going right ahead'.

Humphrey has shown that in Zen meditation one fights with thought like a drowning man. Thoughts in the form of both assertion and negation are to be given up. So a Zen master shows a stick to his disciple and asks him to say what it is, without assertion or negation.

A Zen monk shall never have any possessions. This, we may say, is the same as the sanyasa ideal, and the yama called aparigraha. This is called 'spiritual poverty', which frees the mind from the shackles of desire. Watts has spoken very highly of this mental attitude.

+++ Watts, Allen, W., The spirit of Zen, London: Wisdom of the East, Chpt. IV, V.
Lack of possessions, freedom in its entirety, and direct contact with reality, may be pointed out as the special features of Zen. And all these features can be equally attributed also to the man of samādhi, the Sufi, and the Christian mystic. But in its method of approach, or technique, Zen may be said to be quite different from all of them. The difference lies in what is called 'satori', and the 'koan'.

Satori is the ultimate state of which koan is a means. Eliot has given a detailed description of them. He says that the koans are designed to overcome all conceptual thought. The koans are riddles, and it is said that in order to be a full Zen adept one should have solved two thousand such riddles. Koans are cryptic statements. The beginner is expected to concentrate on them until he feels utterly exhausted. It is in that intense state of 'letting go' that satori or sudden enlightenment may dawn on the student.

Satori brings about a total change in the outlook of the student. It is a sudden 'turning over'

---

of the mind in response to a seemingly trivial experience which gives vent to the pent up habitual state of tenseness. It is a release from 'clinging on' to false ideas of possession or belonging and a shattering of the process of conceptualization. 

Jung + says that satori, as a special kind of enlightenment is practically impossible for the European to appreciate. A person in satori sees things and happenings in a different way. He sees without the habitual restrictions on thought. Our normal consciousness is based on a logical sequence of experience. Koan, the means to produce the state of satori, does not allow this logical sequence to have any role. When the logical sequence is thus denied an expression, then the walls of conceptualization built on its basis are broken down. It is this which brings about a change in the perception of reality. Jung has likened Zen to the way of Hathayoga. The present writer, however, feels that Zen is a kind of samādhi which a karmayoga attains through karma-yoga. Of course, it is not the case that the state of samādhi attained through karmayoga and Hathayoga are two different things.

---

Rajnish * has described satori not as samādhi but as a glimpse of samādhi. He argues that some religions like Zen have mistakenly understood satori as the ultimate experience of samādhi. His argument is based, it seems, on the ground that while there is no rebirth after samādhi, satori can be acquired by rebirth.

The present writer, however, would not like to agree with this view of Rajnish. He finds the view of Ernest Wood ++ more acceptable. Wood has argued that intuition or prajñā is, in the ultimate state, not anything different from samādhi. The occult path of Buddha is two-fold. One is called the 'way', which is for the ordinary people. The other, called 'path', is for those who seek nirvāṇa. It is attained by prajñā, which is intellect in its purest form. This pure intuition makes for direct perception, enlightenment, or highest understanding, which is also the unmistakable mark of samādhi. Rajnish seems to believe that satori is a state lower than the highest samādhi.


The Zen method: the koan and the mondo.

Zen meditation which ultimately leads to samadhi, is, in the main, a method of working with the koans. There are three main aspects of the method, namely, wall-gazing, sudden questioning (called mondo), and solving the enigmatic koans. Every koan has the giant koan of life as its counterpart. The working on the koan is not like self-hypnosis or quietism. It is a conscious effort to break the barrier raised by man in the way of his spiritual freedom. When this wall is broken, satori can dawn.

McCartney has remarked that koans are personal challenges, while mondos are personal experiences. Each of them has a unique form of its own. The experiences pertain to the empirical world. Thus mondo is a happening that is lived through. Zen is thus a kind of pragmatic naturalism, and not only mysticism.

Although mondos have their share in making the state of satori come into being, it is the koan which takes one to the final impasse when the intellect is completely exhausted. An intense feeling of uneasiness

overtakes the mind of the student of Zen. It is followed by a stage of 'letting go'. The mind can no more sustain the tension produced by the unresolved koan. In that state, the awareness of the mind, body, and the koan is completely wiped out, and when one is awakened from the stupor, there is a feeling of inexpressible joy. This 'letting go' means accepting life 'as it is', without any conceptualizations.

There are said to be various degrees of such an experience of satori. A variety of koans is used. The final satori is a state of sudden conversion.

William James has beautifully described that state. He has pointed out that the sudden conversion is always preceded by a stage similar to the final impasse of a koan. It always needs what James calls the 'let go your hold' attitude. This kind of feeling is confirmed by the experiences of many Zen masters.

But there is a vital difference between such a conversion and satori. Conversion is the product of an external phenomenon, whereas satori comes from within. Zen does not entertain any principle of dualism.

Za Zen is another kind of meditation. Its special features are: it relaxes the body and mind, banishes the wandering thoughts, and preserves the nervous energy for applying to the koan. It also helps to bring the wandering mind under control.

Klee + has equated Zen with what he calls 'no-mindedness', because Zen study puts an end to all thoughts. Satori state comes into being only when the thoughts are gone, or silenced. After the satori state is over, one's perception of the world returns, and he starts seeing the material things as before. But there is a vast change now, namely, that the objects are no more projections of mind. Since the mind itself is dissolved, there is no projection of the external world.

Koji Sato ++ has said that the mindlessness of Zen can be achieved through 'mindfulness' of satipathana meditation as practised in Theravada Buddhism. It involves concentration on the sense of touch. Pe +++ has mentioned three ways which constitute

---

the Sunlam way of mindfulness. The first is posture, the second breathing, and the third practice of mindfulness on any sensation. A steady and motionless posture is assumed for this.

For satori to come into being, a threefold learning is recommended. It is made of 'kai', 'jo', and 'E'. KAI means virtuous conduct. Jo means absorption or sāmādhi, and E is the realization of wisdom. Za Zen is one of the expressions of Jo.

As explained by Kadowaki, Za Zen is a silent meditation involving a mystical union with cosmic forces, which causes a separation from external attachment and the end of all inner turmoil and disturbance.

'Jo' has two aspects: those of perception and intuition. It is also called 'Shikan'. 'Shi' signifies sensations, mental symbols, or ideation. 'Kan' is the positive aspect of 'Jo'. It stands for insight, and helps to achieve liberation from ignorance.

The 'E' signifies wisdom, or realization of truth which comes when passions are removed completely. It is the supreme goal of Zen meditation.

The highest illumination in 'E' is based on non-conceptual experience and knowledge. It is also called 'Hannya' form of knowledge, or 'Mufumbetsuchi'. Fumbetsau means a concept, Mufu means 'not'. 'Chi' is knowledge.

This non-conceptual knowledge is what is called 'prajñā' which accompanies satori. It would be easy for one who knows what is 'samādhi-prajñā' to see that it is the samā in both Zen Buddhism and the Hindu Yoga. The moral training included in 'Kai' is also similar to the ethical observances of the Yogis and students of samādhi. The 'Jo' part of Zen meditation is almost the same as the states of dhāranā and dhyāna of Patanjali's Yoga.

Suzuki has described the experience of satori as the consciousness of 'what is' without any conditioning. This is called the 'Tathātā consciousness'. He has translated it from the verse 369 of the Dhammapada in the following words:

"Empty this boat, O Bhikku!
Emptied by you, it will move swiftly,
Cutting out lust and hatred,
To Nibbana thereby you will go!!"

---

In the above verse, emptying the boat means emptying our minds of all conceptual thoughts which make the mind conditioned, partial, and one-sided. This is what happens, as we have seen earlier, in the state of samādhi, which, as we have said, is a state in which all conditioning, seeking, and anguish and pain, come together to an end.

Koji Sato+ has brought out a very pertinent truth about the Zen Buddhism in the following remarks, which, the present writer wants to emphasize, apply equally to the state of samādhi, both of the sabīja and nirbīja kinds. He says,

"Zen is one of the most efficient ways of adjusting higher nervous functions. Zen stands for the aesthetic point of view. It is one of the best methods of personality training, which may be used by any person irrespective of religious beliefs or ideologies".

More or less the same words have been used by Joshi++ about samādhi and Yoga in general as the Hindu science of personality development, while summarising his work on Yoga and Personality.


Study of Zen in relation to psycho-analysis and the role of consciousness and the unconscious in human life, would bring out the striking similarity between the ultimate state of Zen and Samādhi very clearly. Suzuki has done very important work in this direction.

Consciousness was compared by Freud to a floating iceberg with only a small part of it showing up, and a very large part being hidden. Consciousness and the unconscious are the two parts of the human mind, the unconscious being hidden from us, yet most active. Satori as well as samādhi may be called states characterised by a complete harmony between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. When the happenings in the unconscious go out of hand, they produce mental illness. If they can be controlled, on the other hand, as is the case in samādhi and Zen, then human personality can be so molded as to produce the best and most desirable results.

Suzuki has explained this by saying, "when the darkness of the unconscious is broken, one sees all things in the mirror of the self".

It may be said that the darkness of the unconscious is removed in Zen or samādhi by prajñā. It

---

is achieved by an understanding of the unconscious desires and tendencies underlying human behaviour, and thereby being free from the binding effects of the unconscious. Thus it may be said that Zen and samādhi bring about a higher culmination of the process of psycho-analysis, by understanding one's mind perfectly and completely.

Freud has described the unconscious as the seat of irrationality. But to Jung, it is the seat of the deepest wisdom. Freud gave a basis to psycho-analysis by 'making the unconscious conscious'. We may say that this process initiated by Freud is taken to its logical completion by Zen as well as by samādhi. If the goal of psycho-analysis is to have an enlightenment of the real self and to get a mastery of it, then we may say that this goal is completely achieved by samādhi and Zen.

Psycho-analysis is said to increase the feeling of well-being. Samādhi and Zen, it may be pointed out, make this feeling enduring and infinite. Psycho-analysis aims at a harmony between the ego and super-ego. This harmony is perfected by samādhi and Zen.

These points are clearly argued by Chang.

If we study the Zen training of meditation and the ways in which the mind is brought under control, passified, and stabilized, the similarity found between it and the Yogic way of training for samādhi is very evident.

Suzuki has given a very lucid account of the Zen training of a monk. The beginner is expected to go to a monastery on foot. He has no earthly possessions. Rising up early in the morning, hard work is done in the garden. Begging processions are taken out. There is no worship as such like that in Hinduism. The monastic order is a self-sustaining community. Prayers are offered in big and small groups. Asceticism and creativity are the two important qualities to be cultivated. Meditation is practised for long hours. Work, regulation of diet, practice of viryues, keeping fit, and enlightenment are the main points concerning Zen meditation.

Interviews with individual monks are held regularly by the master of the monastery. The four vows are repeated at the end of the interview. One is expected to live an active life and realize the ultimate truth in the experiences of daily life.

Swami Jagadishwarananda has made a comparison of Zen with the Indian Yoga, and has brought out many similarities. He says,

"Buddhist Zen and Hindu Yoga have close similarities. When their technique is translated into a third language, they become indistinguishable".

The spirit of asceticism and vairāgya is common to both of them. Their dhāranās are very much similar. The Zen koans are similar to the Mahāvākyas like "Tattvamasi", "Ayamātma Brahma", and so on.

As a conclusion of our study of Zen it may be said that Zen represents a sappling grown in the Chinese and Japanese soil from the seeds of Indian Yoga by the masters of samādhi.