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ILLOGICAL ZEN

Empty-handed I go, and behold the spade is
in my hands;
I walk on foot, and yet on the back of an ox
I am riding;
When I pass over the bridge,
Lo, the water floweth not, but the bridge doth
flow.

THIS is the famous gatha of Jenye (Shan-hui, A.D. 497-469), who is commonly known as Fudaishi (Fu-tai-shih) and it summarily gives the point of view as entertained by the followers of Zen. Though it by no means exhausts all that Zen teaches, it indicates graphically the way toward which Zen tends. Those who desire to gain an intellectual insight, if possible, into the truth of Zen, must first understand what this stanza really means.

Nothing can be more illogical and contrary to common sense than these four lines. The critic will be inclined to call Zen absurd, confusing, and beyond the ken of ordinary reasoning. But Zen is inflexible and would protest that the so-called common-sense way of looking at things is not final, and that the reason why we cannot attain to a thoroughgoing comprehension of the truth is due to our unreasonable adherence to a "logical" interpretation of things. If we really want to get to the bottom of life, we must abandon our cherished syllogisms, we must acquire a new way of observation whereby we can escape the tyranny of logic and the one-sidedness of our everyday phraseology. However paradoxical it may seem, Zen insists that the spade must be held in your empty hands, and that it is not the water but the bridge that is flowing under your feet.

These are not, however, the only irrational statements Zen makes. There are many more equally staggering ones. Some may declare Zen irrevocably insane or silly. Indeed, what would our readers say to such assertions as the following?

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"When Tom drinks, Dick gets tipsy."

"Who is the teacher of all the Buddhas, past, present, and future? John the cook."

"Last night a wooden horse neighed and a stone man cut capers."

"Lo, a cloud of dust is rising from the ocean, and the roaring of the waves is heard over the land."

Sometimes Zen will ask you such questions as the following:

"It is pouring now; how would you stop it?"

"When both hands are clapped a sound is produced: listen to the sound of one hand."

"If you have heard the sound of one hand, can you make me hear it too?"

"When we see about us mountains towering high and seas filling hollow places, why do we read in the sacred sutras that the Dharma is sameness, and there is nothing high, nothing low?"

Have the followers of Zen lost their senses? Or are they given up to deliberate mystification? Have all these statements no inner meaning, no edifying signification except to produce confusion in our minds? What is Zen through these apparent trivialities and irrationalities really driving us to comprehend? The answer is simple. Zen wants us to acquire an entirely new point of view whereby to look into the mysteries of life and the secrets of nature. This is because Zen has come to the definite conclusion that the ordinary logical process of reasoning is powerless to give final satisfaction to our deepest spiritual needs.

We generally think that "A is A" is absolute, and that the proposition "A is not-A" or "A is B" is unthinkable. We have never been able to break through these conditions of the understanding; they have been too imposing. But now Zen declares that words are words and no more. When words cease to correspond with facts it is time for us to part with words and return to facts. As long as logic has its practical value it is to be made use of; but when it fails to work, or when it tries to go beyond its proper limits, we must cry, "Halt!" Ever since the awakening of consciousness we have endeavoured to solve the mysteries of being and to quench our thirst for logic through the dualism of "A" and "not-A"; that is, by calling a bridge a bridge, by making the water flow, and dust arise from the earth; but to our great

disappointment we have never been able to obtain peace of mind, perfect happiness, and a thorough understanding of life and the world. We have come, as it were, to the end of our wits. No further steps could we take which would lead us to a broader field of reality. The inmost agonies of the soul could not be expressed in words, when lo! light comes over our entire being. This is the beginning of Zen. For we now realize that "A is not-A" after all, that logic is onesided, that illogicality so-called is not in the last analysis necessarily illogical; what is superficially irrational has after all its own logic, which is in correspondence with the true state of things. "Empty-handed I go, and behold the spade is in my hands!" By this we are made perfectly happy, for strangely this contradiction is what we have been seeking for all the time ever since the dawning of the intellect. The dawning of the intellect did not mean the assertion of the intellect but the transcending of itself. The meaning of the proposition "A is A" is realized only when "A is not-A". To be itself is not to be itself—this is the logic of Zen, and satisfies all our aspirations.

"The flower is not red, the willow is not green." This is regarded by Zen devotees as most refreshingly satisfying. So long as we think logic final we are chained, we have no freedom of spirit, and the real facts of life are lost sight of. Now, however, we have the key to the whole situation; we are master of realities; words have given up their domination over us. If we are pleased to call a spade not a spade, we have the perfect right to do so; a spade need not always remain a spade; and, moreover, this, according to the Zen master, expresses more correctly the state of reality which refuses to be tied up to names.

This breaking up of the tyranny of name and logic is at the same time spiritual emancipation; for the soul is no longer divided against itself. By acquiring the intellectual freedom the soul is in full possession of itself; birth and death no longer torment it; for there are no such dualities anywhere; we live even through death. Hitherto we have been looking at things in their contradicting and differentiating aspect, and have assumed an attitude toward them in accordance with that view, that is, more or less antagonistic. But this has been revolutionized, we have at last attained the point where the world can be viewed, as it were, from within. Therefore, "the iron trees are in full bloom"; and "in

the midst of pouring rain I am not wet". The soul is thus made whole, perfect, and filled with bliss.

Zen deals with facts and not with their logical, verbal, prejudiced, and lame representations. Direct simplicity is the soul of Zen; hence its vitality, freedom, and originality. Christianity speaks much of simplicity of heart, and so do other religions, but this does not always mean to be simple-hearted or to be a Simple Simon. In Zen it means not to get entangled in intellectual subtleties, not to be carried away by philosophical reasoning that is so often ingenuous and full of sophistry. It means, again, to recognize facts as facts and to know that words are words and nothing else. Zen often compares the mind to a mirror free from stains. To be simple, therefore, according to Zen, will be to keep this mirror always bright and pure and ready to reflect simply and absolutely whatever comes before it. The result will be to acknowledge a spade to be a spade and at the same time not to be a spade. To recognize the first only is a common-sense view, and there is no Zen until the second is also admitted along with the first. The common-sense view is flat and tame, whereas that of Zen is always original and stimulating. Each time Zen is asserted things get vitalized; there is an act of creation.

Zen thinks we are too much of slaves to words and logic. So long as we remain thus fettered we are miserable and go through untold suffering. But if we want to see something really worth knowing, that is conducive to our spiritual happiness, we must endeavour once for all to free ourselves from all conditions; we must see if we cannot gain a new point of view from which the world can be surveyed in its wholeness and life comprehended inwardly. This consideration has compelled one to plunge oneself deep into the abyss of the "Nameless" and take hold directly of the spirit as it is engaged in the business of creating the world. Here is no logic, no philosophizing; here is no twisting of facts to suit our artificial measures; here is no murdering of human nature in order to submit it to intellectual dissections; the one spirit stands face to face with the other spirit like two mirrors facing each other, and there is nothing to intervene between their mutual reflections.

In this sense Zen is pre-eminently practical. It has nothing to do with abstractions or with subtleties of dialectics. It seizes the

spade lying in front of you, and holding it forth, makes the bold declaration, "I hold a spade, yet I hold it not." No reference is made to God or to the soul; there is no talk about the infinite or a life after death. This handling of a homely spade, a most ordinary thing to see about us, opens all the secrets we encounter in life. And nothing more is wanted. Why? Because Zen has now cleared up a new approach to the reality of things. When a humble flower in the crannied wall is understood, the whole universe and all things in it and out of it are understood. In Zen the spade is the key to the whole riddle. How fresh and full of life it is—the way Zen grapples with the knottiest questions of philosophy!

A noted Christian Father of the early Middle Ages once exclaimed: "O poor Aristotle! Thou who has discovered for the heretics the art of dialectics, the art of building up and destroying, the art of discussing all things and accomplishing nothing!" So much ado about nothing, indeed! See how philosophers of all ages contradict one another after spending all their logical acumen and analytical ingenuity on the so-called problems of science and knowledge. No wonder the same old wise man, wanting to put a stop once for all to all such profitless discussions, has boldly thrown the following bomb right into the midst of those sand-builders: "*Certum est quia impossibile est*"; or, more logically, "*Credo quia absurdum est.*" I believe because it is irrational; is this not an unqualified confirmation of Zen?

An old master brought out his stick before an assemblage of monks and said: "O monks, do you see this? If you see it, what is it you see? Would you say, 'It is a stick'? If you do you are ordinary people, you have no Zen. But if you say, 'We do not see any stick,' then I would say, 'Here I hold one, and how can you deny the fact?'" There is no trifling in Zen. Until you have a third eye opened to see into the inmost secret of things, you cannot be in the company of the ancient sages. What is this third eye that sees the stick and yet sees it not? Where does one get this illogical apprehension of things?

Zen says, "Buddha preached forty-nine years and yet his 'broad tongue' (*tanujihva*) never once moved." Can one talk without moving one's tongue? Why this absurdity? The explanation given by Gensha (Hsuan-sha, 831-908) follows: "All those piously inclined profess to bless others in every possible

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way; but when they come across three kinds of invalids, how would they treat them? The blind cannot see even if a stick or a mallet is produced; the deaf cannot hear however fine the preaching may be; and the dumb cannot talk however much they are urged to do so. But if these people severally suffering cannot somehow be benefited, what good is there after all in Buddhism?" The explanation does not seem to explain anything after all. Perhaps Butsugen's (Fo-yen) comment may throw more light on the subject. He said to his disciples: "You each have a pair of ears; what have you ever heard with them? You each have one tongue; what have you ever preached with it? Indeed, you have never talked, you have never heard, you have never seen. From whence then do all these forms, voices, odours, and tastes come?" (That is to say, where does this world come from?)

If this remark still leaves us where we were before, let us see whether Ummon (Yun-men, died 966), one of the greatest of Zen masters who ever lived, can help us. A monk came to Ummon and asked to be enlightened upon the above remark by Gensha. Ummon ordered him first to salute him in the formal way. When the monk stood up after prostrating himself on the ground, Ummon pushed him with his stick, and the monk stepped back. The master said, "You are not blind, then." He now told the monk to come forward, which he did. The master said, "You are not deaf, then." He finally asked the monk if he understood what all this was about, and the latter replied, "No, sir." Ummon then concluded, "You are not dumb, then."

With all these comments and gestures, are we still travelling through a *terra incognita*? If so, there is no other way but to go back to the beginning and repeat the stanza:

Empty-handed I go, and behold the spade is
in my hands;
I walk on foot, and yet on the back of an ox
I am riding;

A few more words: the reason why Zen is so vehement in its attack on logic, and why the present work treats first of the illogical aspect of Zen, is that logic has so pervasively entered into life as to make most of us conclude that logic is life and without it life has no significance. The map of life has been so definitely

and so thoroughly delineated by logic that what we have to do is simply to follow it, and that we ought not to think of violating the laws of thought, which are final. Such a general view of life has come to be held by most people, though I must say that in point of fact they are constantly violating what they think inviolable. That is to say, they are "holding a spade and yet not holding it", they are making the sum of two and two sometimes three, sometimes five; only they are not conscious of this fact and imagine that their lives are logically or mathematically regulated. Zen wishes to storm this citadel of topsy-turvydom and to show that we live psychologically or biologically and not logically.

In logic there is a trace of effort and pain; logic is self-conscious. So is ethics, which is the application of logic to the facts of life. An ethical man performs acts of service which are praiseworthy, but he is all the time conscious of them, and, moreover, he may often be thinking of some future reward. Hence we should say that his mind is tainted and not at all pure, however objectively or socially good his deeds are. Zen abhors this. Life is an art, and like perfect art it should be self-forgetting; there ought not to be any trace of effort or painful feeling. Life, according to Zen, ought to be lived as a bird flies through the air or as a fish swims in the water. As soon as there are signs of elaboration, a man is doomed, he is no more a free being. You are not living as you ought to live, you are suffering under the tyranny of circumstances; you are feeling a constraint of some sort, and you lose your independence. Zen aims at preserving your vitality, your native freedom, and above all the completeness of your being. In other words, Zen wants to live from within. Not to be bound by rules, but to be creating one's own rules—this is the kind of life which Zen is trying to have us live. Hence its illogical, or rather superlogical, statements.

In one of his sermons a Zen master¹ declares: "The sutras preached by the Buddha during his lifetime are said to amount to five thousand and forty-eight fascicles; they include the doctrine of emptiness and the doctrine of being; there are teachings of immediate realization and of gradual development. Is this not an affirmation?"

¹ Goso Hoyen (Fa-yen of Wu-tsu-shan).

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"But, according to Yoka,¹ 'There are no sentient beings, there are no Buddhas; sages as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are but so many bubbles in the sea; sages and worthies of the past are like flashes of lightning.' Is this not a negation?"

"O you, my disciples, if you say there is, you go against Yoka; if you say there is not, you contradict our old master Buddha. If he were with us, then how would he pass through the dilemma? If you know, however, just exactly where we are, we shall be interviewing Buddha in the morning and saluting him in the evening. If, on the other hand, you confess your ignorance, I will let you see into the secret. When I say there is not, this does not necessarily mean a negation; when I say there is, this also does not signify an affirmation. Turn eastward and look at the Western Land; face the south and the North Star is pointed out there!"

¹ Yung-chia in his "Song of Enlightenment".