

pentagram

Lectorium Rosicrucianum



‘The spirit speaks to the human being in the heart. This is why anyone, who is longing for the Gnosis, will also strive for true, sevenfold purification of the heart.

The emotional life, together with the mental life, will absolutely change in the person who sincerely and perseveringly strives for such purification. Then the light consequently can “make its abode in him”. From that moment, everything he undertakes will be wholly in accordance with this sevenfold purification of the heart. Then the human being is “pure” in everything he does. Only then will the human being enter “into the domain of the good”, as Hermes calls it: into the state of true growth of the soul.’

J van Rijckenborgh

Zen, intuition and the arts
Zen art as vehicle of knowledge
The story of Pete
Closer to Zen
Self-respect
The human duality

pentagram

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Ways of Zen

In this issue of the Pentagram, we undertake a journey of discovery through the specific wealth of Zen – ways in images and texts – which the rational mind is unable to follow. The spirit of the origin does not judge; the thousands of things around us are as they are, all stemming from the same core. If we understand the mystery of this common essence, we are liberated from any confusion, says Zen.

The spirit sees movement in silence and silence in movement. In this way, silence as well as movement disappear. When such contrasts dissolve, even unity cannot exist.

No law or description applies to this highest truth. Do we know this all-encompassing spirit? It is wholly in accordance with the way; all egocentric striving disappears. Doubts and hesitations are dissolved and a life, filled with trust, becomes possible. With one leap, we have been liberated from our captivity; no longer does anything appertain to us; no longer is there anything to which we still hold on.

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Cover:

Cherry blossom in the Kanei temple in Tokyo, Japan. The Japanese characters contain an aphorism of a Zen master: 'The sage hears what is not sound and sees what has no form.'

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the twofold state of man

In a series of articles with this title, we would like to make Hermes speak again, in the way J van Rijckenborgh transmitted his 'voice' to his pupils in his commentaries to the Corpus Hermeticum. 'Hermes' is the nature-born human being, who has received a new



soul state on his path of liberation, and who now, working and building, realises the golden wedding garment. At a crucial moment, the new state of consciousness or hermetic consciousness is manifested in it. Once this consciousness makes itself felt, 'Pymander' comes to the fore: the omnipresent, Divine wisdom, 'the word that is from the beginning'.

LESSONS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF HERMES

Of all the creatures of nature only man is twofold,' says Pymander. There exists in the human system the seed of immortality, the spirit spark, and there is the mortal human being, the natural figure. We cannot find another creature of a similar, twofold nature. In this way, the fall of the original sons of God has created the strange situation that the seed of the Spirit is differentiated in myriads of mortal entities. And all these countless entities, in whom the seed of God is present, may cause the people of the children of God to grow into a multitude no one can count. It may happen and will happen that everything that was initially sin and guilt, with all its consequences, will finally change into a glory, more grandiose than ever could have been the case; a change unto a blessing that no one could possibly envisage. But if this blessing is indeed to take shape, a strong intervention is essential; a great deal must then happen. However, this also implies a tremendous possibility; this also contains the mystery that, out of a fall, such a blessing can come about as proof that the Spirit, that love, is always victorious. He who achieves insight concerning the nature of his nature-born being, is enabled to free himself of his twofold state and to return to his original divine state. Do understand this, at least if you are at this moment aware of your twofold state: on the one hand, of your nature-born being, and on the other, of the rose heart within you, the original, true man. Do see the possibility of deliverance, if you are conscious of possessing a spirit spark. Then you

are not, as a natural being, personally guilty with respect to the being of sin, because as a nature-born entity you are wholly one with the being of dialectics. The course of things in the seventh cosmic plane was and is unavoidable for every entity, linked with this nature. No, as possessors of the rose, we can only become conscious of the existential imperfection, of an existential absurdity. This is the consciousness of sin as it has been understood in the Universal Teachings since the beginning: that the true, spiritual human being becomes aware of his prison, of his current state of being. Awareness of sin means, according to verse 39, becoming conscious of our absolute immortality, to have power over all things and yet to suffer the fate of mortals, because we are subjected to fate. To be more eminent than all of dialectics, and yet to be its servant. To know: the Father is within me; He who is without sleep governs me, and yet I am imprisoned in the power of the subconscious. This is awareness of sin, and it appears from Hermes' words that his pupil understands it. The hermetic human being understands this situation, but for most people, all of this is a very great miracle, the miracle of the blending of nature with humanity and its dramatic aspects: the apparent fall that manifests itself in it and the guilt that arises from it. Notwithstanding, the Spirit wants to conquer and must conquer. A million-fold fragmentation develops through this dramatic event and, consequently, gives all those millions of people the power to become children of God

J. van Rijckenborgh



Hermes with the child Dionysios. Praxiteles, 360 BC.

again. Verse 41 states that the blending of nature with humanity generated an astonishing miracle. Pymander describes the genesis of this miracle: The earth was the matrix; water the procreative element; the fire brought the process of genesis to maturity; nature received from the ether the breath of life and created the bodies according to

the form of man. When Pymander speaks of 'man', he refers to the original, divine man. For the rest, he speaks only of the body, the natural figure. The body received a sham human image. Here he describes how the natural figure was created from the etheric and astral radiations of the nature of death. The natural figure is simply called 'the body', and this is

Pymander, verses 37- 48

37. Concerning himself: when he observed in nature the form that so very much resembled him, because of the reflection in the water, he fell in love with it and wished to live there. What he wished he did at once, and thus he inhabited the reasonless form. And when nature had received its beloved unto itself, it encircled him wholly and they became one, for the fire of their desire was great.

38. That is why, of all creatures in nature, only man is dual, namely mortal as to the body and immortal as to the essential Man.

39. For although he is immortal and has power over all things, he still undergoes the fate of mortals because he is subjected to Destiny. Therefore, although he belongs above the cohesive power of the spheres, he has become a slave within this power. Although he is man-woman, because he issued from the father who is man-woman, and although he is free of sleep, because he issued from a being that is free of sleep, he is nevertheless conquered by the desire of the senses and by sleep.

40. Thereupon I said: 'Oh, Spirit-in-me, I, too, love the word.'

41. Pymander spoke: 'What I am going to say to you is the secret that has been hidden until this day. When nature had become one with man, it generated an astonishing wonder. Man had in himself the nature of all the seven Rectors, composed, as I have told you, of fire and breath; nature now brought forth, without delay, seven humans corresponding with the nature of the seven Rectors, at the same time man and woman and with a figure that was erect.' [...]

what the dialectical world is used to call 'man'. What a mistake! This mistake can be explained by the fact that the natural figure, by virtue of its disposition, possesses a life and a consciousness of its own, and is, in short, a living being. There are two lives within you: the original life and that of the natural figure. Pymander expresses this by saying: the true man originates from life and light. From the one true life, the true man has become a soul being, and from the universal light, a spirit-soul, that is, an inner being of the exceptional soul state that is linked with the spirit. The true man possesses a pure heart; he is the heart. He lives like a god in the heart of the natural figure. The true man is a hermaphrodite, although male or female outwardly. The natural figures, on the other hand, were sexually separated. The natural being is either male or female, although sometimes male, sometimes female outwardly. There are male soul entities and female soul entities, although they are not sexually separated. However, the natural figure is always to be seen in the sexual appearance we know, so that through endless experiences and endless births the plan of salvation can be executed. Through the continuous grinding in the nature of death, through the continual vivification of the microcosm, a concrete possibility always exists to discover the original life again. Significant is the law that applies to every true Rosicrucian 'that he shall not desire to live longer than God allows him', because the dialectical human being, impelled by his nature-born state, always runs the risk of sinking below the level of

the dialectical order. The purpose of the separation of the sexes is to ensure that new natural beings are continually born, while life itself ensures that they will die again. In this way, the plan of salvation can be executed through the hard school of profound experience. In this way, the path of self-knowledge can be walked. The separation of the sexes is necessary because, as a consequence, the wheel of birth and death unceasingly revolves and, so Pymander states, the course through life is the indispensable school of experience. He who is spurred on in this school of life and possesses the spirit-soul, that is, a heart sanctuary that is able to vibrate in accordance with the rose, and is open to the gnostic light, will one day know himself as to his true nature and will deeply feel its twofold state. Such a person will then know that the love for the natural figure, the desire, is the cause of death with all its consequences. In this way, the blending was initiated and the procreation of the species on the basis of the separation of the sexes began, just like in the animal and the vegetable kingdom. He who achieves self-knowledge in this way, is led upon the path of soul humanity. He who continues to embrace the natural figure, continues to wander about in darkness and will experience in a painful way what death is. As a nature-born person, you can only renounce and reject the natural figure for the sake of your conscious yearning and your actual striving to go up into the soul figure again. However, when you do not seek or do not want to walk the upward path, causing the hormonal passions to remain

45. 'Well then, as I said, the creation of the first seven humans took place as follows: the earth was the matrix, water the procreative element, fire brought the process of genesis to maturity, nature received from the ether the breath of life and created the bodies according to the form of man.

46. Man, out of light and life, became soul and Spirit-Soul; life became soul, light became Spirit-Soul. All creatures of the sensory world remained in this state till the end of the cycle and till the beginning of the species.

47. And now listen to what you so strongly desire to hear. When the cycle was completed, the bond that united everything was broken by the will of God. All the beasts that until that moment had been both male and female were separated as to these two aspects, just as man; thus some beasts became male and others female. At once God spoke the holy word: "Grow while you increase and multiply in number, all you who are created and made. And let those who possess the Spirit-Soul recognize themselves as immortal and know that the cause of death is love of the body and of everything that belongs to earth."

48. When God had thus spoken, providence brought about the blending through fate and the cohesive power of the spheres and it set propagation in motion. All the creatures multiplied themselves after their sort; whoever has recognized himself as immortal is chosen above all, whilst whoever has loved the body that originated out of the error of desire remains wandering in darkness and must go through the pain of experiencing all things that belong to death.

insight into zen and za-zen

To love and to be wholly wrapped up in our natural figure, considering it to be man, is the mistake, to which Hermes refers

absolutely unchanged and the natural figure to loiter in this hormonal fire, it is inevitable that an unnatural development will occur.

There is still another aspect of verse 48 of the book Pymander, to which we would like to draw your attention. This verse has often been misunderstood, and these words from the hermetic philosophy were considered to be a kind of warning. It is said: 'Whoever has loved the body that has issued from the error of desire, continues to wander in darkness.' On more than one occasion, these words from Hermes have been understood as a warning against earthly marriage and everything related to it. But this is not the case! On the contrary, it is clear from the Arch-Gnosis that the separation of the sexes with its consequences is necessary to keep the wheel of life and death in motion. Loving the body that has issued from the error of desire, refers to the love for dialectical nature, of which the verses 37, 38 and 39 speak, and which resulted in the development of the mortal natural figure. Whether you face this either married or unmarried, with a loathing of nature or not, in solitude or in duality, does not make any difference. He who wants to overcome the natural figure, will, in accordance with the divine plan of redemption, have to leave the dialectical world and everything inherent in it, and walk the path of the soul, the upward path of return.

Therefore, if future humanity were prevented from following its natural course and the efforts to prolong life were to succeed, this would mean the irrevocable end. Before long, the whole

emergency order, including humanity, would sink below the level of natural laws. To love and to be wholly wrapped up in our natural figure, considering it to be man, is the mistake, to which Hermes refers in verse 48.

If you understand this and ask yourself how to achieve the purification of life that is conditional to deliverance, you should know that the purity, for which a human being has to strive with his natural figure, always concerns the purity of the heart, the sevenfold purification of the heart sanctuary. In a sense, the heart is the abode of the rose. The heart sanctuary is the mirror of the universal light. The heart sanctuary is God. Pymander speaks to the candidate in the heart.

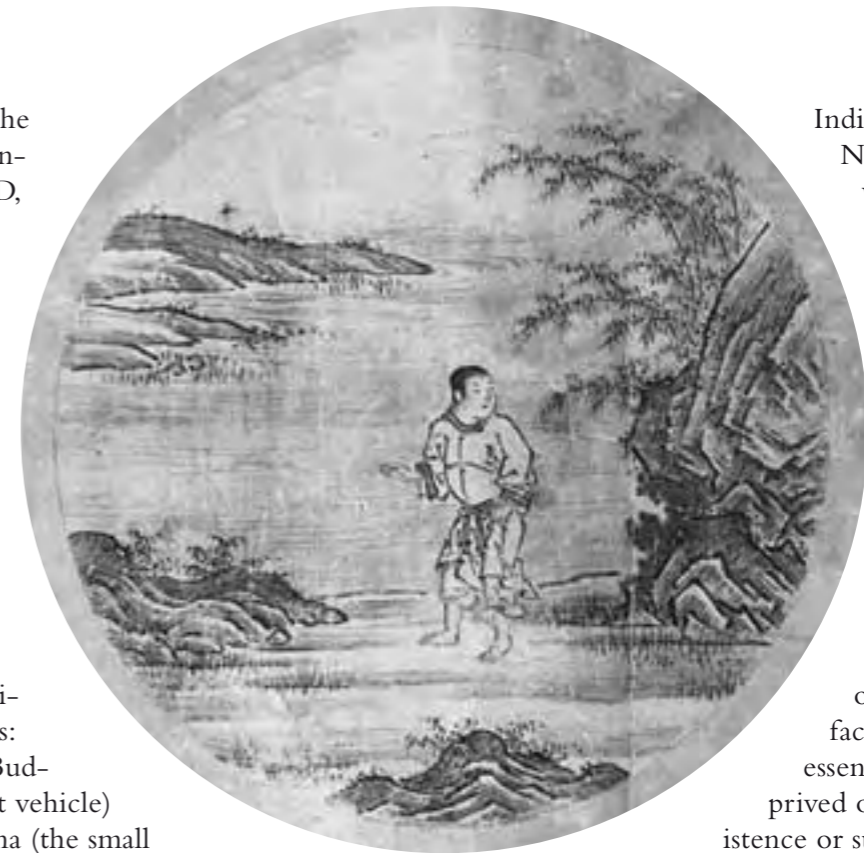
This is why every serious pupil of the Gnosis will have to strive for a true, sevenfold purification of the heart. When a human being becomes pure with regard to the heart sanctuary, when the candidate strives sincerely and perseveringly for such a purification, and the light can make its abode in him, the emotional life, together with the mental life, will completely change, and life's actions will be wholly in accordance with this sevenfold purification. Then a human being is pure in everything he does. Only then will the hormonal functions change and will the candidate enter 'into the domain of the good', as Pymander calls it, that is, the state of true growth of the soul ✦

'All things return to the one, to what does the One return?'

'When a tree falls in the forest and no one is present, does it make a sound then?'

During the first century AD, the council of Jalandhara, India, unsuccessfully attempted to restore unity in the teachings of a strongly divided Buddhism. Ever since, there have been two important, dominant movements: the Mahayana Buddhism (the great vehicle) and the Hinayana (the small vehicle). The former movement of spiritual development is open to every human being, the latter only to monks.

REFORMATIONS During the second century, a branch of Mahayana developed. Mahayana Buddhism had become bogged down in rigid rituals and patterns of thinking and, as a reaction, a movement developed called Sunyavada, after the core idea of its teachings: the only truth that a human being can know is the emptiness (sunya). This movement was to become an important source of inspiration for Zen Buddhism. The



Indian philosopher Nagarjuna broke with the dogmatic nature of Mahayana and developed the idea of the emptiness of our own existence. He stated that the absolute truth is the insight that our (adopted) truth is only an obfuscation of the fact that things are essentially empty, deprived of their own existence or substance and are, therefore, illusion. This insight

leads to nirvana, because it extinguishes any yearning for living or not-living. 'Everything is possible for him, to whom the emptiness is possible. Nothing is possible for him, to whom the emptiness is not possible,' was Nagarjuna's conclusion.

ZEN During the fifth century, the monk, Bodhidharma, brought these teachings to China. There they found a great similarity with the pure teachings of Tao, and together they achieved a great blossoming. Called 'Dhyana' (Sanskrit for at-



tion), the teachings were corrupted in Chinese to 'Ch'an', and later to 'Zen' in Japan.

ZA-ZEN The Zen pupil practises za-zen; he meditates to overcome the binding effect of the senses and the thinking. The aim of his meditation is to achieve inner silence, that is, a state in which the stream of the ego-strengthening stimuli, the identification with the ego and, therefore, the dualistic consciousness, is silenced. All of this falls away, and the pupil knows the state of consciousness, called satori in Zen tradition and samadhi in Buddhism. Enlightenment is beautiful, but can never be the goal. This goal cannot be enforced. Wouldn't that be the very activity of the ego?

THE KOAN Zen knows the paradox: acting in order not to achieve. Hence the koan, the paradox about the goal. The koans are the dialogues between the Zen master and the pupil, written down and used for instruction. They are called 'koeng-an' (case), and were recorded in history under the Japanese name of 'koan'. The master systematically uses koans to guide the pupil to the limits of his thinking and to prepare him for the leap to the intuition. However, unless open or hidden attachment to a goal has ceased to exist, will the goal, or satori, remain unattainable. The essence of Zen is 'being unattached'. This implies that any other method of meditation is actually not necessary. A sense of humour and self-mockery are methods to put the vanity of the ego or the illusion to have achieved anything into perspective: 'The greater the front, the

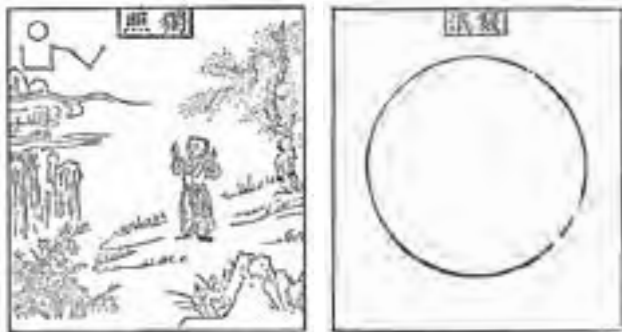
greater the backside!' The two major collections of koans are the Mumonkan (the Gateless Gate) and the Hekiganroku (Tales of the Blue Rock). They are stories of Zen teachers from the first centuries of Ch'an, supplemented by commentaries and poems from later periods.

ENLIGHTENMENT 'One day, Huai-jang sees his pupil, Ma-tsoe, lost in meditation. He asks him about the goal of his meditation exercises. Ma-tsoe immediately replies: "I want to become a Buddha.' Huai-jang does not say anything, but quietly takes a tile and begins to polish it with a rock. Ma-tsoe is unable to control his curiosity and asks: "Why do you polish this tile with a rock?" Huai-jang: "I polish it into a mirror." Ma-tsoe: "But how can you make a mirror by polishing it with a rock?" Huai-jang: "How can you become enlightened by sitting down in meditation?" In the practice of Zen, a number of important differences developed in China, which resulted in a northern and a southern Ch'an. The northern branch, represented by the Zen teachers Shen-hsiu and P'oe-chi, practised the classical dhyana: acquiring insight by a gradual path. The southern school (Hui-neng and Shen-hui) is based on spontaneous enlightenment: 'meditation does not turn anyone into a Buddha, if he is, basically, not one to start with. Acquiring the insight that, deep down, you have already been liberated, is immediately, instantaneously possible, provided the linear thinking has given up its hold on the consciousness.' It is the task of the Zen teacher to uproot this controlling thinking of the pupil.

The eight or ten traditional pictures of the human being and the ox express the essence of Zen. Most explanations state that the ox represents lower nature, and the seeking figure, the personality. However, the seeking figure is the spirit, the 'original human being' (the round picture on page 7). This spirit or 'shepherd' is lost in the wilderness of our world, and is seeking a human being, who wants to bring him home. Initially, the human being is only moderately suitable. He is like a black ox, wild, untamed, controlled by impulses and passions. Taming begins. We see the pattern (the rope) of the spiritual will and the discipline of the law of the spiritual order (the whip). In picture 5, however, the personality has wholly turned to the spirit, and has already become half-white. Then a happy period of peace and learning begins. The song of the spirit resounds; the ox is wholly white, a true soul human being, and reins are no longer needed. The spirit-man increasingly approaches original life; the form disappears in those subtle spheres. In picture 8, this is called that 'the ox and its shepherd have been wholly forgotten'.

ZEN IN JAPAN In the long history of Zen in Japan, the most important master of the koan was the legendary Hakuin, who lived from 1686 to 1769. He breathed new life into the koan tradition, which ran the risk of lapsing into decadence and culture. The koan: 'What is the sound of one clapping hand?' comes from him. He formulated the three main pillars on which Zen rests: deep trust, great doubt and unlimited efforts. In his view, meditation was inseparably linked with daily activities. 'If someone accidentally drops two or three golden coins in a crowded street, does he then forget the money because all eyes are focused on him? Someone who concentrates on meditation in the midst of everyday pressure and worries, is the person who dropped the golden coins and concentrates on finding them again.' To the question: 'What is true meditation?' he replies: 'It is turning everything, coughing, swallowing, waving one's arms, movement, stillness, words, actions, evil and goodness, prosperity and shame, profit and loss, justice and injustice, into one single koan.'¹ 'The great way is not hard for him, who has no preferences. When love and hatred would both be absent,

everything becomes clear and unveiled. However, if you make even the slightest distinction, heaven and earth will be infinitely separated. If you want to see the truth, then be not in favour or against anything. Comparing what you like with what you do not like is the illness of the mind. If you do not understand the most fundamental meaning of things, your indispensable peace of mind is unnecessarily disturbed. The way is perfect as immeasurable space is, within which nothing is lacking and nothing is superfluous. However, because we time and again accept one thing and reject another, we do not see the true nature of things. He who does not live according to the only way, fails in his activity as well as in his passivity, in his outward orientation as well as in detachment. If you deny the reality of things, their reality escapes you; if you emphasise the superficiality of things, you miss their true existence. The more you speak and think about it, the more you stray from the truth. Stop talking and thinking, and there is nothing you will not understand. Returning to the origin means discovering the deeper sense, but chasing after vain appearances means overlooking the source.



In picture 9, no longer anything 'earthly' is found (the 'beast' has disappeared); in the new unity, spirit and form have been dissolved into original life. Before the 12th century, this was the last picture from the series.

The drawings shown here are by the 15th-century Zen master Shoeboen. Another master, Kakoean Sjen, added another thought, because 'an enlightened one returns to the ordinary, everyday world to serve'. This is the last, great, round picture on page 11, 'With open hands to the market'. Social life develops on the market. Here the sage encounters his fellow men, with an open heart (the bared chest) and unshod (prepared to go wherever this is necessary), man amongst men. Warm laughter refreshes his surroundings; and everything is revived and enjoys his presence.

Do not seek the truth; only stop harbouring rigid opinions. If no critical thoughts well up, the old mind ceases to exist. If you do not distinguish between gross and subtle, you do not become rigid and prejudiced. Living according to the great way is neither easy nor difficult. However, if you have a limited vision, you are fearful and uncertain: the greater your haste, the slower you will make progress. Attachment is not limited to one aspect; even if you are attached to the idea of enlightenment, you are already on the wrong way.

Adjust to the nature of things and you will be able to move freely and unimpeded. If your thoughts are curbed, the truth is hidden, because then everything is tainted and turbid.

The depressing practice of criticising everything causes irritation and exhaustion.

What benefit can be gained from fastidiousness and prejudices?

If you want to walk the one way, then never reject even the world of the senses and the ideas. Indeed, wholly accepting them is equal to true enlightenment. The sage does not strive for anything, but the fool shackles himself.

There is only one dharma; there are not many of them. Silly desires cause all distinction. Seeking

the Spirit with a mind filled with prejudice is the greatest of all errors. Rest and unrest originate from illusion; within enlightenment, there is no preference or aversion. All opposites originate from incorrect conclusions.

They are like imaginary flowers in the air: it is folly to want to seize them. Profit and loss, good and evil: definitely discard such thoughts.

If the eye never sleeps, all dreams are automatically dissolved.

If the mind does not distinguish, the ten thousand things around you are as they are, and always stem from the same core.

If you understand the mystery of the common essence, you are liberated from any confusion.

If you study movement in stillness and stillness in movement, both stillness and movement disappear.

If such opposites disappear, unity itself cannot exist.

No law or description is applicable to this highest truth. For the autonomous mind, which is in accordance with the way, any egocentric striving disappears.

Doubts and hesitation are dissolved and a life filled with trust becomes possible. With one leap, we have been liberated from our captivity; no

longer does anything appertain to us; no longer is there anything, to which we are still attached.

Everything is empty, clear, and natural, when we no longer concentrate our mental thinking on everything.

Then thoughts, feelings, knowledge and imagination no longer count for anything. In this world of pure being, there is neither self nor not-self.

To attune yourself directly to this reality, when you feel any doubt arise in you, simply say: 'Not two.' In this 'not two', nothing is separated and nothing is excluded. Irrespective of where or when, enlightenment means that you penetrate to this truth, which cannot increase or decrease in time or space; within it, a single thought lasts ten thousand years.

Emptiness here, emptiness there, but the infinite universe is always visible around you, infinitely large and infinitely small, there is no difference, because definitions have disappeared and limits



are not seen anywhere.

The same applies to being and not-being.

Do not waste time by doubts and arguments, which have nothing to do with it.

One thing, all things: do not stay aloof, but live in the midst of them, without being fastidious. If you

are continuously aware of this, you do not worry about imperfection.

Living according to this belief is the way to unity, because what is not separated, is one with the mind that surrenders.

WORDS! The way cannot be expressed by language, because it does not know yesterday or tomorrow or today.² ☸

1. From: *Hsin hsin ming*, Verses by Sosan Zenji (?-606) (Chinese: Sengtsan, third Zen patriarch)
2. Based on the Dutch translation by Lucy Kooman,

the story of pietje

Pietje was not to be seen anywhere. I was already considering whether or not to forget about the article on mushrooms and to turn on my heels, when I thought that I heard a weak sound inside his caravan, and when I opened the door, my anxious forebodings were confirmed.

Pietje was lying in bed and looked so terrible that I hardly recognised him. His cheeks were hollow, and his otherwise clear, penetrating eyes glowed with fever. He

smiled weakly and dismissed my panicky reaction with a weak gesture. 'The worst is already over,' he mumbled, 'my hour has not yet come.' When I asked him what had happened, his ex-

Guido van Meir

pression became shy and he pointed to his eyes. 'Pietje is getting old,' he sighed, 'I am no longer allowed to go mushrooming without wearing a pair of glasses.' This was followed by an awkward



Zen archery or the art of true waiting

In the 1960's, Zen Buddhism experienced a great blossoming in Western society. Emphasising an open mind or the mind of a novice, it appealed to many young people, who rejected bogged down society. 'Our mind is controlled by obfuscation, value judgements, positive or negative,' they said, 'so that we do not see the true world. Zen offers a way truly to see again, and to be able to let go of what is earthly, our self, our I. In this way, it is closely related to Dao, the 'teachings of the uncarved wood' or 'that which cannot be said'. Particularly popular at the time were books like *Zen and the Art of Motor Maintenance*. It was an investigation into values, a book in which, according to some, 'everything is said'. Let it be clear that this does not deal with motor maintenance and Zen, but with the values behind it.

A book by Eugen Herrigel, who taught philosophy at the imperial university of Sendia, Japan, between 1924 and 1929, was also very popular. This book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, is an account of experiences concerning archery. In the book, the pupil discovers that the point is always something else than he initially thought. Neither shooting nor hitting the target is important in itself. Rather the proper attitude is emphasised, inwardly as well as outwardly, the respiration and the relaxation of the attention. In this way, the pupil discovers that he is, by the outward ritual of archery, initiated into the spiritual mysticism of Zen Buddhism. For a long time, Herrigel was considered the first European, who was taught this particular art, until Guido van Meir, editor of *Humo*, discovered that an old acquaintance of his, Pietje, stayed with master Kenzo Awa during the same period.

Things have happened there, which I saw with my own eyes, and which I still doubt until this day

silence. 'Just imagine that I would have died. How would I explain to Stakke Wanne in heaven that I confused a pantherina amanita with a gray tuber fungus. I am afraid I would not dare to show myself from pure embarrassment.'

'But a pantherina amanita is lethal! Shouldn't I fetch a doctor?'

He shook his head. 'It was only a small piece, and I did everything necessary. Let me rest for a moment, and don't eat from the mushroom omelette on the table.'

I realised that my attempt at an interview about mushrooms was going wrong, because Pietje did not at all seem in the mood to talk much about mushrooms; he was sick and tired of it. I quietly began to clear the table and to stoke the small stove with wood. When I had finished the dishes, I saw that Pietje was awake again, and beckoning me to sit next to his bed. He felt too restless to sleep and asked if I would like to read something to him to divert his thoughts. To my amazement, he pulled a fat volume from under his pillow, which on closer inspection proved to be the first part of Mao Zedong's Collected Works. In my opinion, this was not the ideal bedtime reading for someone, who had just fought a life-and-death struggle with a pantherina amanita. Nevertheless, I began to read in the middle of the 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan'.

When I had finished monotonously reading a few pages, everything indicated that Pietje had sunk into a deep sleep, at least this seemed to be the case, until he suddenly said 'Stop!', so loudly

and unexpectedly that I almost fell from my stool. 'Repeat what you just read!'

I suppressed my irritation and patiently repeated: 'It is the farmers themselves, who erected these sculptures of the gods, and the time will come that they will pull them down again with their own hands; it is not necessary for others to do this for them. The politics of propaganda that the communists must follow in this respect is: Spanning the bow, but not shooting it, only making the gesture.'

The image of the bow seemed to move Pietje for some obscure reason. 'This is how it is,' he whispered, 'Do you understand what Mao means?'

I found it rather peculiar to begin a discussion about Mao with a feverish, old man. 'He means exactly what it says,' I replied.

'Put that book away and give me some water,' said Pietje, 'then I will tell you something.'

AWA'S SHOT 'Do you see that bow on the wall?' (The beautiful bamboo bow of approximately two meters long had intrigued me for a long time. Pietje was very secretive about it and had expressly forbidden me to touch it or even to point at it. Once he had shot it without an arrow. The string gave a short, sharp crack, followed by a deep hum that, according to Pietje, put evil spirits on the flight.) 'I was given this bow by master Kenzo Awa, when I left Japan in 1929 after, quite by chance, having been his pupil for five years. One night, I had rescued him from a bunch of bandits near Tokohu University. By doing so, I missed my ship, because I had incurred a couple of ugly

knife wounds. Out of gratitude, he initiated me and a German professor¹, as the first Europeans, into the art of Zen archery. Master Awa had two beautiful daughters...'

Pietje remained silent, lost in memories, until I was no longer able to control my impatience and reminded him of my presence by emphatically coughing. He saw that I burned with curiosity, but it was useless to tell more about it, he thought, because I would not believe him.

'Things have happened there, which I saw with my own eyes, and which I still doubt until this day. One evening, we sat opposite each other on a cushion. The master had made tea and we listened to the singing of the water pot on the coal fire. Suddenly, he stood up and invited me to follow him to the shooting stand, where it was already pitch dark. He did not light a fire, but made me put a mosquito candle, long and thin like a knitting needle, in the sand before the disc, a tiny light that was hardly visible from the place where he was standing, 60 meters from his target, that is, from here to the Iron Road! Then the Master 'danced' the ritual, shot his first arrow, and from the impact I heard that he had hit the disc. His second arrow also struck the target. When I went to make light near the disc, I saw that the first arrow had hit the centre of the rose, which in itself was incredible. But this was not the most remarkable, for his second arrow had shattered the rear end of the first one, its shaft ripped open, while it was right next to it in the disc!'

To my great dismay, Pietje jumped out of his bed and ran like a flash of white flannel to the bow

on the wall. Before I had recovered from my first shock, in one smooth motion, he had taken an arrow, and drawn the bow taut. In this position, he remained motionless, inviting me to feel the muscles of his arms and shoulders. They were loose and flexible as if he kept the heavy bow tightened without using any force! 'I only use the muscles of my hands...', Pietje explained, 'the rest remains relaxed. In the beginning, I did not make much of it. I hardly held the bow, or my hands began to tremble and I began to gasp for breath. It took weeks and weeks, before master Awa was finally prepared to say what was wrong. 'My boy,' he said, 'you will never learn until you are breathing properly.'

Until then, it had not struck me that Pietje's breathing had changed, since he held the bow drawn. He quickly inhaled the air, held his breath for a moment, and then slowly and gradually exhaled again. 'Now quickly go back to bed, Pietje,' I urged, 'you are ill.' But there was no stopping him.

TRUEWAITING 'It took more than a year before I had learned to draw the bow properly, but the trouble really started when I tried to shoot. Until then, the shot had been unimportant. I just released the string, when I was no longer able to hold it. It did not matter where the arrow landed; it was enough that it hit the bale of straw that was not further away than two meters. When I shot the arrow, I always felt a shock through my body, which spoilt any shot in advance. Look at my hand.' He kept the string firmly pressed in his



To shoot, you have to open your fingers, so that the force of the string pulls the thumb away. Then your arm springs up and this claw should pass smoothly into an extended hand without the least shock

from yourself; you should learn true waiting. You should learn to become I-less by concentrating on your respiration. Everything should fade into a vague murmur like that of the sea. Look at a bamboo leaf that is pushed ever lower by the weight of the snow. Suddenly, the snow slides off without the leaf having moved. Maintain the highest tension like this leaf does, until the shot goes off automatically, until 'It' shoots.'

I had listened so attentively that Pietje's shot struck me like a thunderclap. His hand sprang up with a graceful gesture and the arrow drilled through the door of his caravan with a dry crack.

In his hand, the bow made a deep humming sound, which usually makes evil spirits flee.

'Excuse me,' said Pietje, 'I did not do it deliberately.'

He took a new arrow and drew the bow with the same smooth gesture. 'I did not make any progress. I practised and waited until my fingers became cramped, but "It" did not shoot and I decided to help "It" along a bit. I had experienced that, if I stretched my fingers slowly, a moment arrived that my thumb was no longer able to hold the string and the shot came automatically. I thought that I had discovered the secret that master Awa had deliberately withheld. During the next lesson, I achieved such a beautiful shot that the amazed master Awa looked at me and asked if I would repeat it again. Another beautiful shot! Then the master approached, and without saying a word, he pulled the bow from my hands and sat with his back to me on his cushion. I left with my tail between my legs and with a head like a tomato.

right hand in a peculiar way, which I had never seen before. With his thumb, he pulled the string under the arrow, and his bent fingers curved around it in order to give the arrow a firm hold. 'To shoot, you have to open your fingers, so that the force of the string pulls your thumb away. Then your arm springs up and this claw should pass smoothly into an outstretched hand without the least shock. I continuously practised for months on end, but it was all in vain. Master Awa let me mess about for two years, until I really became fed up, and the master spoke to me about it over a cup of tea. 'It is quite logical that you are unable to do it,' he said. 'You should not open your hand deliberately. A shot can only go off well and smoothly, if the shooter himself is surprised by it, as if the string suddenly cuts his thumb in half as if it were a marzipan pig. That hand should burst open like the skin of a ripe fruit. You are unable to do so, because you are not detached

He no longer wanted to teach me; I had tried to deceive him. Only after having insisted for a long time, he gave in to his daughter, Yoko, who pleaded in my favour. Yes, little Yoko, who did her best for me...' This time, Pietje was as shocked as I was, when his bow unexpectedly went off and the arrow went through the unopened door. I found the old man becoming really dangerous with his bow, and it was quite a relief, when he wisely returned it to the nail. The performance had tired him. He crawled back into his bed and wiped his forehead with his spotted handkerchief.

'IT HAS SHOT!' 'I was allowed back in class, if I explicitly promised never to sin against the great teachings again, beginning the same game again. Weeks went by without my making any progress. I actually couldn't care less. I had been in Japan for over four years now, and I felt that it was time to sign up as a galley boy again. I still went to the exercises, but more for the master and Yoko than out of interest. And then one day, quite unexpectedly, master Awa bowed deeply and stopped the lesson. ' "It" has just shot!' he cried.

'First, I did not understand what he meant, stupid as I was, but then I started to jump around and to shout. "Hey Pietje," said the master sternly, "what I just said was not meant to praise you; it was a simple observation that should have left you cold. Just continue practising as if nothing had happened!" It was not until much later that I pulled off another good shot, as I did every once in a while, until I was finally allowed to start practising in the shooting stand, from a distance of 60 meters.'

I continued listening, very curious how his training had finished, and whether he had mastered the art or had ultimately failed. But Pietje fell silent, eyes closed, as if he had to overcome a moment of weakness.

'Where were we?' he finally asked.

'You were allowed to start practising in the shooting stand.'

'I mean in Mao's book,' he said impatiently, 'where did we stop?'

'I had reached the motto: "Spanning the bow and not shooting it, only making the gesture.'

'Right. Do you now understand what Mao meant by it? Do you grasp it? Right, now go on reading.'

It took only a few pages before he was asleep, and this time, he soon drowned me out with his loud snoring. I carefully closed the book, extinguished the oil lamp and walked to my car. I had parked some distance away to avoid Pietje's caustic remarks about air pollution and indolence. When I came closer, I saw that two arrows had punctured my left front tire, exactly in the o's of Goodyear. Unhappy coincidence or diabolic precision? I will probably never know 🌀

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1) After some research, it was discovered that Pietje probably refers to Eugen Herrigel, who was indeed Kenzo Awa's pupil around that time. By the way, Herrigel described his apprenticeship in the book '*Zen in the Art of Archery*' (Pantheon Books, 1953).



'With open heart, unshod and ready to laugh to the market' (see p.10)

zen art as a vehicle of knowledge

Once, a Japanese master was visited by a scholar, who came to get information about Zen. The master invited him for tea and, when pouring the tea, he filled his guest's cup to the brim, and then, instead of stopping, he continued pouring as a matter of fact. The scholar considered the scene, lost in thought, until he could no longer restrain himself and cried: *'It is already brimming. Please stop.'*

Jesús Zatón

Just like this cup,' the master said, 'you are filled with your own ideas and speculations. How would I be able to teach you what Zen is, if you do not at least empty your cup first?'

One of the fundamental hypotheses of Zen is the need to 'become empty' of ideas, speculations, convictions, prejudices, frustrations, and unfulfilled desires; briefly, to liberate ourselves from any dualism, from any limit that separates opposites (good-evil, correct-incorrect, beautiful-ugly), so that the original nature of the true being can radiate again.

Zen Buddhism bases these premises on the fact that we are unable to observe the world as it really is. Instead, we experience and observe a deceptive sham reality, which we created with a sham being, the I. This dual perception of the world is, therefore, illusion, stemming from the spiritual ignorance into which we have sunk. To Zen, the essential state of the mind, its true nature, is 'enlightenment'. If the mind is not found in such a state, the fact that it is not yet free from repressing thoughts, from deception and negative emotions, should be blamed. Therefore, to achieve the state of 'enlightenment', 'awakening' or 'keenness', Zen proclaims that the mind should be in a state of total freedom, in a state of total emptiness. Such emptiness implies that we stay away from any formalism, dogmatism, attachments, ideology and external influences, in order to return to the original state of the Spirit, free from prejudices. In the sutras of The Book of True Faith by

master Sosan, the third patriarch of Buddhism, we read:

'The great way is not hard for those, who have no preferences.

When love and hatred would both be absent, everything becomes clear and transparent.

However, if you make even the slightest distinction, heaven and earth will be infinitely separated.

If you want to see the truth, then do not maintain any idea in favour or against anything.

The struggle between what is right and what is false in our consciousness is the illness of the mind.'

The mind continuously distinguishes between the personal ego and the other egos, between itself and Nature. In this way, it continuously takes sides, and becomes entangled in the phenomena, in the outward appearances, in what is dual. In order for 'enlightenment' to occur, Zen has, throughout the ages, developed a method, or we should perhaps rather speak of a non-method, based on the study of our own nature and the silencing of our thoughts through meditation.

According to Zen, there is no goal for which we should exert ourselves, or a place that should be reached, because the goal has already been reached, while what matters is becoming conscious of the goal by observation of our own inner being. In short, what matters is experiencing the 'true man' here and now.



I don't understand
the color green.

@hugh

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According to Zen, what prevents us from reaching this experience, in other words, what prevents us from reaching immediate enlightenment, is our very lack of confidence that we are able to achieve this, combined with unwarranted worry about the external aspects of

religion. Under these conditions, it is logical that Zen has little appreciation for sermons and judgements, and gives the advice that the 'great way' to enlightenment is the cultivation of the perception of true nature. It is quite peculiar that in most Zen stories the

monks do not reach 'awakening' gradually, through study, but rather reach it suddenly, instantaneously, upon hearing a song of a bird, upon understanding a koan, upon hearing a shout of the master or upon receiving a blow on the head. It is unimportant to store knowl-

edge; what matters is 'emptying' ourselves and liberating the spirit. The word zen, 'chan' in Chinese, may be translated by 'true and deep silence', and also by 'return to the original, pure spirit of the human being'. This is why Zen is a life of being conscious of



The four attainments. Classical Japanese folding screen

the present, of the current moment, because in this moment, Atman, the true spiritual being, opens up.

The masters say that, in order to receive fundamental understanding of Zen, the first thing we have to do is to abandon searching for it, because of the fact that any realisation that is achieved by effort, is a realisation by the intellect. Perhaps we should rather say that we should stop seeking outside ourselves, for as master Linji expresses it:

‘The pure Light of each moment of consciousness is the very essence of the Buddha, who dwells in your innermost being.’

This explains why one of the most important tools developed by Zen is the koan. This is a mental exercise, aimed at impelling the pupil towards and familiarising him with another approach to reality, outside his ordinary mental functions.

Instead of logical reasoning, the koan uses the groundless nature, the absurdity of everything that disturbs our balance and forces us to pass on from logical and rational reasoning to the thinking of the heart. The koan compels us not

to rely on logic and reason. It tries to help the pupil detach his mind from his dependence on language and intellectual understanding, and to observe reality with his intuition.

This is why it is not strange that we are confronted with paradoxical and seemingly irrational, oral exchanges, including shouting and beating, in the teaching methods of Zen.

In the collection of Sayings of Zen master Lin-Chi, we find the following fragment that illustrates this: The master mounted the rostrum and said: ‘A true human being without place or location lives in this mass of red flesh. Unceasingly, he enters through the gate of your face and also goes out of it again. If any of you does not know this: Look! Look!’

At that moment, a monk stepped to the fore and asked: ‘How does this “human being without a location” look like?’

The master stepped down, grabbed the monk, and said: ‘He speaks! He speaks!’

From the point of view of a purely external perspective, the actions in this story can be seen as a series of absurdities. Yet, the spiritual content of the text could not be more direct and profound.

From the heart of the painter himself, the mountains and caves well up...

When the master indicates that ‘a true human being without place or location lives in this mass of red flesh’, he shows his pupils that under the garment of flesh, the immortal human being, the enlightened one, is living. Unceasingly, he enters and leaves the carnal human being through the organs of the senses: vision, hearing, smell, touch, and intellect; he both observes and can be observed, because he is always present, but the natural human being is not aware of this. Therefore, when a monk asks: ‘What figure has the true human being without location?’ the master grabs the monk, shakes him violently and shouts: ‘He speaks! He speaks!’ By this expression, he tries to make the pupil understand that he himself is a true human being, and that he should speak, that is, manifest himself.

The processes that would, according to Zen, enable the awakening include the arts as to their different manifestations: painting, tea ceremonies, ikebana, rock gardens, poetry (haiku), stories, etc. All these forms of art enable the Sator, the experience of the ‘awakening’, but they lose their value when they are considered a goal in themselves. What we call Zen art should therefore not be seen so much as works of art – which they often are –, but above all as the transcendent expression of everyday life. This is why Zen, as opposed to Western art from the same periods, does not worry too much about technical skills, but rather concentrates on making contact, on fellowship with the universal spirit, which pervades every manifestation of life.

The Zen painter leaves aesthetics and the formal aspects alone, because he wants to go beyond the causes and fathom the continuously flowing, generative power. Master Wan Yu expresses this by the following words:

‘From the heart of the painter himself, the mountains and caves well up.’

By his association with reality, with Dao, the artist shares in the generative power that gives life to everything manifested, because in such a state, the artist is not an isolated ‘I’, but an expression of the transcendent reality.

Thus we can understand that practising Zen is one of the methods by which the artist can achieve the association with nature, that is, the all. However, the Zen painter is not a seeker, because he understands that he should not seek anything; his consciousness is not attached to any goal and, paradoxically, this is the very way in which he reaches the Goal: the integration with the cosmic continuity. A Zen text says:

‘Only if you have mountains in your eyes, you are able to paint trees; only if you have water in your mind, you are able to paint mountains.’

To Zen thinking, water is nothing else than the mountain, and the mountain nothing else than the trees or the eyes. And the images that are painted by the brush, turn into a tool to penetrate the deepest realms of our consciousness.

closer to zen

All forms of art enable the Sator, the experience of the 'awakening', but they lose their value, when they are considered a goal in themselves

The artist not only paints, but he penetrates the primordial silence, the void, where the images do not cloud the eyesight. The Zen artist erases, purifies his memory of any trace of coincidence in order to regain the original harmony. The greatest problem for the Zen painter is, therefore, to empty his own consciousness, and to learn to eliminate any trace of desire.

Similar to the koan, the function of the Zen painting is to cause a shock that enables the appearance of a sudden state of consciousness. We have noticed that in the koan this is done by the paradox, through the irrational, in the Zen painting through emptiness. The relationship full-empty (yin-yang) is present in the individual formal elements, with which the painter works and, more concretely, in the brushstroke. The brushstroke, the basis of the dynamic principle of the work, determines the relationships, which define the space and the formal relationships between full and empty. A thick brushstroke defines a space, and therefore activates the concept 'full', while another, thinner and more transparent brushstroke indicates the approach to emptiness.

In its quest for emptiness, Zen art has developed in the direction of works in which the formal elements have been reduced to minimal expression and in which the painting is realised in a direct, spontaneous way, without the possibility of improvement. This form of approaching the work requires a perfect control of the technique, but, above all, a profound link with what is going to be painted, both with regard

to the whole as well as to each detail. Each type of brushstroke has a name and specific characteristics. In this way, rubbing, pressing, thinning, dragging, loose brushstroke, are formed in the basis of the artist's individual, inner pulse.

However, in Zen art, technique is never a goal in itself. The painter will have to study nature meticulously and meditate about it, until nature penetrates him, and he is able to execute the first brushstroke of his work, for the Zen artist paints to achieve satori. The very act of painting is satori, because it enables receiving the rhythmic respiration that ensouls all living beings.

This is why the Zen artist does not try to imitate nature, but to make the principle itself, working in the universal creation, to be revived. The only and unique brushstroke is only obtained in absolute emptiness. However, it should be absolutely clear that such emptiness does not signify surrendering to the subconscious, but is only an automatism. Zen emptiness demands strict discipline and a clear effort of the will.

Before the first brushstroke, there is only formless emptiness. By the creative gesture of the artist, Unity turns into a multitude, and the painter identifies himself with all of creation. In this way, Zen painting turns from an aesthetic goal into a vehicle of knowledge, in which the final work is a mirror. This mirror shows the spiritual development that is accomplished by the artist ✪

Zen is a branch of Buddhism. According to the Zen Buddhists, it developed when, one day, on the mount of the raptors, the Buddha showed a bouquet of beautiful, gold-coloured flowers to a group of followers. In the story or legend concerned, things happen that cannot be understood or interpreted by the logical mind. This is why the content of the following sutra is considered the beginning of Zen.

The sutra 'On the questions of Mahapitaka Brahmaraja', tells: 'The Brahmaraja approached a group of Buddhists on the mount of the raptors, and while he bowed deeply, he offered the Buddha a gold-coloured lotus flower (utpala). He asked the master to preach the dharma (the teachings) for the well-being of the transitory beings. The Buddha rose and showed the flowers to the group of gods and men. However, no one was able to fathom the meaning of this act, except the reverend Mahakashyapa, who smiled and nodded. Then the Buddha said: 'I am the owner of the beautiful eye (of beholding) of the dharma, which is Nirvana, the spirit, the mystery of reality and unreality, and the gate of the transcendent truth. Now I give it to Mahakashyapa.

He passed on the eye (beholding), which fathoms the depths of the dharma, to Ananda, his successor. This happened as follows. Ananda asked Kashyapa: 'What was it that you received from the Buddha, in addition to the garment and the cup?' Kashyapa cried: 'O Ananda.' Ananda replied: 'Yes.' Then Kashyapa said: 'Please, pull down the flagpole near the gate.' When he received this task, the spirit of Ananda was enlightened and the 'seal of the spirit' was transferred by Mahakashyapa to his young pupil. After the Buddha, there were twenty-eight named patriarchs in Zen. Ananda was the second one, to whom the seal was passed, until Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth one, who went to China in the year 520 AD. This Bodhidharma was the third son of a king in Southern



India. After having studied Buddhism for forty years, he became the patriarch of the Dhyana movement. After a three-year journey, he arrived in Southern China in 520 AD, where he was warmly welcomed by emperor Wu (Liang dynasty). He moved on to present-day Nanjing, where the emperor asked many questions, which, however, stemmed from largely personal considerations. After he had told the emperor that he did not know the answers to his questions, the dharma continued to the state of Northern Wei, where he entered a monastery.



When a person seeks a Buddha, he misses him; when he seeks the way, he misses it, and when he seeks a patriarch, he misses him

sible, not only concerning their interpretation of traditional Buddhism, but certainly also concerning their way of thinking.

If there is one thing that they loathe intensely, it is blind acceptance of external authorities or meekly subjecting to conventions. They want life, individuality and inspiration. They grant the development of the spirit within them absolute freedom, which cannot be limited by worshipping the Buddha as a saviour, by blind faith in the holy books or by the unconditional acceptance of an external authority.

They recommend their followers not to accept anything which they have not experienced as true. Everything, what is holy as well as what is profane, should be rejected as not belonging to the inner spirit.

They propagate: do not cling to your senses; do not cling to intellect; trust neither dualism nor non-dualism; do not allow yourself to be dragged along by what is absolute or by a god, but be yourself and you will be as wide as space, as free as a bird in the sky or as a fish in the water, and your spirit will be as transparent as a mirror. Buddha or not Buddha, God or not God, it is all splitting hairs; it is only a play of words, without any meaning. What counts is only what is true, only what is within a human being ☸

Source: *The history of Zen* by Dr. D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966)
Adaptation and summary of a few pages from *Studies in Zen*, Rider, 1955 CB

He died in 528 at the age of 150 years. He was the first patriarch who passed on the 'seal of the heart of the Buddha' to his successor, who, in his turn, passed it on to his successors. Since the eighth century AD, the Zen movement became increasingly important in China. Almost all important temples and monasteries belonged to the Zen movement, although Zen as a living faith has become almost extinct.

TWO SCHOOLS Currently, there are two schools in Japan, embracing the Zen ideas. This is the Soto that reaches back to the Ch'ing yueh school, introduced by Dogen in Japan in 1233, and the Rinzai school that was officially founded by Yesai in 1191.

Therefore, both schools originate from China. Zen does not have books that are considered

authoritative for the teachings, and there are no precepts that have to be followed by the students as essential to their spiritual well-being.

It is said that the spirit of the Buddha is passed on, that is, his enlightened spirituality, by which he was able to produce so many holy books.

The Zen masters practised their religion without books or dogmas. They were original and were not hindered by any traditional teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha even caught it from his Zen pupils, as may be shown by the following quotation from Rinzai.

'O you, followers of the way, do not see the Buddha as the pinnacle of being. The way I see him, he is a cesspit of sin. Bodhisatvas and arhats are all tools that chain you to pillory and fetter. This is why Majusri Gautama kills with his sword, while Anglimala wounds him with his knife.

O you, followers of the way, there is no Buddha-hood that can be reached. The teachings of the threefold vehicle, the five kinds of being, the perfect teachings, they are all tools that are used for the healing of different diseases, but they are not realities at all. Whatever realities they claim, they are not more than symbolic images, and do not achieve more than an arbitrary ordering of letters. This I declare.

O you, followers of the way, there are a few hairless persons who try to find something, with which they can work and that may liberate them from their worldly bonds. They are absolutely mistaken. When a person seeks a Buddha, he misses him; when he seeks the way, he misses it, and when he seeks a patriarch, he misses him.' It is clear that the Zen teachers attempt to make their pupils as original and independent as pos-

zen in the arts

Francisco Casanueva

All art is a mirror, in which the mental projection of the artist remains reflected; but not all art is conceived as support and manifestation of a spiritual reality. Zen art pretends that it is. It wants to make the beauty and the essence of philosophy merge with the aim of leading practical understanding to the direct experience of the ultimate reality: the transcendental truth, for which human beings yearn in their inner being.

In periods during which logical thinking was still in its infancy, and the human intellect had not yet developed its passion for classification and division, religion, science and the arts formed a unity of perception and experience. Religion as a process of union, or reunion, and merging with the divine, science as a process of understanding the Divine in nature, and the arts as a process of expressing the divine that the human being carries in his inner being in a dormant and unmanifested state, constituted a single respiration, a single attempt in those who were longing for and exerted themselves for transcendence.

However, the extent to which objectivity replaced a unifying subjectivity, these three factors were first differentiated, subsequently separated and finally placed into relative mutual hostility. Currently, it is frequently said that a vision should be developed, one which implies a comprehensive unity and wholeness to restore a union of values around their collective roots. This is absolutely necessary if a human being is to have any chance of successfully confronting the three classical questions about man and his destiny.

However, is it possible to restore what was broken?

*Everyone considers beauty to be beautiful;
and this is why we know what is ugly.*

These words from the Daodejing give an example of the way the intellect makes differen-

tiations in our thinking. Therefore, the crucial question is: how are we still able to experience these three as a unity, once we become aware that science differs from religion and the arts? Is integrated perception of these three possible? And if so, how can it be accomplished? One answer might be: particularly by way of the arts, although it may also be reached via religion, but it is impossible to reach it by way of the sciences.

Current science develops through the distinguishing power of logical thinking, and in this way rules out an integral approach, because the latter is restored in a way that intends the very opposite: the intuitive unity of head and heart. Branches of the old scientific thinking have been relegated to the spheres of religion or the arts, particularly because they do not agree with the domain of objective thinking. The religious way to cosmic consciousness is still walked, although the churches become empty.

However, in the West, the way of the arts has turned into a direction that increasingly removes it from that possibility.

This is why the seeking person, or the human being who recognises a spiritual unrest, feels strongly attracted to oriental art, and particularly to Zen art. Many people see or sense a conscious approach in it, and have the experience that words and linguistic logic cannot express. Zen, an important movement within Buddhism, confronts our consciousness with the problem





Zen clearly confronts us with the conflict between the distinguishing power of logical thinking and the logos of spiritual thinking

What Bodhidharma wanted to make clear by it is that the experiences of the subjective, personal consciousness are meaningless, and have nothing to do with objective observation and acting. This is why Zen clearly confronts us with the conflict between the distinguishing power of logical thinking and the logos of spiritual thinking. This logos has other syntactical rules, and is therefore most powerfully expressed in prophetic language or in poetry. For ages, the intellect has struggled to understand this way of expressing things without ever understanding it, as for instance, happens in the classical example of Achilles and the tortoise.

In this respect, the koan and the haiku are paradigms of how what is subjective cannot be expressed. A few words used with overwhelming intensity serve as suggestion or catalyst in a subtle link with the avoided subject. A koan is a word, sentence, dialogue or story that pupils of Zen Buddhism use to achieve enlightenment. A haiku is a short poem, the experience of a single moment, which releases its compressed message in three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables.

The last barrier to be levelled is the dichotomy between the way and the goal, popular in Western, rational thinking and categorically rejected by Buddhism. Buddhism does not know a goal,

and in this way suppresses one of the two elements of the contrast. There is no goal; there is only a way.

It is a proposition, a point of departure, related to everything we said above, and that tunes in with a cyclical feeling of time as opposed to the linear concept of time of our Western culture. Only in the centre, movement and time stop. Outside the centre, everything is cyclical and hence unlimited. Since there is neither beginning nor end, there is no goal.

On the basis of such a point of view, we are able to experience any point as a whole and to realise the all-consciousness from any side. This can be observed very clearly in Zen painting. In it, the intensity of the moment, experienced by the artist, strikes us with unusual passion that cannot be explained by the theme or motive of the painting. It is like beholding the whole universe in a steaming cup of tea ☘

of the illusion of what we observe, and does so with radical certainty. The legend about the encounter of Bodhidharma with the Chinese emperor Woe-ti, maecenas and protector of Buddhism, builder of monasteries and very devoted to the propagation of the teachings, is an exam-

ple of this radical approach. When Woe-ti asks Bodhidharma what the spiritual merits of his works are, the latter answers by a simple 'none'. This is perfectly clear; it is nothing more or less than ascertaining that purely outward works absolutely cannot be a measure of inner merits.

zen, intuition and the arts

A cursory look at the works of the most prominent Zen artists is enough to understand that we should not speak of Zen art in the sense of a school or a uniform style of painting. Rather we should say that certain monks or artists, who practised Zen, tried to transmit their own vision and philosophy of life through their works. If we take the trouble to compare the various manifestations of Zen art, we actually see that there is very little uniformity from a formal point of view, even during the different stages of the same artist.

Mar López, zen-instructrice

For instance, the landscapes of Sesshu (1420 -1506) from his first period are busy and neatly finished with rigid and stiff brushstrokes. On the other hand, his mature works (when he was already 76) offer aesthetics that are spontaneous, subtle and very powerful. When we compare Sesshu's paintings (which are embedded in the aesthetics of the Japanese Muromachi period) with the works of one of the other great pillars of Zen art, the monk Sengai (1750-1837), we draw the conclusion that, from an aesthetic point of view, there cannot be a greater contrast. Thus we see the contrasts between Sesshu's time-spatial and atmospheric suggestions and Sengai's refined conceptual abstraction.

This is why we cannot speak of Zen art as a formal trend that constitutes a unity. From this point of view, the Sumi-e' style, as it is usually practised in the West, should not be considered authentic Zen painting, but rather its opposite.

After having said this, I would like to point out that the second problem, with which I had to deal ever since I began with Zen photography, was finding an individual and modern aesthetic form, through which I would be able to manifest my own vision on Nature. When I saw something clearly before me, I was no longer able to limit myself to following the ancient patterns, and even less the stereotypes of sham Zen art. I am neither a monk nor a hermit, and my social and cultural conditions strongly differ from the ones of those who left such formidable works behind.

The third question is of a technical nature. Traditionally, a Zen painting is realised with brushes of wolf hair or the like, while black or colours are used on rice paper or silk, to which inscriptions and seals and the like are added.

The blending of the colours and their shades, the weight of the brush, its pressure on the paper and the shape of the brushstroke together constitute the basis on which the technique of traditional oriental painting rests. However, my works would be realised by other means and via other information carriers, concretely by the camera and the subsequent processing on the computer. The question that immediately crossed my mind was, therefore, quite simple: if the Zen monks of the Japanese Muromachi period would have had a camera or a computer at their disposal, would they have used it to realise their works? It is clear that the question is purely hypothetical, but the answer would, in my view, be a clear and unequivocal 'yes'. Zen practises the absence of dogmas; it tries not to impose any vision or offer any a priori truths, but rather leads to personal experience. This being the case, why should I tie myself down by the technique, while the latter should only be a tool to achieve the envisaged goal?

Once I had considered these matters and had more or less solved them at a conceptual level, I still had to deal with the most important question: what is the essence of Zen and how will I be able to convey it in and through the arts? I found an enlightening reference in an ancient manual about Zen painting, 'The garden of the



Zen Wall Sculpture. One Sun Metal Works, Ryan Beard, 2006

mustard seed' by master Lu Ch'ai, in which I read the following sentence:

'He who is learning to paint, must first of all calm his heart, so that he is able to clear his understanding and to increase his consciousness.'

This precept perfectly corresponds to the life reform proposed by the Spiritual School of the Golden Rosycross. To the Rosycross, the heart is not only the seat of the purest feelings, but also the centre of contact with our inner being. The problem is that, generally speaking, our hearts are overflowing with egocentric desires and our aspirations continuously lapse into material pleasures or the immediate gratification of our desires. In this way, our emotions and sentiments constantly fluctuate between gratitude and indifference, between love and hatred.

However, Zen proposes 'to calm the heart' as the basis for learning to paint. Calming down implies liberating ourselves from the duality, from the opposites, from the good and evil of this world. I think that this can only be realised when we first wake up and subsequently unite ourselves with what we, as human beings, possess of the divine

element. We have to wake up and unite ourselves with the dormant Inner being dwelling within us. How are we able to settle down, if this does not first occur in the heart? How do we reach the silence? Surely, throughout history, countless exercises and practises have been suggested in our attempts to achieve this state, but the hard reality is that this is wholly impossible for us if the inner divine element, which does not partake of the desires and the hustle and bustle of this world, is not vivified.

Please understand that I do not say that practises like meditation and the like do not contribute to the achievement of such a state of consciousness. I am only pointing out that any exercise or practise of whatever type, including meditation, is only a tool to reach the goal and that when the inner being does not wake up, the heart will continue to desire what is innate and inherent in it: the things of this world.

In the same work by master Lu Ch'ai, I found other keys, in the past conveyed to the pupils of Zen painting, and still useful for the development of my work. The Japanese master points out the

This therefore concerns an intuitive experience, in which each brushstroke forms a cadence that is linked with the heartbeat of the All in a harmonious way

importance of repetition, so that through practice, the brushstroke spontaneously evolves, without the need to think about it. Let it be clear that the point is not to determine standards based on a thousand times repeated copy, but to liberate the spirit from worries and vain pretences, to stop the stream of unchecked thoughts, which continuously affect us. Because he has mastered the technique to the extent that it no longer plays any role, the artist is able to demonstrate a flowing and natural expression.

This principle is actually not only the basis of Zen art, but of any art, if it is to be manifested unimpeded and unconditionally. In this sense, the artist has to master the technique, before the painting appears as a natural extension of his consciousness. He should, through repetition and practising, not only master the technique to the extent that he does not have to consider it during the act of creation, but it is above all necessary that he is able to form as broad and exact an image as possible of what he would like to paint. This is so that doubts and fears do not constitute an impediment for the harmony between hand, spirit and soul.

From this perspective, the Zen artist diligently observes the profound relationships between human being, nature and higher reality. In this respect, Zen often speaks of the identification with nature.

‘Before you begin to paint a Bamboo, you will first have to grow into it,’ another great Zen master, Su Dongpo, tells us.

Undoubtedly, a human being can only perceive the part of reality that he already possesses inwardly. Just as it is not possible to achieve enlightenment, if this is not yet present in our being, the painter is unable to paint nature with its different forms and manifestations if he is not part of it himself.

It is of the utmost importance for the Zen artist to become aware that his view, his perception, is creative in the sense that he creates the reality, which he is able to perceive. However, the problem is that our perception, our view, is not firmly established in the unity, but in what is fragmentary, in duality. This is why the bamboo must grow within you, before you are able to paint it. However, in order for the bamboo to grow within us, it is necessary that what is perceived and he who perceives, that is, the human being and nature, merge.

This is only possible, when what is not dual and what is not fragmentary is manifested in the human being; in other words, when we are able to form a vehicle or soul that enables the cohesion between the natural consciousness and the divine consciousness.

Let us therefore understand that by the act of painting, the Zen artist does not pretend to represent nature, but rather the awakening of the inner energy that is wholly one with the all and which we have called soul, for lack of a better word.

The word soul implies many aspects and demonstrates numerous qualities. However, fundamentally, we can say that such a soul is formed in a human being who succeeds in attracting the

‘mater’, the primordial substance that forms the universe, and by working with it. The Zen artist feels himself to be an organ of the great body that is mother earth, and perceives in this unity the merging of what is supernal with the parts of his being that surpass what is purely material.

This is why it concerns an intuitive experience, in which, through the stillness of the spirit, each gesture, each brushstroke forms a cadence that is linked with the heartbeat of the All in a harmonious way.

On the other hand, it is clear that the growth of the bamboo within the painter has various stages and levels. However, from the first level, the Zen artist knows that he is taken up into a cosmic body that nourishes him, in which he develops, and which he, in due course, will help develop. Undoubtedly, the highest level will be reached when the artist’s consciousness merges with that of the inner divine being, which he himself no longer is, but which is the ‘inner other one’.

Comprehending these experiences implies a specific disposition, because we not only need sensitivity, but also mental flexibility and intuition. Intuition and inspiration are very closely related. In view of the fact that the Zen artist hardly ever makes sketches or preliminary studies, and in view of the fact that he is not used to painting true to nature either, his work is predominantly a recreation accomplished in his workshop, after profound observation of the model.

This is why the Zen artist does not intend to seize the moment or to represent a unique and fleeting moment, in which certain atmospheric

and environmental elements manifest themselves in nature. He does not seek what is transient and fleeting, but tries to penetrate into the essence of nature itself and to represent the values that surpass what is transient.

Obviously, this quest for what is not transient does not imply that the Zen artist, as often happens in haikus (Zen poems), would be unable to represent ‘the moment’ or rather ‘the now’, because undoubtedly, this ‘now’ is actually the sole reality at the moment that he creates his work. Experiencing the unity with nature, he therefore obviously does not respond mentally to the multifarious transformations through which nature passes. Indeed, the Zen artist roars with the storm, flares up with the wind, sings in the choir of the chirping birds and the hissing of the dragonflies, feels reborn with every new bud of the almond tree and dies with every falling, dry leaf. But he can partake of all these experiences and of the mystery surrounding him, because in his innermost being he has found the centre of the silence, the holy void, from which he feels everything, although he can no longer be seized by anything. On the basis of this state of peace and inner silence, the Zen artist not only experiences the artistic deed as a purely aesthetic development, but as a source of new observations and true knowledge ☸

self-respect

Throughout time and in all schools of thought, the value ascribed to man has always been quite relative. Sometimes he was a god in the innermost depths of his thoughts, at other times an insect that should be happy that it is not immediately trampled. These two extremes are mitigated (and at the same time confirmed) by concepts like courage, self-respect, self-consciousness or modesty, humility and meekness.

We are tossed to and fro between the two banks of the stream which we call life. We never see or experience the true stream of life, which remains an abstract concept, between the abusive 'you, unworthy one' and the promising 'you, chosen one'. Between these two, we live in hope and fears.

At birth, we are immediately placed on a track with a ticket, leading straight to the final destination 'Social Security'. We are given the necessary luggage to bring the great journey to a good end as decent citizens. The interpretation of this 'good end' depends on the track on which we were placed.

Anyway, people have high expectations of us considering the threefold gift with which the earth welcomes us:

1. a body, also called 'the vehicle',
2. knowledge
- and 3. ensoulment, motivation.

This package includes the demand to improve the world, imposed on any newcomer to this world in one way or another, but never truly realised. This is why it is perhaps a good idea to take a closer look at this starting capital.

The body is perhaps a wonderful instrument and we don't have to explain this, but it goes its own way, wanting something at the most inconvenient moments, becoming tired and ill and ultimately kicking the bucket. Our physical appearance remains as unpredictable as it is controversial. Shankara, a Hindu teacher from the 7th century, describes the human being as 'a bag of dust and

dirt', but this is immediately followed by 'Vivified [...] it serves as an instrument of experience for Atman.' This body is apparently something that we have on loan for a purpose.

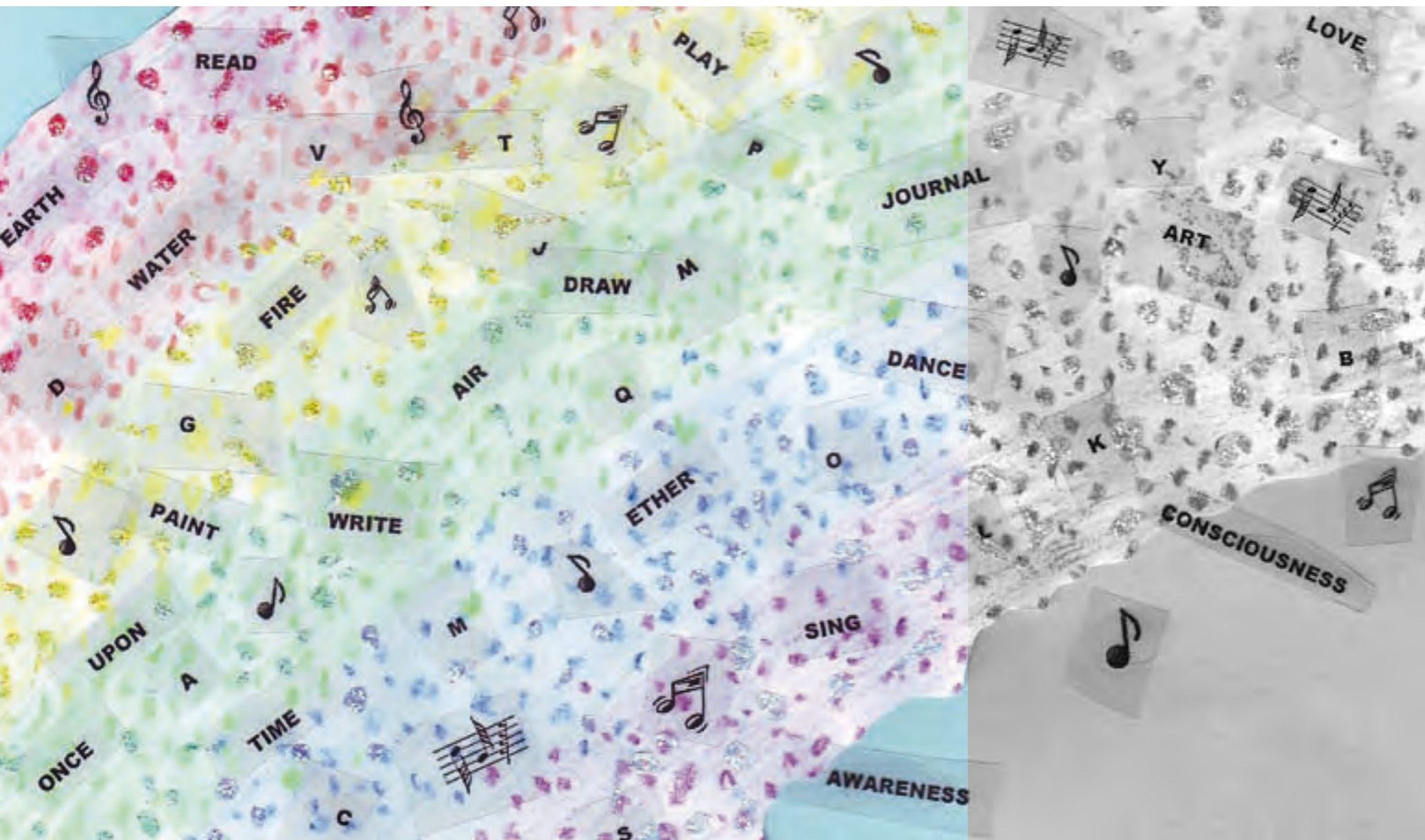
The label 'knowledge' includes all sciences and experiences collected by humanity until now, the savoir vivre, passed on by our predecessors. A book of quotations mentions laconically: 'Experience is the name we give to the sum of all stupidities.' We have, therefore, wholeheartedly been given this 'sum' as luggage, hoping that we would learn something from it.

Are we doing so? The great constant in our history books is war. A generally accepted conclusion, after so many open and hidden battles is: war is senseless; war does not solve anything. Do we do something with it? At a war cemetery in Belgium, we found inscribed the following remark by Albert Einstein: 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought. However, I know it of World War IV: with sticks and stones.' This text is simply placed there and who knows where else, but apparently all knowledge and experience is reflected off a structural barrier in our consciousness. What drives us against our better judgement? What drives us...? This directly confronts us with the third part of our luggage: ensoulment. What ensouls us? Superficially, we do not have to look far, after what we said above. Our comings and goings are largely determined by the needs, ambitions and possibilities of our personality with its physical and mental aspects, by the pressure of the collective consciousness, the socio-economic climate, in which every newcomer is allotted a role through



It is a new perception, not coloured by the senses;
 a new knowledge, not distorted by the mind, and a
 new motivation from within, detached from social
 pressure and self-interest

Rainbow of creativity.Thalia



which he or she is expected to develop his or her received talents to a higher level. Is there any indication that this is indeed happening? The attainments of the human race should not be underestimated. However, do we know whether the current athletes are really stronger and faster than those of the past? Do we really know more than our ancestors? Did we make different combinations with the same set of blocks, in this way re-inventing the wheel? We pose the question: did this contribute to something new under the sun? From the confrontation with this complex question, a sense of self-respect, of inner and outer appreciation emerges. This results in the development of a self-image that grows, a self-consciousness, an I. This I engages in a relationship with the collective consciousness, the supplier of the starting capital, and in its turn, imposes its demands. Unfortunately, using our analogy, the so-called self-respect that we were allowed to experience until now often rather resembles a fictional capital, and since neither the body and its personality nor knowledge and skills nor the ensoulment were able to meet the expectation of 'improving the world', our standard of values soon dropped below zero. We disguise this zero point by our complexes, fear of failure and depressions – or alcohol, drugs and cyber trips, the escape from hard reality, unless indeed something new under sun can be found. Nothing is lost in this world; any development ultimately leads to a point where a breakthrough to a new horizon becomes possible. There the escape from the world can be turned into a conscious exploration of this

world with its intentions and possibilities. It is a well-known axiom: the human being is twofold, and just as there are two nature orders, the ordinary earthly nature and the so-called kingdom of heaven, also called the immovable kingdom, there are also, as Goethe says, two souls in my chest. One of them is the animal soul, also called the blood soul, the fundamental control system, with which we are all born. It allows us to pave our way through the material world, society, the relationships with our fellow men and nature. In a more mature stage, this animal soul increasingly allows us to determine this way ourselves. Therefore, this control system is not static, but contains a learning process. This learning process may lead to the discovery of this second nature order, with a totally different control system.

We might call this new system 'the conscience', one that is based on a mentality or a behavioural code that cannot be explained by upbringing, tradition or study, although there are clearly points of contact. The two voices will, for example, point out to us: 'You shall not kill,' but the tone of this new conscience will be quite a few octaves higher than anything we have earlier received from outside. It is rather as something self-evident, as something that we have always 'known' and that has nothing to do with standards. Perhaps this new light may still become bogged down in the darkness of the intellect, but in terms of eternity, there is no time. One day we will discover the voice of the other programme, of which we were not aware and which brings the old one up for discussion in many respects, supplementing and surpassing it.

This begins with self-consciousness: who am I? For example, the idea that we are at least something other than a replication of our predecessors, with a sterile dead weight as luggage on our way to nowhere. We see something original within ourselves, a specific self-respect that is bigger than what the I can comprehend. It is still only a certain awareness, but it confronts us with a crossroads.

Insight into our impotence to truly live what we know and believe, may lead to humility, to humbleness. This is the calming, meditative aspect, the stage of the desert. On the one hand, we have the possibility of burying our talents, the luggage we have received, together with our frustrations, in the sand and on the other hand, we have the possibility of experiencing, in the silence, this other value as a reality. That is the living, driving aspect, the stage of renewal. It is a new perception, not coloured by the senses; a new knowledge, not distorted by the mind, and a new motivation from within, detached from social pressure and self-interest.

Deep under the sands of the desert, there is a well-spring that wants to arouse us to a living reality, in which the passive withdrawal, the humbleness, the way of least resistance, may develop into true humility along with a formerly unknown impulse to serve. The contemplative track has been recognised and the limits of its natural powers accepted reducing its claims to reasonable proportions. The radiating aspect puts its powers at the disposal of the rediscovered reality, the new capital that has been built, together with the new ensoulment of the old capital, however small and imperfect it seems to be ✪