

Arthur Koestler

## A Stink of Zen

### *The Lotus and the Robot (II)*

IT MAY be useful to begin by drawing certain comparisons between India and Japan—the most traditional and the most “modern” among the great countries of Asia.

Historically common to both are a social structure based on the family with its clan extensions, and the caste-hierarchy with its subdivisions; the domination of male over female, of the aged over the young; the resulting authority of the Father and the Teacher; and some basic aspects of education, designed to promote conformity and to inhibit individuality in thought and action. Common to both is a type of reasoning indifferent to the “laws” of contradiction and excluded middle, to the distinction between subject and object, between the act of perception and the thing perceived; an attitude of equanimity towards life and death, the latter being considered closer to essential

Being than the former, and with a blurred boundary between the two; an approach to Reality which is intuitive and *a prioristic* rather than rational and empirical, and relies on fluid analogies rather than on well-defined concepts. Since the West regards the intuitive approach as essentially feminine, the rational approach as masculine, both Eastern cultures appear from our point of view to be dominated by men with a “feminine” logic and sensitivity compared to the down-to-earth, matter-of-fact attitude of the women.

I shall not try to discuss which of these similarities are derived from some common Asiatic mould in the remote past and which may be due to cultural interaction—Buddhism being the most obvious example of the latter. I would like to consider instead some of the differences and contrasts within the common framework.

The caste system in India, within historical times, was rigid; in Japan, relatively fluid. A *samurai* was entitled to cut down without further ado any commoner who annoyed, or supposedly annoyed, him; on the other hand, a commoner could pass into the *samurai* class by adoption and marriage. During the Shogunate, certain rich moneylenders—who, in theory, were only one step higher up in caste than the Eta—collected rent from indebted peasants and thereby acquired the status of landed gentry, though they did not really own the land; and they bought *samurai* status for their sons by getting them married to daughters of *samurai* and simultaneously adopted into the family. The Japanese custom of adopting a son-in-law entails the erasure of his name from his own family register, and its entry on the register of his father-in-law. Originally intended to prevent the

*This is the second of two articles by Mr. Koestler based on his recent trip to India and Japan. His study of YOGA UNEXPURGATED appeared in the August ENCOUNTER. The “stink of Zen,” as the author notes, “is not a rude expression, but a phrase often used in Zen literature,” and he adds: “The respect for ‘hard, obstinate facts’ which a scientific education imparts does not necessarily imply the denial of a different order of Reality; it does imply, however, the obligation to exhaust all possibilities of a natural explanation of phenomena before acknowledging that they belong to that different order. It could be said, then, that I went on my pilgrimage not so much with an open, as with an equally split mind. What emerged is a mixture of pedantic detail and sweeping generalisations....”*

extinction of a family's male lineage, it became a method of evading the rigours of the caste system—yet another example of the Japanese genius of combining rigidity in the abstract with elasticity in practice. As a result, when the feudal economy changed into an industrial economy, the feudal aristocracy did not have to face a hostile bourgeoisie, because it had literally “adopted” the bourgeois—either individually, or, in the case of the *Zaibatsu*, as a class; the new finance aristocracy was a kind of adopted son-in-law of the feudal state.

India, where the caste system rigidly survived into the modern age, had to go through a social revolution, disestablishing its Princes and their *Zamindar* retainers; whereas Japan was able to preserve her “Emperor system” and build a quasi-capitalistic state on a quasi-feudal foundation. If we search for an explanation of this difference in development, we are led to a basic contrast between the two countries. In India, intermarriage, and even inter-dining, between different castes was unthinkable because caste was ordained by divine providence and bound up with religion and rite; whereas in Japan, caste was regarded from the secular angle as a matter of rank in the social hierarchy and could be treated in a pragmatic manner.

A SIMILAR difference may be traced between the types of authority exercised by the father, the *guru*, and the *sensei*. In India, this authority is of a religious character, in Japan a matter of social obligations and codes of behaviour. The Indian father is *ipso facto* considered a saint; the Japanese father is nothing of the sort, but a creditor to whom a vast amount of *on* is due. The *guru* imparts spiritual *darshan* by his presence; the *sensei* imparts wisdom, which is accepted equally uncritically, but it is a wisdom of worldly learning. The extended family in India is held together by a mystical bond reflected in the joint household; in Japan, obligations towards the more distant members of the family are limited and graded, and if a poor relative must be taken in under one's roof, he is called a “cold rice relative” because he (or she) is last served, and treated with contempt. In India, social etiquette is vague, and the accent is on affirmations of love and affection, symbolised in the Hindu greeting of joining the palms in a smiling gesture of prayer; in Japan, it is an elaborate and watchful ritual. Exactly the reverse is true with regard to religious observances; in Japan, these are treated so non-

chalantly that at the Shinto shrine you clap your hands, or pull a bell-cord, to attract the attention of the gods; in India, it is ceremonialised in a series of ablutions, purifications, recitations. The Indian is careless in his dealings with society, punctilious in his dealings with deity; in Japan, it is the reverse. In India, the beggar has a divine right to alms, and to give means to acquire *darshan*; in Japan, gifts are exchanged and obligations returned in the exact amount of those received. In India, education of the child starts late and remains lax, except in matters of religious and filial observance; in Japan, strict social conditioning starts early, but in all matters not covered by the social code the Japanese child and adult enjoy considerably greater freedom.

The difference between the two cultures is most pronounced in their attitudes to carnality. It goes much deeper than, for instance, the contrast between an English puritan and a French libertine. The puritan is enjoined “to renounce the sinful lusts of the flesh”—but also to accept the Sacrament of marriage which makes “man and wife one flesh;” the Hindu considers marriage as a necessary and passing evil during the second of the four seasons of life, and intercourse as a physical and spiritual impoverishment. The French libertine, from Sade to Genêt, is always a rebel against morality, to which he pays implicit and ambivalent tribute; whereas the Japanese forms of libertinage are not antimoral but amoral, and sex is enjoyed for its own sake—as shown by the division of labour between concubine and wife. In India, masturbation is a sin against body and spirit, leading to neurosis and hypochondria; in Japan it is considered a solitary pastime, almost like smoking. In India, the woman—outside her role as mother—is the temptress who saps the male's strength, reflected in the image of blood-thirsty goddesses; the Japanese woman—again outside her role as mother—is a provider of manifold pleasures, skilled in dance, song, love, and witty conversation. In India, accordingly, she is allowed even less individual personality than the male; in Japan, more than the male, because she is not subject to the same code of honour. The obsessional food faddism and bowel worries of the Indians are of religious origin. The Japanese, too, were vegetarians—though never teetotallers—until the disestablishment of Buddhism; but the zest with which they took to *sukiyaki* and raw fish indicates that they considered the prohibition of meat more as a secular law than

a mystic commandment. Again in contrast to the Hindu pollution-phobia, the Japanese treat their fields with fresh human manure, which is put to use straight from the chamber-pot or *benjo* sink—Western housewives in Tokyo love to tell horror tales about cabbages, artistically arranged in shop-windows, and with dainty specks of excrement on them.

LIKE to remember and compare in retrospect some festive meals, traditional style, in India and Japan. In Japan, we would kneel in front of a low marquetry or lacquered table, manipulate with ebony chopsticks a succession of pretty and delicious miniature courses (some of which were prepared on charcoal braziers in front of us), and wash them down with thimblefuls of hot *sake* presented like sacrificial cups by kneeling waitresses or geisha. We would be refreshed by hot towels between dishes, and use in the course of the meal up to fifty Lilliputian plates, bowls, cups, saucers, and whatnots per guest. In India, if the meal was really in the traditional style, no plates, glasses, cups, or cutlery were used. We would either squat on the floor—as in Vinoba Bhavé's camps—or sit along a table, each with a palm-leaf serving as a plate in front of him, our left arms dangling lifelessly as if they had forgotten their cunning, while with three fingers of the right hand we would mix the rice, vegetables, and curd into a sloppy mush and scoop it into our mouths. After the meal, the guests would each in turn move a few steps away, a servant would pour water from a jug first over his fingers, then into his cupped palm to rinse his mouth and rub his teeth, and lastly to drink a few swallows—hoping, with St. Augustine, for “the day when Thou wilt destroy both the belly and the meat.”

Suicide in India is rare—the only cases sanctioned by tradition were widows committing *suttee*, and Yogis entering final *samadhi*; but the whole cycle of life is a detour towards death and liberation from the wheel. In Japan, even suicide is secularised, a matter of social convention, and *hara-kiri* is treated as a fine art for connoisseurs. Aesthetic perfectionism is as alien to contemporary India as religious perfectionism to Japan. India is a country of dark, tragic grandeur, and contempt for the frills and

vanities of life; the Japanese know thirty-five different ways of wrapping a gift-parcel in paper, and the worst tragedy they know is to lose face. The Indians are plagued by religious anxiety; the Japanese by worry about prestige. Ruth Benedict has suggested an interesting distinction between “guilt cultures” and “shame cultures,” which is much to the point:

A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on man's developing a conscience is a guilt culture. Shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behaviour, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalised conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism... by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasising to himself that he has been made ridiculous... In either case it is a potent sanction. But it requires an audience or at least a man's fantasy of an audience. Guilt does not... Shame has the same place of authority in Japanese ethics that “a clear conscience,” “being right with God,” and the avoidance of sin have in Western ethics. Logically enough, therefore, a man will not be punished in the afterlife. The Japanese—except for priests who know the Indian *sutras*—are quite unacquainted with the idea of reincarnation dependent upon one's merit in this life, and—except for some well-instructed Christian converts—they do not recognise post-death reward and punishment or a heaven and hell.<sup>1</sup>

Nor do they recognise Good and Evil as absolutes; Japanese ethics is pragmatic, relativistic, and situational. A man is not part good, part bad; he is part “rough soul” and part “gentle soul,” both considered equally useful under the proper circumstances. The classical Japanese vocabulary, which had no word for “competition” and “civic rights,” had no word for “God” either; to the first Jesuit missionaries “the translation of the word ‘God’ has caused great difficulties in Japan, where it has been most inadequately represented by the word *Kami*, which means little more than a superior being.”<sup>2</sup>

Which leads us to Zen.

### “Kill the Buddha”

ZEN is to religion what a “flat garden” is to a garden. It knows no god, no afterlife, no good and no evil, as the rock garden knows no flowers, herbs, or shrubs. It has no doctrine or holy writ, its teaching is transmitted mainly in the form of parables as ambiguous as the pebbles in the rock garden which symbolise now a mountain, now a fleeing tiger. When a disciple

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York, 1951).

asks "What is Zen?" the master's traditional answer is "Three pounds of flax" or "A decaying noodle" or "A toilet stick" or a whack on the pupil's head. Zen cannot be debunked because its method is self-debunking. In its *mondos* and *koans*, Japanese ambiguity reaches its metaphysical peak; it is the ultimate evasion. And for precisely that reason it played a vital part in maintaining the balance of extremes in Japanese life.

Taken at face value and considered in itself, Zen is at best an existentialist hoax, at worst a web of solemn absurdities. But within the framework of Japanese society, this cult of the absurd, of ritual leg-pulls and nose-tweaks, made beautiful sense. It was, and to a limited extent still is, a form of psychotherapy for a self-conscious, shame-ridden society, a technique of undoing the strings which tied it into knots; in a word, Zen was the *tanki* (as the Japanese call their tranquilliser pills) of feudal Japan.

In the supposedly oldest Zen poem, attributed to Seng-Ts'an (6th century A.D.), men are admonished:

*Saunter along and stop worrying  
If your thoughts are tied you spoil what is  
genuine. . . .  
The wise person does not strive;  
The ignorant man ties himself up. . . .  
If you work on your mind with your mind,  
How can you avoid an immense confusion? . . .  
If you want to get the plain truth,  
Be not concerned with right and wrong.  
The conflict between right and wrong  
Is the sickness of the mind.<sup>3</sup>*

From its earliest beginnings—supposedly in 6th-century China—the great masters of Zen denied that it aimed at moral improvement: "If a man seeks the Buddha, that man loses the Buddha." According to tradition, it was the fierce-looking Indian monk, Bodhidharma, who brought Buddhism to China in the 6th century. When the Emperor asked him how much merit he, the Emperor, had acquired by supporting the new creed, Bodhidharma shouted at him: "None whatsoever." The Emperor, rather shaken in his enthusiasm, then wanted to know just what the sacred doctrine of the creed was. Again Bodhidharma shouted, "It is empty, there is nothing sacred."

That interview set the tone for the Zen tradi-

tion, which makes a special point of being rude, abrupt, direct, and sarcastic—precisely those things which, according to the Japanese code of manners, must be avoided like the plague. The founding father himself, Bodhidharma, a favourite subject of Zen painting, is invariably portrayed as a snarling tough, with eyes menacingly bulging out of his head yet at the same time twinkling with sarcastic glee. Once he fell asleep while meditating, and got so furious about it that he promptly sawed off his offending eyelids. These dropped to the ground and became the seeds of the first tea-plants—hence the saying that Zen and tea "taste the same." Another leg-pull story has it that the ferocious Bodhidharma persisted in meditation so long that his legs fell off.

The tradition of deliberate rudeness has, significantly, been maintained to this day, and there are endless stories to illustrate it.

A monk asked Tosu (T'ou-tzu), a Zen master of the T'ang period: "I understand that all sounds are the voice of the Buddha. Is this right?" The master said, "That is right." The monk then proceeded: "Would not the master please stop making a noise which echoes the sound of a fermenting mass of filth?" The master thereupon struck the monk.

The monk further asked Tosu: "Am I in the right when I understand the Buddha as asserting that all talk, however trivial or derogatory, belongs to ultimate truth?" The master said, "Yes, you are in the right." The monk went on, "May I then call you a donkey?" The master thereupon struck him.<sup>4</sup>

The reason why the master struck him was not the monk's rudeness—which was in the right tradition of Zen-teasing—but because he was too logical—which is the one unforgivable sin in a Zen monastery. Dr. Suzuki, the *sensei* of Zen *senseis*, comments with a lucidity which is quite unusual in his voluminous writings:

The masterful Tosu knew, as all Zen masters do, the uselessness of making any verbal demonstration against such a "logician." For verbalism leads from one complication to another; there is no end to it. The only effective way, perhaps, to make such a monk as this one realise the falsehood of his conceptual understanding is to strike him and so let him experience within himself the meaning of the statement, "One in All and All in One." The monk was to be awakened from his logical somnambulism. Hence Tosu's drastic measure.

A monk asked the master Ts'ui-wei for what reason Bodhidharma had come from India. The master answered: "Pass me that chin-rest." As

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (London, 1957), pp. 89, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (London, 1959), p. 33.

soon as the monk had passed the chin-rest, the master whacked him over the head with it. That is all there is to the story. A chin-rest is a board to support the head during long meditation; and the moral of the story is evidently: don't try to reason—meditate.

Po-chang had so many students that he had to open a second monastery. To find a suitable person as its master, he called his monks together and set a pitcher before them, saying:

"Without calling it a pitcher, tell me what it is."

The head monk said, "You couldn't call it a piece of wood."

At this the monastery cook kicked the pitcher over and walked away. The cook was put in charge of the new monastery.

Why was the cook put in charge of the new monastery? As a reward, one might say, for his un-Japanese behaviour. This consisted not only in the rudeness, but above all in the spontaneity and directness of his gesture: in his "direct pointing," as Zen calls it, in contradistinction to verbal reflection. The cook was cutting through the Gordian knot.

The whackings and teasings are a mild form of shock therapy to jolt the student out of his mental habits and to hammer it into his head that he must act spontaneously, without thinking, without self-consciousness and hesitation. This is the main purpose of the *mondo*—the brief, sharp dialogue between master and pupil—and the *koan*—the logically insoluble riddle which the pupil must try to solve. A variant of the pitcher *koan*, for instance, is the bath-water *koan*. The master suddenly springs the question at the pupil: "When you let out the bath-water, does the eddy turn clockwise or anti-clockwise?" The pupil hesitates, and the master yells at him: "Don't think! Act!," whirling his hand in the air. Or, the master may ask: "A girl is walking down the street. Is she the younger or the older sister?" The correct answer is, apparently, for the pupil to put on a mincing walk, that is, to *become* the girl, and thereby to demonstrate that what matters is the experience of being and not its verbal description, the "suchness" of existence and not concepts like "older" or "sister."

The truth is, [says Dr. Suzuki] as Tosu declares in the following:

A monk asks, "What is the Buddha?"

Tosu answers, "The Buddha."

Monk: "What is the Tao?"

Tosu: "The Tao."

Monk: "What is Zen?"

Tosu: "Zen."

What is a rose? Is a rose, is a rose.

"In fact," Dr. Suzuki informs us, "there is no other way of illumining the monk's mind than affirming that what is is." And what was was, perhaps.

THESE are said to exist some one thousand seven hundred *koans*, divided into various categories. In the Rinzai sect of Zen, the disciple is supposed to pass through a series of about fifty *koans* of increasing difficulty before his graduation as a fully Enlightened One, and the process is supposed to take about thirty years—but this need not be taken by the letter. In the classic system of Hakuin, there are five graded categories of *koan*; but certain Zen abbots, whom I visited in Kyoto, mentioned a different classification: according to his character, the pupil would be given either "keen knife-edge" *koans* or "gentle spring-wind" *koans* or "iron ox" *koans*. A list of "correct" answers has never been published since this would destroy their purpose; but most of the *koans* are of a type which admits of no logically correct answer, only of a symbolic rejoinder in the spirit of Zen.

The oldest-known *koans* are the "Three Barriers of Hung-lun," an 11th-century Zen master:

*Question:* Everybody has a place of birth. Where is your place of birth?

*Answer:* Early this morning I ate white rice gruel. Now I'm hungry again.

*Question:* How is my hand like the Buddha's hand?

*Answer:* Playing the lute under the moon.

*Question:* How is my foot like a donkey's foot?

*Answer:* When the white heron stands in the snow it has a different colour.

The first answer seems to mean that the circumstances of birth and death are mere ripples in the flow of appearances, as unimportant as the eternal cycle of hunger and satiety. The second means, perhaps: do not try to reason, but serenade the moon and you are the Buddha. The third I leave to the reader to meditate upon.

Some of the *koans* and *mondos* have an archetypal ring. When Yao-shan was asked, "What is the Tao?" he pointed upwards to the sky and downwards to the water-jug before him. When pressed for an explanation, he replied, "A cloud in the sky and water in the jug." Other well-known classics are: "What was your basic nature before your parents made you?" and "What is the sound of a single-handed clap?" The last one is perhaps meant to symbolise that

subject and object have no separate existence, because the act of perception is indivisible like the act of clapping. In other words, the single-hand clapping is as “exceedingly odd” as it seemed to Bishop Berkeley “*that this tree/continues to be/when there’s no one about in the quad.*” And there is indeed no one about in the Zen monastery’s quad to answer: “*the tree/will continue to be/since observed by yours faithfully, God.*”

THOUGH submitted with the guilty knowledge that *koans* exist for the express purpose that they should not be logically explained, the logical explanations given above seem to be borne out by the strong emphasis of Zen on the indivisibility of experience, and on the foolishness of all attempts to chop it up into dualistic or abstract categories of thought. The Zen arch-enemy, the thousand-armed hydra which it fights to destroy, is rational thinking—verbal concepts, definitions, the operations of logic, classification by categories. The more extravagant *koans* are designed to reduce these to absurdity, to undermine the pupil’s confidence in his powers of conscious reasoning, and thus to clear away the obstacles to *satori*—the sudden flash of intuitive understanding which illuminates the path to Enlightenment. Hence the distrust of words, considered to be the germ carriers of abstract thought:

*Those who know do not speak  
Those who speak do not know*

*When you are silent “It” speaks  
When you speak “It” is silent.*

The philosophy of Zen is traditionally summed up in four sentences, attributed to the Second Patriarch—the pupil of Bodhidharma:

Unteachable and unorthodox—<sup>5</sup>  
Not founded on words and letters—  
Pointing directly into the human mind—  
Seeing into one’s nature and attaining Buddhahood.

The last point, by the way, is not stressed in contemporary Zen, because it holds that every man is born a Buddha anyway, though there are “short Buddhas” and “tall Buddhas”—or, to paraphrase Orwell, that all men are Buddha, but some are more Buddha than others. The

<sup>5</sup>This at least is my interpretation of Alan Watts’ interpretation of the four ideograms which constitute the first sentence. Watts’ rendering is: “Outside teaching; apart from tradition.” *The Way of Zen*, p. 88.

main emphasis in the quatrain is on the rejection of “words and letters,” and on the “direct pointing” at the intuitive faculties. Hence the deliberately absurd answer to the question, “What is the Buddha?:” “Three pounds of flax.”

That answer is attributed to T’ung-shan, who lived in the 9th century, and a later authority comments that “none can excel it as regards its irrationality which cuts off all passages to speculation.” The three pounds of flax remind one of the *koan* discussed by the mediæval schoolmen: “If God had chosen to be incarnated in the form of an ass or a pumpkin, could a pumpkin work miracles or be crucified?”—and of Erasmus’ comment: “They are Folly’s servants.” There is something of that Erasmian attitude in Zen’s contempt for the vanity of all endeavours to approach the Absolute with the yardsticks of logic.

THUS some *koans* do make “sense” by their direct appeal to intuitions beyond verbal thought, while others are meant to destroy the self-imposed restraints and imaginary fetters which prevent the spontaneous exercise of the imaginative powers. Once one has entered into the spirit of the game, the answers to certain types of *koan* become fairly obvious. For instance, if a Zen master suddenly barked at me, “Stop that ship on the distant ocean,” I should answer without turning a hair: “Don’t worry, I have just dropped an iceberg in front of it”—the idea being that if I am free to imagine a ship, what is there to prevent me from imagining an iceberg? When Tao-Hsin asked his master how to achieve liberation, the master asked back, “Who binds you?” “No one binds me,” said Tao-Hsin. “Why then should you seek liberation?” And that was the moment of Tao-Hsin’s Enlightenment. In other words, all you need to achieve freedom is to realise that you are free—otherwise you are like the man in the Chinese proverb who was searching for the ox while he was riding on it.

To quote another proverb, the *koans* are “bricks with which to knock open the door.” It is the door which leads to the “natural man,” imprisoned behind the walls of artificial restraints.

The whole teaching of Zen seems to be directed against the inhibitions and restraints imposed by the Japanese code of behaviour. Against the Spartan self-discipline demanded by the code stands Po-chang’s famous definition of

Zen: "When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep." The traditional dread of unforeseen situations is neutralised by springing surprises and shocks on the disciple and encouraging him to reciprocate in equally eccentric fashion: the *koan* technique is designed to bring out just that side of a person which the social code condemns: "the unexpected man." In the social code, "self-respect" is practically synonymous with cautious and circumspect behaviour, designed to avoid adverse comment; Zen bullies the pupil into throwing caution to the wind, and teaches him to respond spontaneously, "without even the thickness of a hair between impulse and act." Social conditioning leads to numbing self-consciousness and blushing homophobia; Zen aims at the annihilation of "the self-observing self." It proclaims itself to be the philosophy of no-mind (*Wu-hsin*), of no-thought (*Wu-mien*), no-striving (*Wu-wei*), no affectation (*Wu-shih*), and of "going ahead without hesitation." In the words of Yün-men, "When walking, just walk, when sitting, just sit, above all, don't wobble." In the social hierarchy, the father ranks second only to the Emperor in authority; Zen debunks even paternal authority by creating a kind of psychotherapeutic transference situation, where the *roshi*, abbot, poses as a formidable father-figure of "tigerish" appearance, but gradually induces the pupil to combine respect with spontaneity, and to respond to *koan* teasers with saucy counter-gambits. The cramped victim of Japanese education, tangled with *giri*, crushed by his *on*, is given by the founder of the Rinzai sect this kindly advice concerning the path towards self-realisation:

Clear every obstacle out of your way. If on your way you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha. When you meet your ancestor, kill your ancestor. When you meet your father and mother, kill your father and mother. When you meet your kin, kill your kin. Only thus will you attain deliverance. Only thus will you escape the trammels and become free.<sup>6</sup>

Another Zen command expresses the same idea in a less fierce image: "Let your mind go and become like a ball in a mountain stream."

### Satori and Samadhi

ZEN spontaneity became the ideal antidote to the Confucian rigidity of the social order. It was a marriage between extreme opposites, which is so characteristic of Japanese culture. But in this case the partners were destined for each other from childhood, as it were. Both came from China, where Confucianism and

Taoism had from ancient times played complementary parts in the nation's life: the former determining law, order, book-learning, and convention, the latter pointing to the intuitive Way—the Tao—towards the inner man and ultimate reality; the cloud in the sky and the water in the jug. Zen owes as much to Taoism as to Buddhism, and perhaps more: it has certainly remained closer to the philosophy of Lao Tse than to any Buddhist sect in other countries.

Zen was introduced into Japan in the 13th century—more than five centuries after Confucianism and earlier forms of Buddhism. It took immediate roots; but it became radically transformed in the process, and the flower was characteristically Japanese. By a feat of mental acrobacy, of which perhaps no other nation would be capable, the gentle, non-violent doctrine of the Buddha became the adopted creed of the murderous *samurai*. A little later it also became the dominant influence in painting, landscape-gardening, flower arrangement, tea ceremony, firefly hunting, and similar nipponeries on the one hand—of swordsmanship, wrestling, Judo, archery, dive-bombing, on the other. How was this possible? The secret is not in the Buddha's smile but in a simple formula applicable to all these diverse activities, the panacea of Zen: trust your intuition, short-circuit reflection, discard caution, act spontaneously. It is amazing what wonders this prescription can achieve, especially in a people tied in knots, conditioned to the reverse set of principles.

To make the formula take effect on the unconscious, non-verbal levels at which it was aimed, verbal admonitions were, of course, not enough. Apart from methods of developing the technical skills appropriate in each branch of activity, a mystic ritual and a special terminology were needed. Key-words in that terminology are *satori*, the sudden flash of insight which brings on Awakening or Enlightenment; the state of *muga*, which occurs when the split between the acting self and the self-observing self disappears, and the act becomes effortless, automatic, entranced—so that the painter or swordsman no longer feels that *he* is wielding the brush or making the thrust, but that a mysterious "It" has taken charge.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, a man who has com-

<sup>6</sup> There are several versions of this famous injunction; the above is Mishima's, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (New York, 1959), p. 258.

<sup>7</sup> "Muga" is the Japanese rendering of "Wu-mien"—no-thought.

pleted his training and reached final Enlightenment, will continue to live zestfully and apparently unchanged, but he will “live as one already dead”—that is, detached and indifferent to success or failure.

*Satori* is a wonderfully rubbery concept. There are small *satoris* and big *satoris*. They occur when one solves a *koan*, or in meditation, but also through looking at peach-blossom or watching a pebble hit a bamboo. The *mondos*, in which the disciple who asked a too rational question is whacked on the head, usually end with the line: “at that moment he had his *satori*.” Facing two famous Zen abbots in the Daitokuyi Temple in Kyoto, I asked them how long a *satori* lasts. The first answered promptly: “One second.” The second added as promptly: “It might go on for days.” Dr. Suzuki defines *satori* as follows:

*Satori* finds a meaning hitherto hidden in our daily concrete particular experiences, such as eating, drinking, or business of all kinds. . . .

*Satori* is emancipation, moral, spiritual, as well as intellectual. When I am in my isness, thoroughly purged of all intellectual sediments, I have my freedom in its primary sense. . . .

When the mind, now abiding in its isness—which, to use Zen verbalism, is not isness—and thus free from intellectual complexities, and moralistic attachments of every description, surveys the world of the senses in all its multiplicities, it discovers in it all sorts of values hitherto hidden from sight.

On another occasion he says:

This supreme moment in the life of an artist, when expressed in Zen terms, is the experience of *satori*. To experience *satori* is to become conscious of the Unconscious (*mushin*, no-mind), psychologically speaking. Art has always something of the Unconscious about it. . . .

Mr. Christmas Humphreys, Q.C., President of the Buddhist Society in London, who, like most modern exponents of Zen, is a pupil of Dr. Suzuki's, informs us in his book on Zen<sup>8</sup> that he had his first *satori* during a lesson in Judo: “On the night when, without ‘thought’ or feeling, I leapt to opportunity and in the fraction of time that my opponent was off his balance, threw him directly, clean, utterly;” but his greatest *satori* he had in a Turkish bath—which conjures up the image of Archimedes jumping out of the tub to shout *Eureka*. By modern Zen standards I would be quite justified to claim that I have a *satori* on each of the

rare occasions when I manage to write down a sentence which says exactly what I mean.

THUS the phenomena covered by the term *satori* range from the mental click vulgarly described as “the penny has dropped,” through flashes of inspiration of a higher (artistic or mystic) order, to that lasting change of character which creates a “living Buddha”—in our language, a well balanced or integrated personality.

The accent is always on insight gained by intuition as opposed to cognition, and on tapping the resources of the unconscious; and *satori* could be simply translated by the word “intuition” which is equally elastic and covers the same range of phenomena. There is not more to it, but also not less. The rest is pseudo-mystical verbiage.

Though Zen derives from Yoga and cultivates the use of Sanskrit terms, it aims in the opposite direction. *Samadhi* is the elimination of the conscious self in the deep sleep of *nirvana*; *satori* is the elimination of the conscious self in the wide-awake activities of intuitive living. The Yogi strives to drown himself in the universal unconscious; the Zen practitioner strives to bring the submerged “It” from the depths to the surface. To make the point quite clear: *literally*, *samadhi* means “deep sleep,” *satori* means “awakening.” *Mystically*, of course, “deep sleep” means entering into Real Life, whereas the Awakened one “lives like one already dead.” But *cynically* speaking, it is less risky and more pleasant to choose the Zen path—to live in *nirvana* rather than be dead in *nirvana*. And, however sincere the Chinese Zen Patriarchs' intentions were when they reversed the direction of Indian Buddhism, the Zen way of the *samurai*, of the modern Flower Masters and gay abbots, seems to be more inspired by that cynical truth—not in their conscious minds, God forbid, but in the intuitive depths of their such-ness.

### The Hitter and the Hit

LEAVING the mumbo-jumbo aside, the special training techniques in any branch of “applied Zen” show remarkable psychological insight and produce some equally remarkable results. Japanese wrestling, for instance, is fascinating to watch because, though the wrestlers often weigh over three hundred pounds and attain six-and-a-half and even seven feet, which

<sup>8</sup> *Zen Buddhism* (London, 1949).



by Japanese standards makes them into giants, their movements are quick as lightning, and the contest has something of the eerie quality of a mongoose fighting a snake.

The bout itself lasts usually less than a minute, but the preliminaries take fifteen minutes and used to take up to forty-five. The purpose of these preliminary rituals is for the contestants to limber up, both mentally and physically. They approach each other, sprinkle salt on the ground by way of purification, throw water over their shoulders and perform a curious balancing act on one leg, then turn their backs and go into a kind of brooding meditation, waiting for *muga*. Part of all this may be showmanship, but one recognises the genuine element when, the psychological moment having suddenly arrived, the two inert mountains of flesh leap at each other with lightning speed, as the mongoose leaps at the cobra's throat, as if "It" had taken possession of them; after a few turns and twists of breathtaking nimbleness, which look as if no force was being used at all, one of the mountains crashes on the floor or is thrown clear of the ring.

The main emphasis in "applied" Zen training is on complete indifference towards success and failure. The "It" will only enter into action when straining and striving have ceased and the action becomes "effortless" and automatic. The formula is, of course, quite misleading because the athlete *will* use the last ounce of his strength to win; what the training really aims at is to relieve the *mental* strain, and the resulting cramped style. But in a culture haunted by the fear of failure, the contestant must be hypnotised into the belief that he does not care about the outcome, that he is not competing but performing a mystic ritual. Hence the invariably ritualistic setting, and the mystic language employed in archery or fencing or flower arrangement, by which Western enthusiasts, unacquainted with the psychological background, are so easily taken in. Mr. Christmas Humphreys, who had an Awakening because he had thrown an opponent in Judo, is a rather endearing case. But it is distressing when a book like Dr. Eugen Herrigel's on Zen and Archery,<sup>9</sup> which manages to combine the more ponderous kind of Germanic mysticism with the more obvious kind of Zen hocus-pocus, is taken seriously by the public in the West. Since this

<sup>9</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery* (London, third impression, 1959).

is one of the few descriptions of applied Zen training, it deserves a closer look.

It starts with the inevitable Introduction by Professor Suzuki. His very first sentence informs us that the practice of archery in Japan is "not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for purely æsthetic enjoyment" but to bring the mind "into contact with the ultimate reality. . . . In the case of archery the hitter and the hit are no longer two opposing objects, but are one reality." There we go; now for Herr Herrigel:

By archery in the traditional sense, which he esteems as an art and honours as a national heritage, the Japanese does not understand as a sport but, strange as this may sound at first, a religious ritual. And consequently, by the "art" of archery he does not mean the ability of the sportsman which can be controlled, more or less, by bodily exercises, but an ability whose origin is to be sought in spiritual exercises and whose aim consists in hitting a spiritual goal, so that fundamentally the marksman aims at himself and may even succeed in hitting himself. . . .

Should one ask, from this standpoint, how the Japanese Masters understand this contest of the archer with himself, and how they describe it, their answer would sound enigmatic in the extreme. For them the contest consists in the archer aiming at himself—and yet not at himself, in hitting himself—and yet not himself, and thus becoming simultaneously the aimer and the aim, the hitter and the hit. Or, to use some expressions which are nearest the heart of the Masters, it is necessary for the archer to become, in spite of himself, an unmoved centre. Then comes the supreme and ultimate miracle: art becomes "art-less," shooting becomes not-shooting, a shooting without bow and arrow; the teacher becomes a pupil again, the Master a beginner, the end a beginning, and the beginning perfection.

Dr. Herrigel explains that he had always been attracted by mysticism; when, in the 1920s, he went to Tokyo University to teach philosophy, he tried to penetrate the mysteries of Zen. But he was told that as a European he could only succeed in this through the study of one of the arts of applied Zen. He thereupon undertook a six-year course of instruction in archery under "one of the greatest masters of this art." Towards this Master he soon developed the Eastern *guru*-father complex; the ruder the Master was the more devotedly he loved him. "Believe me," he quotes with approval a fellow-disciple, "the Master knows you and each of his pupils much better than we know ourselves. He reads in the souls of his pupils more than they care to admit."

About the technical side of the instruction we are told almost nothing—the first year was

apparently spent in learning to draw the bow "spiritually" and to control one's breathing while doing so—but all the more about the Master's sayings:

"We master archers say: one shot—one life! What this means, you cannot yet understand. But perhaps another image will help you, which expresses the same experience. We master archers say: with the upper end of the bow the archer pierces the sky, on the lower end, as though attached by a thread, hangs the earth. . . ."

"He who can shoot with the horn of the hare and the hair of the tortoise, and can hit the centre without bow (horn) and arrow (hair), he alone is Master in the highest sense of the word—Master of the artless art. Indeed, he is the artless art itself and thus Master and no-Master in one. At this point archery, considered as the unmoved movement, the undanced dance, passes over into Zen."

THE gist of the Master's teaching, repeated in endless parables and variations, can be put into three words: Don't worry, relax. Translated into Zen jargon, they read: "... only by withdrawing from all attachments whatsoever, by becoming utterly egoless: so that the soul, sunk within itself, stands in the plenitude of its nameless origin . . ." etc. However, on a few rare occasions, Dr. Herrigel descends to earth.

If everything depends on the archer's becoming purposeless and effacing himself in the event, then its outward realisation must occur automatically, in no further need of the controlling or reflecting intelligence.

It is this mastery of form that the Japanese method of instruction seeks to inculcate. Practice, repetition, and repetition of the repeated with ever increasing intensity are its distinctive features for long stretches of the way.

The key-word is "automatically." In the third year, the disciple underwent a spiritual crisis. It had been impressed on him that he should not lose the arrow by a conscious act of will; the shot must fall by itself from the archer "like snow from a bamboo-leaf." This became an *idée fixe* with him, and while on a holiday, he devised a method of cheating: he eased his grip gradually until the pressure of the bow-string loosed the shot as if this had happened spontaneously. When he demonstrated this heretic technique, "the Master stepped up to me without a word, took the bow from my hand, and sat down on a cushion, his back towards me. I knew what that meant, and withdrew." The stern Master then refused to instruct him further, but was mollified by a distinguished

Japanese go-between. In the fourth year of his training, Herrigel summoned up his courage to ask the Master: "How can the shot be loosed if 'I' do not do it?"

"'It' shoots," he replied.

More months of agony went by.

Then one day, after a shot, the Master made a deep bow and broke off the lesson. "Just then 'It' shot!" he cried, as I stared at him bewildered.

It took, however, some time before he learnt to distinguish his own, right "It" shots from his wrong "I" shots. At last—whether in the fourth, or fifth year, is not made clear—he was allowed to shoot at a target. But it was not explained to him how to take aim. Instead, the Master told him:

If you hit the target with nearly every shot you are nothing more than a trick archer who likes to show off. For the professional who counts his hits, the target is only a miserable piece of paper which he shoots to bits. The "Great Doctrine" holds this to be sheer devilry. It knows nothing of a target which is set up at a definite distance from the archer. It only knows of the goal, which cannot be aimed at technically, and it names this goal, if it names it at all, the Buddha.

So, for the following weeks or months, he went on shooting his arrows without taking aim. By what method he ever learnt to aim we are again not told, but it is clearly hinted that the method employed was telepathy.

Thus, through deepest concentration, he transferred the spirit of his art to his pupils, and I am not afraid to confirm from my own experience, which I doubted long enough, that the talk of immediate communication is not just a figure of speech but a tangible reality. There was another form of help which the Master communicated to us at that time, and which he likewise spoke of as immediate transference of the spirit. If I had been continually shooting badly, the Master gave a few shots with my bow. The improvement was startling: it was as if the bow let itself be drawn differently, more willingly, more understandingly.

Nevertheless, the pupil kept worrying about the Master's contention that hitting the target had nothing to do with aiming.

"That is just what I cannot get into my head," I answered. "I think I understand what you mean by the real, inner goal which ought to be hit. But how it happens that the outer goal, the disc of paper, is hit without the archer's taking aim, and that the hits are only outward confirmations of inner events—that correspondence is beyond me."

"You are under an illusion," said the Master after a while, "if you imagine that even a rough understanding of these dark connections would help you. These are processes which are beyond the reach of understanding. . . . The archer hits the target without having aimed—more I cannot say."

Then, one night, the Master dispelled Dr. Herrigel's doubts by a demonstration of two masterly shots at a target lit only by the tiny flame of a taper. Finally, in the sixth year of training, the author learnt to "dance the ceremony" prescribed in the Great Doctrine of Archery "down to the minutest gesture," passed a public test, and was awarded a diploma. "The Master brought the proceedings to an end by giving two masterly shots in robes of surpassing magnificence. A few days later my wife, in an open contest, was awarded the master title in the art of flower arrangement."<sup>10</sup>

**J**UST before this happy ending there is a revealing passage in the book:

"Do you now understand," the Master asked me one day after a particularly good shot, "what I mean by 'It' shoots, 'It hits'?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand anything more at all," I answered, "even the simplest things have got in a muddle. Is it 'I' who draws the bow, or is it the bow that draws me into the state of highest tension? Do 'I' hit the goal, or does the goal hit me? Is 'It' spiritual when seen by the eyes of the body, and corporeal when seen by the eyes of the spirit—or both or neither? Bow, arrow, goal, and ego, all melt into one another so that I can no longer separate them. And even the need to separate has gone. For as soon as I take the bow and shoot everything becomes so clear and straight-forward and so ridiculously simple. . . ."

Precisely. But was that six-years' detour into the metaphysical fog really necessary before shooting an arrow was revealed as the "ridiculously simple" act which it always had been? The answer is, of course, that every skilled performance appears hopelessly complicated until, through training, it becomes automatic and thereby "simple." The training has a technical and a psychological aspect. About the technical side we learn, in a passage which I have quoted, that it consisted of "practice, repetition, and repetition of the repeated with ever increasing

intensity." There is nothing new about that method; its aim is to enable the pupil to exercise his skill automatically, even "in his sleep." The psychological side of the training is designed to eliminate self-consciousness; its mystic verbiage and esoteric ceremonial are expected to facilitate this process by their irrational appeal to the unconscious. For a pupil brought up in traditional Japanese ways, this may be—or may have been—the proper antidote to mental cramp. On an occidental, the main effect of it is to befuddle him.

In spite of the "Great Doctrine" and the mumbo-jumbo, the technical achievements of Japanese archery seem to be unimpressive. Dr. Herrigel writes too much in a cloud to bother about technical information; on the one occasion when he does so, we learn that the target of the two unforgettable master-shots was at twenty yards' distance. In American championship tests, which consist of several rounds, the target is placed successively at sixty, eighty, and a hundred yards. But the comparison may be misleading because we do not know what kind of bow the Master used; and I was unable to discover reports of Japanese participation in international contests. On the other hand, we know that Judo, another Zen art on behalf of which extravagant claims were raised, is an excellent means of self-defence against an assailant of superior physique and inferior skill, but not more—as was shown at the Olympic Games of 1928 and 1932, when the Japanese champions were defeated in free-style wrestling by other teams.

**I**F HERRIGEL'S slim volume on Zen archery contains little information on its proper subject, Suzuki's long treatise on *Zen and Swordsmanship* contains no information whatsoever on swordsmanship. Neither the type of sword used, nor the technique of using it are mentioned; not even the fact that it is wielded with both hands. It is a repetitive and confused farrago of *koans*, *mondos*, poems, and quotations partly on Zen in general, partly on the theme that the *samurai*-swordsman was fearless, indifferent to death, animated by "It" and "no-mind," and really a Gandhian saint, since "to state it more concretely, bad is good, ugly is beautiful, false is true, imperfect is perfect, and also conversely." A few more quotations are indispensable if one wishes to get a clearer idea of Zen as expounded by the undisputed contemporary authority on it.

<sup>10</sup> Frau Dr. Herrigel also wrote a book—duly prefaced by Professor Suzuki—*Zen in the Art of Flower Arrangement* (London, 1958).

The sword is generally associated with killing, and most of us wonder how it can come into connection with Zen, which is a school of Buddhism teaching the gospel of love and mercy. The fact is that the art of swordsmanship distinguishes between the sword that kills and the sword that gives life. The one that is used by a technician cannot go any further than killing, for he never appeals to the sword unless he intends to kill. The case is altogether different with the one who is compelled to lift the sword. For it is really not he but the sword itself that does the killing. He has no desire to do harm to anybody, but the enemy appears and makes himself a victim. It is as though the sword performs automatically its function of justice, which is the function of mercy. This is the kind of sword that Christ is said to have brought among us. It is not meant just for bringing the peace mawkishly cherished by sentimentalists. . . . When the sword is expected to play this sort of role in human life, it is no more a weapon of self-defence or an instrument of killing, and the swordsman turns into an artist of the first grade, engaged in producing a work of genuine originality.

Tajima no kami thinks that the seeing must first take place in the mind, and then it is transmitted to the eyes, and finally to the body and limbs. . . . If it is the physical organ of sight that first perceives the outside world, as our psychologists would tell us, the act that is needed to follow up the first perception will have to go through the anatomical process of transmission as we have it in our medical textbooks. This will, however, be too tortuous a procedure for the swordsman in the thick of combat involving life. He cannot afford such a luxury or refinement. He must act without intellectual jugglery or, as some would call it, tomfoolery. Hence Tajima no kami's most penetrating observation.

Yagyū seems to be speaking psychologically when he makes his sword see what is not visible as well as what is visible—and this simultaneously. For the visible is the invisible and conversely. In terms of logic, "A" is "not-A" and "not-A" is "A." The sword is, as it were, held at the identification point of opposites.

The conviction that "I am the only swordsman who has no peers in the world" . . . matches the declaration which, according to Mahayana tradition, the Buddha made at his birth: "Heavens above and earth below, I alone am the most honoured one!" This matching of the two declarations is interesting in a double sense: "Ichiun applauds 'infantism' as incarnating the principle of swordsmanship, while it was the infant Buddha who made the bold declaration."

After swordsmanship, a brief remark on teamanship. This is not a Potterism, since Dr. Suzuki calls the master of the tea ceremony a "teaman." About the *satori* of teamanship we learn:

The following is the view on the tea held by Seisetsu (1746-1820), a Japanese Zen master of the late Tokugawa era:

"My Tea is No-tea, which is not No-tea in opposition to Tea. What then is this No-tea? When a man enters into the exquisite realm of No-tea he will realise that No-tea is no other than the Great Way (ta-tao) itself. . . ."

Seisetsu's "No-Tea" is a mysterious variation of the tea. He wants to reach the spirit of the art by the way of negation. This is the logic of Prajna philosophy, which has sometimes been adopted by the Zen masters. As long as there is an event designated as "Tea" this will obscure our vision and hinder it from penetrating into "Tea" as it is in itself.

There is one redeeming possibility: that all this drivel is deliberately intended to confuse the reader, since one of the avowed aims of Zen is to perplex and unhinge the rational mind. If this hypothesis were correct, Professor Suzuki's voluminous *œuvre* of at least a million words, specially written for this purpose, would represent a hoax of truly heroic dimensions, and the laugh would be on the Western intellectuals who fell for it. I shall return to this point in a moment.

## Decline

**I**N SPITE of its remarkable achievements, Zen began to develop certain degenerative symptoms at an early stage. They seem to have started at the spiritual core of the movement, the monasteries. When St. Xavier arrived in Japan in 1549—some two hundred years after the beginning of the great Zen vogue—he made friends with a scholarly and enlightened Zen abbot named Ninjitsu.

Ninjitsu one day took Xavier to the meditation hall of his monastery, where the monks were engaged in their usual exercise of Zazen, which consists of kneeling motionless in concentrated thought upon one subject for the purpose of clearing the mind of all extraneous matters and thus approaching an intuitive grasp of truth. Xavier asked what these men were doing, and Ninjitsu replied: "Some are counting up how much they took from the faithful last month; some are considering where they can get better clothing and treatment for themselves; others are thinking of their recreations and pastimes. In short, none of them is thinking of anything that has any sense whatever."<sup>11</sup>

I was reminded of that passage during a talk with an equally amiable Zen abbot in Kyoto, who, having passed through his final *satori* and graduated as a Buddha "living like one already dead," had just bought himself a television set.

<sup>11</sup> Sansom, *The Western World and Japan*, p. 122.

In Mishima's novel there is another abbot, whom his devoted pupil catches out leaving a cinema, dressed in European clothes, in the company of a geisha. Their attitudes to the vanities of the world seem to be like that of the alcoholic who affirms that he is cured, and that he no longer drinks because he needs it but just for fun.

Although the practice of Zazen—sitting motionless on the wooden platform of the meditation hall—plays a dominant part in monastic routine, Zen and meditation somehow do not seem to fit together. It is the practice of a mystic technique without mystic content; if there is no God, no Moral Law, no doctrine, no teaching, what is there left to meditate about—except repeating a-rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose, as a means to self-hypnosis? The same doubt was voiced more than a millennium ago by one of the great Masters, Huai-jang, when he found another Master sitting in meditation.

“Your reverence,” asked Huai-jang, “what is the objective of sitting in meditation?”

“The objective,” answered Ma-tsu, “is to become a Buddha.”

Thereupon Huai-jang picked up a floor-tile and began to polish it on a rock.

“What are you doing, master?” asked Ma-tsu.

“I am polishing it for a mirror,” said Huai-jang.

“How could sitting in meditation make a Buddha?”

Yet the more dubious the object of meditation, the more rigorously it was enforced by disciplinary measures which one might call barbaric, were it not for the Japanese love of Spartan methods. The monitor in the meditation hall carries a massive staff with a sharp end, and if a disciple fidgets or becomes drowsy, he whacks him with a sharp blow across the shoulder blades. Richard Rumbold, an English Zen enthusiast, who spent about five months at the Shokokuji, a monastery in Kyoto, describes some savage beatings-up administered by the head monk and his assistant for trifling disciplinary offences. He also gives glimpses of the atmosphere in the Zendo hall:

Meditation lasted normally from early evening till ten or eleven at night. But once a month there was a whole week during which we were supposed to meditate more or less continuously with only short breaks for sleep and food. These

periods were a nervous ordeal since the *jikijitsu* would urge us to make a special effort to gain *satori*, at the same time using his stick freely; and by the middle of the week the monks had become glassy-eyed with excitement, tension, and fatigue, like soldiers in the thick of battle.<sup>12</sup>

The article is aptly entitled “Catching the Mood of the Universe.”

ZAZEN meditation, unlike Yoga, holds out no promise of supernatural rewards. At the risk of being repetitive, I must again mention that while both Yoga and Zazen aim at penetrating beyond the captive mind, the “beyond” means in one case trance-sleep and death, in the other case a more intense awareness of the Now and Here. Thus Yoga is a challenge to existence; Zen, a challenge to conventionality. The Yogi practises physical contortions to make his body acquiesce in its own annihilation; Zen uses the mental contortions of the *koan* to stun reason and force it to abdicate. And just as in Hatha Yoga the *asanas* and *mudras* have become physical substitutes for true meditation, thus in Rinzai Zen the *koans* and *mondos* fill the spiritual vacuum.

The *koans* I have so far quoted were relatively tame—like the Yoga *asanas* for Westerners. Here is a more advanced one, a famous classic known as Father Nansen's kitten. It appears in a 13th-century anthology, the *Mumonkan*, and concerns a famous Zen abbot, Nan Ch'uan (Nansen)—whose monks, while cutting the grass, saw a little kitten suddenly appear in a mountain temple. They caught it, but immediately the two groups inhabiting the East Hall and the West Hall of the monastery began to quarrel about its possession. Father Nan Ch'uan, listening to the dispute, caught the kitten by the scruff of its neck and, putting his sickle against it, told the monks: “If one of you can utter ‘a good word’ (that is, a spontaneous Zen repartee), this kitten shall be saved; if not, it shall be killed.” There was a dead silence, so Father Nan Ch'uan cut the kitten into two and threw it away. Later in the day, the chief disciple, Yoshu, returned to the temple. Father Nan Ch'uan told him what had happened and asked for his opinion. “Yoshu immediately removed his shoes, put them on his head, and left the room. At this Father Nan Ch'uan lamented sorely, saying, ‘Oh, if only you had been here to-day the kitten's life would have been saved.’”<sup>13</sup>

My own reaction when I first read this *koan*

<sup>12</sup> ENCOUNTER, January 1959.

<sup>13</sup> Mishima's version, *op. cit.*

was possibly good Zen, because it had nothing to do with the story itself—it brought back to my mind that in the monasteries unwanted kittens and puppies are put out and left to die of exposure because Buddhism disapproves of killing animals. It is one of the few Zen practices dictated by an ethical commandment.

To return to the *koan*, this is how Mishima's Zen abbot explains its meaning in a solemn lecture to the assembled disciples:

The reason that Father Nansen had killed the cat was that he had cut away the illusion of self and had eradicated all irrelevant thoughts and fantasies from his mind. Putting his insensibility into practice, he had cut off the kitten's head and had thus cut off all contradiction, opposition, and discord between self and others. This was known as the Murdering Sword, whereas Yoshu's action was called the Life-Giving Sword. By performing an action of such infinite magnanimity as wearing filthy and despised objects like shoes on his head, he had given a practical demonstration of the way of the Bodhisattva.

The only appropriate comment on this is a passage by Mr. Alan Watts, speaking in dead earnest:

The continued practice of zazen... provides the student with a clear, unobstructed mind into which he can toss the *koan* like a pebble into a pool and simply watch to see what his mind does with it. As he concludes each *koan*, the *roshi* usually requires that he present a verse from the Zenrin Kushu which expresses the point of the *koan* just solved. Other books are also used, and the late Sokeian Sasaki, working in the United States, found that an admirable manual for this purpose was "Alice in Wonderland."

Mr. Christmas Humphreys is equally serious in quoting an episode from *Through the Looking Glass*, and declaring: "This immortal passage is the purest of Zen."

This brings me back, for almost the last time, to Professor Suzuki and the question whether he and his disciples are trying to fool the reader or themselves. Since "*Alice*" is now being used as a Zen manual, I may as well confess that I have always been puzzled by Dr. Suzuki's striking spiritual resemblance either to Tweedledum or Tweedledee, whose twin such-nesses are

<sup>14</sup>To utter emotional shouts in a sword fight is an even older, specific Zen invention, which became an esoteric cult. The traditional shout is "*Katsu*," and Dr. Suzuki has explained its meaning:

"*Katsul*" is pronounced 'Ho!' in modern Chinese. In Japan when it is actually uttered by the Zen people, it sounds like '*Katz!*' or '*Kwatz!*'—*tz* like *tz* in German '*Blitz*.' It is primarily a meaningless ejaculation. Since its first use by Baso Doichi... it came to be extensively used by the Zen

no doubt meant to symbolise the identity of tea and no-tea, arrow and target, author and reader, the deluding and deluded mind.

### The "It" and the Knack

THE slow decline of monastic life, the voiding of Zen's spiritual core, was bound to affect the arts which had fallen under its sway. Its original impact on Japanese life has been immensely liberating and stimulating—as witnessed, for instance, by the Sumi-e style of landscape painting, which had grown under Zen influence in China under the Sung dynasty and had followed Zen to Japan; or by the Haiku type of poetry; or in the Zen-inspired schools of pottery. The flourishing of the Zen arts coincided approximately with the European Renaissance, and lasted to the end of the 17th century. It created a style of art, and a style of life of unique flavour, a golden age whose golden fall-out still lingers over the islands.

The gradual degeneration of Zen art seems to have been caused by a curious misconception inherent in Zen psychology. I mean the confusion between two different types of uninhibited "spontaneous" responses: the spontaneous flash of creative originality, and the pseudo-spontaneity in exercising a skill which has become automatic. Both are immediate and unpremeditated, but the former is an improvisation sprung up from the creative depths of the psyche, the latter is a stereotyped reaction, either innate or impressed through learning by rote. In other words, the confusion is between intuitive response and conditioned reflex.

In a culture which rigorously suppresses the manifestation of emotions and regards self-control as the highest of virtues, spontaneity acquires a magic aura, even if it amounts to no more than shouting in pain. Hakuin is revered as the author of the *koan* system in its modern form, but perhaps even more because he shouted in pain on his deathbed. In his youth, he was shocked by the story that an earlier master, Yen-t'ou, screamed when he was killed by a robber; but when Hakuin had his *satori* he saw in a flash that yelling in pain was a triumph of Zen, a spontaneous manifestation of "It." Since Japanese women in labour are not supposed to utter a single moan, Hakuin's *satori* must indeed have been a revelation to him.<sup>14</sup> In this, as in similar Zen stories, it is impossible to say whether the "It" is meant to convey a divine inspiration, or the natural, uninhibited play of

physiological reactions: "When walking, walk, when sitting, sit, but above all don't wobble."<sup>15</sup>

ONCE more in a culture where the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er, this would be sound advice—if only it were left at that. The purpose of the *koan* is to make the cramped pupil answer without hesitation and reflection—but at this point the dreadful confusion sets in. Since it would need a genius to produce an intuitively inspired answer to every *koan*, the pupil soon learns instead the *type* of answer that is expected of him—the "pointing" gesture, the absurd *non-sequitur*, the rude leg-pull, etc.—and the *mondo* becomes a game after a stereotyped pattern, another automatic skill. When the second Patriarch whacked the third Patriarch over the head and called the Buddha a noodle, they probably meant to give a new turn to mystic thought, not to create a Punch and Judy routine.

The same basic confusion, the same substitution of a ready-made formula for original intuition bedevilled all forms of applied Zen. The inspired "It" ceded to the mechanical knack. The perfect swordsman, says Dr. Suzuki, "becomes a kind of automaton, so to speak, as far as his own consciousness is concerned." In archery, fencing, wrestling, or Judo, this automatic skill of the no-mind is, of course, infinitely preferable to self-conscious wobbleings. But in poetry and painting, dancing or landscape gardening, the substitution leads to lingering death by paralysis.

The *Haiiku* is a typical example of what happened to other Zen arts. It is a poem of seventeen syllables in three lines. It was derived from the classic form of Japanese poetry, the *Waka*—

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masters. Rinzai distinguishes four kinds of 'Katz!' (1) Sometimes the 'Katz!' is like the sword of Vajrarapa (which cuts and puts to death anything dualistic appearing before it); (2) sometimes it is like the lion crouching on the ground; (3) sometimes it is like the sounding pole or a bundle of shading grass; (4) sometimes it serves no purpose whatever... In Zen, what is most significant among these four 'Katz!' is the fourth, when the cry ceases to serve any kind of purpose, good or bad, practical or impractical. Someone remarks that Rinzai with all his astuteness omits a fifth 'Katz!'..."

<sup>15</sup> Next in importance among Zen slogans after *Wu-mien* (no-mind) is *Wu-shih*—i.e., that "nothing special" is to be gained by it; at the same time *Wu-shih* also means "natural, unaffected."

<sup>16</sup> R. H. Blyth, *Haiiku* (Tokyo, 1949, 1950, 1952).

<sup>17</sup> Moritake, 1472-1549; Basho, 1644-94; Buson, 1716-84.

a succession of five-syllable and seven-syllable lines without rhyme, rhythm, stress, or metre. The *Waka* could go on without limits, as it presumably did in early folk-poetry; but from the 10th century onward, its most practised form was the *Tanka*—31 syllables in lines of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7. Out of this the *Haiiku* developed by chopping off the two last lines, leaving 5, 7, 5 syllables as its unalterable structure. Its form resembles a truncated limerick, but without rhyme or rhythmic pattern; its content is a kind of lyrical epigram—a mood caught in a butterfly net.

*With the evening breeze  
The water laps against  
The heron's legs.*

At its best, the *Haiiku* is allusive and elusive like the best *koans*—like "the sound of a single hand clapping." It has "It:"

*In the dense mist  
What is being shouted  
Between hill and boat?*

*The sea darkens;  
The voices of the wild ducks  
Are faintly white.*

*You light the fire;  
I'll show you something nice,—  
A great ball of snow!*

But these inspired vignettes of the great *Haiiku* masters of the 16th and 17th centuries are few and far between the mechanical turnings-out of a *genre* whose knack is all too easy to learn. The proof is that out of the hundreds of *Haiikus* in Mr. Blyth's classic three-volume collection<sup>16</sup> it is always the same half-dozen favourites—by Basho, Buson, or Moritake<sup>17</sup>—that are quoted as samples. Nevertheless the seventeen-syllable *Haiiku* and the thirty-one-syllable *Tanka* have remained for the last five hundred years the only forms of popular poetry in Japan. In 1956, the magazine *Haiiku Research* estimated that there were at least four million *Haiiku* poets practising the art—if that is the proper word for the tireless permutations of crows perching on a branch, frogs leaping into a pond, drops sliding off bamboo-leaves, and autumn leaves rustling in the ditch. Its stereotyped imagery and fixed number of syllables leave no scope for individuality, style, or for critical evaluation. The inquisitive Mr. D. J. Enright once asked some Japanese professors of literature,

...how they could tell a good *Haiiku* from a bad *Haiiku*. "We cannot," replied one of them,

“the trouble is that we don’t know what standards to apply. But perhaps you, from Cambridge...” He smiled politely. Another suggested with a strangled cough, “All *Haiku* are good, perhaps?”

The same degenerative process, due to the same causes, can be seen in the Zen schools of painting, from the truly “spontaneous,” powerful work of Seshu—who used not only the brush, but fistfuls of straw dipped in ink to impart to his landscapes their violent motion—through the gradual hardening of the arteries in the Zenga, Haigu, and Calligraphic styles, into mannerism and aridity. To-day, painting is taught much in the same manner as archery and other skilled routines. Dr. Herrigel remarks admiringly: “What is true of archery and swordsmanship also applies to all other arts. Thus, mastery in ink painting is only attained when the hand, exercising perfect control over technique, executes what hovers before the mind’s eye at the moment when the mind begins to form it, without there being a hair’s breadth between. Painting then becomes spontaneous calligraphy.” He then goes on to quote (without saying so) George Duthuit’s remark: “He who deliberates and moves his brush intent on making a picture, misses to a still greater extent the art of painting. Draw bamboos for ten years, become a bamboo, then forget all about bamboos when you are drawing.”

A surprisingly great number of Japanese have indeed the knack of drawing surprisingly pretty bamboos—and rocks, trees, cranes, and butterflies; the only trouble is that the bamboos and butterflies all look the same. Zen art has declined into producing variations on a few limited themes in a few limited styles—into “spontaneous calligraphy” as the revealing phrase reads. There are still works of greater or lesser distinction being produced, but their subjects are stereotyped and their style petrified.

Zen started as a de-conditioning cure and ended up as a different type of conditioning. The cramp of self-critical watchfulness was

<sup>18</sup> Several Japanese psychiatrists explained to me that Freud’s emphasis on sex and guilt does not apply to Japanese society “because sex is taken for granted,” and “guilt” is a concept created by Christianity. (But what about India?)

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in “Morita Therapy—A Psychotherapy in the Way of Zen” by Takehisa Kora and Koji Sato, *Psychologia* (1, 1958), pp. 219–225.

<sup>20</sup> “Japanese Psychiatry and Psychotherapy” by Avrohm Jacobson and Albert N. Berenberg, *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (November, 1952).

relieved by the self-confident ease of exercising an automatic skill. The knack became a comfortable substitute for “It.” The autumn leaves still rustle in the ditch, but originality has gone down the drain. The water still laps against the heron’s legs, but the muse lies drowned at the bottom of the ancient pond.

### Morita Therapy

ZEN influenced every walk of Japanese life, including psychiatry. Freud and Jung have never taken root in Japanese psychotherapy (though they are discussed among literateurs), but a specifically Japanese treatment, Morita therapy, enjoyed a considerable vogue.<sup>18</sup>

It was founded by Shoma Morita, Professor of Psychiatry at the Jikeikai School of Medicine in Tokyo, who died one year before Freud. His biographer, Professor Shimoda, relates that the idea of the new cure came to Morita while treating a patient, a certain Miss Yatabe, who was suffering from an obsessional neurosis:

She had been treated at the Sugamo Psychiatric Hospital for a long time, and had left the hospital without being cured. He tried at his home hypnosis, other methods of treatment, and his own method of persuasion, but could not be successful. He told me that sometimes he would lose his temper and come to strike her. To his surprise, however, the patient was cured suddenly by herself.<sup>19</sup>

The therapy was developed by his disciples, among them Genya Usa, who had started as a Zen monk, and Takehisa Kora, who succeeded Morita in his Chair. Professor Kora showed me round his Tokyo clinic. He is a quiet and gentle personality, and his patients were docile as usual, but the treatment itself can hardly be called gentle by Western standards. It is mainly used to treat hypochondria, compulsion neurosis, chronic anxiety, and “homophobia”—all of which Morita summed up by the term “*Shinkei-shitsu*” (literally, “nervousness”):

“These patients are said to be extremely punctilious, rigid, fastidious, formal, meticulous, and suffer from excessive doubt. They are so perfectionistic that nothing they do satisfies them as a job well done.”<sup>20</sup> We recognise what one might call the “Confucian syndrome,” and we are not surprised that its treatment was inspired by Zen.

It consists of four stages, each of them lasting on an average a week or ten days. During the



first period, the patient must lie on his mat-bed in a room isolated from any stimulus or distraction. "He is prohibited to read, to write, to talk, to smoke, to sing, to engage in any manual activity"—except eating and going to the toilet. The purpose, roughly speaking, is to let him stew in his juice, to worry himself to a pitch followed by emotional exhaustion. After that, "a feeling of ennui appears and he will be placed in a 'stimuli-starved' state. Desire for work then becomes strong and thereby is created an extroverting mood."

During the second period, the patient is still not allowed to talk or to read, and is still isolated from human contact except with the psychiatrist; but he is allowed some light manual work, and is ordered to write a diary, which he must continue till the end of his treatment. The régime is of monastic rigidity; he must get up, go for walks, clean his room, write his diary, all according to a fixed schedule. The diary is sent in every day to the psychiatrist, who sends it back with his pithy annotations. At a later stage, brief personal exchanges take place with the psychiatrist. Thus, for instance, a patient suffering from "anthropophobia," complains about loss of memory:

*Patient:* "I don't remember in what way I came to this hospital."

*Doctor:* "If you don't remember anything you should not remember your anthropophobia."

This is obviously reminiscent of the technique of the *koan* and *mondo*, during the tense, brief interviews with the *roshi*. The purpose of this second stage is "to promote spontaneity of thought in the patient by forcibly restricting his physical activity;" or, as Professor Kora puts it: "To the patients who are almost completely deprived of stimuli from the outer world during their bed-rest and are hungry for stimuli, the outer world has a precious charm. However, as a reaction, they often feel some sort of displeasure. Even in such cases patients are told to experience pleasure as pleasure, displeasure as displeasure, and to continue to pursue work allotted to them."

During the third period, though the patient is still barred from recreational and social activities, he is at last allowed a moderate amount of physical activity, which he has been craving. This creates a state of euphoria. Sample from a patient's diary:

Began to clean the cage of rabbits. . . . I jumped into it and began to work. It was really interest-

ing to clean it. *Doctor's comment:* This attitude is wonderful.

In the fourth and last period, the patient is allowed to pursue his normal activities, combined with heavy manual labour. The main purpose of this is to give him confidence in his own manual skill. "Neurotics live in their imagination. You are busy handling or managing this or that. The more lively your hands the more active your mind." The patient is not only prevented from brooding, but the heavy manual work is supposed to force him to use his mind in a manner attuned to his mechanical activity—according to the principle of "no-mind." Among Professor Kora's hints for patients are: "to allow the symptoms to remain as they are;" "to accept pleasure and pain as they come as unavoidable;" "to be always occupied with work;" "not to grumble;" "to adjust one's outer appearance and never act like a patient. Adjust your outward self and the inner self will adjust itself."

The therapy lasts from five to ten weeks. After the patient has been discharged, there is no follow-up.

**D**URING my long conversation with Professor Kora, the word "unconscious" was not mentioned. Dreams, subconscious motivations, the causal origin of the disease do not enter into Morita therapy. Its method is not analytical, and it does not aim at unearthing the roots of the symptoms. They will either disappear, or the patient must accept them as unavoidable, and "adjust his outward self" to the conventional pattern in the expectation that his inner self will follow suit. It is not so much a therapy as a re-conditioning based on behaviouristic principles, with special emphasis on manual skills which are expected to help the patient to acquire an automatic kind of spontaneity.

In other words, Morita therapy is a combination of Behaviourism and Zen, of the Pavlov laboratory and the doctrine of the no-mind. When Jacobson and Berenberg published their criticism of it in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Kora and Sato replied in *Psychologia* by quoting some of the American authors' most damning comments, and dismissing them with the single sentence: "Their conclusion reveals their difficulty to understand the true nature of Morita therapy." It echoed the *sensei's* innermost conviction that the Japanese can understand the Western mind, but no Westerner can ever understand the Japanese mind. I must, however, add

in fairness that some of the younger psychiatrists whom I met have clearly outgrown this attitude.

### The Perils of Tolerance

RELIGIOUS feeling is dead in Japan, and has been dead for a longer time, than in any of the great existing civilisations.

A poll, carried out under the auspices of UNESCO among students in Kyoto, contained the following question (from the Allport-Gillespie questionnaire):

Of the following activities, which are the three from which you expect the greatest satisfaction: your career or occupation, your family relationships, your leisure and recreational activities, your participation in activities directed towards national or international betterment, or your religious beliefs and activities?<sup>21</sup>

Only 10 per cent of the male and 14 per cent of the female students mentioned religion at all; and only 1 per cent of the males and 3 per cent of the females gave it first place.

In another survey, carried out by the National Public Opinion Research Institute, people were asked to mention any kind of experience which had made them happy: out of 2,761 subjects questioned, only eleven mentioned religion.

Yet another official enquiry revealed that among the students in a Buddhist seminary, a declared 35 per cent were "without faith in Buddha, 48 per cent without belief in the immortality of the soul."<sup>22</sup> Stoetzel, the author of the UNESCO survey, concludes: "What emerged quite clearly was that, both for the group as a whole and for almost all the individual members of it, religious activities played only the most negligible part... Indeed, it appears that what we call religious needs, while not absolutely unknown to the Japanese, are an exceptional element in their psychology."

It may be argued that a culture can dispense with doctrinal religion provided it has some glimmer of that "oceanic feeling," that spiritual awareness, which prevents the parching of the soul; and it is claimed that Zen provides just that. Thus, for instance, quoting an old Chinese text, Professor Watts says: "As 'the fish swims in the water but is unmindful of the water, the bird flies in the wind but knows not

of the wind,' so the true life of Zen has no need... to drag in religion or spirituality as something over and above life itself." Indeed, "to drag in religion" and engage in argument on metaphysics, is regarded in Zen circles as an abhorrent thing, which the old masters called "to stink of Zen." And after Fa-yung, a St. Francis-like figure, had his *satori*, the birds ceased to offer him flowers because his holiness "no longer stood out like a sore thumb."

Remembering the theological disputes in the history of the Western Churches, and their dire consequences, one may be tempted to agree with this attitude—the more so as Zen keeps reassuring us that even sans theology, the mystical essence is still there—that the fish in the parable which "swims in the water" does possess an oceanic awareness, and is not merely running after smaller fish and away from larger ones. But the boundary between an existential philosophy of Being, and the practical considerations of Being, is a precarious one; and there is always the danger that Po-chung's definition of Zen "when hungry, eat, when tired, sleep" might be taken to mean precisely what it says. We have seen how the growing spiritual void in the Zen centres acted like a suction pump, draining the arts of their inspiration and reducing them to aridity—so that when the impact of the West came, they were already sterile and defenceless. This process was repeated in the field of ethics, with even more serious consequences.

AT THE start of this discussion of Zen, I quoted a few lines attributed to Seng-ts'an, who lived in the 6th century A.D., and was the Third Patriarch—that is, second in succession to the Bodhidharma. They are from his work *Hsin-hsin Ming*, which is regarded as the oldest Zen poem and one of its basic texts:

*Be not concerned with right and wrong.  
The conflict between right and wrong  
Is the sickness of the mind.*

Fourteen centuries later, the last Patriarch reaffirms the unbroken continuity of Zen's ethical relativism:

Zen is... extremely flexible in adapting itself to almost any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with. It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism...

The difference between the two statements is in their historical setting, and in their degrees

<sup>21</sup> Jean Stoetzel, *Without the Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London and UNESCO, Paris, 1955), p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> J. Roggenendorf, S.J., *The Place of Religion in Modern Japan*, Japan Quarterly, Vol. V, No. 1.

of concreteness. The first comes from a Buddhist-Taoist mystic, who looks with a smiling shrug at the sententious pedantries of Confucian society. The second could come from a philosophically-minded Nazi journalist, or from one of the Zen monks who became suicide pilots.

I have stressed the point, and must stress it again in concluding, that the vivifying influence of Zen, its historical and spiritual *raison d'être*, came from its function as a complement and antidote to Confucianism. The division of labour between the rigid and demanding social code of the latter, and the relaxing, amoral spontaneity of Zen, goes back to the origins of Confucianism and Taoism in China. It continued when Zen arrived in Japan, because its teachers knew that it could only flourish within the habitual partnership; and as soon as it became firmly established, the "Five Mountains," the five oldest Zen monasteries in Kyoto, began to propagate not only Buddhism, but at the same time the Confucian doctrine. The monks at the Five Mountains edited and printed the Confucian texts, and were the chief source of their dissemination; paradoxical as it may seem, the neo-Confucian revival under the Tokugawas, which added philosophical depth to the old social code, was chiefly due to Zen influence. The great Zen masters were, after all, sages with a shrewd knowledge of character; they knew that the cosmic nihilism of their doctrine was like arsenic—in small doses a stimulant, in large doses poison. Their wisdom found an unexpected confirmation several centuries later, when Zen was exported overseas and let loose among intellectuals with a decidedly non-Confucian background. They tried hard to obey its command: "let your mind go and become like a ball in a mountain stream;" the result was a punctured tennis-ball surrounded by garbage, bouncing down the current from a burst water main.

To revert to the old *koan*: Zen in itself, without its historic counterpart, is like the sound of one hand clapping. Whether a religion, or a

<sup>23</sup> I have not discussed the other Buddhist sects of Japan—Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Nichiren, etc., because, though numerically they were, and still are, stronger, they cannot compare with Zen influence on the philosophy and art of Japan.

<sup>24</sup> The "we" refers to my friend Quentin Crewe (*A Curse of Blossom*, London, 1960) and Hugh Dunphy, a young man who lived for several months in a Zen temple in Kyoto. The three of us, and Quentin's wife Martha, travelled together through Kyushu.

philosophy, deserves that name if it represents only one hand clapping, is a problem for historians and semanticists. Perhaps the *credos* based on the materialism of the 19th century, or on the catechism of the Council of Trent issued in 1566, could be called equally one-handed. But the fact remains that Zen philosophy and Zen art had been declining for a century or more when the old social system, and with it the backbone of the Confucian code, was destroyed by the Meiji reform a hundred years ago. State Shinto was created to fill the religious vacuum; and when that synthetic Baal, too, collapsed after the lost war, neither Zen, nor the older forms of Buddhism<sup>23</sup> were able to offer an alternative to provide guidance in the chaos of values. They were unable, and even unwilling to do so, because of the ethical relativism of their tradition, their denial of a universal moral law, and a misguided tolerance, which had become indistinguishable from passive complicity.

The contemporary Zen abbots in one of the ancient Five Mountains in Kyoto, with whom we had several discussions, confirmed this impression.<sup>24</sup> They were emphatic in their denials that religion had any bearing on social ethics. When we asked them whether they were indifferent to the persecution of religion in totalitarian countries, one of them answered:

A horse eats in Tokyo and a horse in Osaka is no longer hungry. A Sputnik goes up in Moscow and the shares fall in New York."

That was in the classic *koan* tradition, and it got us nowhere. When we asked a question, they answered with a parable; when I countered with a parable, they begged the question. The parable I submitted was Camus' *La Chute*: the problem of guilt by omission, of complacency towards evil—Camus' Pharisean hero ignored the cry of a drowning woman, and was subsequently destroyed by guilt. After a few meaningless exchanges, one of the abbots said: "Guilt is a Christian idea. Zen has no home. It is glad for converts, but does not seek to make proselytes." At least this was the version given to us by one of our lamentable translators; but it fitted the general trend of the discussion. The abbots were delightful, but after two days of talking, we felt discouraged and dejected. The one significant remark we got out of them was: "When you ask these logical questions, we feel embarrassed."

At another discussion, arranged as a round-table talk at International House in Tokyo, I

had an opportunity to meet Professor N., one of the greatest Japanese experts on Buddhism, who holds the Chair for Comparative Religion at an old university. I asked him whether he thought it possible to have a system of ethics divorced from any transcendental belief. He bristled at the word "transcendental," which, he said, meant nothing to him. One of the participants argued that Buddhism too held certain transcendental beliefs. Professor N. denied this, and mentioned as an example to the contrary that Japanese Buddhism rejected the idea of transmigration.

"Then what happened after death?" he was asked.

"Death," he answered, "is for us, unlike for you, not the 'end' of life, but its culmination, its highest fulfilment, as shown by the value we set on suicide."

What happened past that culminating point? Is there an afterlife?

"Yes, some form of continuity, though not a personal one."

But, we argued, that continuity, in whatever form, *does* transcend the natural realm, so Buddhism *does* have a transcendental aspect?

"We certainly do not believe in anything supernatural," answered N.

Somebody tried a different angle. Buddhism lays great stress on truth. Why should a man tell the truth when it may be to his advantage to lie?"

"Because it is simpler."

Somebody else tried another tack. "You favour tolerance towards all religions and all political systems. What about Hitler's gas chambers?"

"That was very silly of him."<sup>25</sup>

"Just silly, not evil?"

"Evil is a Christian concept. Good and evil exist only on a relative scale."

"Should not then tolerance, too, be applied on a relative scale? Should it include those who deny tolerance?"

"That is thinking in opposite categories, which is alien to our thought."

And so it went on, round after dreary round.

This impartial tolerance towards the killer and the killed, a tolerance devoid of charity, makes one sceptical regarding the contribution which Zen Buddhism has to offer to the moral recovery of Japan—or any other country. Once a balm for self-inflicted bruises, it has become a kind of moral nerve-gas—colourless and without smell, but scented by all the pretty incense sticks which burn under the smiling Buddha statues. For a week or so I bargained with a Kyoto antique dealer for a small bronze Buddha of the Kamakura period; but when he came down to a price which I was able to afford, I backed out. I realised with a shock that the Buddha smile had gone dead on me. It was no longer mysterious, but empty.

ALTHOUGH Zen is an important chapter in Japanese history, it is only one aspect of Japan. When the fog of depression lifted, I was again filled with a shamefaced admiration for the courage, the miraculous powers of recovery, and the charm of this nation of Spartan hedonists whose mentality, for all their Western ways, is so alien to us. But it is precisely this marriage between opposite extremes—the Lotus and the Robot, Confucius and Zen, rigid perfectionism and elastic ambiguity—which has such a profound fascination. Unable to achieve a synthesis, they rejected compromise, and settled for the juxtaposition of extremes—the Spartan and the Sybarite sharing the same bed. Instead of the Middle Way, they chose the tight-rope, balancing a bamboo-pole excessively weighted at both ends. The reason why I called my admiration shame-faced is that, though I cannot approve of this solution, it has a profound appeal to me. And, though my Japanese friends will probably resent the directness of some of my remarks, if I were exiled from Europe, Japan would be the country where I would like to live in preference to any other—although, or because, I know that I would always remain there a bug-eyed traveller from Mars among the slit-eyed citizens of Saturn.

<sup>25</sup> The Professor had spent several years in Anglo-Saxon countries and spoke exceptionally good English.

*William Sansom*

## A Mixed Bag

“TELL you I’ve lost it!”  
“You’ll find it.”  
“No, no—I must have torn it up with the envelope. A cheque’s a cheque.”  
“Look in the paper-basket.”  
“It’s been emptied.”  
“Then look in the—oh no, not again!”  
“Please darling—just this once.”

Down in the dustbin with his red rubber gloves, Beale read A. Beale, Esq. on an envelope and grunted “not that one” and then went on muttering “just this once” for it was the fourth time he had been forced to go through the dustbins that year, which was in its fifth month.

Each time, when he had almost finished sifting a whole binful of rubbish, his wife had hollered from upstairs, in her loudest banister voice, rising and falling like some awful first mate on a frigate’s poop, that she had found it. “Prize abeam, Mister Beale, stow your bins below there!” she might have been calling.

It was like a routine.

Yet, once his hands were in his bin and at work, it was not a routine that Beale altogether disenjoyed. Certainly, the first stages were irritating. The change-over from being clean to dirty: and all the bothersome preparations—clanging off the old lid with its empty, tomcat ring; lifting the big old bin right inside to the basement lobby under a good light; laying newspaper out and getting an empty crate to take the siftings; drawing on the surgical red strangler’s gloves to take the plunge.

But after the plunge, it was different. A moment of conventional disgust at the idea of so much filth. But after all, whose filth was it? It was Beale filth. It was the personal, loving, private and individual detritus of A. Beale, Esq., and Master Bobby Beale, and Mrs. A. Beale the wife, God damn her. Here indeed, packed in one compact corrugated bin, was a picture of a complete Beale week, a beloved microcosm—why, such as this should be buried in concrete for the benefit of future historians, and indeed the old bin with its fluted sides did not look unlike the base of a broken-off Doric pillar, most suitable.

Now with the carrying and clanging done, there was no sound in the basement. A quiet, secretive place, full of old cupboards and the big beginnings of gas and water pipes, and where a row of electric meters spun their dials round as silently as the thoughts you could have here. Beale raised his head once to the stairs. The big upper living belly of the house, full of light and air, must be looking its usual self. But no sound. Beatrice must have closed a door on herself. Beale bent down to look into his bin. No sound from above, but down here in the bottom of the house a deeper, stonier silence thick as the foundations. Here was a place for secrets, for being as alone as a man can be with all his most hidden actions, things that he admits only to himself, which will be repeated to no one, never, sly matters common to everyone but still never to be repeated nor ever even joked of.