straightforwardness—describing conscious love, techniques for focusing astral light, psychic powers, the nature of the Kingdom of God, and secret lodges. In the chapter on the life-force he sums up an essential magical concept: "We have access to this power, because we have it going through our system. Under certain circumstances, you can actually feel the flow of this energy in your body...."

The Truth About Magic isn't encyclopedic; it's more a hornbook, a smart primer of the occult and the esoteric. If you look at the key used to open a locked door, you'll find it's simple too. But surprises may lurk beyond that door. ◆

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The Golden Age of Zen: Zen Masters of the T'ang Dynasty

JOHN C.H. WU, INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS MERTON, FOREWORD BY KENNETH KRAFT. WORLD WISDOM (WWW.WORLDWISDOM.COM). 2003. PP. 280. $19.95. PAPER

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

When you encounter a Buddha, kill the Buddha.
– Lin-chi I-hsüan (Japanese: Rinzai Gigen)

THE ABOVE IS a quintessential and often cited gōng'àn (公案), more commonly known in Japanese as a kōan, skillfully employed by some of the greatest masters of Zen/Chan Buddhism. Yet what do these curious and seemingly paradoxical sayings mean? Other well-known examples of such sayings are: "You can hear the sound of two hands when they clap together. Now show me the sound of one hand."[1] "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?"[2] "Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?"[3] "When you are not thinking of the good and evil, what is your Original Face?" When taken at face value such statements appear as nonsensical and do not seem to have any didactic value. This is especially the case when they are situated outside a revealed spiritual framework and so can give rise to mistaken points of view about the Buddhist tradition, not only within the school of Zen/Chan but all three of the yānas or "vehicles": Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. Much of the Zen/Chan lore confounds the human mind paralyzing ordinary cognition in its tracks, as its transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*) cannot be grasped through the faculty of reason or discursive thought alone. Only through the steadfast

practice and deepening insight of *zazen* (seated meditation) can its metaphysical meaning—although remaining inarticulate—be suddenly illuminated and understood. Its truths point beyond words and concepts, beyond thought and time to Ultimate Reality or the Absolute. All dichotomies of duality and non-duality are unable to capture its essence, as Tung-shan Liang-chieh (807–869) affirms:

> Wonderful is the eternal reality
> Beyond delusion and enlightenment.

Zen/Chan Buddhism is often considered to be iconoclastic and irreverent toward religion and sacred tradition, yet while examples can be found suggesting this, at the same time none of the great masters of Buddhism abandoned its fundamental doctrines and methods of spiritual realization. Buddhist tradition could be summarized through: *śhīla* (morality), *prajñā* (wisdom) and *dhyāna* (meditation), which is mirrored in the well-known precept of the Dharmapada: "Not to commit any sin, to do good; and to purify one's mind that is the teaching of all the Awakened."

Another misunderstood point is the notion that Zen/Chan or the Buddhist tradition as a whole is atheistic; rather, it is non-theistic. This is an important distinction because the Buddhist tradition emphasizes the immanence of the supreme state of *Nirvāna* rather than the transcendent notion of the Divine, yet in Buddhism this same idea is known as the Supreme Being or *Dharmakāya*. As every revealed religion contains both the transcendent and immanent dimensions a Divine Reality, likewise, they are also to be found within the Buddhist tradition. It has been pointed out in the introduction that "Zen [Chan] is not concerned with God in the way Christianity is, though one is entitled to discover sophisticated analogies between the Zen experience of the Void (*Shunyata*) and the experience of God in the 'unknowing' of apophatic Christian mysticism."

The author of this work is Wu Ching-hsiung, also known as John C. H. Wu (1899–1986), writer, lawyer, juristic philosopher, and educator. At the age of forty he converted to Catholicism and became a prominent layman within the church, yet this did not dilute or hinder his ability to expound upon in an authentic fashion on the Buddhist tradition. He completed *The Golden Age of Zen* some thirty years later, when he was in his

late sixties. Wu underscored a universal perspective on religion and spirituality that comprises the heart of all sapiential traditions of both East and West. He writes, "Humanity is one, and it is moving beyond East and West." He was in accord with the ecumenical or interfaith outlook of American Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968), who wrote the Introduction to this work, emphasizing that "All religions thus 'meet at the top.'" This notion is reminiscent of what the great art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) termed "Paths That Lead to the Same Summit."[4]

This book provides a captivating survey of the early years of Chinese Zen, focusing on the movement of Buddhism to the land where Taoism and Confucianism flourished. Wu's survey, combined with illuminating

translations from the earliest Zen/Chen masters of the T'ang period spanning the seventh to the tenth centuries, such as Ma-tsu Tao-i (709–788), Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien (700–790), Nan-ch'üan P'u-yüan (748–834), Pai-chang Huai-hai (720–814), Huang-po Hsi-yün (d. 850), and Chao-chou Ts'ung-shen (778–897), reveals a time of spiritual vibrancy and powerful personalities that helps explain the later developments of Zen/Chan with which Western readers are more familiar. Although Zen/Chan emerged with the coming of Bodhidharma or the "Wall-Gazing Brahman" to China, its foundations were laid later on by Hui-neng (638–713), known as the Sixth Patriarch.

The school of Zen/Chen within Mahāyāna Buddhism began with Shakyamuni Buddha's silent transmission of direct wisdom (prajñā), widely known as the Flower Sermon:
Once upon a time, Shakyamuni was lecturing to a great multitude gathered on Lin-shan or Spirit Mountain (Vulture Peak). After his lecture, he picked up a flower and held it before his audience without speaking a word. Quite mystified, the whole assembly remained silent, pondering as to what Shakyamuni wished to convey by this unexpected action. Only the Venerable Kashyapa (Mahākāśyapa) broke into an understanding smile. Shakyamuni was pleased and declared, "I have the secret of the right Dharma-Eye, the ineffably subtle insight into Nirvana which opens the door of mystic vision of the Formless Form, not depending upon words and letters, but transmitted outside of all scriptures. I hereby entrust this secret to the great Kashyapa."

Mahākāśyapa is recognized as the First Indian Patriarch of Zen/Chan. There are a total of twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs, Bodhidharma being the last in India; he is recognized as a bridge between East and West, between India and China.

The word "Zen" or "Ch'an" in Chinese is a transliteration of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*, which signifies meditation. Japanese Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966), who was a key interpreter of Buddhism in the West, makes clear that "Zen [Chan] as such did not exist in India—that is, in the form as we have it today." To understand Zen/Chan Buddhism one needs to approach this transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*) through the lens of the beginner's mind and not as someone who assumes to know. The following teaching story helps situate the disposition of the beginner's mind that is prerequisite for *knowing through unknowing*: Nan-in, a Japanese master, received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!" "Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"[5]

When Bodhidharma, the legendary exponent of Zen/Chan Buddhism, was asked by a disciple, Hui-k'o, "My mind has not found peace, I beg you, master, to pacify it for me." Bodhidharma responded with, "Bring forth your mind to me and I will pacify it for you." Hui-k'o responded after a long silence, expressing that he had searched for the mind, but was unable to find it. Thereupon Bodhidharma responded,

"Behold, I have already pacified the mind for you!" This encounter speaks to the illusory nature of the "I" or the empirical ego. As Wu points out, "It takes a Buddha to recognize a Buddha; and only a Buddha could have discovered the Buddha-nature in himself and in all the sentient beings." Hui-neng speaks to the paramount need to realize one's self-nature, "He who does not know his fundamental mind can derive no benefit from the study of the Dharma. He who knows his fundamental mind and perceives his self-nature is called a man who has realized his manhood, a teacher of *devas* and men, a Buddha."

A similar question and answer dialogue on self-nature is presented here:

> A monk asks Pai-chang "Who is the Buddha?"
>
> Pai-chang answers: "Who are you?"

It is the identification with what is beyond the empirical ego; the transpersonal dimension that is needed to reintegrate into our primordial nature (*fitrah*), the "image of God" (*imago Dei*), Buddha-nature (*Buddha-dhātu*), or the Self (*Ātmā*), our true identity *in divinis.*

While certain Zen/Chan antics and utterances can be shocking and appear to be nonsensical to the uninitiated who assume to know what real spirituality is and what it is not, yet when contextualized within an integral framework these same antics and utterances can be understood to be in service of awakening. In example, prior to Te-shan's enlightenment he was steadfast in his adherence to the letter of the sacred scriptures, yet after his awakening he became fiercely iconoclastic to the point of appearing to be irreligious in order that the Absolute be rendered naked and transparent for truth to be fully realized.

> I see differently from our ancestors. Here there is neither Patriarch nor Buddha. Bodhidharma is an old stinking barbarian. Shakyamuni is a dry toilet strip. Manjushri and Samantabhadra are dung-heap coolies. *Samyak-sambodhi* and subtle perception are nothing but ordinary human nature freed of fetters. Bodhi and Nirvana are but dead stumps to tie the donkeys to. The twelve divisions of the scriptures are only registers of ghosts, sheets of paper fit only for wiping the pus from your ulcers and tumors. All the "four fruitions" and "ten stages" are nothing but demons lingering in their decayed graves, who cannot even save themselves.

This seemingly mad and unconventional way of viewing things is rooted in the awakened mind. According to Hui-neng modes of conduct and cognition may radically differ for those who are enlightened: "The one who has realized his self-nature may do as he sees fit."

The ordeal that Lin-chi faced with his master Huang-po underscores the severe hardships and adversity that one may face in a student-teacher relationship when on the spiritual path:

> "[Mu-chou Tao-ming recommended to Lin-chi] Why don't you ask the Abbot [who at that time was Huang-po] to explain to you the essential principles of Buddhism?" Following the suggestion, Lin-chi went to put the question before the Abbot. Hardly had he finished with his question when Huang-po struck him with his staff.... Lin-chi did as before, and once again he was beaten.... Lin-chi asked the question for the third time, but he was beaten for the third time...."[Ta-yü asked] What instructions have you received from Huang-po?" Lin-chi replied, "Three times I inquired about the essentials of the Buddha Dharma; and three times

I was beaten. I don't know whether or not I had committed any fault." Ta-yü said, "The fact is that Huang-po had treated you with the compassionate heart of an old woman, bent upon releasing you once for all from bondage and distress. And yet you have come here to ask me whether you are not at fault!" Lin-chi was thoroughly enlightened at these words. Then he said, "So, after all, there is not much to Huang-po's Buddha Dharma!" Ta-yü grasped him, saying, "You bed-wetting imp! Only a moment ago you were still asking whether you might not be at fault. And now you are so bold as to say that there is not much to Huang-po's Buddha Dharma. What truth do you see? Tell me right away!" Lin-chi did not speak, but punched Ta-yü below the ribs thrice. Ta-yü pushed him away, saying, "After all, your master is Huang-po, not me. Why should I be involved?"

It goes without saying that in the present-day milieu, very few could endure such a student-teacher relationship or would be sufficiently prepared and devout in their faith to submit and follow their spiritual guide into the obscurity and suffering that the path may require. The contemporary mindset would tend to render this unconventional relationship as an example of authoritarianism and deem it abusive in nature, condemning it without inquiring further into its inner or esoteric meaning. This perspective fundamentally overlooks that in our present saṃsāric or fallen consciousness we are deluded in our perception and experience of reality, meaning that we assume to know what things are and our experience of them, but we truly do not know what anything is or comprehend our experience of them. It is through traveling the spiritual path that this becomes evident. Wu emphasizes that, "Far from being

irreligious [this] iconoclasm really springs from an authentic religious spirit."

Hui-neng, one of the greatest Chinese Zen masters and the last accepted Patriarch, was asked about his spiritual transmission, "Who has inherited the spirit of the Fifth Patriarch?" In response to this question, the following student-teacher discourse known as wèndá (Japanese: mondō) transpired:

> Hui-neng replied: "One who understands Buddhism."
> The monk pressed his point: "Have you then inherited it?"
> Hui-neng said: "No."
> "Why not?" asked the monk.
> "Because I do not understand Buddhism."

Bodhidharma's teachings provide a treasured key to Zen/Chan Buddhism as has been summarized by Hui-neng:

> Special transmission outside the Scriptures.
> No setting up of words and letters.
> Point directly at man's mind.
> See self-nature and attain Buddhahood.

When Ch'u asked, "What does the true doctrine teach?" Tung-shan replied, "When you have got at the idea, forget about words." This is again because Ultimate Reality or the Absolute is beyond words and concepts.

The great masters of Zen/Chan Buddhism did not wish to draw unnecessary attention to themselves and went even as far as inviting contempt from others in order to conceal their enlightened or awakened state. Tung-shan demonstrates this: "Keep your good deeds hidden and your function secret; / That you may appear as a stupid and dull-witted man."

While Zen/Chan does not rely on words or concepts and condemns the exclusive use of the discursive mind to the point of being anti-intellectual, it nonetheless does facilitate the use of the noetic faculty of the Intellect. It is this Intellect immanent within the human being that apprehends reality directly and is unmediated by the senses or normal modes of cognition. Kuei-shan Ling-yu (771–853) has discussed the non-dual perception of the pure Intellect:

> By the ineffable subtlety of thinking without thinking, turn your attention inwards to reflect on the infinite power of the divine spark. When your thinking can go no farther, it returns to its source, where nature and form eternally abide, where phenomenon and noumenon are not dual but one. It is there that abides the Suchness of the true Buddha.

The anti-intellectual perspective of Zen/Chan is indicative of the limits of human reason and the discursive mind rather than the pure Intellect. This is made clear in the following wèndá (Japanese: mondō) between Yaoshan Weiyan (Japanese: Yakusan Igen, 751–834) and a visiting monk:

> Once Master Yakusan [Yaoshan] was sitting in deep meditation, when a monk came up to him and asked: "Solidly seated as a rock, what are you thinking?"
> Master answered: "Thinking of something which is absolutely unthinkable (*fu-shiryō*), 'not-to-be-thought-of.'"
> The monk: "How can one think

of anything which is absolutely unthinkable?"
Master: "By the a-thinking thinking (*hi-shiryō*), 'thinking-which-is-non-thinking'."[6]

The important question regarding the Buddhist doctrine of sudden or gradual enlightenment is elaborated upon at length by Kuei-shan:

> If a man is truly enlightened and has realized the fundamental, and he is aware of it himself, in such a case he is actually no longer tied to the poles of cultivation and non-cultivation. But ordinarily, even though the original mind has been awakened by an intervening cause, so that the man is instantaneously enlightened in his reason and spirit, yet there still remains the inertia of habit, formed since the beginning of time, which cannot be totally eliminated at a stroke. He must be taught to cut off completely the stream of his habitual ideas ad views caused by the still operative karmas. This (process of purification) is cultivation. I don't say that he must follow a hard-and-fast special method. He need only be taught the general direction that his cultivation must take. What you hear must first be accepted by your reason; and when your rational understanding is deepened and subtilized in an ineffable way, your mind will of its own spontaneity become comprehensive and bright, never to relapse into the state of doubt and delusion.
>
> However numerous and various the subtle teachings are, you know intuitively how to apply them—which to hold in abeyance and which to develop—in accordance with the occasion. In this way only will you be qualified to sit in the chair and wear your robe as a master of the true art of living. To sum up, it is of primary importance to know that Ultimate Reality or the Bedrock of Reason does not admit of a single speck of dust, while in innumerable doors and paths of action not a single law or thing is to be abandoned. And if you can break through with a single stroke of the sword without more ado, then all the discriminations between the worldly and the saintly are annihilated once for all, and your whole being will reveal the truly eternal, in which reigns the non-duality of universal Reason and particular things. This is indeed to be the Bhutatathata Buddha.

With these important points made it is also essential to keep in mind the remarks by Yang-shan Hui-chi (814–890) pertaining to the spiritual path: "The habits of erroneous thinking are

so deep-rooted in you that it would be extremely difficult to uproot them overnight."

This book encapsulates the spirit of Zen/Chan Buddhism in a remarkable fashion and provides the seeker with illuminating insights and reflections on the pilgrimage that leads from the unreal to the Real as established by the earliest spiritual masters of this school. It provides an essential survey of these formative years that are less known to non-specialists or those that are not students of Zen/Chan Buddhism, but no less deserve to be widely read and absorbed. The transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*) of the Buddhist tradition cuts through the bifurcation of the subject-object perception to see beyond the world of dualism, to realize the Void or Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) of conditioned reality communicating its ungraspable quality. Shih-te vividly states that there is only one Self and no other to be realized: "My self-nature and yours are one." Through diligent and continual practice of *zazen* (seated meditation) the primordial, unborn and undying self-nature known as one's "Original Face" can be apprehended. What becomes clear through the teachings of Zen/Chan is that spirituality is not to be found anywhere else but in the abidance of the here and now, this present moment which itself is like a *gōng'àn* (Japanese: *kōan*); as Nan-ch'üan confirms, "Tao is nothing else than your ordinary mind, your everyday life." ◆

[1] "The Sound of One Hand," quoted in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, ed. Paul Reps (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 25.

[2] Quoted in *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Vol. I: Zen*, ed. Richard M. Jaffe (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), p. 40.

[3] "Joshu's Dog," quoted in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, ed. Paul Reps (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 89.

[4] See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Paths That Lead to the Same Summit: Some Observations on Comparative Religion," *Motive*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (May 1944), pp. 29–32, 35.

[5] "A Cup of Tea," quoted in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, ed. Paul Reps (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 5.

[6] Quoted in Toshihiko Izutsu, "The A-thinking Thinking," in *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (Boulder, CO: Prajñā Press, 1982), p. 158.

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