



Research Paper

The Recognition of Momentariness: The Way to Contentment

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Abstract

When we observe closely, it seems that most of the persons in the contemporary world is hankering for money, any kind of power, various kinds of positions etc. Their voracity shows that most of them think that life is permanent and what they possess greedily will be remained as the same forever. In fact, they waste their time and effort for achieving those irrelevant and transient possessions through illegitimate means. Human beings construct multi-storied buildings by exploiting the natural resources and thus they demolish the natural harmony too. Most of them do not realizes the strength of constructive values like love compassion etc. All are busy within their private segments, which they created inside the home as well as outside around them. All these self-created private zones are secured with strong barriers.

Here comes the importance of Zen Buddhist concept of live 'here and now'. Everyone should aware of the importance of Zen Buddhist account of life. The stories of Zen Buddhism show that the life is momentary and transient. This great tradition has no religion, no God, no customs and rituals, no heaven or hell. Buddha says that complete knowledge is complete love. He considers love as the cure for the disease of life, the life which is identified as suffering. When one knows himself completely, he can understand the insignificance of wasting the time and life by running after the transient pleasures. This paper attempts to analyze some Zen Buddhist ideas about life in the light of the present situation of the pandemic Covid-19 framework.

Key words: Meditation, Momentariness, Mind, Covid-19

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I. SOME POPULAR STORIES FROM ZEN TRADITION:

1. Cup of Tea

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), 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 he 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?"¹

2. Reciting Sutras

A farmer requested a Tendai priest to recite sutras for his wife, who had died. After the recitation was over the farmer asked: "Do you think my wife will gain merit from this?"

"Not only your wife, but all sentient beings will benefit from the recitation of sutras," answered the priest.

"If you say all sentient beings will benefit," said the farmer, "my wife may be very weak and others will take advantage of her, getting the benefit she should have. So please recite sutras just for her."

The priest explained that it was the desire of a Buddhist to offer blessings and wish merit for every living being.

"That is a fine teaching," concluded the farmer, "but please make one exception. I have a neighbor who is rough and mean to me. Just exclude him from all those sentient beings."²

3. No Water, No Moon

When the nun Chiyono studied Zen under Bukko of Engaku she was unable to attain the fruits of meditation for a long time.

At last, one moonlit night she was carrying water in an old pail bound with bamboo. The bamboo broke and the bottom fell out of the pail, and at that moment Chiyono was set free!

In commemoration, she wrote a poem:

In this way and that I tried to save the old pail

Since the bamboo strip was weakening and about to break

Until at last the bottom fell out.

No more water in the pail!

*No more moon in the water!*³

4. Right and Wrong

When Bankei held his seclusion-weeks of meditation, pupils from many parts of Japan came to attend. During one of these gatherings a pupil was caught stealing. The matter was reported to Bankei with the request that the culprit be expelled. Bankei ignored the case.

Later the pupil was caught in a similar act, and again Bankei disregarded the matter. This angered the other pupils, who drew up a petition asking for the dismissal of the thief, stating that otherwise they would leave in a body.

When Bankei had read the petition, he called everyone before him. "You are wise brothers," he told them. "You know what is right and what is not right. You may go somewhere else to study if you wish, but this poor brother does not even know right from wrong. Who will teach him if I do not? I am going to keep him here even if all the rest of you leave."

*A torrent of tears cleansed the face of the brother who had stolen. All desire to steal had vanished.*⁴

5. Everything is Best

When Banzan was walking through a market he overheard a conversation between a butcher and his customer.

"Give me the best piece of meat you have," said the customer.

"Everything in my shop is the best," replied the butcher. "You cannot find here any piece of meat that is not the best."

*At these words Banzan became enlightened.*⁵

Zen means waking up to the present moment. That is, perceiving this moment exactly as it is, rather than through the filter of our ideas, opinions, etc. According to Zen, existence is found in the silence of the mind (no-mind), beyond the chatter of our internal dialog. Existence, from the Zen perspective is something that is only happening spontaneously, and it is not just our thoughts. All of life that we perceive is constantly in a state of change. It recommends to concentrates on the present moment. That each moment, whatever you're doing, just do it because what we really are, can only be experienced in each moment. Zen Buddhism teaches us of the importance of living in the present. Forget about learning from the past and applying those lessons to the future. Zen aims at achieving a state of mind named "Enlightenment". Exactly what Enlightenment is not easy to describe. It can be described as the liberation from the material world and its dualism.

The most distinguishing feature of this school of the Buddha-Way is seen in its contention that wisdom, accompanied by compassion, is expressed in the everyday "life-world" when associating with one's self, people, and nature. The everyday "life-world" for most people is an evanescent transforming stage in which living is consumed, philosophically speaking, by an either-or, ego-logical, dualistic paradigm of thinking with its attendant psychological states such as stress and anxiety. Zen demands an overcoming of this paradigm by practically achieving a holistic perspective in cognition, so that the Zen practitioner can celebrate, with a stillness of mind, a life of tending toward the concrete thing-events of everyday life and nature. Zen cherishes simplicity and straightforwardness in grasping reality and acting on it "here and now". Zen maintains a stance of "not one" and "not two," i.e., "position less position," where "not two" signals a negation of the stance that divides the whole into two parts, i.e., dualism, while "not one" designates a negation of this stance when the Zen practitioner dwells in the whole as one, while suspending judgment in meditation, i.e., non-dualism. Free, bilateral movement between "not one" and "not two" characterizes Zen's achievement of a personhood with a third perspective that cannot, however, be confined to either dualism or non-dualism (i.e., neither "not one" nor "not two").

It says that through a practical transformation of the psychophysiological constitution of one's being that one prepares for embodying nondiscriminatory wisdom. This preparation involves the training of the whole person and is called "self-cultivation". It is a practical method of correcting the modality of one's mind by correcting the modality of one's body, in which practice is given precedence over theory.

Meditation

Meditation becomes an important part of our daily life. Meditation never renews, refresh or make a new person. In fact, it is a training in awareness and it gives a different kind of perspective to the person. That results in making a healthy approach to our own feelings and thoughts. It never helps you to avoid our thoughts and feelings, rather, it trains us to observe them without judgment. Meditation without any kind of pressure or anxiety is the characteristic of Zen Meditation.

When one engages in Zen meditation, Zen recommends that its practitioner follow a three-step procedure: adjusting body, breathing and mind. The adjustment of the body means to prepare oneself (one's mind-body) in such a way that one can achieve an optimal state of being free. To do so, the practitioner needs to have a proper diet, engage in appropriate physical exercise, and avoid forming habits contrary to nurturing a healthy mind-body condition. The adjustment of the body is necessary for the practitioner in order to experience the practical benefits of doing meditation.

The benefits of Zen meditation are closely tied to the practice of breathing. This exercise has the effect of infusing one's mind-body with fresh life-energy and expelling a negative toxic energy out of the practitioner's system. A key to performing breathing exercises successfully is just to observe the in-coming and out-going breath. Neurophysiologically, the center where breathing is controlled is found in the hypothalamus, in the mid-brain. The autonomic nervous system is so-called because it functions independently of our will. Zen breathing is a shift from unconscious, involuntary breathing to conscious, voluntary breathing. This means that Zen meditation is a way of regulating the unconscious-autonomic order of our being. Breath count trains the unconscious mind and the involuntary activity of the nerves that control the function of the various visceral organs. This point is significant in learning to control emotion. Ordinarily, we are told to control our emotion by exercising our will. a lot of psychic energy is required to suppress one's deeper emotions. There comes a time then when one can no longer hold them down. Consequently, one may end up exploding in various ways, ranging from personal fits to violent social crimes. If we observe a person in an angry state, we will notice that such a person's breathing pattern and rhythm is shallow, rough, and irregular. In a person who is in peaceful state, it is deep, smooth, and rhythmical. These examples show that there is a strong correlation between the pattern and the rhythm of breathing and a person's emotional state, or more generally, state of mind. Zen breathing has a way of naturally heightening the positive correlation between the activity of the autonomic nervous system and emotion.

Once the bodily posture and the breathing are adjusted, the practitioner next learns to adjust the mind. This means that the practitioner consciously moves to enter a state of meditation. In so doing, the practitioner learns to disengage him- or herself from the concerns of daily life. That is to say, one tries to stop the operation of conscious mind. Meditation trains one to sit face-to-face with one's self, while creating a psychological isolation from the external world. With this, one enters into an internal world of psyche. As the practitioner attempts to enter the world of psyche, various things start surfacing in the field of the practitioner's meditative awareness.

In the process of deepening meditation, one can roughly identify three distinct stages: the stage of concentration, the stage of meditation, and the stage of absorption. In the stage of concentration, the practitioner concentrates, for example on the lower abdomen, in which case there is a dualistic relationship established between the practitioner who is concentrating, and the lower abdomen that is the focus of concentration. This dualistic relationship is broken gradually as the practitioner moves into the stage of meditation. The ego-conscious activity is gradually lessened, and the barriers it set up for itself will gradually be removed. When the practitioner enters the stage of absorption, the dualistic framing of the mind will be removed such that the mind starts structuring itself non-dualistically. There will be no separation or distancing between an object of the mind and the activity of the mind itself.

As the practitioner repeats this process over a long period of time, he or she will come to experience a state in which no-thing appears. Zen uses the phrase "no-mind" to designate this state. No-mind does not mean a mindless state. Nor does it mean that there is no mind. It means that there is no conscious activity of the mind. No-mind is a free mind that is not delimited by ideas, desires, and images. No-mind is a state of mind in which there is neither a superimposition of ideas nor a psychological projection. That is, no-mind is a practical transcendence from the everyday mind, without departing from the everydayness of the world.

Zen can be considered as an anti-philosophy. The term "philosophy" means the establishment of the kingdom of reason. It has been launched an intellectual effort of the most brilliant minds. Traditional philosophers used ego-consciousness as a starting point as well as a destination in philosophy. On the other hand, Zen's view is that reason is incapable of knowing and understanding what reality is. Zen contends that physical nature and human nature must be sought in an experiential dimension practically trans-descending, and hence transcending, the standpoint of ego-consciousness. That is to say, it must go beyond "the one" and "the two," as both of these stances are prone to generate a one-sided and hence incomplete world-view. Instead, they must be sought in the depths of one's psychē and beyond.

Overwhelming Dualism

Zen Buddhism has produced an understanding of reality quite different from those offered by Western philosophy. The discursive mode of reasoning offers a distinction between the outer and inner worlds. As a result, the world appears to be dualistic in nature, that is to say, it recognizes two things to be real.

Zen opposes both the logical and epistemological understanding of the reality. Zen proposes the concept of “not two.” “Not two” is in part a recommendation for experientially achieving oneness through the practice of meditation. In Zen Buddhism “not two” designates a negation of any “two” things that are affirmed to be individually real. The dualistic standpoint also ignores the logical fact that any “two” things cannot be individually one because for one to be, it must be dependent on, and interconnects with, the other one. An either-or logic ignores this interdependence. With this recommendation, Zen maintains that mind and body, I and others, I and nature ought to be experienced as one for those who remain in the everyday standpoint.

Seeing

Zen mentions the state of nothing - no-thought and no-image. In Zen, seeing means seeing no-thing. Zen's contention is that there is no determination whatsoever in the mirror's activity of “just seeing.” That there is no determination means to Zen that because the bottomless ground is nothing, it does not impose form on things that are mirrored. When these qualifications are taken together, Zen interprets “just seeing no-thing or nothing” to mean seeing or mirroring things without discrimination, that is, with a sense of equality. When a mirror, for example, reflects an image of a beautiful object, it does not make any discriminatory value judgment that it is beautiful. And neither does it make any discriminatory value judgment when it mirrors an ugly object. It mirrors thing-events as they are. That is, the mirror does not take any stance of likes and dislikes; it does not take a stance of “for” or “against.” It is non-egological in mirroring each thing equally. Moreover, Zen observes that the nature of the mirror is such that it does not change due to the kind of object it mirrors. For example, it does not increase or decrease in size in virtue of the fact that it mirrors an object. It remains as it is in its original nature of always mirroring, which highlights the fact that it is clear and transparent. Because equality is the characteristic of this seeing, Zen speaks of the activity of this seeing as nondiscriminatory. The obvious point Zen wants to make through this analogy is that the minds of people are analogously the same in their original nature and activity.

How knowledge operates in Zen experience can be understood from the following dialogue between the master and the disciple:

The disciple asks: What then is it [i.e., no-thought]?

The master replies: It is nothing like “what is”, therefore, we cannot explain “no-though”. The reason why I am speaking about it now is because you have asked about it. If you haven't asked about it, there is no need to explain it. Suppose that there is a clear, transparent mirror. If it does not face a thing, no image is reflected in it. To say that it mirrors an image means that because it faces something, it just mirrors its image.

The disciple asks: If it does not face anything, is there or is there not a reflection in the mirror?

The master replies: That the mirror reflects a thing means that it always mirrors regardless of whether it is facing or not facing a thing.

The disciple asks: If there is no image and since you do not give an explanation, how can all beings and nonbeings become an issue? Now when you say that it always mirrors, how does it mirror?

The master replies: When I say that the mirror always mirrors, it is because a clear, transparent mirror possesses an original nature as its essential activity of always mirroring things. Analogously, people's mind is originally undefiled, and naturally possesses a superb light of wisdom that illuminates the perfect world of nirvāna.

The disciple asks: Insofar as people's minds are originally like that, when do people get it?

The master replies: It just sees nothing.

The disciple asks: When it is nothing, what can it see?

The master replies: Seeing is not like something you can call a thing.

The disciple asks: If it is not like anything one can call a thing, what does it see?

The master replies: it sees no-thing. That is the true seeing. It always sees.⁶

Here and Now

Zen contends that “here and now” is enfolded in both zero time and zero space. Zen does not understand time and space by imposing a formal category on them. “Here and now” is one experience, and for this reason they should be designated as “here-now.”

In living this integrated, living space-time, Zen does not understand time to be a quantifiable and homogeneously punctuated unit, nor does it conceive of it as a linear progression from past to future through the present, although it does not exclude them insofar as they are useful for everyday life. The negation of the linear idea of time also includes the negation of the idea of time as symmetrical as well as reversible, because in the

Zen experience of space-time, a teleological intentionality, an “in order that,” is absent. Yet, Zen does not accept, time as a “fleeing image of eternity”. Zen takes time to be living. According to Zen, theories of time built through conceptual abstraction, are distanced and separate from the immediacy of “here-now.” Space, too, is neither a container nor an a priori limiting condition, nor the place of displacement for the volume of an extended thing. Rather it is a living space. Dōgen for example captures this sense of space as “the bird flies the sky and the sky flies the bird.”

The Pandemic Era

We were forcefully locked in our own places for the last one year. All the human beings had to stay where they were at the time of Lock-down announcement, in March 2020. All the men had to change their routines, their life-styles, food-styles etc. All the public places were closed that there were no other chances other than their private places. Apart from the disparities, all over the world, everyone was capitulated in front of a miniature virus. There were discriminations on the basis of caste, class, race, color, money, power and so on. Everything was incapable when the virus started to spread. Those who neglect the disastrous epidemic, affected rigorously all over the globe. Death rate was increased horribly. Burial of the corpses was very difficult and huge number of bodies were buried in the same catacomb. No one could even see the body of their beloved for the last time.

Presently, we are practicing a kind of detached attachment by keeping social distancing. The minute virus has taught the humanity so many lessons. To an extent, a positive change is seen in the people that they become compassionate, lovable and ready to help others. Everyone got enough time to spend with the family members. They changed their food habits and way of life. They started to live in the moments. They experienced the happiness by following or by resuming their passions. The harmony of nature came into a balanced condition slightly. When the people are locked in their own places, an overall change has been taken place in the atmosphere all over the world.

Of course, the disaster the Corona virus brought to the humanity is immeasurable. Millions of people lost their beloved ones due to the widespread of the pandemic. So many children became orphan. Incalculable lost in the economic sphere has occurred globally. Amidst of all these some kind of constructive changes even though they are a smaller in amount but enormously countable. The virus taught us the lesson that instead of running after the external pleasures, the man has to live here and now by enjoying the life’s each moment in its completeness.

II. CONCLUSION

‘Being good, Doing good and Judging good’ is the slogan of Zen teachings. There is no mysticism in Zen and we cannot see any dogmatic philosophy in Zen. Zen advocates to walk in the path alone and thus upholds the importance of individual freedom by proclaims ‘your world is yours’. It affirms the role of the ‘present’ by maintaining that ‘being where you want at the time you want and for the reason you want’. Also, it stresses the requirement of eliminating the regrets of the past and the fear of the future. As it is not bound by the words and letters of the sutras and sastras, it passes from mind to mind outside the classified and systematized doctrines. This great tradition has no religion, no God, no customs and rituals, no heaven or hell. Buddha says that complete knowledge is complete love. He considers love as the cure for the disease of life, the life which is identified as suffering. It concentrates on penetrating to the inherent nature of man and thus it seems as a way to realize oneself.

It is easy to understand these teachings because there is no complex dogmas included in this. In the contemporary world there is a requirement of recognizing the transient nature of things, events, and the life itself. All are in a hurry to achieve power, position and money. In the race of accomplishing these transitory achievements the people forget that they are missing the beautiful moments of their life. After a distressing contention when he thinks about what he has conquered he falls into a dilemma. That he cannot realize actually what he has apprehended.

In this context, Zen teaching has something to offer in realizing the ‘real nature’ of man’ in each individual. Zen Buddhism tries to show the momentary nature of life, the transitory characteristics of the things and events and thus asserts the necessity of living in the present moment.

Zen Buddhism is the viewpoint of self- inquiry and it helps man to know his own real identity without any kind of difficult efforts. It is the teaching beyond textual or oral theories and principles. It enables man to enlighten his own inner consciousness. It is the religion of self-realization. It does not give importance to collective realization. It is the thinking of self-control and simple life rather than any other systems which are rooted in various kinds of actions and principles. When we understand the Zen way of life, we can have the comprehensive awareness of each and every second of our life in its wholeness. There is no need to have highly intellectual exercises to know and practice the Zen teaching. When we realize ourselves fully by looking into our inside world, we can follow the Zen path easily. Expecting a wonderful world with full of self-realized

individuals, who love each other, who help each other, who care each other and who are kind to the nature as well.

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