

A SOURCE BOOK IN  
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PHILOSOPHY

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## THE ZEN (CH'AN) SCHOOL

priests over the world only speak of spontaneity and do not speak of causation."

*Answer:* "It is due to their stupid mistake that monks set up causation but not spontaneity, and it is due to their [stupid] mistake that Taoist priests only set up spontaneity but not causation."

The assistant to the governor asked: "We can understand the causation of the monks, but what is their spontaneity? We can understand the spontaneity of the Taoists, but what is their causation?"

*Answer:* "The spontaneity of the monks is the self-nature of living beings. Moreover, the scripture says, 'Living beings [have] spontaneous wisdom and wisdom without teacher.' This is called spontaneity. But in the case of causation of the Taoists, Tao can produce the One, the One can produce the two, the two can produce the three, and the three produce all things. All are produced because of Tao. If there were no Tao, nothing will be produced. Thus all things belong to causation." (pp. 143-144)

### C. THE RECORDED CONVERSATIONS OF ZEN MASTER I-HSÜAN<sup>76</sup>

1. The Prefect, Policy Advisor Wang,<sup>77</sup> and other officials requested the Master to lecture. The Master ascended the hall and said, "Today it is only because I, a humble monk, reluctantly accommodate human feelings that I sit on this chair. If one is restricted to one's heritage in expounding the fundamental understanding [of salvation], one really cannot say anything and would have nothing to stand on."<sup>78</sup> However, because of the honorable general advisor's strong request today, how can the fundamental doctrines be concealed? Are there any talented men or fighting generals to hurl their banners and unfold their strategy right now? Show<sup>79</sup> it to the group!"

A monk asked, "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" Thereupon the Master shouted at him. The monk paid reverence. The Master said, "The Master and the monk can argue all right."

*Question:* "Master, whose tune are you singing? Whose tradition are you perpetuating?"

<sup>76</sup> For his biography see *Sung kao-seng chuan*, ch. 12, TSD, 50:779. Not much is known of him. His school is called the Lin-chi school (Rinsai in Japanese) because he lived in the Lin-chi monastery in Hopei.

<sup>77</sup> He was Wang Ching-ch'u, prefect of the Honan Prefecture, and a Buddhist lay pupil of Zen Master Ling-yu (771-853).

<sup>78</sup> Commentators are not agreed on the meaning of this sentence. The present interpretation is harmonious with the spirit of independence and revolt of the Zen School.

<sup>79</sup> The phrase *cheng-chü* here does not mean evidence but to make clear.

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The Master said, "When I was a disciple of Huang-po,<sup>80</sup> I asked him three times and I was beaten three times."

As the monk hesitated about what to say, the Master shouted at him and then beat him, saying, "Don't nail a stick into empty space."<sup>81</sup>

2. The Master ascended the hall and said, "Over a lump of reddish flesh there sits a pure man who transcends and is no longer attached to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings. He comes in and out of your sense organs all the time. If you are not yet clear about it, look, look!"

At that point a monk came forward and asked, "What is a pure man who does not belong to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings?" The Master came right down from his chair and, taking hold of the monk, exclaimed, "Speak! Speak!" As the monk deliberated what to say, the Master let him go, saying, "What dried human excrement-removing stick is the pure man who does not belong to any class of Buddhas or sentient beings!" Thereupon he returned to his room. (TSD, 47:496)

*Comment.* This is one of the most famous *koans*. The nonsensical answer in the *koan* is a new Zen device, but witty and shocking conversations have their precedents in Taoism and Neo-Taoism. One can find many in the *Chuang Tzu* and the *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* (New Discourse on the Talk of the Times), to mention only two well-known examples.

The mention of excrement is no vulgarity. It is derived from Chuang Tzu who said that Tao is even in human excrement and urine.<sup>82</sup> Japanese scholars have invariably avoided direct translation of the term and used such expressions as "dried stick of dirt" instead. In doing so, they have missed the extremely important point in Taoism and seem to forget that the Buddha, like Tao, is everywhere.

3. The Master ascended the hall. A monk asked, "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" The Master lifted up his swatter. The monk shouted, and the Master beat him.

[The monk asked again], "What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?" The Master again lifted up his swatter. The monk shouted, and the Master shouted also. As the monk hesitated about what to say, the Master beat him.

*Comment.* The swatter was originally used to hit mosquitoes but

<sup>80</sup> This refers to Zen Master Hsi-yün (d. 850) who lived in the Huang-po Mountain. For his work, see Bibliography.

<sup>81</sup> One gets nowhere in so doing.

<sup>82</sup> *Chuang Tzu*, ch. 22, HHCC, 7:49b. cf. Giles trans., *Chuang Tzu*, 1961 ed., p. 215. See above, ch. 8, comment on C, 2.

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in Zen it is used to needle the mind. Hu Shih and Suzuki are diametrically opposed in their interpretations of such a technique. For Hu Shih, the apparently nonsensical Zen gestures are calculated to force the student to think for himself, "a method of education by the hard way."<sup>83</sup> For Suzuki, the swatter and various forms of gestures represent Zen's "persistent and often violent opposition to words and then to the intellect which deals exclusively in words."<sup>84</sup> Suzuki added that Zen has no prescribed methods. We may add that in the typical Buddhist fashion of the Four Points of Argumentation,<sup>85</sup> the swatter may mean this, it may mean that, it may mean both this and that, and it may mean neither this nor that.

Thereupon the Master said, "Listen, men. Those who pursue after the Law will not escape from death. I was in my late Master Huang-po's place for twenty years. Three times I asked him about the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha and three times he bestowed upon me the staff. I felt I was struck only by a dried stalk. Now I wish to have a real beating. Who can do it to me?"

One monk came out of the group and said, "I can do it."

The Master picked up the staff to give him. As he was about to take it over, the Master beat him. (TSD, 47:496-497)

4. The Master ascended the hall and said, "A man stands on top of a cliff, with no possibility of rising any further. Another man stands at the crossroad, neither facing nor backing anything. Who is in the front and who is in the back? Don't be like Vimalakīrti (who was famous for his purity), and don't be like Great Gentleman Fu (who benefited others).<sup>86</sup> Take care of yourselves." (TSD, 47:497)

5. The Master told the congregation: "Seekers of the Way. In Buddhism no effort is necessary. All one has to do is to do nothing, except to move his bowels, urinate, put on his clothing, eat his meals, and lie down if he is tired. The stupid will laugh at him, but the wise one will understand. An ancient person said, 'One who makes effort externally is surely a fool.'<sup>87</sup> (TSD, 47:498)

6. *Question*: "What is meant by the mind's not being different at different times?"

<sup>83</sup> Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method," *Philosophy East and West*, 3 (1953) p. 21.

<sup>84</sup> Suzuki, "Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih," *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>85</sup> See above, ch. 22, Introduction.

<sup>86</sup> Fu Hsüan-feng (b. A.D. 28) put the fish he caught in a basket and submerged it under water so those fish which wished to escape could do so. He and his wife worked in the farm for others.

<sup>87</sup> This saying and part of what precedes immediately come from a song by Zen Master Ming-tsan (fl. 788) in TSD, 49:606.

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The Master answered, "As you deliberated to ask the question, your mind has already become different. Therefore the nature and character of dharmas have become differentiated. Seekers of the Way, do not make any mistake. All mundane and supramundane dharmas have no nature of their own. Nor have they the nature to be produced [by causes]. They have only the name Emptiness, but even the name is empty. Why do you take this useless name as real? You are greatly mistaken! . . . If you seek after the Buddha, you will be taken over by the devil of the Buddha, and if you seek after the patriarch, you will be taken over by the devil of the patriarch. If you seek after anything, you will always suffer. It is better not to do anything. Some unworthy priests tell their disciples that the Buddha is the ultimate, and that he went through three infinitely long periods, fulfilled his practice, and then achieved Buddhahood. Seekers of the Way, if you say that the Buddha is the ultimate, why did he die lying down sidewise in the forest in Kuśinagara after having lived for eighty years? Where is he now? . . . Those who truly seek after the Law will have no use for the Buddha. They will have no use for the bodhisattvas or arhats.<sup>88</sup> And they will have no use for any excellence in the Three Worlds (of desires, matter, and pure spirit).<sup>89</sup> They will be distinctly free and not bound by material things. Heaven and earth may turn upside down but I shall have no more uncertainty. The Buddhas of the ten cardinal directions may appear before me and I shall not feel happy for a single moment. The three paths (of fire, blood, and swords) to hell may suddenly appear, but I shall not be afraid for a single moment. Why? Because I know that all dharmas are devoid of characters. They exist when there is transformation [in the mind] and cease to exist when there is no transformation. The Three Worlds are but the mind, and all dharmas are consciousness only. Therefore [they are all] dreams, illusions, and flowers in the air. What is the use of grasping and seizing them? . . .

"Seekers of the Way, if you want to achieve the understanding according to the Law, don't be deceived by others and turn to [your thoughts] internally or [objects] externally. Kill anything that you happen on. Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him. Kill a patriarch or an arhat if you happen to meet him. Kill your parents or relatives if you happen to meet them. Only then can you be free, not bound by material things, and absolutely free and at ease. . . . I have no trick to give people. I merely cure disease and set people free. . . . My views are

<sup>88</sup> An arhat or arhan is the ideal being in Hīnayāna or Small Vehicle, a saint or worthy who is no longer subject to incarnation.

<sup>89</sup> For the Three Worlds, see above, ch. 20, n.38.

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few. I merely put on clothing and eat meals as usual, and pass my time without doing anything. You people coming from the various directions have all made up your minds to seek the Buddha, seek the Law, seek emancipation, and seek to leave the Three Worlds. Crazy people! If you want to leave the Three Worlds, where can you go? 'Buddha' and 'patriarchs' are terms of praise and also bondage. Do you want to know where the Three Worlds are? They are right in your mind which is now listening to the Law." (TSD, 47:499-500)

*Comment.* This "doing nothing" philosophy means more than the Taoist philosophy of leaving things alone and being absolutely spontaneous. It assumes that Ultimate Reality is everywhere and can be discovered without any special searching. Eating, sweeping the floor, simply walking, or anything will do.

7. Ma-ku<sup>90</sup> came to participate in a session. As he arranged his seating cushion, he asked, "Which face of the twelve-face Kuan-yin<sup>91</sup> faces the proper direction?"

The Master got down from the rope chair. With one hand he took away Ma-ku's cushion and with the other he held Ma-ku, saying, "Which direction does the twelve-face Kuan-yin face?"

Ma-ku turned around and was about to sit in the rope chair. The Master picked up the staff and beat him. Ma-ku having grasped the staff, the two dragged each other into the room.

8. The Master asked a monk: "Sometimes a shout is like the sacred sword of the Diamond King.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes a shout is like a golden-haired lion squatting on the ground. Sometimes a shout is like a rod or a piece of grass [used to attract fish]. And sometimes a shout is like one which does not function as a shout at all. How do you know which one to use?"

As the monk was deliberating what to say, the Master shouted. (TSD, 47:504)

9. When the Master was among Huang-po's congregation, his conduct was very pure. The senior monk<sup>93</sup> said with a sigh, "Although he is young, he is different from the rest!" He then asked, "Sir, how long have you been here?"

<sup>90</sup> Zen Master Pao-ch'e of Ma-ku Mountain.

<sup>91</sup> Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva "who sees the world's sound," or the cries of suffering. The name may also mean the one who sees reality as it is, free and at ease. Characterized by compassion, this Buddhist saint assumes many forms, has many faces and hands the better to see and help sentient beings toward salvation. In popular Chinese religion, the saint had assumed a feminine form and has come to be known in the West as Goddess of Mercy.

<sup>92</sup> A bodhisattva in the diamond-realm, the realm of wisdom as contrasted with the realm of principle, the two realms representing those of effect and cause, respectively.

<sup>93</sup> Huang-po's disciple Ch'en Mu-chou.

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The Master said, "Three years."

The senior monk said, "Have you ever gone to the head monk (Huang-po) and asked him questions?"

The Master said, "I have not. I wouldn't know what to ask."

The senior monk said, "Why don't you go and ask the head monk what the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha clearly is?"

The Master went and asked the question. But before he finished, Huang-po beat him. When he came back, the senior monk asked him how the conversation went. The Master said, "Before I finished my question, he already had beaten me. I don't understand." The senior monk told him to go and ask again.

The Master did and Huang-po beat him again. In this way he asked three times and got beaten three times. . . . Huang-po said, "If you go to Ta-yü's<sup>94</sup> place, he will tell you why."

The Master went to Ta-yü, who asked him, "Where have you come from?"

The Master said, "I am from Huang-po's place."

Ta-yü said, "What did Huang-po have to say?"

The Master said, "I asked three times about the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha and I was beaten three times. I don't know if I was mistaken."

Ta-yü said, "Old kindly Huang-po has been so earnest with you and you still came here to ask if you were mistaken!"

As soon as the Master heard this, he understood and said, "After all, there is not much in Huang-po's Buddhism." (TSD, 47:504)

*Comment.* Not only is there not much in Huang-po's Buddhism; there is not much in Buddhism itself!<sup>95</sup> This saying has been repeated time and again by Zen Buddhists. It expresses not only a spirit of revolt, but also the determination to wipe out anything in the way of the mind's direct and immediate intuition of truth, including Buddhism itself. Fung Yu-lan is right in considering this point as one of the five most important in Zen.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> This monk lived in the Ta-yü Mountain in Kiangsi Province.

<sup>95</sup> This was actually said in the same story recorded in *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 12:3b.

<sup>96</sup> *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 2, 1953, p. 401.

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